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National Ownership and Security Sector Reform in Mali

External Actors' Sensemaking and Field Practices in View of Conflicting Demands

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Content

Abbreviations

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AQIM	Al-Quaida in Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
C2	Command & Control (US)
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy (US)
CDS	Parliamentary Defence and Security Committee (Commission défense et sécurité)
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements (Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad)
CNRSS	National Council for Security Sector Reform (Conceil national de la RSS)
CONOPS	Concept of Operations Document (CSDP missions)
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRT	Crisis Response Team (US)
CSA	Monitoring Committee of the Peace Agreement (Comité de suivi de l'accord de paix)
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy (EU)
CSRSS	Sectoral Committee for SSR (Comité sectoriel pour le RSS)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAO	Defence Attaché Office (US)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DIB	Defence Institution Building
DNF	National Directorate of Frontiers (Direction Nationale des frontières)
DoD	Department of Defence (US)
DPKO	Department for Peacekeeping Operations (UN)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DSR	Defence Sector Reform
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General
ECOSOCC	Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EC	European Commission

EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUCAP Sahel Mali	European Union Capacity Building Mission Sahel Mali
EUMS	European Union Military Staff (EEAS)
EUTM Mali	European Union Training Mission Mali
FAMA	Malian Armed and Security Forces (Forces armées et de sécurité du Mali)
FC-G5S	G5 Sahel Joint Force (Force conjointe du G5 Sahel)
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)
FO	Foreign Office
FY	Fiscal Year
G5S	G5 Sahel (institutional coordination framework of five Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger)
GATIA	Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self Defense Movement (Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés)
GIZ	German Development Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH)
GoM	Government of Mali
GPRSS	Multidisciplinary Reflection Group on SSR (Groupe pluridisciplinaire de réflexion sur la réforme du secteur de la securité)
GS	General Staff (military)
HoD	Head of Delegation
HQ	Headquarters
IA	Interim Authorities
ICG	International Crisis Group
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, President of the Republic of Mali since Sep 2013
IO	International Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KTC	Koulikoro Training Center (EUTM)
LOPM	Military Programming Law (Loi d'orientation et de programmation militaire)
LPS	Internal Security Programming Law (Loi de programmation sur la sécurité intérieure)
MAF	Malian Armed Forces
MDSF	Malian Defence and Security Forces
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (UN)

MIP	Mission Implementation Plan (MIP)
MoAF	Ministry of Armed Forces and Former Combatants
MOC	Coordination Mechanism (Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination)
MoD	Ministry of Defence (Ministère de la Défense et des Anciens Combattants)
MONUSCO	UN Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSCP	Ministry of Security and Civil Protection (Ministère de la sécurité et de la protection civile)
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en l'Afrique de l'Ouest)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OPLAN	Operations Plan (CSDP missions)
OSC	Office of Security Cooperation (US)
PARSEC	Programme of support for enhanced security in the Mopti and Gao regions and for the management of border areas (Programme d'appui au renforcement de la sécurité dans les régions de Mopti et de Gao et à la gestion des zones frontalières)
PPP	Public Private Partnership
QIP	Quick Impact Programme
R2DT	Relief to Development Transition (US)
RAP	Regional Action Plan
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SGI	Security Governance Initiative (US)
SSG	Security Sector Governance
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UNPOL	United Nations Police
USAID	Unites States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

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1 Introduction: Ownership policy and external intervention

National ownership[1] is a sine qua non principle for aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding interventions and a fundamental principle of the respective international policy frameworks (UN/OECD). The concept is rooted in the context of debates on participatory development, people-centred approaches to reform, and recipient-led development approaches (Narten, 2009, p. 253; Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 26; von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 29). Ownership describes a state in which domestic actors design and implement development policies, institutions and activities, with external actors providing support on demand to processes that have been initiated and are led by domestic actors (Carlowitz/Pietz, 2011, p. 2).

One of the most important international forums in which national ownership was established as a formally guiding principle for aid and development cooperation was the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, which produced the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The Paris Declaration stipulated country ownership as the key principle to guide aid delivery, with the aim of making aid itself more effective (Stanley, 2008, p. 23). Partner countries receiving aid agreed to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, to strengthen their operational development capacity and to coordinate the different development activities of donors in their country. Donors affirmed that they would respect the leadership exercised by the partner countries, align themselves with the strategies of these partner countries, make use of these countries' institutions and systems, and to assist them in building capacity (OECD, 2008). As Stephen Brown notes, 'donors recognized in Paris that they themselves also needed to change the way they operated, including by setting aside their own priorities, self-interest and rivalry and work together to support recipient countries' priorities' (Brown, 2017, p. 3). The principles of the Paris Declaration were reaffirmed and substantiated in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, which again acknowledged country ownership to be key to successful development efforts.

The Paris and Accra declarations had a strong effect on the development narratives of international organisations engaged in related fields, including the security and peacebuilding sectors (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299). Today, it is widely agreed upon that ownership is fundamental to the success of reform processes and the effectiveness

[1] The terms local, domestic, national or country ownership are not used consistently in international policy frameworks. Therefore, this study works with the unspecified term of 'ownership'. For more information on the terminological debate, see (Brown, 2017).

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and sustainability of external support for such processes. Besides, several authors note the resemblance of the ownership concept to an internationally accepted norm that adds value to interventions and should be pursued for its own sake (Ismail, 2008, p. 127; Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 25; Wilén, 2009, p. 347). However, while the ownership terminology finds firm establishment and validation in organisational policies and guidelines, this only confirms that the concept is agreeable in a negotiating setting within the international sphere. It does not necessarily follow that country ownership enjoys social recognition in the places where it is applied – largely in the context of external-domestic relations and often in fragile/post-conflict situations. Despite its high policy status, the ownership concept faces substantial scepticism from academics and practitioners alike, mostly in view of discrepancies between aspirations formulated at the policy level and external actors' actual field practices. In sum, there is a consensus in the literature that external actors do not 'practice what they preach'.

The gap between ownership policy and external actors' field practices

Previous research has detected a wide gap between policy aspirations on ownership and external actors' field practices in day-to-day project implementation (Ansorg, 2017; Bargues-Pedreny, 2016; Grøner Krogstad, 2014; Shinoda, 2015). Hideaki Shinoda describes this gap as follows:

> International development aid officials make various kinds of efforts to show their respect for national ownership by inviting government officials to coordination meetings, consulting with national political figures, referring to policies of the national government, and other efforts, to solidify consensus among stakeholders. […] Development aid is an area where the niceties of respect for national ownership are much discussed. But the donor-driven structure usually remains untouched. It is apparent that donors always retain the controlling hand on discussions for the very understandable reasons of supervising their financial resources despite the principle of national ownership' (Shinoda, 2015, p. 21).

Antoine Rayroux and Nina Wilén found that SSR in the context of EU peacekeeping in the Congo was driven more by supply than demand and was mainly shaped by the interests of international donors present in the country (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014). Denise Blease and Florian Qehaja concluded, for the case of Kosovo, that local actors in the country had the role rather of 'clients' than 'owners', and external actors selected counterparts that were deemed capable and supportive of the agenda for external reforms (Blease/Qehaja, 2013). Filip Ejdus found that in the context of EU missions in the Horn of Africa, ownership was increasingly operationalised as an externally driven endeavour with limited local participation (Ejdus, 2017). Ejdus further argued that ownership is 'driven by the rationality of advanced democracies on how best to govern global

insecurities at a distance. Consequently, ownership is operationalized as responsibilization for externally designed objectives' (Ejdus, 2018, p. 28). Empirical findings on external actors' structural obstacles to realising ownership have been added to the debate by Sarah von Billerbeck for the case of UN peacekeeping missions (von Billerbeck, 2017). The gap between ownership policy and external actors' field practices has been detected across country-cases and for a variety of different external actors. Hence, this gap is considered a cross-cutting phenomenon in external actors' interventions in the fields of aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding.

Several reasons for this gap between policy and practice are identified in the literature. The requirement to demonstrate ownership adherence is found to be by no means the only institutional demand external actors are faced with at the field level. Other demands and constraints include the requirement to adhere to standardised procedures of organisational conduct, donor priorities, tight timelines, limited capacity and budgetary constraints, among others (Blease/Qehaja, 2013; Lemay-Hébert, 2012; Narten, 2009; Philipsen, 2014; Reich, 2006; Sahin, 2016). Sarah von Billerbeck describes the dilemma for external actors resulting from conflicts between the requirement to demonstrate ownership adherence and the requirement to respond to other institutional demands for the case of development actors:

> Development agencies are under constant pressure to deliver results and demonstrate good value for money. However, devolving project design, implementation, and evaluation to local actors means, in essence, devolving the achievement of results to local actors. Unfortunately, […] the lack of capacity of national actors, the political interests of governments, and the proliferation of subnational and non-governmental owners means that results may come about slowly or not at all, forcing development agencies to trade efficiency for ownership and return empty-handed to their governments (von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 33f).

The dilemma described by von Billerbeck illustrates how ownership policy plays an ambivalent role in organisational strategies that aim at maintaining coherent self-representations and political support and ensuring a high operative level at the same time. What is more, the ownership concept has not been subject to much organisational codification. Organisational guidance on how to accomplish, in practical terms, a state of ownership in external programming and how to cope with competing demands at the field level remains limited. As Timothy Donais notes:

> While the ownership principle has now become firmly entrenched as a core tenet of international engagement with fragile and war-affected states, what is less clear is how it should be operationalised. It is fair to say that on this issue, practice has yet to fully catch up with rhetoric; indeed, the shift from

> words to action exposes key tensions and fundamental ambiguities in the concept that are unavoidable at the operational level (Donais, 2015a, p. 40).

Demonstrating ownership adherence without ample guidance, while navigating competing institutional demands, can pose a 'wicked problem' for practitioners. Frictions arising from competing demands cannot necessarily be resolved by single bouts of decision-making or by seeking more accurate information, as there is not one 'correct' view of the most appropriate organisational action (Brunsson, 1989, p. 174; Weick, 1995, p. 92). Rather, uncertainty about how to determine adequate organisational courses of action in view of ambiguous and competing demands becomes a permanent working condition. To remain operational and to maintain external support, external actors need to continuously account for various demands and constraints, while avoiding putting core organisational goals at risk.

Considering these conceptual ambiguities and competing demands associated with the ownership concept, academics and practitioners are divided over the substance and relevance of the ownership concept. Oliver Richmond refers to the ownership concept as a 'fashionable piece of rhetoric' (Richmond, 2012, p. 357). Olawale Ismail calls ownership 'a thorny, contested and unresolved (perhaps unresolvable) concept' (Ismail, 2008, p. 127). Erlend Grøner Krogstad questions if the concept of ownership has any consistency or substance at all (Grøner Krogstad, 2014, p. 105). Other authors discuss the concept critically as an instrument of foreign intrusive intervention, which masks external conditionality and surveillance, while material, framing and symbolic power remains with external actors (Bargues-Pedreny, 2016; Fraser/Whitfield, 2008; Sahin, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2016). Stephen Brown notes that while it is not yet time to abandon the ownership concept altogether, it should be a research priority to carefully and critically investigate the concept's concrete application and the dynamics it creates at the level of the field (Brown, 2017, p. 18). Overall, opinions differ as to whether ownership constitutes a Western policy narrative, a guiding norm for field practices, or if it is simply a rhetorical façade.

1.1 The research question

In view of the diverging positions on the relationship between ownership policy and external actors' field practices, more general questions arise: Is there any relationship between policy concepts and external actors' field practices at all, for better or for worse? Would 'better' policy guidance result in more effective and legitimate field practices? And which factors hamper or are conducive to external actors' adherence to policy prescriptions at the field level? Depending on the school of thought, answers to these questions look fundamentally different.

On the one hand is the *functional view* on policy, which conceives of policy as a means to rational problem-solving, directly informing and shaping implementation practices. According to this thinking, ownership is a policy tool for increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of governance transfers. On the other hand, there is the *critical view*, according to which policy is developed to conceal hidden agencies of bureaucratic power and external interests. According to this thinking, ownership is an instrument for the extension of power and for external control. From this more critical perspective, policy is more or less irrelevant for field practices, because it does not aim to inform these practices in the first place. Both perspectives have limited explanatory value for the case of ownership policy: In view of the wide gap between policy aspirations and actual practice, it seems unlikely that ownership policy simply informs and shapes external actors' field practices. At the same time, the resemblance of the ownership concept to an internationally accepted norm makes it unlikely that the concept is entirely irrelevant for field practice.

Some authors assume a moderating position of sorts between these two opposing perspectives. For example, David Mosse suggests that while development actors are first and foremost driven by external requirements and constraints and their need to maintain political support, they aim to perpetuate their self-representation as instances of authorised policy (Mosse, 2004, p. 693). Hence, while policy is not a means in and of itself to understand organisational practices, this does not mean that policy is entirely irrelevant for practice. According to Mosse, policy is indeed central to what happens in areas of aid and development, as a crucial part of the authorisation concept of external intervention. However, while greatly advancing the debate on the politics of contemporary aid relationships with his propositions, Mosse does not provide more specific insights into policy's exact relevance at the level of the field. Instead, he points to the 'black box of unknowing between development policy and its effects' (Mosse, 2004, p. 641). The question of how and why external actors, who are faced with an abstract policy concept, translate this policy concept into their respective field practice remains largely unexplored and contested in the literature. Further empirical investigations are required, following a problem-driven approach.

Against this backdrop, this study expands on the question as to how ownership as an 'idea with power' (Mosse, 2004, p. 665) interacts with institutional practices at the field level and poses the following research question:

How do external actors make sense of ownership as a policy concept (in view of competing demands), how does this translate into their respective organisational practices at the field level, and which factors influence this process?

The research question aims to illuminate underlying institutional processes, which connect ownership policy and field practices, to contribute to an understanding of how gaps between policy and practice come about. To this end, this study embarks on an in-depth investigation of external actors' cognition and practices evolving around ownership policy in the context of the SSR process in Mali. Exploring the ownership concept as a case of an abstract policy principle, which external actors must 'make sense' of at the field level to come to decisions about adequate organisational responses, also provides insights into the more general debate on the relationship between policy and practice in aid, development and peacebuilding relationships.

0wnership policy and the legitimacy and effectiveness of external intervention

What makes the ownership concept in aid, development and peacebuilding interventions such a contested issue is its location at the centre of tension between the legitimacy and effectiveness of external interventions.[2] First, ownership for reform processes is postulated to lead to more *effective and sustainable project results,* with domestic owners assuming tasks and responsibilities when external interventions come to an end. Accordingly, the policy-oriented literature is rich in contributions on how to better 'operationalise' ownership in the context of aid, development and peacebuilding programming, for example through participatory approaches and inclusive planning.

Second, external interventions usually take place in 'areas of limited statehood', where central authorities are not able to collectively enforce binding rules and the monopoly of force (Krasner/Risse, 2014, p. 549). Hence, these interventions are often characterised by substantial power asymmetries between external and domestic actors and entail considerable interference by external actors with domestic governance arrangements, calling the primacy of national self-determination into question. Therefore, these interventions are faced with extensive criticism that presupposes a lack of legitimacy and the presence of imperialist-interventionist rationale (Cunliffe, 2012; Jackson, 2011). Against this backdrop, ownership policy prescribes 'rules of engagement' and courses of action in the context of external-domestic relations that are widely considered proper and morally right. Hence, referencing ownership as an internationally recognised guiding principle, vested with moral power and connotations of national self-determination, allows external actors to hedge against accusations of unduly

[2] In this study, effectiveness is understood as the ability of external actors to deliver envisaged outputs according to their organisational goals. Legitimacy comprises elements of (empirical) beliefs and attitudes of the actors affected by an intervention, as well as the normative status of an external intervention. Cord Schmelzle has pointed out that external actors can only draw on a very limited stock of legitimacy, which has implications for which actions of external actors are deemed appropriate by their organisational environment. For details on the conceptual debate on the relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy of governance, see Schmelzle, 2012.

interfering with domestic affairs (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299; Reich, 2006, p. 7; Shinoda, 2008, p. 98). Demonstrating adherence to ownership principles allows external actors to maintain self-representations as supporters of nationally driven processes. As such, it can serve as a *source of legitimacy* for external interventions in the eyes of the organisational environment and thereby facilitate external support. This also means that challenging the validity of ownership would risk causing severe reputational damage to the institution involved and, in turn, a loss of external support. Therefore, external actors can be expected to perceive the need to demonstrate adherence to ownership principles as pressing, which is confirmed by strong policy statements that reaffirm the universal applicability and primacy of the concept in the context of external intervention.

However, while ownership is discussed at the policy level as crucial for the legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions, previous research has pointed out that the causal underpinnings of these concepts and their relationship to each other are complex and far from clear (Schmelzle, 2012). While some authors point to *mutually reinforcing* qualities of the two concepts, other authors argue that demands of effectiveness and legitimacy ever so often require *trade-offs* at the field level. Sarah von Billerbeck summarises this point, regarding ownership policy in the context of UN peacekeeping missions:

> '[…] for all the logical soundness of the concept in terms of increasing legitimacy and sustainability, it fails to regularly produce these results, suggesting that theories – or assumptions – of how local ownership functions are incomplete. More specifically, local ownership may not "work" as expected because of divergent understandings of what local ownership is, because of how the UN "does" local ownership, because of conflicting organizational imperatives, or because of differing perspectives on legitimacy' (von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 7).

Ownership as an abstract yet highly important policy principle is at the heart of these conflicts over factors that make external interventions more effective and more legitimate.

Current policy trends: widening the gap?

External actors' practical dilemmas of demonstrating ownership adherence without ample guidance, while navigating competing institutional demands at the field level, have been further aggravated in recent years by a growing divide, which becomes apparent at the policy level. This growing divide could have implications for the future status and relevance of the ownership principle in external-domestic relations: While the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further substantiate

the language of inclusiveness, partner orientation and sustainability, other policy frameworks gradually move towards a stronger emphasis on global security agendas and short-term stabilisation objectives, which partly call the guiding principles of the international development and aid agenda into question. These tendencies have been noted, for example in the context of the 'securitisation' of development discourses (Beall et al., 2006; Duffield, 2010; Gibert, 2009). The Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union from 2016, which emphasises the primary role of its member states' geopolitical and security interests, is only one example that illustrates this trend. These policy trends point to a decline in notions of alignment with partner states' objectives and in the usage of country systems, in view of shifting international strategic agendas. Accordingly, these developments could gradually lead to fundamental alterations in the relationships between donors/interveners and recipients/state objects of intervention – a relationship which is at the core of the ownership concept.

Besides, these policy trends coincide with a growing and widely shared frustration about the limited impact that policy initiatives like the Paris and Accra declarations have had on external actors' modes of operation and about the still limited ability of large organisations like the UN to adapt and learn accordingly. Hence, approaches to ownership in the context of external intervention remain a pertinent topic of research.

1.2 A note on the study's methodology

This study investigates how external SSR actors in Mali make sense of the ownership concept at the field level. Sensemaking analysis explores how different factors shape individuals' perceptions of how to cope with uncertainty vis-à-vis the organisational situation, enabling actors to determine actions that are deemed appropriate.

The analytical perspective chosen should not be mistaken for conceptualising ownership as a function of how international actors perform. The study is indeed not based on the assumption that the way external actors perceive phenomena within their environment is an accurate, infallible reproduction of events. The gap between policy and practice is not understood as a gap between external actors' expectations and domestic actors' behaviour. Neither are perceptions of external actors seen as the main access point to understanding security governance in Mali. Instead, this study argues that external actors' abilities to access and understand their environment are limited, that the cues they use to make sense of their situation are *selective* and *collectively interpreted,* and that the perspective they develop is *socially constructed*, 'in the sense that people do something that creates the environment with which they must then deal' (Gioia/Mehra, 1996, p. 1227). This study argues that it is precisely this *enacted image*

imposed on the environment that is eventually decisive for external actors' sensemaking as concerns appropriate conduct.

Assuming the perspective of external actors means to assume an intentionally inward-looking perspective on institutions as bureaucratic systems, which has as its aim an understanding of the images that external actors create and maintain of their environment, in order to thus understand how such images shape the actions of external actors.

1.3 Preview of the findings

The main contribution of this study is to provide a more nuanced and structured picture of *how* ownership policy is relevant for SSR field practices in the case of SSR in Mali. While a 'gap' between policy and practice might look similar at first glance, if only 'input' and 'output' are compared, this study engages with *underlying processes of sensemaking* of external actors, their organisational practices in view of ownership policy and influencing factors that impact organisational sensemaking and practices. The study finds that ownership policy features in organisational sensemaking in more diverse ways than just as a legitimising factor. Based on the findings, different paths for strengthening external actors' adherence to ownership policy are suggested in the concluding chapter of this study.

Sensemaking patterns of ownership

The study finds that ownership policy as a demand, in the case under research, conflicts with other institutional demands at the field level – to an extent that inhibits organisational action, unless sensemaking provides the cognitive bridges required to cope with dilemmas and to make decisions about adequate responses. In sensemaking, the ownership concept can feature in different ways, depending on the sensemaking situation and the characteristics of the sensemaker. It finds that ownership policy serves in external actors' sensemaking as a (1) *resource* for sensemaking, while acting as an (2) *obstacle* to coherent field practices on other occasions. At other times, ownership becomes a (3) *subject* of sensemaking itself, with sensemakers modifying the properties of the concept to make it more congruent with other demands.

(1) As part of a given organisation's engagement philosophy, ownership can serve as a normative and cognitive template, which features in institutional and individual *logics of appropriateness*. Practitioners apply 'owner' as a lens upon the domestic actors' landscape, to identify eligible counterparts and to decide on adequate actions, according to prescribed roles and responsibilities. From this perspective, ownership served as a *resource* for respondents to draw on, to make sense of their situation and to

determine adequate actions. This sensemaking pattern is closely related to organisational policies and guidance, supporting functional perspectives on the relationship between policy and practice. However, this approach to ownership gets critically challenged when ownership is perceived to be largely absent, while other demands require organisational action. Under these conditions, the second pattern is more likely to emerge.

(2) While genuine ownership in the form of commitment and political will is largely perceived to be absent and not achievable from the outside, external actors depend on its presence to maintain coherent self-representation as supporters of a nationally driven process. Moreover, other demands directed at organisations require actors to show results and proceed with the implementation of activities, with or without perceived ownership. These demands do not only compete but also conflict with the requirement to adhere to principles of ownership. Under these conditions, ownership (or, more precisely: the absence of ownership) acts as an *obstacle* to coherent self-representations in sensemaking processes. This pattern is closely related to perceived implementation dilemmas, limited abilities to act and expressions of personal frustration about the inconsistency of organisational approaches to ownership.

(3) In view of competing demands, respondents engaged in 'making sense' of the ownership concept itself as a *subject* of sensemaking, with the aim of *altering the concept's properties* and making it more congruent with other demands, thereby facilitating organisational action. These alterations comprised, for example, its sequential position in external interventions (starting point or end state), its effectuation (ownership as a governing principle or a subject of policy transfers), its level of ambition (the ability or intention of domestic actors) and its purview (national reform process or the context of external intervention). Furthermore, as ownership is found to lack conceptual substance, it is endorsed with meaning *in relation* to other demands, either in *demarcation* (ownership vs. political will, ownership vs. agency) or in *equation* (ownership equalling capacity/knowledge). This sensemaking pattern aims to increase external actors' abilities to act and actively cope with implementation dilemmas, supporting more critical perspectives on the relationship between policy and practice.

Organisational practices in view of ownership policy

The study found that logics of appropriateness attached to the ownership concept have an impact on the cognitive frames and logics of intervention of external actors, which cannot be easily dismissed at the field level. Hence, *defiance* and *open avoidance* as attempts to conceal the necessity of compliance with ownership policy and manipulation in the form of dismissal, challenge or attack were not encountered, as demon-

strating ownership adherence was perceived as vital to maintaining coherent self-representation and to sustaining external support. However, *full adherence* to ownership principles was not encountered either, though some external actors approximated ownership adherence more than others. The findings suggest that full adherence is not a viable response for external actors to pursue for the sake of organisational effectiveness and protecting organisational goals, if demands conflicts. Overall, external actors opted for *compromise, avoidance* and *manipulation* tactics to maintain their self-representation of ownership-adherent actors, while also responding to other institutional demand and retaining scope for choice and action.

Factors impacting organisational sensemaking of ownership and practices

The study finds that certain constellations of influencing factors make certain organisational responses more likely. Which approach external actors opt for, to cope with competing demands, is found to largely depend on the *characteristics and capacities of the actors* (competencies, resources, access), their *perceptions of the institutional environment*, and the *perceived strength of institutional demands* in relation to each other. In view of other institutional demands, ownership is found to be the weaker side of demand in most cases, as it is not connected to the resource base of the organisation and it is also not internally institutionalised or connected to means of coercion/enforceability. Non-adherence thus is not perceived to lead to negative organisational consequences/sanctions. A more active approach to making conflicting demands more congruent, like manipulation but also compromise, requires more influence and resources to actively alter the nature of at least one demand side (in this case: ownership adherence). A more passive strategy, which means that the actor lives with ambiguity arising from conflicting demands without taking active steps to weaken or change one demand side, is more likely if external actors lack the capacities/resources to opt for a more active approach.

In view of these findings, the study suggests that sensemaking can connect policy and practice in various and potentially unique ways. The study expands on Mosse's argument, according to which policy impacts practices but not in an instructive manner, rather from a legitimatory, authorising point of view. In the case under research, ownership policy, while perceived as a weak demand, constituted a vital element in organisational cognition and featured in individuals' logics of appropriateness. These insights can be taken up to strengthen external actors' adherence to ownership requirements at the field level.

2 The debate in the literature

This chapter provides an overview of the way in which the relationship between policy concepts and organisational practices of external actors has thus far been studied. As international policy concepts and their relation to institutional practice is a subject for different disciplines, the study engages with different fields of research. By discussing and comparing relevant theoretical and empirical approaches, the chapter also provides insights into the conceptual foundations that chapter 3 (The conceptual framework) builds on.

