

Title	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Mali
Publisher	Minority Rights Group International
Country	Mali
Publication Date	28 June 2012
Cite as	Minority Rights Group International, <i>State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - Mali</i> , 28 June 2012, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fedb3f6c.html [accessed 6 March 2013]
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The fragility of Mali, one of Africa's landlocked countries, was exposed with the resumption of the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali following the revolution that toppled the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Nomadic Tuaregs are one of Mali's nine main ethnic groups. Mali has experienced a series of Tuareg uprisings since the 1960s, in which Tuaregs have demanded recognition of their identity and an independent state in the north of the country. The latest uprising ended the fragile peace established between separatists and the government in 2009. Insurgents organized themselves under the banner of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a movement founded at the end of 2011, spurred by the return of thousands of Tuaregs from fighting for Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

The resumption of the conflict towards the end of 2011 led to the displacement of pastoralists in northern Mali to other parts of the country and to neighbouring Niger Republic. Many of the internally displaced (IDPs) and refugees had to leave their livestock when fleeing, while those who could salvage some livestock have difficulty being admitted to IDP and refugee camps, which are not designed to provide sanctuary for livestock.

During 2011, minorities also faced difficulties arising from the commodification of natural resources. For instance, Dogon people, who live in the arid Mopti plateau region, faced exploitation by water privatization programmes, which have reduced their access to water, excluded them from water management and undermined Dogon culture, which is intimately linked to water. In June 2011, the Mali Committee for the Defence of Water wrote in a report that these water privatization programmes were in violation of a 2010 UN Resolution that declared the right to water and sanitation as a fundamental human right.

The Malian government has recently granted about half a million hectares of land concessions to large investors, according to a 2011 report by the Oakland Institute. Thousands of hectares of land were sold to mainly foreign buyers during 2011, by the government, which is desperate for foreign investment, at a very low price, displacing smallholder farmers and minority groups. The biggest buyers include Malibya from Libya (100,000 hectares), China (17,000 hectares), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (14,000 hectares) and Tomota, a Malian company (100,000 hectares).

Land deals include the right to extract water for irrigation at very low prices, which is radically reducing water available for indigenous groups and farmers. For example, a lease granted to Moulin Moderne du Mali – a public-private partnership with the Malian government – involves a rent-free lease of 20,000 hectares on the banks of the Niger River. This project has affected the Samana Dugu indigenous community in the Office du

Niger, West Africa's largest irrigated zone. Samana Dugu who opposed the deal report serious threats to their livelihoods, with little or no consultation or compensation. The Secretary of State in charge of development in the Office du Niger zone denies that the communities living on the leased lands are indigenous and has stated that such communities have 'installed themselves' on the land without permission. Violent attacks on indigenous groups and smallholder farmers have been reported. In June 2010, men, women and young people from the Samana Dugu community protested against the work of bulldozers and the cutting of hundreds of their trees. About 70 gendarmes were brought in to quell their protest. Protesters were beaten and about 40 of them were arrested, among them 14 women.

Despite Mali's limited availability of arable land and food scarcity, much of the land leased is used to grow crops for bio-fuels or for water-intensive rice cultivation. The land acquired by the Libyan company in Segou, the most fertile region of the country, also includes a 40 km canal. In November 2011, farmers and indigenous groups organized an International Conference of Peasant Farmers in Sélingué which aimed to stop the land and water grabs.

The livelihoods of minorities in Mali are also increasingly negatively impacted by gold-mining. The growing presence of multinational companies involved in gold-mining across western Mali is having an adverse impact on pastoralists and agriculturalists. For example, Fulani, Soninke and Bamana minority groups have been negatively impacted by cyanide poisoning caused by the Sadiola mine in the far west of the country. There are also 200 artisanal mining sites, most of which operate outside the government's regulatory framework. Mining methods are mostly substandard, involving use of highly poisonous mercury and exploitation of child labour.

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