



Laboratoire Mixte International MACOTER

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Research on land in Mali and Africa: Societal and policy challenges and scientific responses

Venue: Bamako, University Campus of Badalabougou
Dates: 21-23 November 2016

CALL FOR PAPERS

I. Context and scope of the conference

There has been an exponential increase in the number of land titles on the African continent in recent years, as well as a proliferation of legal references and written records to demand or contest rights. Private property has taken on broader normative values than those inherited from colonial law, economic liberalization and international recommendations—it is becoming the frame of reference for ever larger parts of the population and it has been pushed to the forefront by the objectives of environmentally conscious development and efforts to secure access to resources. The urban elite, international interests and various socio-economic initiatives have expressed a desire to influence governments and authorities, thus reshaping the political dimension of land issues. This touches on the *law* (“*droit*”) and its social spheres, but also on *rights* (“*droits*”) – conceived as universal or social – to natural resources and urban land.

The particular visibility of these issues in Mali is bound up in the unprecedented economic and physical violence in the capital and certain regions across the country. The sense of insecurity is palpable among the working poor, but it is also present in the emerging middle class and among landowners considered, until now, to be privileged. It has generated strong expectations from the legal system and in terms of the integrity of the State at a time when the latter has been openly designated as weak in its regulatory practices.

Since the public policy approach to “land-related affairs” and regional appreciation is an issue that spans broadly across the African continent, the MACOTER research laboratory¹ has seized on the topic of land inherent to its scientific mandate to propose an international conference focused on the social utility of academic research.

The goal is to open debate on a topic of interest to all strata of society. When addressed effectively, land issues provide a solid foundation for local, regional and national development. But when handled poorly, they are the crib of institutional instability and political disorder. The University of Legal and Political Sciences and the University of Arts and Humanities of Bamako have offered to host the event in hopes of producing not only high level academic output, but also of proposing solutions to the conflicts that have plagued local populations and authorities for the past few decades.

It is expected that this event will generate:

- analyses and feedback from Mali and other African countries;
- the publication of a book and substantive articles based on the selected presentations;
- alongside the conference, a methodology workshop for doctoral candidates focused on data collection and scientific writing on land-related issues.

II. Objectives of the conference, presentation ideas

The degradation of natural resources has been an increasing issue since the early 1970s and has taken on multiple forms in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region. The competition for land has intensified based on issues that are both local and international in scope. Deforestation, soil deterioration and peri-urban sprawl have occurred alongside rising pressure on land which has also exacerbated social tension and destabilized community regulation. There are increasing conflicts of interest tied to access to land and capturing the added value generated by transactions on public or private property; investments frequently have to contend with the extra costs of corruption and security; poverty-reduction goals have to face off with problems tied to officialising and registering customary rights, enabling broader access to land ownership and to loans secured for this purpose; in cities, the rental market relegates a non-negligible part of the population—particularly young people—to a form of second class citizenship.

Mali is emblematic of the political risks that accompany territorial strife, economic insecurity and the resulting confrontation in urban and rural areas. Conflicts between private individuals have engorged the country’s legal system and challenged the State through the abilities and behaviour of its representatives. Other administrative disputes have further worked to undermine the idea that national problems can be managed publicly. While the recent decline in social cohesiveness in the Malian way of living together has drawn the attention of researchers and academics to the critical importance of land issues, the topic itself is not new. And through the cross-cutting nature of a social fact as total as land, the “spoliation”, “predation” and “impunity” that are now emerging from debate within Malian

¹ Reconfigurations maliennes : Cohésions, Territoires et Développement (Faculté des Sciences Humaines et des Sciences de l’Éducation de l’ULSHB, Faculté de Droit Public de l’USJPB, IMAF-UMR 243 de l’IRD, CESSMA-UMR 245 de l’IRD).

society have marked the country's unique political evolution and caught the attention of others on the continent.

The first goal of this conference is therefore to grasp the multiple aspects of the pressure exerted on land, to assess its rhythms and orientations, and analyse land-grabbing and speculation processes through the lens of established scientific categories. The idea is to **place the Malian experience in the broader context of Africa, more diverse in terms of land rights and jurisdictions, but confronted with many of the same challenges:** demographic pressure, urban sprawl, agricultural markets, the security of uses and properties, competition between local and foreign investments, the transfer of land management tools, new norms for territorial governance, equipment and tax policies (or the lack thereof), etc.