The chapter starts out with a discussion of how external actors' interventions in areas of limited statehood have been studied so far, focussing on literature in the fields of international relations, peacebuilding and research on contemporary aid relationships. While neither legitimacy nor effectiveness of external interventions are the main subjects of this study, these concepts are briefly discussed in the beginning of the chapter, because they pertain to the ownership concept in a wider sense. Next to research on external actors' interventions, this study discusses theoretical concepts derived from organisation/management research, as this field of research has generated and empirically substantiated a variety of theoretical and analytical approaches to explore the relationship between individuals, organisations and their environment, which can be introduced into the debate on aid, development and peacebuilding. Indeed, previous ethnographic research has emphasised that organisation research is helpful in understanding external actors as bureaucratic systems, pursuing organisational goals (Hirsch/Gellner, 2001; Mosse, 2013). For this study, organisational approaches to analysing organisational information-processing as a necessary process preceding organisational action are particularly relevant and are discussed in more detail.

Based on a discussion of the specific conditions under which organisational cognition of external actors in areas of limited statehood takes place, the study identifies the sensemaking perspective as the most appropriate approach for exploring cognitive processes of external actors who are charged with devising appropriate organisational actions vis-à-vis the environment. As the actual characteristics of sensemaking processes are rather undertheorised, the study briefly turns to localisation studies and (norm) translation processes, identifying Lisbeth Zimmermann's model of modes of dealing with norm contestation as a relevant model for categorising different modes of sensemaking in view of competing demands. As the literature on localisation and translation approaches is vast and comprises different branches, the focus of the review is

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on the literature that deals with the role of external actors in (norm) translation processes.

In terms of organisational practices, Christine Oliver's model of organisational responses to conflicting demands and constraints is identified as the most encompassing model to assess external actors' organisational practices at the field level. Moving to influencing factors of organisational cognition, the literature review again mostly draws on organisation theory. As ownership policy is the main subject of research, the study pays special attention to the role of policy as an influencing factor of institutional practice. Discussing both policy-affirming and critical notions of policy, the study positions itself in between the two and identifies David Mosse's arguments as the most pertinent for external actors' sensemaking of ownership and field practices.

In the second part, the literature review turns to the more specific debate on ownership policy in the context of SSR interventions. It starts out with an overview of the policy status of ownership in SSR and outlines conceptual debates on ownership, which inform the conceptual framework. The study then elaborates on policy-affirming and critical perspectives on ownership in SSR, demonstrating that this more specific debate largely reflects the general debate on the relationship between policy concepts and institutional practice.

The chapter concludes with an overview of empirical investigations of external actors' SSR practices, which equally reflect the debate on external actors' field practices in areas of limited statehood in more general terms. The review provides evidence that suggests that trade-offs between demands pertaining to the effectiveness and legitimacy of external actors' interventions are unavoidable at the field level, with ownership policy playing a crucial role in these trade-offs. This part of the literature review underlines that the gap between policy and practice is particularly evident in the case of ownership policy in SSR interventions. As ownership and SSR are often discussed in the wider context of peacebuilding, the review also partly reflects on publications from this field of research.

2.1 External actors' field practices

'External actor' is an analytical umbrella category that encompasses a variety of state and non-state actors, including international organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), public private partnerships (PPP), national development agencies, religious actors, financial institutions and multinational corporations. EU and UN missions can also be categorised as 'external actors'. As a specific category of

internationally operating governance actors, external actors are commonly distinguished from national, domestic or local actors.[3]

For each category of external actors, there is a specialised sub-field of research, for example on IOs, NGOs and UN peacekeeping missions. The state of research cannot be discussed in detail for each sub-category of external actors, especially as the attributions for actors as 'local' and 'external' are highly context-dependent. However, while external actors can take various shapes, they usually share certain common organisational features like explicit rules and regulations for conduct, an internal division of labour and organisational goals (Hirsch/Gellner, 2001; Junk/Trettin, 2014). These common structural features allow for a comparative perspective on external actors as organisations and on their field practices in the context of interventions.

This study focuses on external actors for which ownership as a policy concept is applicable. Pinpointing these actors requires recalling the policy purpose of the ownership concept: The ownership concept did not emerge from routine social behaviour in a given society but was established as a policy model for a specific purpose, which is to determine rules of engagement and courses of action in the context of external-domestic relations that are widely considered proper and morally right. Purely nationally driven reform programmes do not require notions of ownership, because they are owned by national actors by default. It is only in external interventions in which the ownership concept serves a purpose. These interventions often occur in the context of peace- and statebuilding endeavours in 'areas of limited statehood', undertaken by external actors. According to Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse, these are 'areas of a country in which central authorities (governments) lack the ability to implement and enforce rules and decisions and/or in which the legitimate monopoly over the means of violence are lacking' (Krasner/Risse, 2014, p. 549). Hence, external actors intervene in these areas, to enhance the capacity of these states, following global development scripts of peace- and statebuilding. Furthermore, Lee et al. suggest that external actors increasingly intervene in areas of limited statehood to provide collective goods and services themselves (Lee et al., 2014). For both types of external interventions, the ownership concept is applicable.

These interventions of external actors in areas of limited statehood have been subjected to substantial academic research. More policy-oriented investigations often focus on the effectiveness and legitimacy of these interventions. Some authors point to

[3] Local, domestic and national actors are all common categories in the literature that are not clearly distinguished. This study works with the term 'domestic actors', in order to emphasise the distinction from external actors, which could be located equally at the national or the local level.

mutually reinforcing qualities of effectiveness and legitimacy of governance. Policy documents – including ownership policy – are mostly based on the assumption that the concepts comprise mutually reinforcing qualities. Other authors argue that demands of effectiveness and legitimacy ever so often require *trade-offs* at the field level. Overall, authors are far from agreeing on the relationship and causal underpinnings of the two concepts.[4]

Critical research has questioned the effectiveness and legitimacy of external interventions in areas of limited statehood alike. Much of this criticism has been directed at external actors' attempts to create 'Westphalian states', based on the replication of policy frameworks and values associated with liberal states (Richmond, 2004, p. 91). According to this criticism, the absence of liberal governance institutions is used as a justification for a neo-colonial 'mission civilisatrice' by external actors. Mark Duffield found that connections between security concerns and under-development or absence of governance in states that are framed as failing are constructed in order to justify external interventions (Duffield, 2010). Referring to David Chandler, Oliver Richmond suggests that 'this means that peace is seen as ending conflict through governance, often on the grounds of human rights violations. This provides external actors with both an ethical *obligation* to intervene if they are to live up to the human rights and humanitarian rhetoric of liberal states, but also an *opportunity* to intervene to establish democratic governance' (Richmond, 2004, p. 94).

These critical voices are amplified by empirical research that finds that these interventions are mostly unsuccessful in accounting for competing demands of effectiveness and legitimacy during the implementation phase. What is more, large organisations like the UN show limited progress in adapting and learning from experience. For example, Séverine Autesserre found that policy-makers and practitioners continue to apply standard models and techniques of peacebuilding, knowing that they are ineffective and that peacebuilding interventions are regularly counterproductive (Autesserre, 2014b). Elisabeth Schöndorf has analysed UN transitional administrations in East Timor and in the Croatian region of Eastern Slavonia, finding widespread 'pathologies' of external actors, resulting in 'spoiling from within' peacekeeping missions (Schoendorf, 2009). Schöndorf's research underlines the importance of both individual and structural obstacles resulting from the UN's bureaucratic structure to effective planning and mandate implementation. Susan Watkins et al. suggest that development actors function according to organisational logics, but that they are faced with specific

[4] For a more in-depth debate on the relationship between the legitimacy of governance actors and the effectiveness of governance provision see: (Gilley, 2009; Schmelzle, 2012; Schaeferhoff, 2014).

uncertainties arising from 'altruism at long distance' – for example, unachievable goals and ambiguous, unpredictable environments (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 288). As Watkins et al. put it, for development actors in more general terms, '[t]hese organizations confront a profound contradiction between the global visions of transformation that animate them and the complex, obdurate material and social realities they encounter on the ground' (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 286).

Lisa Denney has contributed insights to the debate with her research on the SSR programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) in Sierra Leone, in which she traces how an SSR intervention that was designed to focus on the inclusion of local structures and customs struggled with its own character as an institution being based on and striving for Max Weber's legal-rational decision-making in its policies, when interacting with the local context, leading to frictions and miscommunication (Denney, 2013). Sara Hellmüller demonstrated how international policy-makers have taken ten years to integrate local priorities into their peacebuilding strategies (Hellmueller, 2013). Overall, critical voices on external actors' state-building interventions in areas of limited statehood are numerous and have been reinforced by a growing body of literature on the limited success and unintended consequences of internationally driven state-building endeavours.

Coming to the reasons behind this bad track record of external interventions in areas of limited statehood, empirical investigations of external actors' field practices suggest that external actors are faced with various competing demands and constraints in terms of effectiveness and legitimacy and provide evidence for conflicts between demands of effectiveness and legitimacy arising at the field level, underlining tensions between external actors' intentions to foster domestic reform processes, on the one side, and implementing externally conceived and funded large-scale interventions on the other (Blease/Qehaja, 2013; Lemay-Hébert, 2012; Narten, 2009; Philipsen, 2014; Reich, 2006; Sahin, 2016). External actors are required to attend to donor priorities and to demonstrate quick results. Organisational mandates determine benchmarks and timelines that the organisations are expected to meet, while the organisation's reputation and public image need to be fostered and protected. To remain operational and maintain external support, external actors need to continuously engage with different demands arising from the organisation and its environment, without putting organisational goals and vital organisational processes at risk. The tensions between demands of effectiveness and legitimacy were found to be especially critical if the interests of external and domestic actors in peace- and statebuilding interventions diverge: For example, Jairo Munive found for the case of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) interventions in South Sudan and Liberia that frictions

between local and external actors began with different perceptions about what interventions were supposed to achieve (Munive, 2013). This underlines the importance of *perceptions* in actors' decision-making on appropriate practices in view of conflicting demands, which will be taken up in the conceptual framework.

Insights from organisation research

The contributions on external actors' field practices in the fields of international relations, peacebuilding and contemporary aid relationships discussed so far all conceptualise the relationship between external actors as organisations and their environment in some way. While these theoretical roots are not always made explicit, research in these fields often draws on theories and models derived from organisation research. At the end of the day, external actors in areas of limited statehood are 'social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals' (Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 15) and are thus, to a certain degree, comparable to for-profit firms and companies in the OECD world that are the main objects under research in organisation theory. For the case of UN peace missions, Elisabeth Schöndorf notes that '[t]ransferring them [concepts] from their original application areas of economic firms and public administrations, concepts of organizational theory and administrative science yield valuable descriptive, explanatory, and prescriptive potential for the study of pathologies and coping of UN peace operations' (Schöndorf, 2009, p. 52).

When it comes to theoretical perspectives on external actors' field practices, organisation research has provided pertinent and empirically substantiated contributions. Two views on organisational practices in view of competing demands are dominant in the organisation literature. One view assumes that environments exert pressure on organisations to conform to environmental demands. From this point of view, external actors are expected to passively conform to demands expressed by their environment, in order to be perceived as legitimate by their environment and thus receive support (Barnett/Coleman, 2005, p. 598; Scott, 1995). According to this thinking, if organisations experience insecurity – for example, due to demands countering what organisational members perceive to be their core mandate or if the organisational resource base is threatened – they would feel compelled to *conform to their environment*. Conformity with the organisational environment is expected to increase chances of survival but reduce organisational efficiency (Zucker, 1983, p. 445). This view has been criticised for an overly passive and conforming perspective on organisations (Brown et al., 2008, p. 182; Oliver, 1991, p. 146). Factors like cognitive properties, discursive power, self-interest, dynamics of agency and the formative character of the institutional environment often remain under-acknowledged or under-employed (Boxenbaum/Jonsson,

2008, p. 79). To this end, Oliver suggests conducting further research on conditions under which organisations do not conform to pressures arising from the environment (Oliver, 1991, p. 175).

The second view proposes that organisations approach their environment more actively and apply practices of *strategic non-compliance*. It supposes strategic non-compliance as the most likely way for organisations to cope with environmental demands. Well-established 'coping strategies' of non-adherence are the closely connected concepts of 'decoupling' and 'organised hypocrisy', which refer to inconsistencies between organisational rhetoric and action (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 79; Hensell, 2015; Lipson, 2007). Drawing on similar ideas, they are discussed in the following section in the context of the 'decoupling' debate.

Decoupling depicts a process in which an actor rhetorically accepts certain norms or targets, which the actor might also adopt in the form of rules and regulations. However, in terms of activities and practices, the actor follows a diverging strategy and detaches practices from rhetoric (Pache/Santos, 2013, p. 974; Schlichte/Veit, 2009; Zimmermann, 2014). According to the literature, decoupling often happens between organisational structures serving *legitimising* functions and practices that are believed to be *efficient* (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 91). This phenomenon has also been researched by Stephen Krasner, who focussed on rulers who served different interests of their constituencies (Krasner, 1999). Decoupling can have different effects, ranging from fuelling dysfunction to holding instrumental value that encourages organisations to maintain their legitimacy, to obtain resources and facilitate cooperation amid interdependence. Michael Lipson, for example, analysed decoupling in UN peacekeeping, which is implemented in an environment of contradictory pressures and norms, while drawing its legitimacy from its upholding of widely held international norms. He concludes that decoupling can be a useful approach for external actors to strategically manage inherently conflicting pressures that emerge from the surrounding environment (Lipson, 2007, p. 12). According to Lipton, recognising the obstacles posed by decoupling is an important step towards a realistic assessment of the feasibility of reform and towards enhancing the likelihood of success for such reforms (Lipson, 2007, p. 16). Krasner also recommends decoupling as a policy response to state failure. Nils Brunsson supports the idea that organisations can respond to inconsistencies with decoupling and suggests that organisations can attempt to reflect inconsistencies by adapting their outputs, structures or processes to enable decision-making and action. He notes: 'Organizations dealing with inconsistencies have reason to be hypocritical. When other methods of reflecting inconsistencies are difficult to use, they should even be expected to be hypocritical' (Brunsson, 1989, p. 171).

Brunsson further suggests that decoupling may happen over time: Organisations may opt for talk and decision-making as a substitute for action and respond to demands for action at other times. Furthermore, decoupling could happen over issues (separate conflict debates), over environments (partners and audiences, specialising in niches) or over sub-units (more political or more action-oriented sub-units) (Brunsson, 1986, p. 174ff.). According to Brunsson, inconsistencies are easier to handle in terms of talk and decisions than with regard to action (Brunsson, 1989, p. 171). Talk could be directed to specific audiences and decisions could be taken without being followed by corresponding actions. While the decoupling perspective is widely applied in international relations and norm diffusion research, Lisbeth Zimmermann criticises that it does not account for organisational practices in between rejection and full adoption (Zimmermann, 2014, p. 5).

Two more related strategic responses to competing demands from organisation/management studies pay specific attention to the relationship with the environment: External actors can react to external pressures with *buffering* and *bridging* approaches. Those strategies aim at protecting core organisational activities from external influences and from the impact of ambiguity/uncertainty as a limitation to organisational operativeness. Buffering means that actors try to keep stakeholders who exert pressure on the organisation at a distance, for example by sealing off the organisation from the environment and reducing those stakeholders' opportunities for interference with internal affairs (Van den Bosch/Van Riel, 1998). Buffering is a defensive reaction strategy and a *form of strategic non-compliance*. In contrast, bridging aims at creating relationships with the environment, by adapting organisational activities in a way that *conforms to external demands*. Bridging can take various forms of reciprocity with the environment – for example, exchange of information, negotiation or cooperation (Child, 1997, p. 59). Bridging can also involve elements of innovation. Frans van den Bosch and Cees van Riel suggest that the more an actor depends on support from the organisational environment, the more likely it is that the strategic approach chosen will be bridging. However, mixed forms of bridging and buffering are also possible, as the two strategies are not mutually exclusive.

Oliver's typology of organisational practices in view of competing demands

The most differentiated perspective on a wide range of organisational practices, beyond passive conformity or strategic non-conformity, is provided by Christine Oliver's typology of strategic responses to conflicting demands:

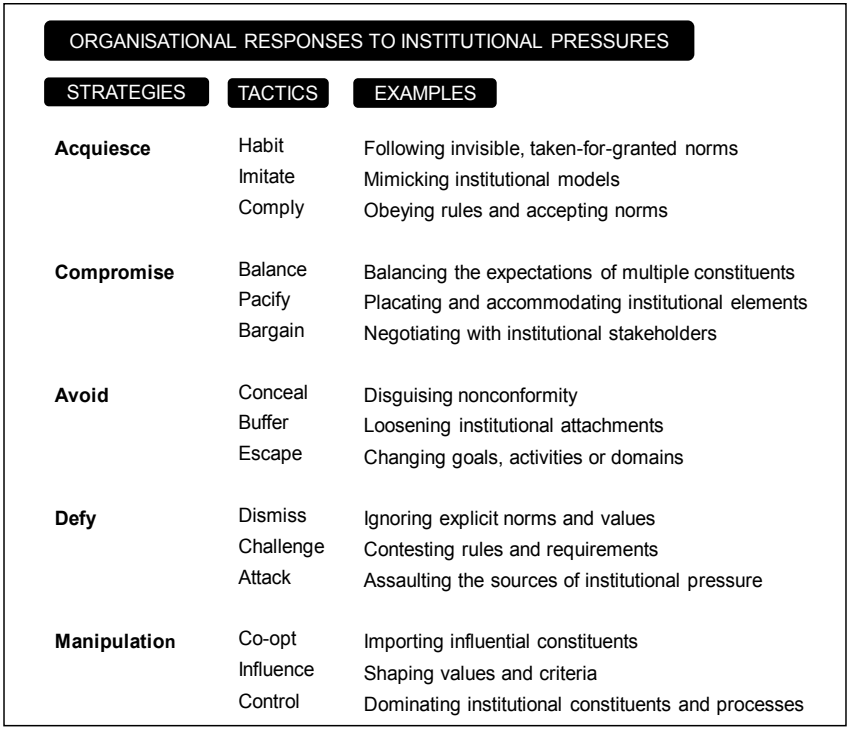

Figure 1: Organisational responses to institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991, p. 152).

Oliver's model is widely applied in organisation/management research to explain organisational responses. Oliver postulates *acquiescence* as full adherence to rules and values, imitating the behaviour of other actors or compliance in the sense of obedience to certain institutional norms and requirements. Another response strategy introduced by Oliver is *compromise.* Compromise encompasses balancing as being the accommodation of multiple demands to achieve parity, pacifying tactics that also aim at partial conformity, and bargaining as a more active form of compromise – for example, by seeking concessions. *Avoidance* is conceptualised by Oliver as an attempt to preclude the necessity of conformity through concealing tactics. Avoidance could also appear in the form of 'ceremonial conformity' or 'window dressing', symbolic acceptance and ceremonial pretence, as well as buffering and escaping as attempts to reduce exposure to external requirements – for example, through decoupling. *Manipulation* refers to the active alteration of certain institutional requirements and of influence on their promoters. *Defiance* is a strategy that aims more at resistance and is pursued by explicitly

rejecting one or more of the institutional demands, through dismissal or by ignoring, challenging, contesting, attacking or denouncing them. Manipulation is the most active resistance strategy, as is constitutes a 'purposeful and opportunistic attempt to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures and evaluations' (Oliver, 1991, p. 157).

Oliver's model provides the most nuanced perspective on organisational practices in view of conflicting demands and constraints. Therefore, it is selected as the most pertinent model for the conceptualisation of organisational responses (chapter 3), to be integrated into the sensemaking model this study works with. However, it will be demonstrated in the conceptual chapter that ownership, as a special type of policy demand, limits options for organisational responses that external actors may deem appropriate.

Overall, while organisational practices in view of competing demands have been subject to substantial research, what is found to be mostly absent from the debate on external actors as governance actors is a structured assessment of how competing demands of effectiveness and legitimacy interact with each other at the field level. Junk and Trettin note that 'despite the increasing importance of IOs [International Organisations] and their respective administrative bodies, especially in the field of peace and security, a recurring theme over decades is the very assessment that still too little is known about the actual inside and inner workings of these organizations' (Junk/Trettin 2014, p. 8). According to Junk and Trettin, research to date has paid little attention to understanding intra-organisational workings and dynamics and their consequences for the performance of external actors. Therefore, the authors call for a new research agenda that explores IOs as bureaucratic systems, drawing on public administration and organisation theory.

2.2 External actors' cognition in view of competing demands

Shedding light on the 'inner workings' of organisations requires exploring external actors' cognition. Indeed, every organisational action requires prior cognitive processes of information-processing that precede formal decision-making and that render subsequent organisational practices possible. Organisation theory has provided various models for these processes.

Insights from organisation research

When it comes to organisational information-processing and decision-making, some approaches emphasise the importance of structural factors, while others put stronger emphasis on the relationship between the organisation and the environment (for example, in resource-dependence theory and principal-agent theory) or on the role of

individuals as decision-makers (for example, in more sociologically or psychologically oriented behavioural research). Some emphasise the role of individual staff members in information-processing and decision-making, while others see individuals as immersed in organisational thinking, pointing to difficulties in differentiating processes of individual and organisational information-processing and decision-making. Overall, processes of cognitive consideration preceding organisational decision-making have less often been the subject of research than formal processes of decision-making. As Dennis Gioia and Henry Sims note, 'much of what has been written about organizations has focused on behaviours and outcomes, without an in-depth understanding of the cognitive processes that influence those behaviours and outcomes' (Gioia/Sims, 1986, p. 3).

For the specific situation of the external actors in areas of limited statehood being researched, only certain of the mentioned organisational models are relevant. The external actors under research have distinct characteristics and objectives that deviate from conventional models of organising and thus require a certain perspective on processes of organisational information-processing and deliberation. Most conventional organisation theories think of organisations as collective actors that *pursue organisational survival* as a key objective (Barnett/Coleman, 2005, p. 597). However, the mandates of the external actors being researched are connected to internationally agreed-upon development goals, such as peacebuilding, rural development or poverty reduction. Depending on the scope of the mandate, the condition of an *organised collective with shared goals* is temporarily limited. What is more, external actors in areas of limited statehood are usually on the ground only for a limited period, to fulfil their mandates – this is also the timeframe in which organisational survival could serve as an objective. Despite tendencies towards organisational preservation, permanent organisational survival in the form of projects on the ground cannot be an explicit organisational goal. On the contrary, external actors in SSR are morally expected to render themselves redundant.

Distinct characteristics also pertain to the relationship between external actors and their environments. Rational-choice models of organisation theory expect efficiency-seeking actors to *choose their domain of engagement by attractiveness*, in terms of clients, markets and the level of competition (Child, 1997, p. 54; Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 21). Since consistent norms are easier to adhere to than inconsistent ones, organisations have reason to specialise and to place themselves in environments with consistent demands (Brunsson, 1989, p. 166). These conditions could be found first and foremost within the regional and cultural context to which organisational members belong (Osland/Bird, 2000, p. 67). However, external actors in aid, development and

peacebuilding interventions usually work in *environments that are least favourable* in terms of infrastructure, technologies and access to information, not least due to an often-volatile security environment. They usually work outside of the usual infrastructures present in industrialised societies (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 289).

Besides, as their organisational setup is often temporary, clear rules and regulations for organisational decision-making are often not in place. This has implications for the options available to external actors and which alternatives are known for navigating their environment. Most organisation models assume that actors have full access to information on operational alternatives and also have the flexibility to adapt to new contingencies, as well as an ability to forecast the consequences of decisions taken (Oliver, 1991, p. 150). However, external actors in aid, development and peacebuilding interventions usually have *limited access to information* about their quickly evolving environment. This limits their *ability to anticipate the consequences of their actions*, in view of competing demands. Under these conditions, basic assumptions of standard models of organisational decision-making as intentional choice and consequential action are critically challenged (March 1991, p. 97).

The sensemaking perspective as a lens for organisational cognition

Against this backdrop, it is questionable whether or to what extent external actors have access to a set of options as well as clear information on operational alternatives and the consequences of decisions made. In view of the nature of the dilemmas arising from competing demands at the field level and the working conditions of the actors involved, conflicts cannot be resolved by one-time, informed decision-making or by more accurate information, as there is not one correct or most rational view of adequate organisational responses (Brunsson, 1989, p. 174; Weick, 1995, p. 92). Under these circumstances, organisation research suggests that ambiguity becomes a permanent working condition, constituting a ‘wicked problem’ or ‘prolonged puzzle’ for practitioners at the field level. Single explanatory approaches to organisational information-processing and decision-making, such as strategic choice, resource-dependence or principal-agent problems, as sole driving forces that explain organisational practices thus fall short in analysing the case at hand. As Scott and Davis have put it:

> Organizations are, first and foremost, systems of elements, each of which affects and is affected by the others. Strategies are not the key to understanding the nature and functioning of organizations, no more than are the people, the formal structure, or the technology. And no organization can be understood in isolation from the larger environment. We will miss the essence of organizations if we insist on focusing on any single feature to the exclusion of the others (Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 24f).

Therefore, a *sensemaking perspective* is found to be a suitable analytical approach to organisational information-processing and interpretation. Sensemaking describes a process of searching for meaning of developments and events when assumptions are challenged or when experience does not resonate easily with established frames and explanatory models. Sensemaking is a cognitive and social process that aims at (re-) establishing clarity and the capacity to act in reaction to environments. It allows sensemakers to establish an account of what is happening and to constructively respond to situations characterised by uncertainty (Maitlis/Sonenshein, 2010, p. 2). With its foundations rooted in Karl Weick's 'The Social Psychology of Organizing' from 1979, the sensemaking perspective became popular in the fields of communication, organisation and management studies, as well as in related fields such as health and education research.[5] Brown et al. describe the sensemaking perspective as 'an enormously influential perspective […] in organization studies, associated strongly with research that is interpretive, social constructionist, processual and phenomenological' (Brown et al., 2015, p. 266).