No single discipline in the social sciences, humanities, law or economics can fully address the scientific scope of land issues, nor address the growing request for expertise to help manage conflicts and consolidate the priorities of the development sector. **A second goal of the conference is therefore to offer an overview of knowledge and expertise in the field. How can we capitalize on knowledge that draws on different theoretical references and scientific approaches? What are the emerging topics of today?**

Jurists, political scientists, economists, geographers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and linguists, among others, are invited to present on different aspects of land rights and land law and the fields of resource management: e.g., legal ordering or disordering, environmental insecurity, the status of local rights, the regionalization of territorial planning, land register policies, needs for urban land, resisting eviction, property tax systems, mortgage management (non-exhaustive list). Proposals may focus on the different levels, methodological choices or reflexivity unique to each discipline. Correlatively, we encourage shared research initiatives and the use of multidisciplinary approaches to research.

In the vein of such cross-disciplinary collaboration, we can examine the key words found throughout the work of researchers focused on the African context—legal pluralism and the re-interpretation of land entitlement, government rent and municipal clients, property systems and conflicts of appropriation, institutional revision and new forms of social mobilization, etc. The goal is to identify the action theories to which they refer and to contrast and compare them—on the one hand to the issues facing the continent, without being unique to Africa (e.g., land grabbing, securitization, equipment funding), and on the other hand to the popular visions and corporatist pleas (e.g., farmers' unions, real estate developers, the banking sphere, independent professionals) expressed via new platforms and spheres of governance.

On a methodological level, we may even look at what researchers suggest in their research to connect the regulatory and practical aspects of access to land resources—institutional production and administrative culture on the one hand, and collective representation or more individualized experiences of legitimation on the other hand. How to correct the lack of precise statistical measurements? How to monitor land values over the long term? How to put to good use the monographic approaches provided by numerous village and ethnic case studies in African countries—frequently by adding a procedural analysis, at times by ignoring possibilities for comparison and taking a more general approach? How to promote approaches based on sampling, or that shift from the plot level to the scale of a region or even administrative territory? How to address sectors designated as “sensitive” or of “primary interest” (e.g., resources tied to water, pastoralism, mining, peri-urban reserves, women's

rights), when others appear to be overshadowed by contemporary concerns or overlooked altogether in the existing research? Finally—especially—, how can we envisage the opportunity and limits of a continuum of problems between urban and rural areas?

A third objective of the conference is to allow presenters and the public debate to address the interaction between research and public policy. The research world brings its ability to analyse and various decision-making tools, but it can also be criticized for its institutional dispersal and the time sometimes required to respond to urgent issues, according to the required recommendations, to the expectations of indicators and in line with good practices. Public debate allows experts on land to observe the political environment of public policies from a new angle; it provides access to data that is less accessible under other circumstances—but it is also part of a scale that is external to the research world; of power dynamics that result in studies being filed blindly away; and at times subject to tug-of-wars between national authorities and funders who form the unsaid of “land governance”.

In Mali in particular, the decentralization reforms, revisions to the Code on public and private lands, urban projects, the laws on agricultural orientation, etc., provided real opportunities for decision-makers to solicit academic expertise. Following several forays into civil society (customary rights, human rights) and following the 2009 national conference on land, the need for a property registry (cadastre) re-expressed in 2013 and the land management reform launched in 2014 were another recent opportunity for interaction between experts and political actors. How were specialists consulted and heard given the complexity of land management issues?

The conference will also be an opportunity to present an experience in which researchers were involved with the Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure (analysis of the production of definitive titles in Mali). It will envisage other channels through which to encourage a proactive vision of university in terms of land management for territorial governments, legal systems, decentralized municipalities, and fora for democratic debate and budgetary control. It will also be an opportunity for feedback on other examples of expertise in the sub-region. What conclusions can researchers draw from the conflicts sometimes observed at the core of States? How to (re-)sociologize or (re-)politicize the issue of land when the studies commissioned are often based on short diagnostic reports or technical approaches that are piloted externally?

Finally, the conference will conclude with a round table discussion with non-researchers including political and institutional actors, and development practitioners. They will discuss their unique organizational constraints, the partnerships they do or do not have with the academic world, and their expectations from researchers.

III. Conference organization

Deadline for submissions

Researchers and experts interested in presenting at the conference are invited to submit their proposals in the form of a one-page abstract. Proposals must be sent by e-mail: **no later than 7 July 2016**, to baka2cam2@yahoo.com and monique.bertrand@ird.fr.

Proposals must include the title, first and last name(s), institutions(s) and e-mail address(es) of the author(s). All abstracts must clearly present the chosen topic and explain how the topic addressed is relevant to the conference. Doctoral candidates are encouraged to participate, either by submitting a proposal to present or in the context of the workshop on scientific writing. Authors whose proposals are selected by the conference's scientific committee will be informed on **5 September 2016**. They will have to send their final paper by e-mail and in compliance with the style guide that will be provided no later than **15 October 2016**.

Accommodation will be suggested to participants from outside of Bamako. Financial assistance may be granted to a limited number of external contributors based on a well-supported request.

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