Sensemaking analysis explores how people undergo cognitive processes that allow them to create a knowledge system in which developments and events have meaning – thereby 'making sense'. More abstractly speaking, sensemaking is the process by which individuals confronted with ambiguity come to understand different situations by labelling events, connecting the abstract with the concrete, and by structuring the unknown (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412).

Sensemaking as a collective process

According to most sensemaking researchers, sensemaking is first and foremost a cognitive process that takes place in the mind of individuals. Sensemakers seek to maintain a coherent, positive self-conception. With developments and events making sense, one's own identity and relations with one's surroundings are re-affirmed (Brown et al., 2015, p. 270; Mills et al., 2010b; Weick, 2005, p. 60). This resonates with Mosse's suggestions on the importance of authoritative interpretations and the coherence of self-representations (Mosse, 2004).

However, while largely found to occur in the minds of individuals, the sensemaking perspective is also widely applied in research on processes of organising. According to Weick, human thinking and social functioning are aspects essential to one another;

[5] For more in-depth discussions of different definitions and theoretical underpinnings of sensemaking see (Weick, 2012; Maitlis, 2014; Jones, 2015). Weick is chosen as the most important approach to sensemaking. His perspective is widely agreed to be the most relevant for collective processes of sensemaking.

the cognitive and the social are intertwined. Individual conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, and collective parameters shape individual perceptions (Weick, 1995, p. 39). Individuals share common values, identities and a sense of belonging. They draw on shared scrips, jointly negotiated narratives and models of action (Currie/ Brown, 2003, p. 564). Also Mary Douglas points out that institutions have an 'institutional grip' on the minds of their organisational members (Douglas, 1986). Or, as Gioia and Sims put it,

> '[…] after a time, individuals within a group or an organization tend to think, at least to some degree, alike. Some authors call this shared meaning *organizational culture*. Consensuality does not necessarily imply perfect agreement, nor that individuals have conducted a formalistic process of "reaching consensus". It merely implies that, whatever the process – conscious or unconscious, deliberate or not – individuals have achieved a certain similarity in the way they process and evaluate information' (Gioia/Sims, 1986, p. 8).

Sensemaking helps organisational members to share understandings of what counts as or can be identified as problems and how these problems should be resolved – by discovery and invention (Brown et al., 2015, p. 267). A shared orientation ('who we are') and 'making sense' are indeed found to be critical for all processes of organising (Choo, 1996, p. 330; Maitlis/Christianson, 2014, p. 58). Sensemaking is the basis for organisational communications, decision-making and interactions with the environment – with counterparts and the world at large. Against this backdrop, a sensemaking perspective is often applied not only to understand sensemaking of individuals but also to explore organisational sensemaking as a *collaborative process* of interpreting and framing experienced situations in meaningful categories. This makes it a relevant perspective for the case of external actors as *collective entities*. In sensemaking theory, organisations are treated as 'loosely coupled systems'. This perspective takes a middle stance between conceptualising organisations as closed, rational systems as opposed to entirely open systems, thereby preserving rationality and indeterminacy as potential modes of collective dealing with contradictions (Orton/Weick, 1990, p. 204).

Sensemaking as enactment

Another feature of the sensemaking perspective that makes it a relevant perspective for the case under research is the *analytical focus on perceptions*. According to sensemaking theory, people make sense of things by seeing a world on which they have already imposed what they believe. This process goes beyond interpretation as discovery, as it encompasses a component of invention; here, sensemaking refers to the *enactment* of environment. As such, sensemaking should be thought of as a process

of 'accomplishing reality', not of discovering it (Weick, 1999, p. 42). This thought is also put forward by Scott:

> The concept of enactment emphasizes the role of perception but also recognizes that organizational members do not only selectively perceive but also directly influence the state of their environments through the cognitive frames they utilize as well as by their own actions, which can alter the state of the environment. […] Participants selectively attend to their environments, and then, in interaction, make collective sense of what is happening (Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 105).

While this means that individuals respond to their own perceptions of their environment, it does not mean that the environment is reduced to a sole object of interpretation by individuals. In sensemaking theory, the environment is still conceptualised as being constituted apart from individual perceptions – for example, through the action of other actors in the field (Child, 1997, p. 53).

Analytical approaches to sensemaking

In the literature, sensemaking is not coherently treated as ontology, philosophy, theory, a methodological approach or a body of findings. In the widest sense, sensemaking can be understood as a *heuristic* for the systematic collection and analysis of qualitative material. Weick describes sensemaking as a *perspective*. Consequently, different conceptions of sensemaking have been integrated into theories, frames and methods of mostly interpretive research over time (McNamara, 2015; Naumer et al., 2008). What is missing to date is an elaborated, agreed-upon, analytical sensemaking framework.

Probably in widest use is Brenda Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology (SMM). It is particularly influential in the fields of communication and information studies (Naumer et al., 2008). SMM focuses on the way people gather and make use of information, providing the basis for a user-centred approach to information use. To this end, Dervin has introduced a metaphor of sensemaking as gap-bridging, which provides heuristic guidance for conceptualising vital elements of a 'standard' sensemaking process.

SMM is a communication-based methodology. Dervin focuses on how individuals seek, interpret and use information to bridge cognitive gaps. The model visualises 'how humans construct interpretive bridges over a gappy reality' (Dervin, 1999, p. 730). It shows that sensemaking is conceptualised as context-specific (dependent on the situation and the individual sensemaker) and that it connects the individual's sensemaking processes (which cognitively bridge gaps) with action-related responses (outcomes). Dervin and Frenette postulate that sensemaking becomes accessible and analysable

in the ways individuals use thoughts, cognitions, and come to conclusions; the attitudes, beliefs and values they draw on; and the feelings, memories, and intuitions, as well as the stories and narratives, they reference (Dervin/Frenette, 2003). As SMM is focussed on individual processes of sensemaking, it is not designed for the analysis of collective processes of sensemaking (see below). Still, it can also serve as a heuristic for the analysis of these processes.

Joyce Osland and Allan Bird have developed an approach for studying the sensemaking of individuals across cultures (Osland/Bird, 2000). Osland and Bird postulate that actors working under these conditions draw on stereotypes and schemas when trying to make sense of what they encounter in an unknown environment and then, over time, gain a deeper understanding of their environment. Their model describes the following steps (Osland/Bird, 2000, p. 70f): (1) *Framing*[6] *the situation*: Individuals approach a context and notice cues about their situation that serve to establish a frame for the situation. This is the framework in which stimuli are interpreted; (2) *making attributions*: Frames are drawn on, in order to match context with patterns; (3) *selecting scripts*: Based on the frame and the attributions, appropriate patterns of social interaction are chosen to guide actors through the organisational situation. Osland and Bird's approach puts special emphasis on cultural paradoxes that expatriates face and is therefore particularly relevant for studying the behaviour of organisations working in largely unfamiliar environments. However, it is a functional model that assumes that cultural observation and extended exposure to different cultures leads to greater understanding, context-appropriate practices, learning and the development of explanations for cultural paradoxes by default (Osland/Bird, 2000, p. 75). Previous research on peacebuilding missions has shown that external actors and their practices can be maladjusted to their context for an extended period of time (Philipsen, 2014; Schoendorf, 2009).

Some further analytical approaches to sensemaking should be noted: Kunal Basu and Guido Palazzo postulate an analytical distinction between cognitive processes, which encompass the organisation's relations with its environment and decisions about activities, linguistic processes – through which decisions for certain activities are explained – and conative processes, which involve the organisation's commitment and consistency in conducting activities (Basu/Palazzo, 2008, p. 124). Joergen Sandberg and Haridimos Tsoukas propose an analysis of sensemaking by tracing processes of creation, interpretation and enactment (Sandberg/Tsoukas, 2015, p. 14). Klaus Weber

[6] In the original article, the first step is described as 'indexing context'. In later publications that draw on the Osland and Bird model, it is usually referred to as 'framing the situation'.

and Mary Ann Glynn suggest a rather broad distinction between perceptions, interpretations and actions.

Overall, while taking different approaches and usually being highly specialised, most analyses of sensemaking share certain commonalities. Most sensemaking analyses explore sensemakers' *personal narratives* and the *resources/factors they draw on*, in the form of expressions, categories, terms and illustrations (Saldaña, 2015, p. 111; Silverman, 2011, p. 17). For the case of collective sensemaking, these analyses aim to account for the enactment of organisational identity and the organisation's mutually dependent relationship with its environment to varying degrees. Focussing on *perceptions*, they aim at capturing how sensemakers carve out meaning from the influencing factors they *selectively pick as cues*, based on shared *cognitive frames* (Fellows/Liu, 2016, p. 248). The conceptualisation of the sensemaking model for this study will be elaborated further below (chapter 3.2).

2.3 Influencing factors on external actors' cognition

Oliver suggests that 'organizational responses will vary from conforming to resistant, from passive to active, from preconscious to controlling, from impotent to influential, and from habitual to opportunistic, depending on the institutional pressures toward conformity that are exerted on organizations' (Oliver, 1991, p. 151). This assessment requires a closer look at the institutional pressures external actors intervening in areas of limited statehood are faced with.

Insights from organisation research

When it comes to institutional pressures, organisation/management research often works with single explanatory factors that are treated as 'predicators' or 'determinants' of organisational responses (Miebach, 2012, p. 15). Anne-Claire Pache and Filipe Santos criticise this still dominant thinking in causal functions and point out that 'what is missing is a clearer picture of which elements of the logics organizational actors enact as they try to navigate competing demands, as well as what factors drive these behaviours' (Pache/Santos, 2013, p. 973). Boxenbaum and Jonsson also criticise the limited attention paid to the relationship between causal mechanisms proposed and actual outcomes, in terms of organisational practices (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 89). They note that organisations do not respond similarly to the same pressures and suggest that future research should explore organisational factors that lead to certain strategic responses (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 87). Lipson points out that most studies do not account for underlying *cognitive* processes that lead up to decisions and the coping of organisations with conflicting demands (Lipson, 2007, p. 24). Therefore, it is

important to pay closer attention to factors pointed out in the literature as influencing the way institutional demands impact on organisational cognition and are dealt with by external actors.

The sensemaking perspective suggests that the question of which demands are responded to at the expense of others depends on which factors sensemakers selectively notice and perceive as pressing (Fellows/Liu, 2016, p. 248; Weick, 1995, p. 134). According to the literature, consequential for organisational action are the *characteristics of demands* and their *relations to one another,* as those aspects affect their perceived strength and the perceived pressure on organisations to adhere to them. Influencing factors can be operational in nature, while other factors pertain to the level of organisational goals. According to Oliver, c*onsistency of demands with organisational goals* is expected to make adherence more likely (Oliver, 1991, p. 164). Goals are expressions of the organisation's core value system, which are not easily challenged. Oliver further claims that if gains in terms of *social legitimacy, strategic utility* and *economic gain* are perceived to be high, responses will tend to adherence. Brunsson points to the *negotiability of demands* that allows for the formulation of problems, explicit statements and discussions of alternatives (Brunsson, 1989, p. 168). Pache and Santos suggest that it matters if demands have a certain level of *internal representation*, as this adds to their perceived strength (Pache/Santos, 2010, p. 460). Moreover, if demands are accompanied by control, pressure and sanctions, this results in an increase to their perceived strength, as well (*means of coercion*). Moreover, the interplay between organisational responses and the structural order in which they operate – organisational features like funding sources and the composition of boards, the relationship with other organisations, as well as cognitive factors that pertain, for example, to prior experiences with a certain type of organisational response – are identified as potentially relevant factors. Further factors can be derived from resource-dependence theory, according to which demands associated with the *actor's ability to control the allocation and availability of critical resources* is most pertinent. This connection between the strength of demands and the resource base and level of control over critical organisational processes, respectively, has been pointed out by several authors (Child, 1997, p. 58; Oliver, 1991, p. 164; Pache/Santos, 2010, p. 358; Watkins et al., 2012, p. 294). Strategic-choice approaches further suggest that *greater knowledge* of and *control over the environment* increases opportunities and the scope for organisational choice. This suggests that demands that are perceived to limit decision-making discretion and control over processes and outputs, such as aligning with domestic priorities, leads to resistant responses. However, as discussed before, external actors also need a minimum level of *legitimacy in the eyes of the people affected,* to remain operational. Jonsson and Boxenbaum also point to *perceptions of the importance of constituents,*

concerns about the organisational image, and the *power of external stakeholders* as relevant factors (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 91).

In addition to these factors, which mostly follow logics of cost-benefit calculations, consequences and organisational self-interest, cognitive and normative factors are also mentioned in the literature as relevant for organisational cognition. According to James March and Johan Olsen, *logics of appropriateness* are important for the way human behaviour should be interpreted. March and Olsen see organisational information-processing as driven by rules, meaning that to

> […] act appropriately is to proceed according to the institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good. […] The simple behavioural proposition is that, most of the time, humans take reasoned action by trying to answer three elementary questions: What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this? (March/Olsen, 2013).

Logics of appropriateness as substantial moral convictions are also identified by Schmelzle as a crucial reason for compliance (Schmelzle, 2012). This implies that organisational members take normative considerations into account when deliberating about policy requirements and that organisational rules can play a prescriptive role in coming to adequate responses. However, while rules may provide parameters for action and make certain organisational actions more likely, they can also be obscure and interpreted in different ways. Furthermore, rules may compete and conflict with one another. Against this backdrop, also the relationship of organisational policies and external actors' practices are far from being agreed on in the literature.

Policy as an influencing factor on external actors' field practices

As this study is concerned with the influence of policy concepts on organisational sensemaking and field practices, *policies* are discussed as an influencing factor on external actors' cognition and action in more detail. This study is concerned with policies that are conceived at an international level, but which are applicable to external actors intervening in areas of limited statehood. It is not about policies that guide governments but about policies in the sense of organisational principles and guidelines that direct and limit external actors' field practices in pursuit of organisational long-term objectives. Policies in this regard are understood as *formally adopted governing principles of action.* For external actors, they comprise fundamental rules of engagement, guidelines for their activities, and standard operating procedures, as long as they are formally endorsed and validated (Shore/Wright, 2011).

There are two main perspectives on how policy concepts relate to field practices. On the one hand, there is a *functional view* on policy, which conceives of policy as a set of managerial tools to rational problem-solving, directly informing and impacting implementation practices in policy transfers. Cris Shore and Susan Wright term this view the 'practitioner perspective', which regards policy as 'common sense', arising from decisions made by rational authorities (Shore/Wright, 2011, p. 4). This perspective assumes that the better the policy, the better the implementation, meaning that policy improvements or refinements lead to better implementation results at the field level. This perspective is often applied in organisation/management studies. On the other hand, there is the more *critical view*, according to which policy is developed as a 'cloak of power', strategically concealing hidden external agencies of intrusive social engineering and bureaucratic power, in relations defined by power asymmetries, and justifying permanent external governance interferences. According to this perspective, the turn to participatory policy is a manipulative move by external actors to advance their own interests (Mosse, 2004, p. 643).

In view of these two main perspectives, Jilles von Gastel and Monique Nuijten criticise that both approaches alike do not pay ample attention to the organisational realities and the working environment of actors charged with implementing policies in day-to-day operations, at the headquarters (HQ) or the field level. Instead, van Gastel and Nuijten propose a practice-based approach to policy analysis, exploring 'how organisational realities are constructed, sustained and changed through processes of interaction and enactment' (van Gastel/Nuijten, 2005, p. 88). Also Shore and Wright point out that policies are connected to larger processes of governance and are embedded in 'domains of meaning' (Shore/Wright, 2011, p. 1). Hence, they could have different meanings in different cultural and political contexts. Analyses exploring policies and their effects should take their process of generation, their 'meaning in use', and their actual application by different actors into account. The following section focuses on academic contributions that have responded to this call for an exploration of the 'meaning in use' of policy concepts and their application in the context of external-domestic interactions. These scholars who explore policy models in the context of external-domestic relations are 'concerned with the construction of meaning – the hermeneutic mechanisms through which actors justify their claims and actions, or simply attempt to make sense of "development"' (Gould, 2014, p. 1). They inquire into *how* development works, not *whether* it works or whether or not certain development projects have been successful. By exploring the transformation and co-creation of concepts from their places of origin across the world, they pay varying attention to the agency of actors, path dependencies and structural forces of power.

Insights from localisation and translation approaches

Empirical explorations of the relationship between policy models and field practices have been undertaken, amongst others, through lenses of 'travelling concepts' and norm translation. These are particularly relevant for this study, which asks about the 'translation' of one abstract policy concept by external actors into field practices and factors influencing this process. Besides, previous research has discussed ownership as a concept that resembles an internationally accepted norm (Ismail, 2008, p. 127; Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 25; Wilén, 2009), which makes these fields of research relevant sources of insights for the relationship between ownership policy and institutional practice. In view of the vast and highly specialised literature, theories on norm localisation, appropriation and norm diffusion cannot be elaborated in an exhaustive manner, as part of this literature review. Therefore, pertinent research contributions on external-domestic relations and norm contestation are selectively discussed.

Research on translation processes often engages with norms and normative orders. What the term 'norm' comprises is a subject of discussion. A definition frequently found in the norm literature is that norms are 'collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity' (Jepperson et al., 1996, p. 54). A norm can pertain to fundamental norms (constitutional/procedural), organising principles (political procedures, policy practice) and standardised procedures (specific prescriptions, rules and regulations) (Wiener, 2009, p. 185). Antje Wiener points out that norms can be understood as a fundamental norm in one context, while being applied as an organisational principle in another. The norm translation/diffusion literature in the field of international relations has engaged with different questions evolving around the interpretation, evolution and contestation of international norms.[7] However, as Susanne Zwingel points out, its proponents mostly conceptualise international norms as causes that produce or fail to produce effects within domestic contexts. This is also reflected in policy debates on the *appropriation*[8] of norms and in the context of the aid selectivity and conditionality debate (Kanbur, 2003; Mosley et al., 2003; Stokke, 2013). These policy-oriented contributions are mostly concerned with domestic actors and their *compliance with international norms or policies*. Zwingel argues that 'global-to-local flow of norms inherent in most of the global norm diffusion literature is simplistic' (Zwingel, 2012, p. 115). Also Lisbeth Zimmermann criticises that disparities between concepts and actual practices

7 For a more in-depth discussion of the global norm diffusion literature, see (Zwingel, 2012).

8 Note that the term 'appropriation' can have different notions: While the localisation literature uses the terms to describe processes of active translation and reinterpretation of external norms and concepts, the policy debate refers to appropriation as the process of domestic actors embracing international norms and concepts, which can be externally fostered. While pertaining to the same situation, notions of the concept are quite different.

are often conceptualised as deficits, in the sense of partial compliance or incomplete internalisation (Zimmermann, 2014).

From a travelling concepts/translation perspective, the conditions and locations of processes of meaning and meaning-making evolving around concepts are important for the analysis. Tobias Berger conceptually explored translation processes of Western concepts into non-Western contexts, underlining that concepts are not only translated linguistically but also into different social and political practices (Berger, 2012, 2017). Berger points out that scholars concerned with these translation processes should focus on investigating 'everyday patterns of political thinking' in different parts of the world (Berger 2012, p. 40). Along similar lines, Shalini Randeria criticises the widespread equation of Western history and concepts with global ones, calling for a 'decentralisation of Western perspectives' (Randeria 1999, p. 380). Richard Rottenburg pointed to the importance of the chain of the translation steps, which take place at the interface between the cultural context of the policy-emanating centre and the site of policy implementation in development cooperation (Rottenburg, 2002, Hoenke/ Mueller, 2018). Rottenburg postulates that policy concepts go through a wide range of translation steps, with each step requiring individual exploration of processes of translation and intermediation, so that frictions between interpretations and changes in the 'meaning in use' across different contexts might be better understood. As Norman Long puts it, it is at the interface between external and domestic actors where actors compete in the struggle over the attribution of social meanings to particular ideas, where 'development intervention models become strategic weapons in the hands of those charged with promoting them'(Long/Long, 1992, p. 24). These debates provide pertinent insights into how to conceive of 'translation' processes of policy concepts into external actors' field practices.

The external side of external-domestic interactions

Focussing more on the external side of external-domestic interactions, David Mosse's research on the workings of development policy and practice in the development sector has greatly influenced ethnographic accounts of international aid and development relationships. Though leaning towards the critical side, Mosse positions himself in between the dualistic notions of policy discussed above. First, Mosse argues that the main function of policy in the form of development models and project designs is not to guide implementation practice but to legitimise organisational practices and maintain coherent self-representation. Second, he notes that implementing organisations are driven by external factors, requirements and constraints, as well as by their need to maintain relationships, and not by policy. Third, he concludes that development actors

on the ground work hardest to perpetuate their self-representation as instances of authorised policy. According to Mosse, development projects aim to maintain themselves as coherent policy ideas and as systems representative of such ideas (Mosse, 2004, p. 693). While organisations have limited control over events and processes in their environment, they have more control over the *interpretation of these events and processes*, for which legitimising policy is a source. Hence, while policy is not a means in and of itself to understand organisational practices, this does not mean that policy is irrelevant for practice. According to Mosse, it is indeed central to what happens in development areas and has effects, as donors are disciplined by their own discourse:

> Practices and events are too obviously shaped by the logic and demands of institutional relations (and incentives). Indeed, during the "implementation phase" all the diverse and contradictory interests that were enrolled in the framing of an ambiguous policy model and project design, all the contests and contradictions that are embedded in policy texts, are brought to life and replayed. At the same time, development workers and managers are unable (or unwilling) on the basis of this experience to contradict the models in terms of which they are busy framing and validating their enterprises and identities; the models that make them successful, ensure coalitions of support and justify the flow of resources. So, while the coherence of design unravels in the practical unfolding of a project, everybody is particularly concerned with making, protecting, elaborating and promoting models with the power to organize authoritative interpretations, concealing operational realities, re-enforcing given models and limiting institutional learning (Mosse, 2004, p. 664).

Against this backdrop, Mosse makes a case for empirically exploring the 'black box' between policy designs and the outcomes they are supposed to generate, in terms of institutional practice. This resonates with Junk and Trettin's call for investigating intra-organisational workings and dynamics and their consequences for the performance of external actors.

The domestic side of external-domestic interactions

Though domestic actors are not the subjects of this research, they are taken note of as well, as 'the other side' of external-domestic interactions. With regard to the role of domestic agency in the context of translation processes, Amitav Acharya's work received particular attention (Acharya, 2004). Acharya focuses on the translation of norms from the external to the local level, exploring the adaptability of external ideas to local practices and the ways in which domestic actors connect global norms to domestic normative orders. To this end, Acharya proposes analytical models of local reactions (translation, adaptation, resistance) to external norms and investigates frictions which occur at external-domestic interfaces. Nonetheless, Zimmermann finds that

categorisations for localisation processes and norm translation are still missing. Pointing to the importance of processes of reinterpretation and modification of norms, she proposes a conceptualisation of the outcomes of norm translation processes, focussing on translation into discourse, into law, and into implementation (Zimmermann, 2014):

	Resistence		Full adoption
First step: Translation into domestic discourse	Domestic frames and practices contest validity of norm set	Re-interpretation of global frames and practices, no contestation of validity	No contestation of validity, understanding of norm set in line with international community
Second step: translation into law	No adoption	Re-shaping of norm set during adoption (leaving out/adding on/modifying)	Full adoption of international standards
Third step: translation into implementation	No implementation	Re-shaping during implementation (leaving out/adding on/modifying)	Full implementation

Figure 2: Category system for studying norm diffusion results (Zimmermann, 2014, p. 8).

Zimmermann's model is relevant for this study as one example of a category system that provides a differentiated perspective on norm translation processes and conceptualises *full rejection* and *full adoption* as the exception and not as the rule. However, Zimmermann's model focuses on norm diffusion from the international to the local side. This study is not about ways in which domestic actors adapt, reject or transform external policy concepts, nor is it about the local effects of external intervention. Ownership is not a policy concept that is primarily meant to be 'transferred' or 'diffused' by external actors as a norm to be embraced by the local context; ownership policies are formally meant to *guide and govern institutional practice of external actors*. Therefore, research on the domestic side in translation processes is not elaborated in more detail.

Norm contestation

Further relevant insights have been provided by research on norm contestation, which found that norms can be subject to challenge with the aim of avoiding compliance-costs or of adjusting the norm to divergent interests – either verbally or through actions (Panke/Petersohn, 2015, p. 5). According to Diana Panke and Ulrich Peterson, consequences depend on the *negotiation system* in which the norm is embedded, the *norm characteristics*, and the *strength of the actor* challenging the norm. Zimmermann et al. engaged with situations of competing or overlapping norm systems/orders, for actors at the international level. Zimmermann et al. suggest mutually exclusive categories of

ambivalence, case-by-case decisions and establishing clarity as strategies to cope with these conflicts (Zimmermann et al., 2013, p. 48). If actors decide to live with ambiguity, this means that neither the acute conflict is solved, nor that the competition/ overlap between normative orders is addressed. While Zimmermann et al. conceptualise this strategy as an intentional decision of tolerating different normative orders in parallel, they also acknowledge that living with ambiguity could result from ignorance or information deficits. If actors take decisions on conflicts between normative orders on a case-by-case basis, they solve acute conflicts without addressing the competition/ overlap between normative orders. Finally, if actors aim to establish clarity, they make fundamental decisions in terms of realignment, hierarchisation or harmonisation of different normative orders, by modification of the orders themselves. While the categorisation does not account for underlying cognitive processes that lead up to decisions on coping strategies, Zimmermann et al. suggest that the categories proposed provide the basis for future research that explores factors that are causally connected to the choice of coping strategies (Zimmermann et al., 2013, p. 55). The categories proposed by Zimmermann et al. focus on codified norms in the context of international relations, less on emergent policy concepts that come with normative connotations. Still, they provide relevant, though abstract insights into the question of how actors engage with conflicting demands. Therefore, they are taken up again in the conceptual framework.

Overall, insights from research on translation processes/norm diffusion are important points of departure for this study. However, what is required for this study is an 'upstream' version of the cascade models proposed by global norm diffusion approaches that accounts for actors' perceptions of and reactions to their environments – or, in other words, to their *enacted situation*. This study focuses on interpretation processes that external actors undergo if confronted with organisational and environmental demands, to come to an enacted image of their situation and to take decisions on appropriate conduct. What has rarely been undertaken thus far is an assessment of small-scale 'translation' steps, as proposed by Rottenburg, that do not occur at external-domestic interfaces but *within* external institutions, between the policy-emanating centre and the site of policy implementation. External actors are not homogenous, closed systems with one policy concept in use; a policy concept does not need to leave the boundaries of the external institution to be subjected to translation processes. Though increasingly called for, few contributions to date connect conceptual debates on the relationship between policy concepts and institutional practice with an actual assessment of external actors' field practices in view of envisaged policy objectives.

2.4 Ownership policy in the context of Security Sector Reform interventions

So far, the literature review has taken account of the relationship between abstract policy concepts and institutional practices of external actors in areas of limited statehood. The second part of the literature review engages with more specific research on ownership policy in SSR/peacebuilding, to investigate the state of research on the relationship between policy concepts and external actors' field-level practices for a concrete case. This chapter will demonstrate that the dualism between functional and critical perspectives on the relationship between policy and practice also characterises the discourse on the ownership concept in SSR and that the gap between policy and practice is also evident in the case of ownership policy in external actors' SSR programming.

2.4.1 The emergence of the ownership concept in the field of SSR

The ownership concept was introduced in the discourse on aid and development towards the end of the twentieth century. One of the earliest publications explicitly referring to ownership as a precondition for development processes is the OECD report 'Success will depend' from 1996 (Bargues-Pedreny, 2016, p. 228). The concept is rooted in the context of debates on participatory development, people-centred approaches to reform, and recipient-led development approaches (Narten, 2009, p. 253; Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 26; von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 29). While there is no generally agreed-upon policy definition of ownership, there is wide consensus that according to the concept, reform processes should be locally owned, locally implemented and based on a consensus among local actors. Implemented under the ownership paradigm, external interventions must not contradict the reforming country's history, culture and legal framework (Bendix/Stanley, 2008, p. 95; Hellmueller, 2013, p. 225). The intervention itself should be a nationally owned process that is rooted in the particular needs and conditions of the country (Fitz-Gerald, 2012, p. 13). Several authors note the resemblance of the concept to an internationally accepted norm that adds value to interventions and should be pursued for its own sake (Ismail, 2008, p. 127; Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 25; Wilén, 2009).

At the political level, the concept of country ownership received wide attention in the context of the Second High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, which was attended by more than 100 countries and which produced the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The Paris Declaration stipulated country ownership as the key principle to guide aid delivery, with the aim of making aid itself more effective (Stanley, 2008, p. 23). Partner countries receiving aid agreed to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, to strengthen their operational development

capacity and to coordinate the different development activities of donors in their country. Donors affirmed that they would respect the leadership exercised by the partner countries, align themselves with the strategies of these partner countries, and make use of these countries' institutions and systems, also assisting them in building capacity (OECD, 2008). The principles of the Paris Declaration were reaffirmed and substantiated in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, which again acknowledged country ownership to be key to successful development efforts. These policy debates took place in response to calls for greater donor accountability raised in the international discourse on external-domestic relations (von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 33).

The Paris and Accra declarations had a strong effect on the development narratives and theories of change of international organisations engaged in related fields, including the security and peacebuilding sectors (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299). Ownership now constitutes a fundamental principle of virtually all SSR interventions undertaken by external actors. It is widely agreed upon that ownership is fundamental to the success of SSR processes and the effectiveness and sustainability of external support for such processes. The OECD was the first organisation to develop an ownership-based SSR framework, emphasising its pivotal role as a fundamental principle for external support for SSR processes:

> The OECD DAC and its membership have sought to put local ownership at the heart of international SSR policy and practice. […] Up to now, the principle of local ownership in SSR has in some cases been understood to mean that there must be a high level of domestic political support for donor activities. This logic should be reversed: instead, donor support for the programmes and projects should be initiated by local state or community actors. This means that donor governments should facilitate partner country leadership in defining programmes developed, managed and implemented by domestic actors. Donor country development agencies and SSR specialists would not implement SSR; rather, in response to partner country leadership or demand, donor countries would adopt advisory or mentoring roles and drive partner country efforts to address the organisational change and political challenges central to SSR (OECD, 2009, p. 15).

Today, it is widely agreed upon that ownership is fundamental to the success of SSR and peacebuilding processes and the effectiveness and sustainability of external support for such processes (Arensman et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Conceptual debates on ownership in SSR

However, while the discursive power of the concept at the policy level is widely acknowledged, several authors also point to its conceptual ambiguity in the context of SSR/peacebuilding. While the regulatory aim of the ownership concept in external-

domestic interactions is more or less agreed-upon in the policy debate, the procedures to achieve ownership as a state in governance transfers are vaguer. Ruth Stanely notes: 'Given that security reforms go to the heart of sovereignty, local ownership of such reforms seems even more compelling. However, despite the lip service paid to local ownership, there is little agreement on the meaning and scope of the concept, especially as applied to SSR' (Stanley, 2008, p. 23).

As there is no formally agreed-upon policy definition of ownership, the concept is discussed in the literature from different viewpoints, with authors highlighting different characteristics of the model and coming to different conclusions about how it should be effectuated in practice. Hideaki Shinoda describes ownership as the *ability* and *intent* of domestic actors to govern a process (Shinoda, 2015, p. 20). Alastair Fraser and Lindsay Whitfield underline the importance of *control* as a signifier of ownership and work with a limited concept of ownership, which is 'the degree of control recipient governments are able to exercise over policy design and implementation, irrespective of the objectives they pursue. Indeed, it is only where we can identify differences in the objectives of donors and recipients that the ability to control outcomes can be discussed' (Fraser/Whitfield, 2008, p.2). Timothy Donais discusses tensions between *ceremonial* and *substantive* understandings of ownership, as well as whether ownership is understood as pertaining to the national level, the local level, elites or the whole of society (Donais, 2015a, 2015b). According to Donais, there is a minimalist concept of ownership, according to which only national-level elites must buy into SSR programming and a maximalist conception, according to which the broader local constituency must be involved, including local civil society organisations (Donais, 2008, p. 9), Donais suggests that certain clarifications must be added to the concept, amongst them clarifications as to who these owners are and what comprises such ownership, as well as its relationship to conditionality and mutual accountability (Donais, 2015a). Simon Chesterman also suggests that there are different notions of ownership, ranging from passive involvement to active exercise of sovereignty. If considered broadly, ownership would refer to fully fledged *self-determination* (Chesterman, 2007). As pointed out by Filip Ejdus, other authors conceptualise ownership as a middle ground between the *buy-in* of domestic elites and *autonomous authorship* of reforms without external interference (Ejdus, 2017, p. 3). Mary Martin and Stefanie Moser find that ownership is 'neither clear in a conceptual sense, nor in terms of process' (Martin/Moser, 2012, p. 22). According to Mosse, ownership policy could be thought of as a mobilising metaphor 'whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences, to allow compromise and for the enrolment of different interests, to build coalitions, to distribute agency and to multiply criteria of success within project systems.' (Mosse, 2004, p. 663)

What adds to the conceptual ambiguities of the ownership concept is the finding of previous research that SSR policy offers little guidance on how to approach ownership in day-to-day SSR programming (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 303; Gray, 2017, p. 14; Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 22). Leopold von Carlowitz and Tobias Pietz point out that no coherent theories on ownership have been established, which, according to the authors, leads to considerable uncertainty about how an externally driven process like a peacebuilding intervention could be 'owned' by local actors in practice (Carlowitz/Pietz, 2011, p. 11). Antoine Rayroux and Nina Wilén also find that there are no clear concepts and policy guidelines for the effectuation of ownership, which leaves external actors in a position where they emphasise the concept as a main feature of SSR support, while the actual meaning of ownership in day-to-day operations is left up to their interpretation (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 28). Sarah von Billerbeck notes that 'development practitioners exhibit a striking lack of coherence on how they define local ownership' (von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 31). Hence, the concept is widely found to be imprecise, which leaves room for re-interpretation at the field level.

Policy-affirming perspectives on the ownership concept in SSR

In accordance with the dualistic perspectives on the relationship between policy concepts and institutional practices discussed above, the debate on ownership in SSR and peacebuilding can be broadly separated into two schools of thought. One such school is the more policy-oriented, looking at ownership in SSR from a problem-solving perspective. Most of these authors confirm that the ownership concept carries pertinent normative connotations, and that it is ethically correct. For example, David Booth points out that development does not occur without ownership (Booth, 2012). Also John Laidlaw Gray underlines the importance of ownership by emphasising its vital role in peace-promotion in post-conflict contexts (Gray, 2017). From a policy-affirming perspective, ownership is not only viewed as a normative principle governing policy transfers that are characterised by power asymmetries but as a technical solution to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of external intervention, by guiding and providing capacity to domestic actors in taking over and sustaining processes in the long term (Boege, 2014, p. 239; Held/McNally, 2014; Nathan, 2008).

One the one hand, ownership for reform processes is postulated at the policy level to lead to more *effective and sustainable project results,* because domestic owners are required to assume tasks and responsibilities when external interventions come to an end (Ismail, 2008, p. 129). External actors cannot sustain the outcomes of their (temporarily limited) intervention by themselves. Unless they have an executive mandate or act as trustee, they do not have a relation of political authority with the people who

are directly affected by their intervention. They also have no access to formal enforcement mechanisms and no mandate to set and implement binding rules. Hence, for external interventions to be effective and the results to be sustainable, domestic owners are required who take over processes. Accordingly, policy-oriented contributions mostly deal with the question of how to make these external interventions more effective and the results more sustainable, measured against benchmarks of models of liberal statehood.

On the other hand, the ownership policy has been ascribed a crucial role in adding to the legitimatory basis of external aid, development and peacebuilding programming. Ownership policy prescribes rules of engagement and courses of action in the context of external-domestic relations that are widely considered proper and morally right. Hence, referencing ownership as an internationally recognised guiding principle, vested with moral power and connotations of national self-determination, allows external actors to hedge against accusations of interfering with domestic affairs (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299; Reich, 2006, p. 7; Shinoda, 2008, p. 98). Demonstrating adherence to ownership principles allows external actors to maintain self-representations as supporters of nationally driven processes. As such, demonstrating adherence to the ownership principle can serve as a *source of legitimacy* for external interventions in the eyes of the organisational environment and thereby facilitate external support.[9] Along these lines, research on international aid architectures has pointed to the relationship between this dependence on legitimacy and a policy turn towards more inclusive language and a re-framing of external-domestic relations in terms of partnerships and ownership (Mosse, 2005b, p. 4). From this point of view, demonstrating ownership adherence is mostly directed at the organisational environment or the purpose of sustaining external support. However, previous research has also found that external actors as governance actors require at least a minimum level of *acceptance in the eyes of the population undergoing reform* for such reform to be successful (Boege, 2014, p. 239; Krasner/Risse, 2014, p. 556; Sabrow, 2017; von Billerbeck/Gippert, 2017). As Andrea Talentino notes: 'Even the most well-constructed international reform effort will be a failure if citizens do not perceive it as legitimate' (Talentino, 2007, p. 153). Donais also notes that if reform processes cannot be imposed, it would be important for reform processes to resonate with local traditions, values and principles, in order to generate a critical mass of consensus for reform initiatives (Donais, 2008, p. 11; 2009, p. 121). Ownership policy carries strong connotations of external actors' adaptation to demands arising from the local context.

[9] For an in-depth discussion of the emergence of the ownership concept as a means to legitimacy for external interventions and the sustainability of reforms, see von Billerbeck, 2017.

Against this backdrop, the policy-affirming side of the literature is mostly concerned with questions of how to solve problems associated with the concept and how to realise ownership in practice, thus how to 'operationalise' ownership in SSR programming and peacebuilding. According to this school of thought, ownership is increasingly understood as a *learning relationship* between external and domestic actors that develops over time through 'mutual dependencies and relative ability to use different modes of power (such as legitimation and appropriation) to influence outcomes' (Sahin, 2016, p. 3). Jens Narten suggests that external actors should aim to find the right timing for transferring ownership of measures, which should be neither too early, when domestic actors could not handle these responsibilities, nor too late, when dependency trajectories have been created (Narten, 2009, p. 263). According to this thinking, ownership is a *final state* and not the *means* of a reform process (Chesterman, 2007, p. 7). Along similar lines, Eirin Mobekk conceptualises ownership as a *process* and as a *means* to phase out external intervention:

> Ownership of SSR is not possession, but influence, capability and responsibility of the different phases of planning, implementation, policy making and execution. Not all of these facets will be present simultaneously, to the same degree or from the start in all contexts. Viewing local ownership as an evolutionary process better reflects the different contexts (Mobekk, 2010, p. 232).

Many policy-oriented contributions deal with the question as to how to increase ownership on the domestic side. *Participatory approaches*, making use of domestic networks and implementation structures, *inclusiveness* and context-sensitive programming are proposed as ways for external actors to better reflect ownership in SSR implementation (Gordon, 2014; Mobekk, 2010; Nathan, 2008). Besides, the concept is often associated with *capacity-building* measures and *knowledge transfer*, enabling domestic actors to assume responsibilities for reform processes. This is, for example, the case in the UN's policy framework on SSR, as will be shown in the MINUSMA case study.

As most authors agree that ownership is not about actual possession, another relevant perspective on the 'operationalisation' of ownership can be found in the field of management studies. While this research is not explicitly referenced in the debate on ownership in SSR/peacebuilding to date, it is relevant for the debate on the operationalisation of the concept. Philipp Sieger et al. find that *psychological ownership* is positively related to company performance, as it results in entrepreneurial behaviour of individual staff members (Sieger et al., 2013). Psychological ownership pertains to *feelings* of ownership (Rudmin, 1991). Sieger et al. suggest that stimulating feelings of ownership towards the organisation is a way of alleviating agency problems, by turning agents

into psychological principals, thus creating behavioural outcomes similar to formal ownership. Along similar lines, Jon Pierce et al. suggest that developing feelings of ownership towards material and immaterial objects is part of the human condition, and that these feelings have behavioural consequences (Pierce et al., 2001). According to Pierce et al., feelings of ownership need not necessarily arise from legal ownership and actual possession but can increase with the *level of control* over organisational factors (Pierce et al., 2001, p. 299). Moreover, feelings of ownership could be enhanced through *higher levels of information*, *longer term association with organisational targets*, *involvement in decision-making* that impacts the target, and 'investing the self' into organisational targets (by being involved in their creation) (Pierce et al., 2001, p. 302). While coming from a different field of research, these factors are included in the conceptual framework on influencing factors (chapter 3.1), because they can inform the current debate on ownership in aid, development and peacebuilding.

Critical perspectives on the ownership concept in SSR

The other school of thought on ownership is more critical, pointing to fundamental problems associated with the concept, often embedded in more far-reaching criticism of the liberal peace- and statebuilding paradigm and its underlying principles.[10] Many of its proponents are associated with the critical school of peace and conflict studies (Mac Ginty/Richmond, 2013, p. 766).

The 'local' as a vital constitutive factor of the ownership concept is an important research topic of this school of thought. Critical authors point to paradoxes of policy-oriented contributions that treat 'the local' as a source of the conflict that liberal peacebuilding has to address, as well as an indispensable vehicle for the legitimacy among populations, 'bottom up' peacebuilding and the sustainability of external interventions (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 841). Roger MacGinty suggests that 'the local' and 'the international' in peacebuilding are constructed imaginaries that are maintained by external actors in peacebuilding, representing a linguistically unprecise terminology, as they suggest homogenous entities. According to MacGinty, the imaginaries of 'local' and 'international' in the framework of the liberal peace agenda are co-constitutive and often connected with compliance, intervention and power relations, possibly camouflaging colonial and stabilisation projects with optimistic language, as concepts are

[10] As many authors working on ownership in SSR offer some sort of critic of the ownership concept on a conceptual or empirical level, they cannot always be clearly associated with one side but often provide impetus for both debates. Also, publications of the same author at different points in time may tend in one or the other direction. Hence, the distinction applied does not strictly associate authors with one or the other side but points out publications that support or provide arguments for one side or the other.

constructed and perpetuated as important and real by international actors and domestic elites (Mac Ginty, 2016, p. 197). At the same time, critical authors also note a tendency in the literature to 'romanticise' the local, as local agency would not describe a normatively desirable factor by default, advocating for a nuanced perspective on complex actors' landscapes in the context of external-domestic interactions (Mac Ginty/Richmond, 2013).

Other critical contributions deal with supposedly functional perspectives on the 'operationalisation' of the ownership concept in external actors' field practices, as a paternalist legitimating rhetoric of external intervention. According to MacGinty, the collaboration and buy-in of domestic actors are the means used by external actors to gain legitimacy and reject the criticism of supposed colonial behaviour, as these actors can claim to act on invitation. This would also limit reputational risks for the external actor if things were to go wrong (Mac Ginty, 2016, p. 198). Moreover, it could reduce the costs of intervention and facilitate the adoption of an exit strategy. This thought is seconded by Oliver Richmond who underlines that while the terminology of ownership indicates the flexibility and choice of domestic actors, the actual parameters of what ownership means in a given intervention context are set by external actors (Richmond, 2012, p. 355). According to Richmond, participatory policies are introduced to generate 'proper' beneficiaries. Under these circumstances, ownership does not pertain to autonomy but mainly to consent to externally drafted peacebuilding agendas. Ownership is thus mostly limited to the *conditioned participation* in pre-existing programmes. Richmond further suggests that external actors assume the role of social engineers, which negatively affects the local legitimacy of peacebuilding initiatives. Richmond identifies these practices as 'profoundly anti-democratic' (Richmond, 2012, p. 362). Along similar lines, Selver Sahin points out:

> The language of "ownership" enables external donors to gain access to these sensitive areas in conflict-affected countries and mask the extent of power and influence they exert over domestic policy making without any accountability to the local population through casting their role as facilitators of democratic self-governance. It also helps legitimize their intrusive international engagement in the domestic sphere through a promise of a more human-centric conflict transformation agenda (Sahin, 2016, p. 8).

Other authors question if ownership is a means to ending external intervention and suggest that it is rather a means to prolong it and to establish *external control over domestic processes*. Gerhard Anders in his analysis of the Bretton Woods Institutions finds that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) see *conditionality* as a logical consequence for external actors to evoke ownership for external interventions in host states. To this end, the author quotes an IMF fact sheet which states that

'conditions reinforce the level of country ownership' (Anders, 2005). Against this backdrop, Anders concludes that concepts of 'partnership' and 'ownership' are technologies of control. Pol Bargues-Pedreny points to paradoxes of ownership arising from its current meaning in policy usage as a learning relationship between external and domestic actors. This meaning in policy usage moves the concept further away from notions of self-government and self-determination, undermining political and moral autonomy of intervened societies (Bargues-Pedreny, 2016, p. 228). If understood as a process towards the enabling and phasing-out of external intervention, notions of the political autonomy of societies are postponed. According to Bargues-Pedreny, this rationale questions the equality of intervened societies with other states, which could handle their political affairs autonomously (Bargues-Pedreny, 2015, p. 15).

However, while critical voices about the ownership concept are numerous, this does not mean that all critical authors reject or deny the normative purpose behind the concept altogether. Some critical scholars also agree that the ideas underpinning the concept of ownership in SSR and peacebuilding point in a desirable normative direction, while it remains highly contested in the literature if its implementation has much to do with these normative aspirations.

Several authors call for an acknowledgement of the limits of the liberal peace- and statebuilding paradigm and a 'local turn' in peacebuilding theory. Calls are raised for example for exploring forms of 'emancipatory peace' and 'hybrid peace'[11] (Randazzo, 2016, p. 1352). Moreover, Schroeder und Chappuis note that 'fine-grained, micro-focused empirical data, describing security from the bottom-up, has been largely absent from studies of SSR, which have instead tended to look from the top-down, often never seeing beyond developments at the level of state or institution' (Schroeder/Chappuis, 2014, p. 41). According to Schroeder und Chappuis, more attention should be paid to local dimensions of peace and domestic agency in reform processes. Erlend Grøner Krogstad also points to the need to focus more on the local side of SSR/peacebuilding interventions, understanding how local agency shapes these processes (Grøner Krogstad, 2014). Séverine Autesserre suggests to 'go micro', looking at what practitioners actually do in the field, as well as at community dynamics and citizens' perceptions of peace and conflict (Autesserre, 2014a, p. 492). According to Autesserre, questions should be asked about who 'local' owners are and how domestic governance landscapes impact external SSR programming.

[11] In short, the concept of hybridity in peacebuilding describes informal/non-standard institutional governance arrangements that have arisen in areas of limited statehood. For more details, see Mac Ginty/Richmond, 2016.

2.4.3 External SSR actors' field practices in view of ownership policy

When it comes to external actors' field practices and empirical investigations of these practices, many authors have concluded that while ownership is often referenced by external actors in the discourse on SSR/peacebuilding, it remains a buzzword that is not substantiated by field practices. Many authors find that most SSR processes are indeed donor-driven and that ownership as a governing principle of external-domestic interactions is rarely 'realised' in practice (Ansorg, 2017; Bargues-Pedreny, 2015, p. 6; von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299; Donais, 2008, p. 4; Ejdus, 2017; Mobekk, 2010, p. 230f; Richmond, 2009, p. 337; Scheye/Peake, 2005, p. 245). Full adherence to more substantial requirements arising from the concept for external actors is largely found to be absent (Sahin, 2016, p. 5). In practice, research finds that external actors retain autonomy to exercise choice. Hideaki Shinoda describes external actors' practices in view of ownership policy as follows:

> International development aid officials make various kinds of efforts to show their respect for national ownership by inviting government officials to coordination meetings, consulting with national political figures, referring to policies of the national government, and other efforts, to solidify consensus among stakeholders. […] Development aid is an area where the niceties of respect for national ownership are much discussed. But the donor-driven structure usually remains untouched. It is apparent that donors always retain the controlling hand on discussions for the very understandable reasons of supervising their financial resources despite the principle of national ownership. […] The more the main actors of the international community take interventionist approaches, the more they tend to emphasise the operational utilities of local ownership. […] Especially when international actors conduct 'robust' operations, they tend to emphasise ownership. While they carefully avoid blindly following national power holders, they take extra care in handling ownership issues for their own sake (Shinoda, 2015, p. 21).

Several authors have undertaken empirical investigations of ownership in the context of field practices of SSR and peacekeeping interventions. Antoine Rayroux and Nina Wilén examined ownership in the context of EU peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), concluding that SSR appeared to be much more supply than demand-driven, and that it was mainly shaped by the interests of international donors present in the country (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014). They also found that ownership was limited to the central government of the DRC, excluding large sections of society. Furthermore, Congolese authorities would claim ownership over reform processes on the one hand, while on the other hand resisting any structural reform processes that would influence their positions of power:

> A solution to the paralysis seems to be far away as long as local actors resist externally constructed reforms and the notion of "local ownership" remains the prevailing norm. Imposing the reforms would not solve the problem, as the essence of local ownership remains crucial for the sustainability of peace efforts. Neither, however, would internally crafted reforms that do not actually address the real problems for fear of losing powerful positions solve this impasse in SSR (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 38).

Denise Blease and Florian Qehaja, in exploring the Kosovo case, conclude that ownership in Kosovo was more of a policy reference, implemented as the buy-in of local actors to an externally driven SSR-intervention, but not as the handing-over of authority to actors who were perceived as having made an SSR-intervention necessary in the first place. According to Blease and Qehaja, local actors in Kosovo had the role of 'clients' rather than 'owners', and external actors selected counterparts that were deemed capable and supportive of the external reforms (Blease/Qehaja, 2013, p. 5). For the case of Kosovo, Selver Sahin also finds that both external and domestic actors drew on notions of ownership to pursue their desired outcomes. Thereby, different patterns of ownership emerged over time, as a result of a power-based interplay between external and domestic actors (Sahin, 2016). According to Sahin, 'Kosovo's experience is illustrative of showing how the principle of local ownership embedded in the discourses of international and domestic actors is in practice characterized by their acts of legitimization and appropriation in an attempt to achieve their preferred outcomes in a dynamic context' (Sahin, 2016, p. 482).

Mary Martin and Stefanie Moser find for the cases of Bosnia and Kosovo that the domestic actors' landscape was perceived by external actors as too fragmented to express coherent sets of expectations vis-à-vis international actors. According to Martin and Moser, external actors thus often approached civil society representatives to fulfil the interests of donors, instead of engaging with wider parts of society and the government. The authors also point to diverging perceptions of security needs: Locals often prioritised immediate needs, while international actors wanted to follow bigger-picture policies. Timeframes, ordering mechanisms and objectives of international interventions were not discussed with local stakeholders, and differences in expectations were not problematised (Martin/Moser, 2012, p. 22). Therefore, they conclude that relations between external and domestic actors in the context of intervention in Kosovo could be described as 'fake' ownership. According to Martin and Moser, external actors associated ownership with power and control and adopted a stick and carrot approach in interactions with domestic counterparts. They further note that external actors engaged with different demands to come to decisions about adequate organisational practices:

> What happens instead is that there is 'second-order' interpretation of the local voice. This involves a) claims by the government and internationals as to what is the basis for defining and implementing local ownership, b) an aggregation of what different EU member states interests are in order to arrive at the international priorities for their intervention (Martin/Moser, 2012, p. 22).

Reflecting Martin and Moser's findings, also Ana Juntos has pointed out that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU's understanding of local ownership was limited to the implementation of SSR, not extending to the initiation and planning of these reform efforts (Juncos, 2018).

Similar findings have been added to the debate by Patrick Müller and Yazid Zahda for the case of Palestinian Territories. Müller and Zahda investigated local perceptions of the EU's SSR programme and peacebuilding practices in the Palestinian Territories, finding that Palestine stakeholders did not perceive to have the possibility to participate in the strategic decision-making on the reform process (Mueller/Zahda, 2018). Instead, their participation was perceived to be limited to the technical level. Also Alaa Tartir and Filip Ejdus conclude for the Palestinian Territories that notions of ownership in the context of the EU Police Mission were limited to the technical side of the reform process (Ejdus/Juncos, 2018). Ursula Schröder, Fairlie Chappuis and Deniz Kocak added, however, that the Palestinian influence and ownership of the reform process increased over time, despite the strong influence of external interests and strategies (Schroeder et al., 2013).

Ejdus also conducted research on the gap between rhetoric and the practice of ownership in the context of EU missions in the Horn of Africa, finding that in the EU context, ownership is increasingly perceived as a middle ground between restraint and imposition, that it is operationalised as an externally driven endeavour with limited local participation, and that there are structural obstacles within CSDP (EU Common Security and Defence Policy) missions that impede the emergence of local ownership (Ejdus, 2017). Ejdus identified external actors' focus on stability, high politics and ingrained every-day practices of peacebuilding interventions as reasons behind challenges to realise ownership in practice (Ejdus, 2017, p. 4).

Sarah von Billerbeck adds similar findings for UN peacekeeping missions: According to von Billerbeck, the current approach to ownership adopted by UN peacekeeping missions does not arrive at reconciling conflicting institutional demands of adhering to the principle of self-determination and the UN's operational responsibility to take action, which interferes with this normative aspiration (von Billerbeck, 2017). According to the author, the UN applies a restrictive approach to ownership in practice, 'relying

on it primarily as a discursive tool for legitimation but not an operational principle for effective peacekeeping' (von Billerbeck, 2017, p. 4). In another publication, von Billerbeck finds that the UN perceives the excessive devolution of agency to local actors according to the ownership concept as endangering the achievement of two key operational goals: The liberalisation of the post-conflict state and the delivery of demonstrable outputs in the short term (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 200). She further suggests that the requirement to adhere to ownership policy can lead to situations in which external actors' operational and normative duties – and their input (participation) and output (effectiveness) means of legitimacy can conflict with each other (von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 300). Against this backdrop, von Billerbeck suggests more critical scholarly investigations be undertaken concerning how the ownership concept is understood and operationalised and if these understandings and practices result in the expected effects.

Morten Bøås and Karianne Stig investigated ownership in the context of SSR in Liberia. They find that external actors did not pay ample attention to adherence to principles of participatory democratic governance, which led to an alienation of domestic stakeholders over time (Bøås/Stig, 2010). Bøås and Stig argue that external actors have a strong responsibility to put in place the framework conditions for 'genuine local participation' in the SSR process. They state: 'It is an ironic paradox that the international community expects local actors to govern in accordance with the principle of participatory democratic rule, while they themselves do not feel obligated to adhere to the very same principles.' (Bøås/Stig, 2010, p. 285f) The contribution of Bøås and Stig is interesting from two perspectives: First, in contrast to most other investigations of external actors' field practices, Bøås and Stig assume a perspective that explicitly assesses field practices in view of adherence to policy principles. Second, they point out that external actors apply the ownership concept as a means of avoidance: While external actors focus on technical aspects of the reform process, they leave the political aspects of the reform processes to domestic actors, as is their responsibility according to the ownership principle. According to Bøås and Stig, this blurs roles and responsibilities within a relationship characterised by power inequalities and leaves the blame for stagnation and failure with domestic actors (Bøås/Stig, 2010, p. 291).

Overall, several authors observe that 'the local' is often perceived by external actors as the problem and not the solution (Donais, 2009, p. 121; Grøner Krogstad, 2014, p. 107; Scheye/Peake, 2005, p. 235). Schroeder and Chappuis point out that the role of domestic stakeholders in reform processes is often perceived by external actors as ambivalent, as they could be potential drivers of conflict (Schroeder/Chappuis, 2014). Moreover, the impression prevails that domestic actors do not have the will or the

capacity to implement SSR processes (Sahin, 2016, p. 6). This is found to add to the reluctance of external actors to transfer decision-making rights, budget responsibilities and control over implementation processes to 'local owners' whose actions are perceived as having triggered the need for SSR in the first place. Other authors have noted that in operational environments of competing demands and constraints, the ownership objective can conflict with other organisational objectives (Brzoska, 2006, p. 7; Held/McNally, 2014; Wilén, 2009, p. 346). These institutional demands could, for example, be demands for visible and timely progress with the SSR process – which may conflict with ownership, if there is a perceived lack of it or if domestic agency points towards an agenda differing from the internationally standardised SSR framework (Shinoda, 2008, p. 100).

Further empirical investigations of external actors' field practices in SSR and peacebuilding could be quoted, but the tenor would be similar: External actors pay lip service to ownership policy as a means to effectiveness and sustainability but regularly fail to include domestic stakeholders into the design and implementation of interventions in a substantial manner. Moreover, external actors are found to be wary in view of expressions of domestic agency as potential spoilers of internationally agreed-upon reform processes. In the overall picture, organisational practices are found to have little to do with what ownership policies prescribe. However, while its legitimatory character and importance for the sustainability of governance interventions is widely agreed upon, positions in the literature significantly divert regarding the questions if ownership adherence is conducive or hampering for organisational effectiveness and how it relates to other institutional demands. Empirical investigations rather suggest that ownership adherence is perceived by external actors as resulting in trade-offs in terms of effectiveness at the field level.

Understanding how the strong policy relevance of the ownership concept in SSR and peacebuilding relates to external actors' actual field practices, which are found to reflect more general notions on gaps between policy concepts and external actors' institutional practice discussed above, makes the question of how external actors make sense of ownership as a policy concept (in view of competing demands), how this translates into their respective organisational practices at the field level, and which factors influence this process a crucial one, both from an academic and a policy perspective.

2.5 Summary of the state of research

In the overall picture, the gap between policy and practice of ownership in SSR/peacebuilding is widely acknowledged but insufficiently explained and theorised. Research

on ownership in SSR and peacebuilding has reached a point where most authors agree that ownership is problematic, complex and under-specified and that there is a wide gap between ownership policy and external actors' field practices. The inherent tensions of the concept and associated implementation dilemmas identified in the literature are numerous and pertain to the very substance of the concept. This is not only the case for SSR but also for the wider fields of aid, development and peacebuilding. Yet, authors are divided over the causal underpinnings of this gap, which resonates with the wider debate on the relationship between abstract policy concepts and institutional practice and the dualism between instrumental and critical perspectives on this relationship. Critical scholars state that policy is not meant to inform but merely to legitimise or conceal practices. According to this thinking, ownership policy does not qualify as an influencing factor of external actors' field practices in the first place. Policy-oriented authors suggest that policy is not good or well-enough adapted to correctly inform practice and must be improved to achieve better results. They see the main angle for reducing the gap between policy and practice in making better policy. It remains an open question if the detected gap can be 'bridged' by better operationalisation of the concept in practice or if inconsistencies and options for its instrumentalisation in the context of power inequalities are too prevalent for the concept to ever govern external-domestic interactions in a meaningful way.

Besides, most contributions stop at underlining paradoxes of ownership as inherent implementation dilemmas, without constructively providing impetus for the policy debate, for example, by suggesting factors that concretely hamper or reinforce external actors' adherence to the requirements emerging from the concept. While a variety of influencing factors have been detected in the debate on ownership in SSR/peacebuilding, they have yet to be systematically included in analyses of external actors' field practices in relation to ownership policy adherence as an institutional demand. Moreover, a systematic stocktaking of influencing factors and their perceived strength in organisational cognition is missing in most cases. This limits their value for practical improvements of SSR/peacebuilding practices.

What is more, still relatively few of the conceptual contributions to the debate on ownership are grounded in thorough empirical research on the practical day-to-day implementation of ownership in SSR or the wider field of peace-building (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014, p. 25). As Brown notes: 'Although it is not yet time to discard the concept of ownership […], scholars and practitioners should pay close attention to the dynamics associated with its application to concrete cases' (Brown, 2017, p. 18). Several authors call for more empirical research that explores workings and dynamics of ownership at the field level, grounding theoretical claims in more fine-grained empirical data. Are

external actors, as Mosse suggests, disciplined by their own policy discourse (Mosse, 2004, p. 649)? Or does the concept quickly fade into the background and loose meaning, as more critical voices suggest? So far, most empirical investigations focus on large scale UN or EU peacekeeping interventions and do not extend the analysis beyond one institutional context.

Empirical research on ownership is complicated by the dynamic, emerging character of the concept. The meaning of concepts evolves and depends on context, reflecting political and social realities of the place where they are applied. In the end, little is known about why organisational practices on the ground look so different from what policy prescribes and if and where ownership 'gets lost', is overruled, neglected or renegotiated. New empirical insights into the causal underpinnings of the gap between policy and practice are required to provide impetus for the debate.

2.6 The contribution of this study

The research interest of this study pertains to wider questions of the relationship between policy designs and institutional practice in the context of external interventions. Like Mosse, this study does not assume a purely functional or critical perspective on this relationship from the outset. Figuratively speaking, functional and critical views on the relationship between policy and practice are considered as two opposed ends of a scale, while most empirical phenomena evolving within this relationship are expected to manifest in between. This study aims to contribute to the debate with empirical insights into one concrete example: The relationship between ownership policy and external actors' field practices in the context of SSR interventions. For this purpose, Mosse's main arguments can be summarised as follows: (1) ownership policy serves as a narrative of authoritative interpretation, legitimising external actors' interference with national self-determination, perpetuating coherent self-representation and concealing operational realities of non-adherence; (2) organisational practices are not instructed by policy but shaped by other demands and constraints. These suggestions serve as points of departure for the development of the conceptual framework of this study.

Having identified the sensemaking perspective as the most relevant analytical model for investigating the workings and dynamics of the ownership concept in the context of external actors' cognition in view of competing demands, the study investigates the 'processes by which staff interpret and negotiate the meanings of their mandates, rules, and policies, and how this interpretive process shapes its response to external stimuli' (Barnett/Coleman, 2005, p. 594). By doing so, relations between organisational cognition and practices are revealed beyond notions of ownership as either an

instrument of power extension and external control or as functional notions of ownership as a vehicle for increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of governance transfers. This study thereby responds to a certain extent to the call for 'going micro' for one specific category of actors, namely external actors engaged in SSR interventions.

Focussing on external actors could be understood as neglecting the domestic side of external interventions. However, assuming the perspective of external actors should not be mistaken for conceptualising ownership as a function of how international actors perform – a research habit that has been criticised in previous research (Grøner Krogstad, 2014, p. 106). Rather, this study aims to understand the images external actors create and maintain of their environment, in order to thus understand how these images shape the actions of external actors. This is an intentionally inward-looking perspective, based on the concept of *enactment*, as postulated by sensemaking theory. The study does not suggest that the way external actors perceive phenomena within their environment is an accurate, infallible reproduction of events or that external actors' actions are the sole determinants of SSR and peacebuilding processes. Neither does it conceptualise local actors as factual constraints of SSR or peacebuilding processes. Instead, this study argues that external actors' abilities to comprehend their environment are limited and that the cues they choose to make sense of their situation are *selective* and *interpreted*. This means that if external actors perceive their environment as constraining, this is not taken as a factual description. The study argues that it is precisely this *enacted image* imposed on the environment that is eventually decisive for external actors' sensemaking as concerns appropriate conduct. Yet, exploring external actors' sensemaking and field practices is just one, though important, piece in the puzzle of the ownership paradigm. Exploring ownership in the context of external institutions provides one perspective on the subject, which complements research on ownership with a focus on domestic actors or on actual interface processes between external and domestic actors. As ownership poses difficult conceptual problems, different perspectives in the literature can complement one another, to come to a more holistic picture of the current workings and dynamics of ownership in the context of aid, development and peacebuilding.

Reflecting on the research question in the light of concepts derived from different disciplines, the findings are relevant for interpretive policy analysts interested in the ownership principle and policy ethnographers working on external actors in SSR/peacebuilding. By focussing on SSR in Mali, this study provides new empirical material from which conceptual debates can draw to substantiate theoretical claims. It adds a comparative perspective on different external actors to previous accounts that have mostly

focussed on one institutional context. Moreover, it includes actors into the analysis that have received considerably less research attention than UN peacekeeping missions or EU CSDP missions. Inevitably, the case analyses cannot engage as thoroughly with each case as in single case studies. Hence, this study does not offer a comprehensive account of processes and activities for any of the actors discussed. Instead, it provides insights into selected inter-organisational patterns relevant for the research question at hand. Identifying dilemmas and coping mechanisms that are shared across institutions can inform the more general debate on ownership policy beyond single institutional contexts.

Moreover, exploring sensemaking of ownership as a case of a 'prolonged puzzle' also provides new insights regarding the basic assumptions of organisational sensemaking, which is relevant for organisational researchers with a methodological interest in collective sensemaking processes. Lastly, by including an assessment of influencing factors that are related to external actors' adherence with ownership policy, the study also identifies angles for the policy-oriented debate on better adaptation of external actors to their environment and organisational change, which could eventually contribute to increasing the level of context adaptation of external intervention in the fields of SSR/peacebuilding.

3 The conceptual framework

To analyse how external actors 'make sense' of the ownership concept under conditions of competing institutional demands, how this translates into their respective field practices and factors that influence this process, a conceptual framework is required that connects institutional demands/influencing factors, organisational sensemaking and organisational practices. The sensemaking perspective (introduced in chapter 2.3.2) provides an analytical approach that brings these different components together in one analytical model.

Sensemaking analysis can be applied in different research contexts and by different disciplines. There is not *one* established and agreed-upon analytical approach. It is a heuristic that researchers can apply in different ways, in the service of their research objectives. This study works with an adapted version of Dervin's sensemaking metaphor:

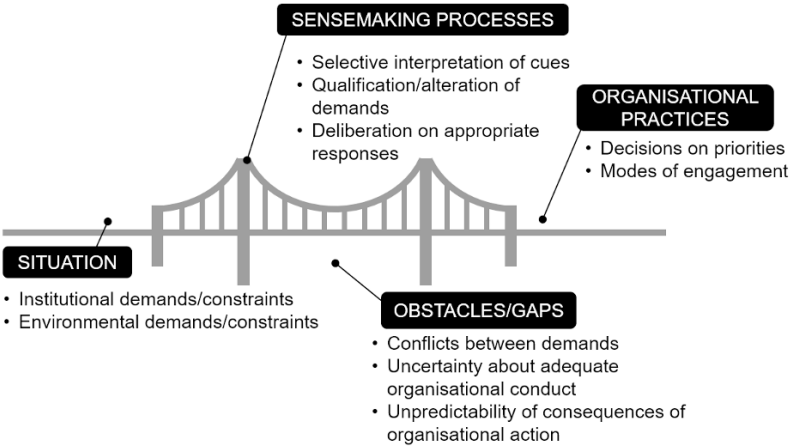

Figure 3: Model of external actors' sensemaking of ownership policy in SSR interventions, author's representation.

The model includes characteristics of the actor (institutional factors) and perceptions of the environment (environmental factors) – which can comprise demands and constraints for external actors, as components of the *situation* in which sensemaking processes unfold. Adherence to ownership, as a policy requirement, is one demand next

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to other demands the actor must account for during the implementation phase, resulting in organisational uncertainty and *sensemaking gaps* about how to take appropriate action, while remaining operational and pursuing vital organisational goals. Uncertainty increases with consequences of organisational action being largely unpredictable, as in SSR programming in areas of limited statehood. Under these conditions, the study argues that sensemaking processes are a necessary pre-condition to enable organisational decisions on appropriate action. External actors engage in sensemaking processes, to selectively process information and to *bridge gaps* between demands and constraints. To this end, they selectively pick cues from their environment and interpret them in a way that they together 'make sense' again, in terms of coherent self-representation and adequate organisational actions. In line with theoretical assumptions on norm conflicts discussed above, this can involve *altering certain demands* the organisation is faced with to make them more coherent with other demands. The perceived strength of demands plays a role in how other demands are weighed and in the level of importance attached to them. Interlinkages between these cognitive processes and organisational practices become visible in terms of *prioritisation of organisational tasks* and the *approach to cooperation* with domestic partners. The individual components of this conceptual framework are further elaborated below.

Though working with a theoretically informed conceptual framework, this study does not take generalised explanations of cause-effect relationships as a point of departure. It rather focuses on case-specific insights into interdependent relations between factors that play a role in external actors' sensemaking about adequate field practices. Processes involved in sensemaking are not expected to unfold in a linear way, from policy to practice. This study argues, with sensemaking theory, that influencing factors are perception-based and subject to interpretation, depending on the sensemaker and the context. Due to the enactive character of sensemaking, organisational cognition and practices are seen as 'inextricably reciprocal' (Gioia, 1986, p. 51). While the nexus between cognition and action itself (the 'translation process', visualised by the sensemaking bridge) is not observable, perceptions expressed by respondents and actions observed can be discussed in relation to each other, making causal assumptions. It further suggests that certain constellations of influencing factors make the unfolding of certain organisational processes more likely, manifesting in observable patterns of sensemaking, which suggests that such factors may also have a certain predictive value for organisational action.

3.1 A conceptualisation of institutional demands

The first component of the research design is a 'stocktaking' exercise of institutional demands, arising from organisational and environmental factors. Depending on whether one follows a more functional or critical perspective on policy, perspectives on factors that play a role in organisational information-processing diverge significantly. As this study assumes a position in between the dualist notions of policy discussed above, it does not exclude policy from the analysis of influencing factors from the outset but considers a wide spectrum of influencing factors that could play a role in sense-making, next to ownership policy.

The sources of institutional demands

External actors at the field level are faced with a variety of competing institutional demands.[12] This study argues that these demands and constraints interact with the institutional demand to adhere to ownership policy at the field level, thus triggering sense-making processes. Drawing on the previous literature review of influencing factors (chapter 2.3), the following factors are suggested to be the most relevant for the case under research:

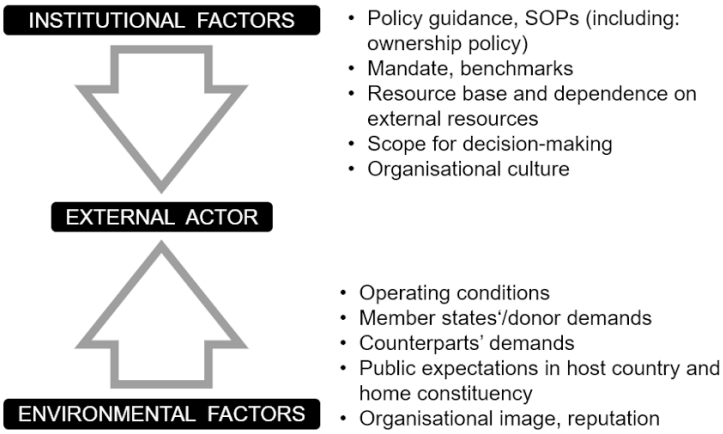

Figure 4: Sources of institutional demands in sensemaking, author's representation.

[12] In the following, the terms institutional demands and institutional pressures are used interchangeably as demands arising from organisational and environmental factors. In the organisation literature, both terms are common, pertaining to similar organisational phenomena.

First, demands and constraints can arise from the *organisational structures* (formalised policies, rules, responsibilities), which 'constrain the ways in which individuals may act and the possibility of appropriate interpretations of meaning' (Mills et al., 2010b, p. 190). They entail mandates and scripts for engagement, scope for decision-making at the field level, informational channels, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and more informal factors pertaining to organisational culture, such as intra-organisational political processes, workplace ethics, social dynamics or the prevalent leadership style (Child, 1997, p. 49). Organisational factors are not necessarily homogeneous; external actors are often large, decentralised and culturally heterogeneous entities themselves. Organisational factors can be conducive for operations (additional resources) or they can hamper organisational action (conflicts between departments).

While the critical role of *individual staff members' characteristics* in sensemaking is acknowledged and touched upon in the form of organisational characteristics (level of influence of individual decision-makers), the analysis of this study is focussed on *collective sensemaking* and does not account for individual life histories and the personal characteristics of the respondents.

Second, the *institutional environment* is relevant for organisational sensemaking processes. The organisational environment comprises clients and their normative orders, public opinion and expectations, socio-economic conditions, technology, government regulations and other companies operating in the same sector – as suppliers, partners, customers, pressure groups or competitors (Scott/Davis, 2007, p. 18). However, the organisations under research are not exposed to *one* homogenous environment, as they require legitimacy in their host country and in their home constituencies (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 292). In a globalised world, 'environments' are also not clearly distinguishable spaces, and demands of constituencies can change on short notice. For the case of external actors, environments might also hold different legal obligations and political constraints. Consequences can be legal and operational uncertainty. Like organisational factors, environmental factors can be conducive for operations (new engagement opportunities) or they can hamper organisational action (new competitors, security incidents).

The strength of institutional demands

Organisation research has pointed out that responding to one demand side at the field level regularly requires an organisation to ignore or defy another (Pache/Santos, 2010). These trade-offs often pertain to the question of whether to prioritise legitimacy/support or efficiency/stability gains (Oliver, 1991). As there is no clearly defined hierarchical relationship between most of these demands, organisational uncertainty

about which demands to respond to, at the expense of others, can be the consequence. The analytical framework therefore needs to establish a concept of the perceived strength of demands, drawing on theories of norm contestation introduced in chapter 2.3.

As Panke and Petersohn have suggested, consequences of norm conflicts depend on the negotiation system in which the norm is embedded, the norm characteristics, and the strength of the actor challenging the norm (Panke/Petersohn, 2015). Adopting these suggestions for the case of ownership policy in the context of external interventions, this study suggests that the most important angle for external actors' sensemaking of competing demands is to engage with the characteristics of demands and ponder demands in relation to each other. Hence, results in terms of decision on appropriate action will depend on the *organisational characteristics of the sensemaker:* A 'strong' actor (in terms of capacities, resources and access) will be able to make situational or fundamental decisions on which demands are more pressing, while a 'weak' actor with limited capacities will rather live with ambiguity between demands, as the actor does not have the means to actively alter one or both demand sides.

This study suggests that the perceived strength of demands and their weight in sensemaking processes depends on the following factors, which can be conducive to or hindering of external actors' adherence to requirements arising from ownership policy:

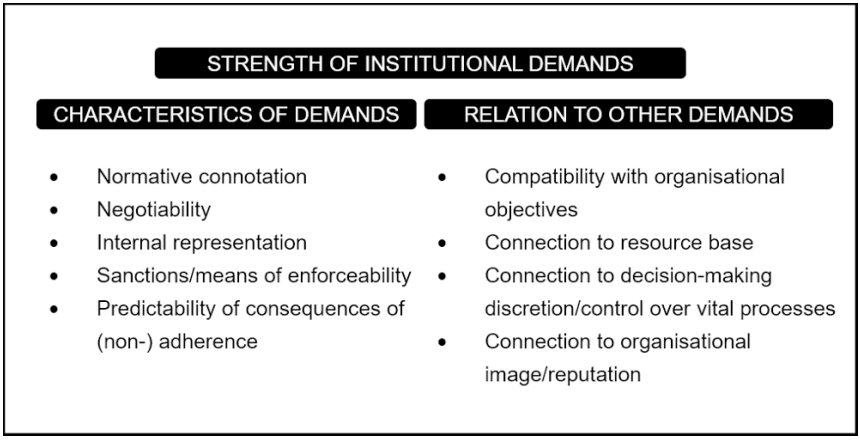

Figure 5: Perceived strength of demands in sensemaking, author's representation.

- *Compatibility with organisational objectives:* If a demand is in line with crucial organisational goals, this makes adherence more likely.

- *Connection to resource base:* If a demand comes with the incentive of additional resources or the threat of cutting resources in case of non-adherence, adherence with the demand is more likely.

- *Connection to decision-making discretion/control over vital processes*: If a demand involves giving up decision-making power or control over important organisational processes, it is more likely that the organisation will resist the demand.

- *Connection to organisational image/reputation:* If adherence with a demand can be expected to improve the organisational image, the organisation is more likely to adhere to the demand.

- *Normative connotation*: Demands which are normatively connotated have an intrinsic value for staff members and are expected to be an element of organisational logics of appropriateness, adding strength to the demand and making adherence more likely.

- *Negotiability:* A demand is easier to qualify in view of other demands if it can be negotiated. This is, for example, the case if a demand is of mere operational character (following a certain SOP), as opposed to demands that relate to organisational goals/survival. If demands can be negotiated, this makes it easier to avoid adherence to them.

- *Internal representation*: If a demand has a certain level of representation within the organisation, this adds to its perceived strength, because it has internal proponents advocating for adherence.

- *Sanctions/means of enforceability*: The same is the case if there are measures in place that follow up on adherence to certain demands (like benchmarks being monitored and reported against).

- *Predictability of consequences of (non-)adherence:* Greater knowledge of and control over the environment increase opportunities for organisational choice (Child, 1997, p. 58). Organisations are expected to opt for practices that limit the likelihood of unpredictable consequences.

3.2 A conceptualisation of sensemaking processes

Uncertainty arising from conflicting demands can lead to organisational stagnation and an inability to act. However, organisations must be responsive to institutional pressures to varying degrees, in order to survive (Oliver, 1991, p. 146). To be able to respond,

organisations need to take decisions on how to act. Taking these decisions requires an organisational process of deliberation on which organisational responses are deemed appropriate. Hence, sensemaking is an *intentional process* of preparing decision-making processes, to enable organisational action. A shared interpretation of a situation makes organisational action possible and meaningful for organisational members. According to Gioia and Sims, sensemaking processes comprise 'dealing with information, constructing a workable world, and taking effective action' (Gioia/Sims, 1986, p. 2). Sensemaking helps external actors to reduce complexity and come to shared perceptions of the meaning of unforeseen events and shocks, in order to remain operational and maintain external support (Brunsson, 1989, p. 169; McCaskey, 1982). Coherent sensemaking is expected to be conducive to organisational operativeness. While weak sensemaking systems are likely to lead to incapacitation, strong sensemaking systems are likely to increase or restore operability and organisational success (Weick, 1999, p. 40). The less adequate sensemaking is in view of a crisis, the less control actors will have over the occurrence and unfolding of a crisis (Weick, 1988, p. 305).

Some authors approach sensemaking as similar to interpretation or framing,[13] especially those who pay specific attention to accounting for context as constitutive factor (Fiss/Hirsch, 2005, p. 30). *Perceptions* are usually at the heart of sensemaking analyses (Maitlis/Christianson, 2014, p. 62; Weick, 1995, p. 86). Methodologically, most sensemaking analyses focus on single events and trace how organisations have made sense of them in retrospect. These analyses end with the re-establishment of sense. Under these conditions, processes leading up to decisions are less visible, which is why most sensemaking analyses focus more on the results of sensemaking than on actual processes. In order to make sensemaking processes more visible, Weick suggests to 'watch how people deal with prolonged puzzles that defy sensemaking, such as paradoxes, dilemmas, and inconceivable events (Weick, 1995, p. 49).

This sensemaking analysis is not a comprehensive assessment of all organisational sensemaking processes related to one development or event; only sensemaking processes pertaining to ownership are relevant for this analysis. As discussed above, ownership adherence qualifies as a case of a 'prolonged puzzle' for external actors faced with different demands during implementation. There is not one correct way of interpreting dilemmas and devising adequate responses; trade-offs between different

[13] In short, framing can be described the act of social construction (of, for example, policy issues) and attribution of meaning to social phenomena. Framing pertains to both thoughts and communication. It enables individuals to understand and respond to complex environments. Frames can be composed of generic situations/circumstances, generic actors/objects, generic motives and generic patterns of interaction or narrative episodes (Tayler et al., 1996, p. 262).

institutional pressures are unavoidable. Under these conditions, sensemaking is not a one-time process that results in the re-establishment of certainty/sense but a continuous coping process that organisational members engage in to remain operational in view of conflicting demands. Under these conditions, sensemaking is *more recurrent than retrospective*, because it is not about making sense of a single event in the past but about an ongoing effort to cope with uncertainty.

Against this backdrop, the study questions the widely shared assumption that strong sensemaking systems are likely to increase organisational success (Weick, 1999, p. 40). In view of the ambivalent situation of ownership policy at the interface of organisational effectiveness and legitimacy and the disputed relationship between these two concepts, potential consequences of different modes of 'making sense' of ownership and adhering to requirements arising from the ownership concept, as concerns organisational practices, are not clear. Under these conditions, 'coherent' sensemaking might well result in organisational incapacitation and gridlock.

The role of cues in sensemaking analysis

The search for 'sense' in sensemaking processes is mostly guided by cues, because cues facilitate understanding and action (Gioia, 1986, p. 57). Weick suggests 'pay[ing] close attention to the ways people notice, extract cues, and embellish that which they extract' (Weick, 1995, p. 49). According to Weick, 'cue' is a generic term for signals/stimuli perceived by individuals which are *connected to a certain line of action*. They are simple, familiar structures that act as seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring, linked to more general ideas. Cues are situational and dependent on individual cognition and experience. They can have informatory or guiding character. Cues provide sensemakers with important impetus for bridging sensemaking gaps and make decisions about adequate responses, to overcome uncertainty. Actors select cues from their environment that fit to their pre-conceived frames – and discard or ignore other cues that other actors might notice. Cues can be significant to some actors, while others do not notice them, do not attribute meaning to them or even dispute their occurrence. According to Weick,

> '[…] small, familiar cues can have a disproportionate influence in framing what one feels one is dealing with. Sensemaking is about sizing up a situation […]. Although size-ups may be short-lived, their influence is enduring because once a hypothesis is formed, people tend to look for evidence that confirms it. This tendency is especially strong if people are under pressure to act quickly and if it is hard for them to find time to question their initial beliefs' (Weick, 1999, p. 41).

As Weick's suggestions are very similar to the working conditions of external actors in SSR/peacebuilding interventions, this suggests that sensemaking through the selective interpretation of cues is a likely activity for these actors to engage in.

Categories of bridging sensemaking gaps

To categorise sensemaking processes, this study applies a distinction adapted from theories of norm conflicts as a basic assumption for how sensemakers may and can cope with conflicting demands (chapter 2.3): Actors can either:

(1) live with ambiguity,

(2) make decisions on which demands are more pressing on a situational basis, or

(3) make fundamental decisions in terms of a hierarchisation between different demands.

Zimmermann et al. have established this category system of coping strategies in situations of norm conflicts (Zimmermann et al., 2013). While this categorisation has been established for incompatible normative orders and while it is questionable if ownership is a fully-fledged international norm, the model can provide useful orientation for options at the disposal of external actors for coping with conflicting demands. In the context of sensemaking, the three categories serve as bridges between conflicting demands and workable solutions to deal with these conflicts. Option 1 is the most passive response, which implies that sensemakers do not make decision based on which demands are more pressing. Option 2 involves actively *altering at least one demand side*, either in terms of its characteristics or in qualification vis-à-vis other demands, with the aim of making different demands and constraints more compatible. Option 2 is expected to be the most likely option for the case under research, because it allows the actor to retain a level of flexibility without having to make fundamental decisions about the status and relevance of ownership policy. Option 3 follows a similar logic to option 2 but with the aim of establishing permanent clarity. However, as ownership is expected to be of limited negotiability, it is questionable to what extent external actors can make fundamental decisions on a hierarchical basis between demands that would question the universal validity of ownership.

3.3 A conceptualisation of organisational practices

According to Gioia and Sims, organisational cognition and practices are seen as 'inextricably reciprocal' in sensemaking (Gioia, 1986, p. 51). As opposed to Gioia and Sims, the study does not consider 'taking effective action' as part of the sensemaking process but rather as the observable result of sensemaking processes. Therefore, organisa-

tional practices are conceptualised as an individual element of the analytical framework.

The organisational practices under research

Ownership is an emergent and still abstract policy concept, not a scientific one (Booth, 2012, p. 538). For example, the UN SSR policy framework describes ownership as a *process, methodology* and *outcome* that occurs within a society undergoing reform (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 13f). Jens Nartan notes that '[l]ocal ownership can be regarded as the overall goal or outcome as well as the necessary means or process leading to it' (Narten, 2009, p. 255). This conceptual vagueness of the ownership concept poses challenges in terms of identifying organisational practices that are relevant for an assessment in view of ownership policy.

Previous research has operationalised ownership in terms of the actual level of participation of national actors in SSR programmes (Donais, 2015b; Nathan, 2008; Sahin, 2016) or in terms of the level of control of national actors over reform processes (Fraser/Whitfield, 2008). The more policy-oriented literature has also operationalised ownership as domestic compliance with the international SSR framework.

This study applies a different approach. It argues that in order to advance the discourse on the ownership concept from where it is now, it is required to explore ownership policy as an institutional demand for external actors that *prescribes external actors' adherence to certain rules and procedures*. Recalling the literature review, there is wide consensus in the international discourse – that which occurs in forums such as the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness – that external actors should provide support for processes that are initiated, implemented and steered by domestic actors, that external actors should align with the priorities of domestic actors, and that they should use and strengthen country systems, instead of building parallel implementation structures. Therefore, to assess external actors' adherence to ownership policy, this study focuses on external actors' *approaches to cooperation* with domestic partners and their *prioritisation of organisational tasks*.

This narrow focus on organisational practices was chosen because the external actors under research were in the early stages of implementation during the research period (see: 4.1). Therefore, benchmarks that would require a more long-term perspective could not be incorporated. Potential additional benchmarks (for example, how inclusive external actors' approaches to cooperation with domestic partners are) will be discussed in the suggestions for future research in the final chapter of this study.

A conceptualisation of ownership policy adherence

In order to assess external actors' adherence with ownership policy, a differentiated framework is required, from full ownership policy adherence to strategic non-compliance, as well as intermediate steps. Oliver's model of organisational responses to institutional pressures is applied, because it is comprehensive and focuses on responses to one side of demand (ownership policy). For the cases under research, Oliver's categories translate into the following categories of external actors' actions:

(1) *Full Adherence*: Adherence to rules and values, in the sense of obedience to certain institutional demands and constraints. Adherence to ownership policy is perceived as the most pressing demand, in situation of conflict.

(2) *Compromise*: Balancing as the accommodation of multiple demands to achieve parity, pacifying tactics that aim at partial conformity, bridging and bargaining as a more active form of compromise – for example, through seeking concessions. While compromise means that both domestic and external priorities can play a role in conceiving an activity, both must be clearly reflected in the process. Compromise means that decisions about which demands are more pressing are taken collaboratively on a situational basis.

(3) *Avoidance*: Attempts to preclude the necessity of conformity through concealing tactics. Avoidance could appear in the form of 'ceremonial conformity' or 'window dressing', symbolic acceptance and ceremonial pretence, as well as buffering and escaping as attempts to reduce exposure to external requirements. Avoidance means that actors live with ambiguity, without solving conflicts between competing demands.

(4) *Manipulation*: Manipulation constitutes a 'purposeful and opportunistic attempt to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures and evaluations' (Oliver, 1991, p. 157). Manipulation refers to the active alteration of certain institutional requirements and influence on their promoters. While Oliver conceptualises manipulation as the most active resistance strategy, this study proceeds on the assumption that the manipulation of ownership entails a lower level of resistance than open defiance of the concept. Manipulation means that actors take single-sided decisions on which demands are more pressing on a situational basis.

(5) *Defiance*: Defiance is a strategy that aims at active resistance. It is pursued by explicitly rejecting one or more of the institutional demands. In the case of ownership, defiance means that external actors fundamentally hierarchise demands.

4 Research design and methodology

4.1 Units of analysis and case selection

External actors' sensemaking processes concerning policy concepts and their translation into field practices under conditions of competing demands are a complex phenomenon. Hence, a single case study is presented, which allows for an in-depth engagement with research participants' perspectives and contextual conditions (Yin, 2013). Four external actors are explored individually as well as from a comparative perspective, in order to gain insights into similarities and disparities and to make inferences with regard to the overall research question (Mills et al., 2010a, p. 135f). The analysis is bounded in time and space: It focuses on SSR in Mali, with empirical research mostly undertaken in the capital city Bamako, between June 2015 and December 2016. In the following, criteria for the selection of the case and the units of analysis will be presented.

4.1.1 Issue area: SSR interventions

The policy concept under research is the ownership concept. Ownership as a governing principle of external-domestic interactions is not a stand-alone feature that is negotiated or implemented for its own sake. It requires a 'vehicle' in the form of an external intervention to become a potential issue of contestation and a feature in sensemaking. Hence, an *issue area* is required, in order to allow for a structured approach to discussing the workings and dynamics of an abstract policy concept with practitioners (Wiener, 2009, p. 192). The issue area is a *door opener* for empirical research. It enables the researcher to discuss concrete developments and events with respondents that are relevant and meaningful in their daily work. The issue area (in this case: SSR) is not the subject of research for research's sake.

Several reasons suggest that SSR is an issue area in which the ownership concept can be submitted to a 'maximum stress test', with conflicts between demands becoming particularly evident. External interventions related to security fundamentally touch upon questions of national sovereignty, comprising considerable interference of external actors in matters of domestic governance arrangements and national self-determination. Interventions of this type are often faced with extensive criticism about imperialism/post-colonialism that supposes a lack of legitimacy and imperialist intervention rationales (Cunliffe, 2012; Jackson, 2011). Discussions on dependency phenomena in large-scale external interventions substantiate this point. Moreover, security-related

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interventions aim to impact the core functions of the state. Reform processes touch upon the power of political elites and their means of using violence. Hence, the stakes of all actors involved are expected to be high and the support of the domestic elite for internationally driven reform objectives expected to be limited. SSR interventions usually take place under conditions of substantial power asymmetries between external and domestic actors. At the same time, in many SSR contexts, domestic actors can choose between several external actors who offer support which adds leverage to their agendas. What is more, SSR interventions are located at the interface of development and security policies. This puts external actors commissioned with SSR implementation in a position where they must adhere to both sides – aligning with development logics and the security objectives of donors/member states. These factors, coming together in the context of external-domestic interactions, increase the likelihood of organisational dilemmas regarding the ownership model.

What is more, external SSR actors neither have a relation of political authority with the people who are affected by their intervention, nor do they aim for political authority.[14] They have no access to formal enforcement mechanisms and no mandate to set and implement binding rules. SSR interventions cannot draw on coercive means but must apply means of persuasion, incentives and, potentially, sanctions. Hence, external actors are expected to foster a political and societal climate that is conducive to the type of reform they have to offer and to adopt formal structures that symbolise conformity with certain legitimised organisational standards (Brunsson, 1986, p. 179; Wilén, 2009, p. 7). Demonstrating ownership adherence is one of the few legitimising mechanisms that external actors can draw upon, which makes the need of external actors to demonstrate compliant behaviour in SSR likely quite high. Against this backdrop, it is expected that the gap between ownership policy and practice becomes more evident in the case of SSR than in other fields of aid and development cooperation –fields that are similarly characterised by the international discourse on aid effectiveness and donor-recipient relations.

4.1.2 Regional focus: Mali

One country with an ongoing SSR process, instead of a comparison between different country cases, was selected because with one country case, environmental conditions of organisational sensemaking are more similar and sensemaking of different external actors in view of similar domestic developments and events is more comparable.

[14] Note that the mandates of the actors under research, while all taking place upon invitation of the Malian government, are based on different legal grounds. These are discussed in the empirical chapter.

To allow for within-case comparison of a small number of actors, a variety of external actors with different organisational characteristics (multilateral actors, bilateral actors, NGOs) was required to be engaged in the SSR process. With a variety of different actors involved in SSR, access to the phenomenon was expected to be easier to observe than in other cases and variation of empirical data was likely. This variety was expected to be found in countries with an ongoing multilateral peacekeeping intervention (United Nations, 2017). This is because today, SSR is often at the heart of ongoing international peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions, and the UN framework prescribes a holistic national SSR process. With UN engagement, the SSR process is expected to be approached as a large-scale reform at the national level, not a minor sectoral reform. Thus, the number of external actors participating in the process is expected to be higher than if the process were dominated by a single bilateral actor.

Besides significant external involvement, the national SSR process should have started no more than five years ago, so that external actors' deliberations about adequate modes of cooperation with domestic partners and organisational priorities in supporting SSR are still in a formative phase.[15] Otherwise, trajectories of engagement of different actors would be more difficult to account for. SSR processes with UN involvement in Kosovo (1999), Liberia (2004) and Côte d'Ivoire (2003) had begun significantly earlier. The UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire focussed on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and was already preparing to wind down its efforts. Kosovo is a special case, with the UN being tasked to implement an interim administration. This suggests a power imbalance between external actors that would not be favourable for the within-country comparison. International support for the SSR process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) also started significantly sooner than five years ago (EU, 2005; MONUSCO, 2008). Furthermore, the SSR process in the DRC has already received significant scholarly attention (Boshoff, 2004; Clément, 2009; De Vries, 2016; Hale, 2012; Justaert/Keukeleire, 2010; Keane et al., 2008; Mandrup, 2017; Mobekk, 2009; Onana/Taylor, 2008; Tunda, 2016; Wilén, 2013). The SSR process in the Central African Republic (CAR) also began in 2008. However, violence resurfaced in 2012, and the SSR process was effectively abandoned (Fuior/Law, 2014). At the time when the research had begun, the security situation in CAR was not conducive to field research. In South Sudan, despite numerous efforts to include SSR measures in the national project after independence in 2011, a comprehensive national SSR process had not gained traction. Internal conflicts and recurrent surges of violence also hampered possibilities to conduct field research.

[15] The identification process started in early 2015, so UN peacekeeping missions were considered that started in or after 2010.

Mali was selected as a country case with an ongoing SSR process and significant external involvement. While occasional SSR initiatives took place in Mali since 2008, the 2012 crisis lead to a temporary retreat of most actors of the international community.[16] In the aftermath of the crisis, a large scale SSR process with significant international involvement was initiated and the landscape of external actors supporting the process evolved quickly. With a large number of external actors coming to Mali to engage in SSR at the same time, actors demonstrated a certain level of commonality, allowing for comparison (Mills et al., 2010a, p. 175). At the time when the selection was undertaken, external interventions in Mali had only recently begun implementation or were in the process of deciding on their intervention approaches. Some actors had pledged to engage in SSR prospectively but had not started activities or determined their intervention approaches. The actors' constellation could be described as a moderately centralised yet fragmented field, with 'competing influence of multiple and misaligned players whose influence is not dominant yet is potent enough to be imposed in organizations'(Pache/Santos, 2010, p. 485). Due to its recent quality, very limited research was available on the ongoing SSR process in Mali. Therefore, in-depth empirical research on the subject was expected to also enrich the discourse in the SSR community with novel empirical material.

4.1.3 Within-country case selection: External actors

External SSR actors are neither clear cut entities nor are they clearly distinguishable from their environment. They are systems of loosely coupled units, comprising a policy framework, centralised headquarters (HQ), perhaps further attached institutions, HQs at the field level, and often also decentralised field offices. Consultants and associated partners might be attached to the external actor, and various agents might be active in the external actor's purview. External actors as organisations might also have embedded elements – like local staff members within the organisation or international staff embedded as advisors in national ministries. This list could be extended, for example by including social contacts of the individuals working for the organisation, which further blur the idea of an 'external entity' that acts as one monolithic institution. Still, this study applies an institutional perspective on external actors as collective entities, though also considering the specific characteristics of and interdependencies between external actors.

[16] There had been several DDR processes in the course of past peace negotiations. However, these were not labeled part of a comprehensive SSR process. Several respondents in Bamako confirmed that SSR was perceived to be a new concept.

Due to the recentness of the SSR process in Mali, insufficient information on external actors engaged in the sector could be collected through desk research. Therefore, the identification of the most pertinent sub-cases had to be undertaken as part of the first field visit. Prior to the first field visit, a comprehensive list of ongoing SSR interventions was provided by EUCAP Sahel Mali, as facilitation for the research (EUCAP Sahel Mali, 2015). Based on the SSR matrix and preparatory desk search, interviews were conducted with representatives of MINUSMA, EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali, DCAF, USAID, the US military cooperation, GIZ, the African Union (AU), the Dutch embassy, the Danish embassy, the French embassy, UNDP, UNOCHA, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), as well as representatives from Malian ministries and local NGOs, in order to inquire about important external actors in the SSR field. It was found that the degree of formalisation and depth of intervention in domestic affairs varied between actors. Some programmes were limited to training and the equipment of personnel in the security sector, while others focussed on the counselling of governing institutions in the security sector or on constructive state-society relations. In the aftermath of the first research trip, the criteria for the selection of the most relevant external actors were refined. Actors who merely provided security equipment or constructed facilities were excluded, as modes of cooperation with domestic counterparts on substantial aspects of the design and implementation of interventions were expected to be limited. External actors were considered for the comparison if they displayed the following characteristics:

(1) Being engaged in activities pertaining to the SSR process at the national level (certain level of representativeness);

(2) Formally acknowledge the international SSR framework and the ownership paradigm as guiding principles for SSR interventions (otherwise, the puzzle would not be relevant in the first place);

(3) Make critical decisions about modes of cooperation/prioritisation of tasks during the period of research. These decisions could also involve non-engagement. However, decision-making had to go beyond routine activities and situational contemplations of respondents (otherwise, it would not have been possible to connect sensemaking processes and organisational practices);

(4) Not predominantly receive funding from German donors (to reduce bias towards researcher).

Four external actors were considered sufficient to allow for meaningful comparison, while the number was still small enough to allow for an in-depth analysis of each actor (Mills et al., 2010a, p. 135f):

(1) *MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali):* The peacekeeping mission was mandated to support the Malian SSR process and coordinate external actors who supported the process. After the signature of the Peace Agreement, the SSR engagement had to be aligned to MINUSMA's supporting role in the implementation of the overall peace process. This made a reorientation of MIUSMA's SSR support necessary. Ownership is a key pillar of the UN SSR framework.

(2) *European Union:* Ownership is also a key feature of the EU SSR framework. The EU operates two CSDP missions in Mali. EUCAP Sahel Mali (*EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali*) assists the Government of Mali with the reform of its internal security forces and supports the restructuring of the police, the gendarmerie and the National Guard. During the research period, EUCAP had to respond to changing member state priorities. The second mission, EUTM Mali (*EU Training Mission in Mali*), provides military training to the Malian armed forces and advisory services to the Ministry of Defence. Though less affected than the political mission, EUTM also had to adapt to changing member state priorities.

(3) *DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces):* Ownership has the comparatively highest status in DCAF's organisational policy and guidance. DCAF also plays a major role in the setting of norms and standards and providing practical guidance on SSR. Unlike MINUSMA and the EU, DCAF has a limited technical mandate in Mali, with a focus on providing advisory support on SSR to the government.

(4) *US Security Cooperation:* The US embassy implements several projects in the field of Security Cooperation, partly under the umbrella of the US Security Governance Initiative (SGI). While ownership is less of an issue in the pertinent policy framework, it is formally endorsed as a guiding principle for SSR support as well.

4.2 Research methods and operationalisation

Having established the issue area, the regional focus and the external actors under research, the study now turns to the research methods that were applied in the context of the case analysis and the way the research question was operationalised.

4.2.1 Research period

Sensemaking is an ongoing process. According to Weick, 'people are always in the middle of things' (Weick, 1995, p. 43). Sensemaking takes place continuously, as cognitive processes of dealing with human experience (Sandberg/Tsoukas, 2015, p. 9). Sensemaking processes do not exhibit a fixed origin and starting point or an outcome; people may join a collective sensemaking process and leave it before they reach any conclusions; different processes might be intertwined and interdependent. Dorothea Hilhorst, who applied a sensemaking perspective on NGOs finds: 'Although there is ordering, there is never order; "systems" of meaning never attain coherence and closure. NGOs are continuously reconstituted, but not through orchestrated processes. They emerge through the negotiations of meaning in the minutiae of everyday life, and all NGO actors are involved in these negotiations' (Hilhorst, 2003, p. 170). At the same time, not all everyday sensemaking is consequential for organisational practices.

This suggests working in a bounded setting with a limited temporal scope. Therefore, the research period was not predetermined by set dates. Instead, it was informed by SSR developments and events to which research participants attributed high importance. The empirical research phase commenced with an initial exploratory three-week field phase in June/July 2015, with the aim of gathering an overview of the SSR arena in Bamako. During that research phase, the Malian Peace Agreement, which was signed in June 2015, was confirmed as a crucial point in time for external actors to engage in deliberation over modes of cooperation and priorities in the field of SSR support. The Peace Agreement entailed provisions that had significant implications for the already ongoing SSR process. Therefore, this event was assumed to be significant for the sensemaking of external actors, who were planning or had already been involved in recently initiated SSR interventions in Mali.

A second short field trip (November 2015, four days) was not part of the main empirical research process. It was used to maintain contacts with key respondents (MINUSMA/EUAP) and to identify any developments and events since the first visit that could be considered potentially critical for organisational decision-making. During the subsequent research trip in January/February 2016 (three weeks), guiding questions focussed on changes that had taken place since the first visit. For example, the attacks on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako in November 2015 were an important event pointed out by several respondents as critical for organisational action. The fourth research trip in November 2016 (three weeks) aimed at consolidating the information that had been thus far collected. During this field phase, it was still possible to collect illustrating narratives, but few significantly new perspectives of respondents were

encountered. Also, organisational priorities were mostly decided on at this stage, indicating that no major changes in the near future were expected. Therefore, the empirical research phase was concluded in December 2016.

By applying a sequential approach to field research, changes in perceptions over time could be observed. This 'as it happens, where it happens' approach allowed for follow-up on inquiries into emerging patterns and problems. It was also found to be a useful approach to discussing the respondents' perceptions and modes of meaning-making that led up to organisational practices, before more coherent narratives of organisational self-representation had been put in place. Implementation dilemmas, information deficits and trade-offs were more open to scrutiny than if more time would have passed between respondents' experiences and the duration of the research. In retrospect, processes are likely to be framed more like strategic paths towards success, while respondents experienced these processes as murky and characterised by ambiguity.

What is more, Boxenbaum and Jonsson point to the dynamic character of organisational practices. According to Boxenbaum and Jonsson, purely ceremonial adaptation is difficult to sustain over time and eventually triggers corrective action (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 88). This is another argument in favour of a limited research period and in favour of a focus on organisational practices in an emergent stage, during which conflicts between demands arise and the impact on organisational practices becomes apparent, while longer-term correctives have not yet been undertaken.

4.2.2 Collection of empirical material

The SSR arena in Mali was found to be a restricted research field, which impacted access to facilities and respondents. Because ownership as a policy standard pertains to the normative and ethical underpinnings of organisational self-representation, organisations do not favour exposure to external scrutiny, unless pressures or incentives require it. Boxenbaum and Jonsson point out that especially organisations engaged in decoupling practices are likely to avoid close inspection of their organisational practices: 'A corollary to the decoupling proposition is that when institutional pressures lead to decoupling, organizations will do their best to avoid scrutiny or at least to control the process of scrutiny' (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 81). Empirical research on organisational cognition and action is a form of external scrutiny.

Moreover, ownership adherence of external actors is a sensitive topic for empirical research. Researching sensitive topics means undertaking inquiries into issues that can have direct consequences for the research participants or the collective group they

represent. These topics are often associated with 'areas of social life surrounded by taboo' (Lee, 1993, p. 3). Issues might be sensitive for general emotional or ethical reasons but also for situational and contextual ones. The norms and principles governing external-domestic relations in the context of external intervention are sensitive topics for several reasons.[17] First, security governance is at the heart of conceptions of national self-determination. External interference in this sector is critical by default. Second, ownership as a legitimising concept is crucial for external actors' coherent self-representation. External actors have an organisational need to protect authorised views and policies (Mosse, 2006, p. 938). Therefore, inquiries into ownership adherence can be perceived as incriminating and stigmatising. Third, the interventions under research were ongoing, which makes them more sensitive than terminated cases in which respondents have already begun working in different contexts and where the organisation's reputation is less relevant to protect, with external funding no longer being an issue.

This sensitivity of the research subject and the issue area impacted possibilities to collect empirical material, access to respondents, and the willingness of respondents to talk about their work, particularly the strategic and operational challenges they saw themselves confronted with. The implications of these research conditions for the research process are elaborated in more detail below.

In-depth interviewing and background discussions

Previous research on the relationship between policy and practice has found a 'growing disparity between bureaucratic reporting and actual practices' (Shore/Wright, 2011, p. 21). Therefore, organisational narratives, authorised policy and formal processes of decision-making/ratification were expected to not provide insights into actual sensemaking processes. Indeed, processes of ongoing meaning-making were expected to be overridden by authorised policy over time and stories becoming more coherent and consensual. Therefore, this study selected *personal narratives* of respondents as major access point for the analysis of sensemaking. Personal narratives are expressions of how people interpret and communicate meaningful accounts of the 'why' of events or phenomena and transform them into socially constructed knowledge. They 'make us care about a situation to varying degrees as they pull us into the teller's point of view' (Riessman, 2003, p. 18).

[17] Nevertheless, the sensitivity of the research subject should also not be overestimated. Neither is it a 'forbidden research terrain' (Lee, 1993, p. 21), nor does the research pose any potential substantial threats to research participants.

In-depth interviews, expert talks and background discussions were conducted to collect respondents' personal stories. Interviews were mostly conducted in Bamako, where external actors working on SSR in Mali had their field headquarters (HQ). The field HQ was expected to be the location in which external actors in SSR had the closest interactions with domestic counterparts (as more remote field movements were mostly restricted). In total, 98 interviews and background discussions were conducted. On average, interviews lasted ca. 1-1.5 hours, with a small number of interviews being limited to 30-45 minutes and few others lasting up to 2.5 hours. Most interview partners in Bamako were in office during the entirety of the research period and could be interviewed repeatedly. This made it possible to take up individual discussion points from previous encounters and to have more in-depth conversations, based on shared information backgrounds.

For security reasons, most external actors were restricted to movements within Bamako, rarely having the opportunity to leave the capital. These research conditions have been described by Laura Davis as 'the Bamako-bubble' (Davis, 2015, p. 262). While Davis perceived this regional restriction as a limitation for seeking out different sources and as leading to research bias, this study deliberately sought to explore collective sensemaking of a specific community of experts. Again, the objective was not to gather objective descriptions of developments and events but to trace subjective sensemaking of these developments and events in the context of insecurity, limited access to information and regional restriction.

Interview partners

The organisations under research were, by far, too large to engage with representative numbers of respondents. Research participants were therefore picked selectively, following the suggestions of research participants about whom to approach externally as well as within the organisation for further information ('respondent-driven sampling'). As Gellner and Hirsch note:

> […] in most cases the people themselves within the organization – those with whom one is having day-to-day contacts and/or interviewing – will suggest the most appropriate focus. To be in a position to appreciate this, one needs to be open-minded and attentive, prepared to engage with "native" categories and representations. […] It often then turns out that a small set of key concepts provide the crucial insights needed to gain an "ethnographic" understanding of the organization (Hirsch/Gellner, 2001, p. 8).

Focal persons and experts engaged in SSR-related activities were approached first. Actors in positions with decision-making abilities were favoured, because it was expected that their sensemaking was most relevant for organisational practices. Also,

respondents at the technical working level were favoured, because they were those most directly confronted with the need to 'make sense' of the requirements arising from the ownership concept vis-à-vis their domestic counterparts. Moreover, respondents in analytical positions were considered, as they had a more holistic perspective on organisational processes and the position of the organisation within the organisational environment.

Preference was furthermore given to respondents who showed willingness to engage in in-depth discussions and to share information, who displayed a level of self-critical thinking, and/or who showed interest in the research and its outcomes. For the case of larger organisations (MINUSMA, EUCAP), a significant number of respondents from different departments (security cooperation, civil society engagement, coordination etc.) were approached for interviews, to get a more in-depth perspective on the role and interrelation of the SSR department within the wider organisational context.

Interviews with Malians actors were undertaken as a sounding board for perceptions of domestic priorities referred to by external actors. Additionally, regional experts in Accra, Ghana, where several research institutions focussing on governance and security policy in West Africa are based, were consulted to garner feedback on the findings from a more regional perspective. Finally, in November/December 2016, HQ visits were undertaken in Geneva (DCAF) and Brussels (EUCAP/EUTM), and a Skype interview was conducted with a representative of DPKO. HQ interviews served to gain better insight into the relationship between HQ and the field level, as well as the genesis and relevance of SSR policy within the organisation. Partly, specialised discussions with policy experts on the ownership concept were possible, which also served as background information. Though being based in HQ, most respondents turned out to be practitioners as well, of whom several had previous work experience in Mali.

Guiding questions

One of the core methodological assumptions of sensemaking is that 'the only way to hear another's world is to invite and assist the other in describing that world as much as possible entirely in the context of his/her own experiences, understandings, and meanings' (Agarwal, 2012). Therefore, research participants were encouraged to provide narrative accounts of their day-to-day project experience, memories and their expectations about future developments.[18] To this end, open-ended guiding questions were elaborated that aimed at identifying situations in which respondents found

[18] One specialised field where one of Weick's properties of sensemaking is challenged is the future-oriented branch of the literature, which challenges the principle of sensemaking being retrospective. For details on this debate see Maitlis, 2014, p. 67.

themselves in their work, as well as perceived dilemmas and gaps and ways to cope with these dilemmas.

Test interviews with practitioners from other fields of aid and development cooperation prior to the first field phase indicated that direct references to questions of ownership triggered statements based on authorised narratives ('no support without ownership'), unless respondents were very frustrated about their organisation's work and talked openly about organisational problems. Also, direct questions about the relevance of ownership policy for field operations were found to trigger assumption on the side of the respondents that they were interrogated about compliance. Therefore, a more indirect approach was chosen for the interviews in Mali, focussing on subjects of relevance for ownership (perceptions of environment, modes of engagement with counterparts, political leadership and commitment, roles and responsibilities, priorities).

While time was allocated to explaining the background of the researcher and the research interest in the beginning of the interviews, interventions from the side of the researcher in the course of the interview were kept at a minimum, in order to acknowledge the expertise of the research participants (Naumer et al., 2008, p. 15f). This reserved approach was a way of reducing the likelihood of influencing the views of research participants or of eliciting certain topics. When developments and events emerged as meaningful, follow-up questions were asked, probing further into context and meaning. The wording and technical terms used by respondents were similarly applied in queries, as they have been found conducive to trust-building by previous research and to lead to more consistent reporting in the study of sensitive topics (Lee, 1993, p. 78). Finally, targeted questions about developments and events identified by other research participants were also raised. Sometimes, questions were formulated in a more challenging way, in order to avoid the routine repetition by respondents of standardised rules and guidelines (Wiener, 2009, p. 187). These questions could, for example, pertain to organisational dilemmas. This approach was applied with great care, on few occasions, and only if respondents had been interviewed repeatedly and had demonstrated solid willingness to participate in the research.

The first questionnaires were designed to acquire contextual information on actors and pertinent processes. This background information was used to gain knowledge about ongoing discourses respondents were involved in, to identify appropriate language and technical terms to meaningfully relate to respondents and, as Schwartzmann suggests, to find the right questions to ask (Schwartzman, 1993). The insights from the first research trip were used to design more contextualised guiding questions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

(1) Organisational characteristics

- What is the role and status of SSR within the organisational mandate?
- How does the organisation (plan to) engage in the SSR process?
- What is the role of the organisation in the 'bigger picture' of the peace process?
- Does the organisation have comparative advantages/disadvantages?

(2) Policy status of ownership

- Which institutional regulations for ownership/SSR are in place?
- Does practical guidance on how to foster ownership exist?
- How relevant is policy guidance for day-to-day operations? Examples?

(3) Perceptions of demands and constraints

- Which developments and events affect the organisation?
- Is the environment perceived as conducive/hampering for action?
- What are concrete operational challenges in day-to-day operations?

(5) Perceptions of ownership

- Which priorities do domestic stakeholders express?
- Which domestic actors play a positive role in SSR, who acts as spoiler?
- What are concrete signs of national commitment for SSR in Mali?
- Is a national discourse on the SSR process evolving? What is missing?
- (How) can ownership of domestic stakeholders for SSR be fostered?

(6) Prioritisation of organisational tasks

- Which tasks are perceived as priority? Why?
- Which institutional and environmental demands are most pressing?
- Who is involved in the decision-making process? At which stage?

(4) Approach to cooperation

- Who are domestic counterparts?
- Which roles/responsibilities do domestic partners have?
- Have cooperation routines been established?
- Positive/negative examples of day-to-day interactions?

(7) Individual characteristics

- What are personal predictions regarding developments of SSR in Mali?
- What are personal take aways of experience in Mali?

Figure 6: Guiding questions for the empirical research, author's representation.

Most respondents were specialists in specific technical fields, working on specific issues in different hierarchical positions. Also, several respondents were interviewed repeatedly; hence, it was important to follow up on issues that had been identified as meaningful in previous encounters. Questions based on previous conversations led to a better reception by respondents, who took those questions more seriously and demonstrated a higher willingness to engage in in-depth discussions about their work. Therefore, standardisation of questionnaires was only partly possible, and questions had to be adjusted to the respondent to provide the space for them to tell their individual stories.

Some respondents who had been encountered repeatedly also demonstrated interest in discussing more in-depth, abstract conceptual questions pertaining to ownership and the ambivalent character of the SSR concept as they experienced it in their work. This was especially the case for respondents who had been or were engaged in research, as well. For some respondents, 'empirical manifestations of local ownership' was a stimulating idea to discuss, while normally abstract concepts were avoided.

Interview approach

Prior to the interviews, it was important to emphasise to respondents that all interviews and background discussions were conducted under the provision of confidentiality. Anonymisation was used to guarantee the privacy of all research participants. Similar approaches to anonymisation/data confidentiality have been applied by other researchers, inquiring into sensitive questions around local ownership and security governance (Bergamaschi, 2014; Davis, 2015; Ejdus, 2017; Gray, 2017; van Vliet, 2014).

Respondents were invited to choose the interview conditions. Most respondents opted for informal meetings during lunch breaks or after work. Interviews at office spaces proved to be more formal, with respondents sharing less information. This was especially observed when offices were shared, and other colleagues were present. Also, informal interviews proved to last longer and be more in-depth than formally arranged appointments during office hours. On higher levels up the hierarchy, discussions were partly closer to authorised policy than discussions with field-level practitioners, who were often more open and self-critical. The best results in terms of information-sharing and trust-building were achieved if relations to respondents developed organically, in informal interview situations with few open-ended questions, in which respondents could tell their own stories and focus on issues which were important to them. Successive interviews (partly up to four or five) proved to be a good way to establish a relationship built on trust and shared knowledge.

Requests for recording were mostly rejected. Initial interviews were recorded if respondents agreed to recording, but this led to reluctant conversations and a stiff interview atmosphere. Therefore, interviews were documented through the intensive protocolling of respondents' statements. Short statements were also noted as quotes. While this already involved a certain selection in terms of what was noted and what was not noted, efforts were made to document as many conversation points as possible, keeping the respondents' original wording, including parts of the conversation that did not pertain directly to the research question. What was first seen as a disadvantage – the unwillingness of respondents to be recorded and the preference for informal interview settings – turned out to be a means to have more trust-based conversations, especially over time.

Some respondents were not comfortable with being perceived as representatives of their organisations, pointing to limited competencies and the absence of formal approval to provide information, while still being interest to engage in conversations. Hence, respondents were approached as observers from the inside of organisational processes, putting both the researcher and the respondent in a more detached position towards the organisation under research. If respondents preferred to report their perceptions of other organisations' performance while not being comfortable with providing an inside view of their own organisation, this was not discouraged, though treated differently in the analysis. These background talks at times provided cues that could be taken up in interviews with respondents of other organisations, to stimulate discussion. Moreover, these background talks provided insights into the relationships between organisations.

Other empirical sources

In view of the sometimes meagre or patchy interview material, 'thick descriptions' in an anthropological sense – based on a systematic coverage of sources – were not possible. Hence, a flexible, broad approach was chosen that treated all relevant empirical information as sources, including field notes, research memos, online articles, expert interviews, public relations documents of international organisations etc.[19]

The majority, yet not all organisations, granted access to visit their facilities and engage in participatory observation of project events. During the research period, it was possible to participate in three workshops, to conduct several field visits of training sites,

[19] The study applies a broad concept of 'data', as postulated by Coombs (1964), amongst others.

and to visit two training sessions on SSR for mostly Malian participants.[20] Access was mostly facilitated by key respondents to whom a trust-relationship could be established.

Furthermore, sources were consulted that did not depend on the self-reporting of research participants, in order to complement direct accounts of respondents and, as far as was possible, hedge against potential problems caused by the presence of the researcher as a foreign and reactive element in the field (Lee, 2000). Policy documents, organisational guidance on the SSR framework/national ownership, publications, statements and press releases were publicly accessible. Internal organisational material (project executive summaries, maps, project publications, press releases, meeting protocols, power point presentations, image videos with beneficiaries' statements), pertaining to intervention logics were collected whenever possible. Additionally, secondary literature on the SSR process in Mali and the role of external actors was reviewed as background information and with the purpose of relating the findings to existing research. As part of creating an overall picture, these other sources were included in the analysis – under consideration of the context of their origin and target audience.

4.2.3 Role of the researcher and research relationships

In a research field with restricted access, relations between the researcher and research participants are crucial determinants of the richness of the material provided and the possibility to engage in ethnographic observations. As Watkins et al. note for the case of development actors, 'it is not sufficient to rely for information on the texts produced by the project: Rather, the conflicts and tensions of implementation are only visible by examining practices' (Watkins et al., 2012, p. 295). Research participants determine the filter through which the researcher sees the field (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 92).

In the case under research, the field was seen through the eyes of external actors. Rottenburg has pointed out that staff members of international organisations working on SSR are no conventional subjects of research approaches inspired by ethnographic

20 Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securite (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015 at CICB Bamako; Atelier national: 'Projet Relance Economique et Gouvernance des Affaires Locales – Tombouctou, Mopti, Ségou. Réflexion sur les dynamiques locales et les perspectives politico-institutionnelles', 27 Jan 2016 at Hôtel Salam Bamako; Atelier Technique: 'Coopération Mali – USA en matière de Justice Militaire, Renforcement des Capacitiés en Resources Humains de la Justice Militaire', 16 Nov 2016 at Direction de justice militaire Bamako; Field visit at EUTM Mission Koulikourou for Medivac Simulation Exercise, 30 Jan 2016 in Koulikourou; Observatory visit at training course 'Reforme du secteur de la sécurité ' on 27 Jan 2016 at Ecole de Maintien de la paix (EMP) Bamako.

research traditions. Research endeavours of this kind have been described by Rottenburg as 'studying up':

> In the domain of development cooperation, anthropologists deal with locals who have the same level of education, who often earn considerably more money than they do, and some of them occupy high-ranking positions. These people are able to effectively defend their territory against unwelcome intrusions. They regard anthropologists not as representatives of a superior culture but as members of the insignificant genus "social scientists". For anthropologists, this situation is called *studying up*. The important point here is if anthropologists follow the principle of methodological agnosticism, their views of the locals inevitably annoy the latter. While locals – in this case, development experts – labor to increase their certainties in order to be able to react responsibly, the anthropologist hovers around them, peering over their shoulders with an interested but sceptical eye. The underlying assumption is "You may be the expert here, but I see something that you cannot see, and that is the way in which your ideas are dependent on your frame of reference." In the context of studying up, this annoyance can become acute at any moment and result in the anthropologist's exclusion of the terrain of study (Rottenburg, 2002, p. 18f).

At the outset of the field research, the researcher was often rather perceived in a role similar to a consultant on an assessment mission, who would come in for a short period of time, in order to conduct stakeholder interviews about the SSR process and submit recommendations. This phenomenon has also been described by David Gellner and Eric Hirsch in the context of ethnographic methods in organisation research, pointing to 'problems of appropriate categorization' of the researcher in the eyes of the research participants (Hirsch/Gellner, 2001, p. 5). This changed over time, when regular encounters became more of a routine.

A common, practice-oriented language was applied from the outset of the research. According to Taylor, this is an important feature of coming to a shared picture of the 'sense' of developments and events:

> 'Nobody ever tells the whole story, but the inevitable sketchiness will not matter if the teller and listener share a common understanding of how to generate stories – if they have a common grammar of narrative structures, to make an analogy with language. It is this collective narrative competence that marks off a particular conversational culture' (Taylor/Lerner, 1996, p. 262).

While shared cultural and biographical references were found to be conducive to the research process in terms of access and of relating to the stories of respondents, they also entailed pitfalls in terms of emerging biases and lack of distance of the researcher to the research field. It was found that critical assumptions developed by the researcher prior to the field phases were often displaced by more apologetic perspectives on

organisational coping. The way respondents 'made sense' of their situations was often compelling, appeared without alternatives and more as informed descriptions of realities than as a picture of the environment enacted by the respondents. This was especially the case when stories and narratives where shared by several respondents from different organisations.

Against this backdrop, a reflexive approach to one's own role as researcher and to the context in which data could be acquired during comparatively short field phases was required, to remain conscious of the relation between respondents' sensemaking, as well as the sensemaking processes the researcher has inevitably undergone. Like the research participants, the researcher was confronted with an unknown territory characterised by complexity, unpredictability and a multitude of competing, ever changing perspectives. Like the respondents, the researcher aimed at coming to consistent and convincing conclusions, having to make the most of limited information, thereby being prone to picking up the cues that were most in line with patterns that appeared to emerge. In the end, only one (ideally coherent) story could be told, which is dependent on previous experience and convictions of the researcher, as well as on individual options for access to respondents and information. As Weick puts it:

> Once a sense of the situation begins to develop, that sense can be terribly seductive and can resist updating and revision. The sense of relief one gets the moment there is some idea of what might be happening makes it so much harder to remain attentive and willing to alter one's sense of what is happening and one's own position in that altered scenario (Weick, 1999, p. 42).

Weick's observation can be applied equally to the situation of the research participants and the situation of the researcher. In order to mitigate this researcher bias of nonreflective adoptions of respondents' perspectives as instances of reality, it proved useful to approach the field sequentially, to create distance and allow for prolonged phases in between field phases for reflections on the observed (Lueger, 2000, p. 91). Moreover, the difference between the life situations of the respondents and the researcher (SSR practice vs. basic social science research) added a level of 'perceived difference' that provided additional social distance. The importance of exiting the social worlds of research participants and separating 'field' and 'desk' work for assuming an ethnographical, analytical perspective on the practices of powerful institutions has also been noted by Mosse (Mosse, 2006). Shore and Wright discuss this approach in the context of anthropological research as a way of sustaining an intentional tension between an 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective, which enables the researcher to engage with 'native' modes of meaning-making and appreciate respondents' beliefs and values, while also problematising received information:

> Finding a location from which to gain a sympathetic "insider's" understanding of the actors' policy worlds and to appreciate their beliefs, values and ritualised practices is essential for an anthropologist. But it is equally important not to become inured to their normalities, to maintain sufficient critical distance to be able to keep asking fundamental questions about how they conceptualise their worlds and what this means for theoretical debates. Central to anthropological research is this continual oscillation between insider and outsider perspectives, which makes critical reflexivity possible (Shore/Wright, 2011, p. 15).

With more distance to the field during desk phases, shared stories and narratives of respondents from different organisations could be reflected upon as instances of cross-organisational collective sensemaking. While presuppositions and biases could not be entirely avoided, the researcher aimed at keeping an agnostic perspective on the meaning of developments and events and drew on different sources of information, to gain multifaceted insights into the research field.

Besides, as the working conditions of the researcher and the respondents were quite similar from these perspectives, this was also seen as a point in favour of the analytical perspective chosen. If sensemaking was a behaviour the researcher likely engaged in, it was also likely that sensemaking played a crucial role in respondents' enactment of their environment and the way they added meaning and consistency to their own mission.

4.2.4 Analysis of empirical material

The analysis of the empirical material followed a thematic logic, searching for common thematic elements and patterns (Riessman, 2003, p. 2). Different qualitative methods for analysing the empirical material were applied. Prior to the main qualitative analysis, the empirical material of the first and second research trip was subjected to a *coding exercise* (Atlas TI), which was applied to provide a first overview of the main features of the material and to structure and systematically describe its content. As the relationship between data-driven and concept-driven coding is not agreed-upon in the literature, this study opted for an approach in which the coding was informed by the empirical material collected during the first field phases and concepts derived from previous research/theory. If issues emerged that were presented by respondents as meaningful and could not be adequately described by the pre-determined categories of the conceptual framework, the analytical categories were refined or sub-categories were added (Clark/Jennings, 997; Steigleder, 2008). This provisional clustering of the empirical material allowed for the identification of patterns and connections within the material. More analytical depth was added to the analysis over time, in light of previous knowledge from different disciplines that were relevant to the identified categories

extracted from the empirical material (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200). The main qualitative analysis then focused on sensemaking processes and organisational practices.

Analysis of sensemaking processes

Personal narratives are mostly explored through narrative analyses. Narrative analysis is an umbrella term for different methods. Narrative analysis can focus on discursive practices, symbolism, hermeneutics, lifetime experience or other linguistic accounts. Definitions of narratives and ways to examine them vary between the disciplines. For a text passage to qualify as a narrative, some chronological and consequential sequence is required. Narratives encompass beginnings, middle sections and proper endings. They are not merely descriptions of objective facts. They are representations of facts, which have been arrived at by cognitive processes of interpretation. Besides, narratives can be more or less coherent. They depend largely on the respondents' imagination and manner of expression. Not every story being told comprises a level of personal interpretation; neither are such stories necessarily consequential. Moreover, the time and place of the account, possible taboos (corporate communication rules), and the relationship with the researcher (trust level) influence how narratives are told.

In order to account for ongoing processes of meaning-making, this study opted for the analysis of 'antenarrative'. Antenarrative is the pretext to more coherent narratives. According to David Boje 'antenarrative directs our analytic attention to the flow of storytelling, as a sensemaking to lived experience before the narrative requirements of beginnings, middles or endings' (Boje, 2001, p. 4). Antenarrative are polyphonic accounts of events and personal experience that can encompass competing logics. They invoke assumptions of purposefulness and rationality, related to organisational practices. These stories are still in flux and can provide valuable 'real-time' insights into emergent sensemaking processes that are related to subsequent organisational decision-making and action. While in other research designs, accounts of antenarrative would maybe be treated as 'noise' diverging from a more coherent storyline, this study assumed that it is precisely these *raw fragments of thoughts* and *perspectives in development* that tell us the most about the processes behind the ways in which organisational cognition and action relate to one another under conditions of competing demands, at a particular time and in a particular space. Different results that could potentially be derived from comparisons between 'antenarrative' and narratives are taken up in the last chapter on recommendations for future research.

'Antenarrative' can be analysed with different methods. In view of the empirical material the study works with (interview protocols, memos, policy papers, internal documents), this study did not opt for a linguistic approach to analysing cues, which would explore

nuances of wordings and grammar in detail. Instead, the study directly analysed the material regarding its content and pinpointed cues respondents noted as meaningful, to determine patterns in the way respondents noticed and interpreted cues, as well as whether these processes pointed towards specific responses. Sensemaking cues as communicative elements in *personal statements* were accounted for in the form of figurative elements, stories and themes that comprised an element of interpretation (Fellows/Liu, 2016, p. 249):

(1) Figurative imagery: This pertains to single words and expressions respondents used in statements that carried meaning (for example professional terms). Those could be simple illustrative elements but also *symbols* or *metaphors*, representing a wider domain of meaning (Gioia, 1986, p. 52).

Examples: 'Porous borders'; get activities out of the 'development box' and into the 'security box'; 'it feels like being alone in the desert and calling'; 'we are prisoners of concepts'.

(2) Anecdotes/stories: Helen Schwartzmann emphasises that storytelling is a common activity that 'individuals in all organisations use to make sense of their world and their life at work' (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 43). Respondents talk about specific events, to make a point that makes subsequent choices and actions appear more appropriate. Anecdotes and stories are personal, short sequences of statements on incidents and events. They can be sketchy and unbounded.

Examples: Accounts of how the domestically-driven processes were experienced; stories about counterparts' behaviour like absence from or attendance of coordination meetings; anecdotes from workshops with counterparts; Radisson Blu attacks as a sign of Malian security forces not being able to adequately respond to terrorist threats and of requiring external assistance.

(3) Underlying themes/frames: Figurative elements and stories, if endowed with significance, can point to unifying elements of cognitive order (Taylor/Lerner, 1996, p. 262). Actors draw on underlying themes and frames, in order to rationalise and justify choices and practices in view of the organisational situation (Bruner, 1991, p. 6). They can also take the form of *organisational scripts*, as 'cognitive vehicles for structuring experiential knowledge and for guiding appropriate action' (Gioia, 1986, p. 51). While figurative elements and stories can be directly identified in the content of respondents' accounts, underlying themes/frames need to be extracted from respondents' accounts in a more indirect way.

Examples: Security-development nexus; securitisation; Malian consensus culture; SSR as an intellectualist concept; knowledge gap between external and domestic actors.

While linguistically distinct, these communicative elements can be equally important in sensemaking and do not need to be hierarchised. The differentiation above is generic, to account for different indications of sensemaking in respondents' statements, from single words to more comprehensive, indirect accounts. From an analytical perspective, they were applied indifferently, because it did not make a difference if respondents used metaphors or referred to underlying frames. In sensemaking terms, they were equally relevant, if they pointed to meaningful 'cues'. Hence, their analytical value was similar, as long as they carried meaning in the eyes of the respondents and could be linked to sensemaking factors and/or organisational practices.

Having established what cues of sensemaking could look like in the case under research, the next question would be how to assess which cues were meaningful to respondents? Sensemakers' experiences and observations differ. Cues can be perceived as being more or less relevant, depending on the individual disposition and situation of the sensemaker. While a cue might be ignored in one case, it might tip the scale towards a certain organisational decision in another.

Understanding which cues are meaningful to respondents requires a certain approach to conducting an interview (in-depth, open-ended, ideally recurrent, see 4.2.2.1/ 4.2.2.4). Accounting for contextual factors and ethnographic observations facilitated the appraisal of which developments and events were perceived as important within the life worlds of respondents. Moreover, a comparative perspective on the accounts of different respondents increased the researcher's ability to assess the importance and meaningfulness of cues in organisational contexts. The frequency of cues mentioned was not applied as an indicator of importance, because the meaning respondents attached to sensemaking resources like ownership policy did not necessarily increase with quantity.

Analysis of organisational practices

Organisational practices were observed over a rather short period of time. Given that organisational practices are dynamic and in flux, it is likely that practices show different characteristics at different times. To keep the analysis focused, two aspects of organisational practices were included in the analysis:

(1) Approach to cooperation: External actors' approaches to cooperation pertain to the level of involvement of domestic actors in day-to-day activities in different stages

(design phase of project, implementation phase). The distinction draws on models of citizen participation, which have already been used to assess forms and levels of ownership by Selver Sahin for the case of SSR in Kosovo (Sahin, 2016) and by Bu Wilson for the case of SSR in Timor-Leste (Wilson, 2008). The closer external actors' cooperation with domestic actors, the more these practices are in line with the idea of external actors 'using country systems', which indicates ownership policy adherence.

Examples: Sensitisation and informing, education on pre-determined outcomes and consultation to implementation partnerships, and full control/steering of programmes by domestic actors.

(2) Prioritisation of tasks: Prioritisation pertains to decisions of external actors about which activities within (or beyond) the SSR mandate are perceived as the most adequate and important.[21] The study considers external actors' priorities and commitments that do not simply fall back on behavioural routines but involve a certain level of intention and rationale (Maitlis/Christianson, 2014, p. 87). The prioritisation should be purposeful and intentional, as sensemaking is most evident in these cases (Weick, 1995, p. 49). Prioritisation asks why decisions have been taken. The more external actors' actions correspond with perceived domestic actors' priorities, the more these practices are in line with the idea of 'aligning with domestic strategies and priorities', which indicates ownership policy adherence.

Examples: donor priorities vs. domestic counterparts' priorities.

Analysis of ownership adherence

Assessing ownership policy adherence involved a *personal appraisal* of what the researcher thought to have observed and deducted from interviews. This personal assessment was required for having some means of appraisal that was independent from the research participants' self-reporting and which drew on sources other than respondents' own perceptions (for example internal working documents). The following categories were applied:

(1) Full adherence: To qualify as full ownership adherence, activities must be clearly initiated by national actors' priorities and implemented in close cooperation with and

[21] Domestic demands perceived by external actors are not necessarily equivalent to actual needs and interests of the domestic counterparts. External actors apply filters to which demands they need to comply with and make these demands the benchmarks for their own compliance. Therefore, although domestic actors' priorities are not a subject of this study, interviews with domestic government/civil society actors are drawn upon, as a sounding board for the extent to which activities of external actors resonate with domestic actors' priorities.

under the leadership of national actors. Accountability of the external actor must be directed towards national authorities.

Examples: Adherence to counterparts' priorities; counterparts in positions of leadership (citizen power); providing support on demand.

(2) Compromise: Domestic priorities must be clearly reflected in the process. It is not sufficient for domestic actors to have been consulted about activities, to have been involved in some stages of the implementation, or to have been party to a debriefing conducted with national stakeholders. The *intention to find a common ground* between domestic and external demands, without prioritising external demands at some stage, must be consistently visible.

Examples: Negotiation of common objectives; controlled participation of counterparts; focus on the manageable/limit expectations; turn to ad-hoc modes of cooperation.

(3) Avoidance: Avoidance of ownership policy means that external actors perform activities regardless of domestic actors' opinions of these activities – for example, by implementing projects for which no national actors' involvement is required. Avoidance is distinguished from manipulation by external actors not attempting to influence domestic actors. They merely *circumvent* the requirement of involving them in a substantial manner in the design and implementation of activities.

Examples: Focussing on uncontested activities; selecting niches where no resistance is to be expected; implementation of activities without counterparts; creating parallel structures; searching for 'pockets' of ownership within the domestic stakeholders' landscape.

(4) Manipulation: Manipulation is understood to be mostly about *intent*. Manipulation of ownership entails a lower level of resistance than open defiance of the concept. Manipulation does not mean that no coordination with national stakeholders takes place. However, the external actor eventually aims to impose his/her priorities on the process.

Examples: Agenda setting, conditioning of support, activities are actively framed in a way in which they appear as having been initiated upon domestic request; actors are persuaded to assume certain roles or express certain priorities; supporting the like-minded, while excluding other domestic actors; 'making an offer they cannot refuse'.

(5) Defiance: Defiance is a strategy that aims at active resistance. It is pursued by explicitly rejecting one or more of the institutional demands, through dismissal or by ignoring certain demands, as well as challenging, contesting, attacking or denouncing them. In the case of ownership, defiance means that external actors negate the adherence requirements or applicability of the concept or reject its relevance in SSR altogether. If *external demands are defied* for the sake of ownership adherence, this qualifies as an affirmative stance on the importance of ownership, pointing towards adherence.

Examples: Open resistance to counterparts' priorities; rejection of cooperation with counterparts; denouncing validity of ownership concept.

5 External SSR actors' sensemaking and field practices in Mali

5.1 Setting the scene: The SSR process in Mali

This section provides an overview of the country context and an overview of previous research on external actors' aid engagements in Mali. It further identifies significant developments pertaining to the Malian security sector during the time under research, as a reference for the case studies. In order to provide a 'sounding board' for the statements of external respondents on what they perceive as priorities in the Malian SSR and peace process, this section also encompasses information on the perceptions of Malian respondents of SSR, the peace process and the international involvement in these processes. This section does not aim to determine what 'genuine Malian ownership' would look like. Rather, it aims to illustrate the complexity external actors face when trying to 'make sense' of Malian ownership, as contextual information for the sensemaking analysis.

5.1.1 Country background

Mali is a landlocked state in West Africa, with a population of around 18 million inhabitants, who mostly live in the South of Mali and the capital Bamako (World Bank, 2017). Mali borders Mauretania, Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Senegal. While Mali comprises a multitude of different ethnic groups, among them Fulani, Dogon, Songhai, Mandé, Berber-descended Tuareg and Tamacheq, the largest ethnic group comprising about a third of the population are the Bambara. While the state is secular, the population is dominantly Muslim. Agriculture is a major source of livelihoods for most of the Malian population. Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. It ranks 175 on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2017), with poverty being most prevalent in rural areas.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Mali was under French colonial rule, gaining its independence in 1960, when the new government had to assert its authority on a vast territory. (Chauzal/van Damme, 2015) After different one-party and military regimes and coup d'états, Mali transitioned to a multi-party constitutional democracy in 1991. Today, Mali is member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel, which is a coordination body for development and security matters, established in 2014. Since 2017, the G5 Sahel comprises a joint force (FC-G5S), which was established as a military response to the instability in Mali and the wider region

K. Eickhoff, *National Ownership and Security Sector Reform in Mali*,
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(International Crisis Group, 2017). Due to its central location in the West African region, Mali is considered strategic to building peace and stability in the Sahel.

The Malian security sector consists of a variety of institutions.[22] The National Assembly puts in place fundamental principles that govern the security sector and provides parliamentary oversight. The president chairs various forums, which make decisions on security and defence, and commands the armed forces. Internal security is provided by the National Police, the gendarmerie and the National Guard. At the ministerial level, the Ministry of Armed Forces and Former Combatants (MoAF), which implements a framework law on military programming (LOPM), and the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection (MSCP), which has a sectoral committee for SSR, are the major interlocutors for external actors.

5.1.2 The 2012 crisis

In the nineties, a series of insurgencies over political autonomy, access to state services, economic development and other grievances took place in the North of Mali, followed by peace treaties and attempts to implement disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes. However, these were never fully implemented (DCAF, 2016c). The conflict was exacerbated in 2012, when the region was destabilised by the fall of Qaddafi's regime in Libya. Tuareg rebels and Islamists formed a temporary alliance in the North, giving rise to an armed conflict and the subsequent proclamation of the independent state of Azawad and the imposition of Sharia law (Chauzal/van Damme, 2015). The rapid defeat of the Malian army in the North was accompanied by a coup d'état in Bamako. The alliance between Tuareg rebels and the Islamists did not last, and further fighting erupted between different groups in the North. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reacted by sending a mediation team to Bamako, in support of a political dialogue between the interim government and the armed groups. Together with the African Union (AU), ECOWAS also advocated for a Security Council mandate for the deployment of an African-led military force that would support the Malian authorities in their responsibilty to protect the population from war crimes committed by the Islamist groups (Karlsrud, 2016). However, as these groups advanced further towards the capital Bamako, the Malian interim government requested France to provide military support. The French Opération Serval intervened and dispersed the assailants in an effort to prevent their march towards the South.

[22] For a more comprehensive overview see: DCAF (2016d). Justice institutions are not considered because they are not in the focus of the study.

In the literature, several factors are discussed as providing a breeding ground for the crisis in 2012, among them the absence of economic prospects for youth, resentments of northern communities towards the central state, bad governance, corruption, widespread illicit trafficking and regional destabilisation in a wider sense (Caparini, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2014; Klute, 2013; Lecocq et al., 2013; Reeve, 2014; van Vliet, 2014). Most observers agree that the 2012 crisis revealed a striking deficit in the capacities of the Malian armed and security forces (FAMA), which were not able to adequately respond to the armed conflict in the North and provide protection to the population.

Malian respondents also pointed out that several reasons led to the events in 2012. These would go well beyond the crisis in the North and pertained to fundamental governance issues in the South. NGO representatives pointed out that Mali was still influenced by its colonial past. The government lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the people and displayed a lack of accountability vis-à-vis the population. The government was also perceived to be mostly concerned with the 'administration of development projects'.[23] The security sector was assessed as a crucial factor in the arrival of the crisis. According to respondents, the security forces did not comport themselves as being at the service of the population. Respondents pointed out that the army had structural deficiencies and had been weak for a long time.[24] Several respondents also underlined that religious fundamentalism was taking root in Mali.[25]

5.1.3 International involvement in Mali

The 2012 crisis also marked a turning point in the modes of cooperation of external actors engaged in Mali. Up to this point, Mali, which had an elected president, democratic institutional structures and a comparatively low military budget, had been a 'donor darling' (Karlsrud, 2016). However, during the crisis, several external actors withdrew or put their activities on hold.

After the French and Malian troops formally regained military control over the North, a ceasefire between the interim government and two Tuareg groups was negotiated in Ouagadougou, and presidential elections were held under overall good conditions in July/August 2013. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK), who had served as prime minister

[23] Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Field notes, Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securite (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015, CICB Bamako.

[24] Interview with three representatives of local NGO, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako.

[25] Interview with three representatives of local NGO, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

from 1994 to 2000, became president with an estimated 77% of the votes (Gierczynski-Bocande, 2013). The elections were expected to end the political vacuum that had resulted from the 2012 coup and to create a more conducive environment for international activities (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 2). A more comprehensive framework for future peace talks was drawn up as well (Pezard/Shurkin, 2015, p. 5). Under the auspices of the UN, peace negotiations were taken up in Algiers in July 2014. The mediation team comprised Algeria, the UN, the African Union, ECOWAS, the EU, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger (United Nations Security Council, 2015a). In June 2015, a Peace Agreement (Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali) was signed by the government and two representative associations of the rebel groups from the North (Al Jazeera, 2015). In late 2016, the gradual re-establishment of interim authorities in the North of Mali commenced.

Several external actors, who had temporarily paused or withdrawn their missions during the crisis, returned to the political arena in Mali after 2012, in order to negotiate the terms of peacebuilding and the political settlement. Security moved up on the agenda of the development community, in line with a more global turn towards security-oriented development cooperation. Security Sector Reform (SSR) became a major field of activity for external intervention. During the research period, the focus of the international community gradually moved towards counter-terrorism and border control/management as an outcome of the shifting global security agenda and the 'migration crisis' in Europe, which had an impact on donor priorities in Mali.

In 2013, the UN Security Council issued a resolution that established the mandate for MINUSMA to assume various tasks in the field of stabilisation, which included supporting the re-deployment of the Malian government and security forces in the North and the co-facilitation of peace negotiations. MINUSMA troops were re-deployed ('re-hatted') from the previously established AU mission (AFISMA). The mission's mandate also encompassed support for rebuilding the Malian security sector and leadership in coordinating the SSR process (Caparini, 2015). The EU also investigated options to respond to the crisis. The EU Training Mission (EUTM Mali) was established in 2013, mandated to enhance the capacities of the Malian Armed and Security Forces (FAMA) in Bamako. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)'s advisory support for the Government of Mali on SSR began in 2013. DCAF focuses on sensitisation, high-level discussions and capacity-building for the Ministry of Security and Civil Protection (MSCP) as well as for civil society and other actors with a potential role in the SSR process. The civilian EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali) for the internal security forces (police, gendarmerie, National Guard) assumed work in Bamako in late 2014. Other actors involved include other UN organisations that

have been on the ground since before MINUSMA, as well as several bilateral actors providing security assistance and NGOs working on topics pertaining to the security sector.

Despite the potential momentum of the peace process, fundamental doubts about the political will and commitment of the government to undertake a profound reform of the security sector remained prevalent in the international community. While several members of the international community acknowledged the presence of political will to deal with the security crisis in the North and to enhance the performance of the FAMA, respective initiatives would not necessarily happen within the context of SSR or within the contractual conditions of the Peace Agreement (see respondents' statements in sections further below). Nevertheless, substantial external resources were allocated for setting up a national SSR process. Bruce Whitehouse describes the political situation at the time as follows:

> There was a moment, two or three years ago following the installation of an elected government, when a genuine re-boot of Mali's state apparatus seemed possible. Whether due to lack of political will or lack of means, that never happened, leaving Malians stuck with essentially the same undemocratic, dysfunctional political system they lived under when their country's crisis erupted in 2012. […] Mali's international partners have refused to acknowledge the true nature and depth of this crisis (Whitehouse, 2016).

On the other hand, several Malian respondents expressed reservations about the strong presence of external actors in Mali and the influence they wielded in the peace and SSR processes. In general, international actors were perceived as politically very influential.[26] According to respondents, international and regional actors would arrive with their own interests and their own concepts of security and a variety of strategies. Bringing in the funds, they would come with pre-conceived programmes and would not sufficiently engage in consultations with domestic stakeholders. In the end, it would be the donors deciding what they intended to implement and not the government deciding whom they would want to work with. However, domestic respondents stated that international actors did not really ask what would be good for the Malian people. 'People with the funds' would approach the government and propose what they wanted to do.[27] This lack of alignment would lead to project failure. As one respondent put it: 'If you make up a project in Washington or Copenhagen or Brussels and take it to Kidal, it will

[26] Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with representative of local NGO, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with Malian police officer/EMP, 18 Nov 2016, Accra.

[27] Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

not work.'[28] This perception is supported by Isaline Bergamaschi's perspective on the donor landscape in Mali at the time:

> 'Mali has become a laboratory for the implementation of the Paris Declaration in West francophone Africa. However, the much-wanted recipient ownership is very weak. Some donors working in Mali describe it as an example of 'donor-driven ownership', meaning that there are few signs of genuine policy ownership and that the government lacks both the "capacity" and the "political will" to pursue development goals and take the lead in the aid relationship' (Bergamaschi, 2008).

At the same time, respondents from the domestic side underlined that external actors would want to see quick results. The government would neither have the resources nor a strategy to go ahead to assume a stronger role. Therefore, the priorities of external partners would become the priorities of the government over time.[29] Especially MINUSMA was criticised for taking sovereignty from the government and for not showing enough commitment to supporting the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Along these lines, Malian participants of pertinent SSR workshops criticised that the UN did not adapt to the conditions on the ground and that it mostly stayed in Bamako.[30] However, due to their strong influence on the peace and SSR process, external actors were also perceived as having a shared responsibility in making the processes work. These perceptions match the findings of Stephen Brown, who emphasises that international actors fail to operationalise the norms of the aid effectiveness agenda, especially the principle of ownership, in Mali. Instead, he suggests that external actors impose their priorities on their Malian counterparts (Brown, 2017).

This overview of mutual perceptions of external actors and Malian counterparts who interact in the context of the SSR process serves as background information for the subsequent case studies, as it depicts the conditions under which external-domestic interactions take place. While they are again specific for each external actor, several of the conditions touched upon above in more general terms have also been encountered in the other cases. Therefore, they provide insights into the overall conditions of collective sensemaking of external actors in Mali.

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28 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

29 Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.

30 Field notes, Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securite (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015, CICB Bamako; 2 Field notes, Projet Relance Economique et Gouvernance des Affaires Locales – Tombouctou, Mopti, Ségou, Workshop, 28 Jan 2016, Hotel Salam/Bamako.

5.1.4 The SSR process

During the peace negotiations, the international community advocated for and incentivised a democratic rebuilding of the Malian governance institutions and a reform of the FAMA (Gierczynski-Bocande, 2013). The affirmative stance of the presidential candidate IBK towards a reform of the FAMA has been a decisive factor for both his international backing and success in the presidential elections.[31] This presidential statement served as a reference for the political will and commitment for SSR from the national side and as the initial spark of external support for the SSR process.

Towards the end of 2013, a reflection group on SSR (GPRSS) was established, in coordination with the international community and national actors, tasked to develop a national vision for SSR (MaliActu.Net, 2013). With assistance from external actors, the GPRSS drafted a decree for the establishment of a National Council for SSR (CNRSS) and an SSR coordination cell (Caparini, 2015; Presidence de la Republique, 2014). The coordination cell was established, but during the time under research, only the secretary was appointed. Neither a team nor working facilities were provided, so that its operative and strategic capabilities remained limited. Though continuously advocated for, a comprehensive national strategy or national vision for the reform of the Malian security sector was not elaborated.

Peace negotiations in Algiers began when the national SSR process was already in progress. The two processes evolved in parallel, both with significant international involvement. After the signature of the Peace Agreement, it was decided that the decree for the establishment of the CNRSS and the SSR coordination cell would be revised to reflect the implications of the Peace Agreement. Amongst others, the envisaged staffing of the national SSR institutions needed to be adjusted, to encompass representatives of the rebel groups. Respondents expressed diverging expectations regarding the question of when to expect the revised decree to be issued and formally adopted.[32]

The revised decree was finally adopted in May 2016, but the CNRSS did not become operational during the research period. Individual ministerial reform initiatives remained partial and fragmented. The DDR and integration committees were established in 2016, but respondents' perceptions of their functionality differed. Again, regarding these three coordination mechanisms (CNRSS, DDR committee, integration committee), respondents suggested that the international community had been the driving

31 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.

32 Interview with EMP officer, 26 Jan 2016, Bamako; Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Jan 2016, Bamako; Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.

force behind their establishment.[33] Though intertwined, the DDR and the integration[34] processes were mostly seen as processes separate from the SSR process. They were subject to the peace process, while the SSR process was meant to develop a dynamic of its own. Over time, these interdependencies were pointed out as increasingly important, as the stalled DDR and integration processes were hampering options to proceed with SSR. Due to previous failed attempts of DDR, which had been negotiated in past peace processes, there were widespread reservations against integrating rebel groups from the North into state structures.[35] These developments underline how the SSR process also became more of a bargaining chip in the negotiations accompanying the peace process.

Against this backdrop, external actors' involvement in the SSR process cannot be analysed without at least addressing some aspects of the peace process, as well, in particular the DDR and integration processes. They are too closely intertwined to treat them as entirely separate processes; therefore, sensemaking of ownership in the context of these related processes is included in the analysis – if respondents referenced them in their statements as meaningful for ownership/SSR.

In view of the slow progress of the SSR process, respondents expressed doubts that the comprehensive reform agenda that was put together in the aftermath of the ceasefire and the elections had fully met the initially expressed demands from the Malian side. They suggested that the presidential statement referred to the military reinforcement and reputational rehabilitation of FAMA – factors that are closely linked to public perceptions of state authority and legitimacy but not necessarily to profound reform processes.[36] According to several respondents, the more holistic frame of SSR for further reform steps had been introduced and advocated for by the international community, which supported the mediation and also played a dominant role in the elaboration of the SSR framework after its establishment.[37] Indeed, international respondents suggested that an engagement of the international community in the North of Mali had been connected with the request that there had to be an SSR process, as well. This

33 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.

34 The integration process is a complementary process to the DDR process. While DDR is about re-integrating ex-combatants into civil life and society, the integration process is about members of the rebel groups joining the public security institutions, like the army or the MoD. For both processes, rules and procedures had to be drawn up in coordination between the mediation, the government and the signatory parties. While partial steps were undertaken, like the construction of cantonment sites for the rebel groups, both processes were mostly stalled during the time under research.

35 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.

36 Interview with EMP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.

37 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako; Interview with IOM officer, 25 Jan 2016, Bamako.

would have enabled the elections and IBK to assume office. One respondent described both the Peace Agreement and the SSR concept as having been imposed on the Malian authorities.[38] This is supported my Luca Raineri, who notes regarding the peace process:

> Its main steps included the restoration of security and sovereignty, and the organisation of national elections, to be achieved at any cost within a few months. Despite the abuse of the "local ownership" rhetoric, Malians' aspirations for good governance, end of impunity, genuine decentralisation and social development were given a marginal place in the process (Raineri, 2016, p. 89).

These statements of international respondents were matched by the perspectives of Malian respondents on the SSR process, who stated that SSR was a new concept in the Malian context and that the discourse on SSR was dominated by international actors.[39] Other respondents expressed that according to their opinion, the Malian SSR process had been designed by international actors, based on lessons from other country contexts.[40] According to respondents, security was mostly understood in Mali in a conventional, institution-centred way; the president maintained an old-fashioned understanding of state security, and security cooperation was mostly understood as train and equip.[41] At the same time, the term 'reform' was found by respondents to be a taboo topic when it came to the security forces. They stated that Malian stakeholders played a minor role in the process, and that they interacted more with international partners than with each other. Indeed, the MoD and the MSCP were presented as in competition with one another.[42] Both would follow sectoral approaches, rather than implementing a joint SSR process.[43] According to respondents, the MoD did not want to be delayed by the MSCP in the SSR process. Moreover, the MoD felt it had already made a significant contribution but was underrepresented in the structures proposed by the GPRSS. Several Malian respondents criticised the passive role of the government in the SSR and peace processes. According to them, the president assumed no leadership, and the government did not indicate its priorities.[44] The Peace Agreement was not perceived as a genuine strategy of the government, but as more of a

38 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
39 Interview with representative of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
40 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
41 Interview with EMP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.
42 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.
43 Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
44 Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with representative of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with EMP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.

commitment to the donors, not a sign of ownership.[45] In the end, the Peace Agreement was seen as not representative, because the relevant communities had not been sufficiently involved.[46] Therefore, many groups did not feel bound by it. Also, many citizens did not know about the content of the agreement. A perceived lack of political will to reform on the side of the Malian government has also been noted in previous research (Brown, 2017, p. 15).

5.1.5 Malian perspectives on the security sector[47]

Perspectives on priorities regarding the SSR and peace processes were multi-faceted and often pertained to the direct areas of responsibilities of the respondents. While respondents from the ministries pointed out the need to strengthen national SSR structures, NGO representatives were more concerned with reconciliation and trust-building. Often, priorities were identified that were close to the organisational agenda. In the overall picture, SSR was not a term referenced by most respondents. Single needs were pointed out and when discussing the security sector, needs were mostly expressed in terms of livelihoods, development and social cohesion, and less in terms of holistic reforms, as prescribed by the international SSR framework. Still, some recurrent themes emerged that were mentioned by respondents with different organisational backgrounds, which are presented in the following section.

Trust-building between security forces and the population

Respondents expressed several reform needs regarding the setup of the Malian security forces. There was a general perception that the security forces were not sufficiently trained and equipped to protect the population and fight terrorists in the North. People in the North felt abandoned and partly mistreated by security forces and the government. Capacity-building measures for the security forces were needed for them to be better able to protect the population.[48] However, also in this case, the socio-economic conditions of members of the security forces were pointed out as important angles for change. Respondents felt it more important to focus on development and on the living conditions of the soldiers and their interactions with local communities rather than focussing on equipment.[49] Furthermore, it was pointed out that security forces had been

45 Interview with three representatives of local NGO, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako.

46 Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

47 It must be noted that respondents were mostly from Bamako. It can be expected that responses would have differed if respondents from the North would have been interviewed, for example regarding the absence of state structures and perpetrations of the security forces against parts of the population, under perceived impunity.

48 Interview with Malian police officer/EMP, 18 Nov 2016, Accra.

49 Interview with representative of local NGO, 24 Jul 2015, Bamako.

involved in atrocities and violent activities directed against the population in the North. These incidents were never prosecuted.[50] Accounting for the needs of the population as concerns justice and building trust was indeed more important to several respondents than the current focus on counter-insurgency measures in the North.[51] According to respondents, there was a need for trust-building within local communities.[52] This was especially underlined by respondents from civil society organisations. Some of the civil society representatives who were engaged in the field of governance also pointed to the need to strengthen good governance and civilian oversight over the security sector. The socio-economic conditions affecting the population as well as their development needs played a larger role in most interviews, however.

Fighting the root causes of radicalisation

Fighting the root causes of radicalisation was often mentioned as an important task of the security forces, for which capacity-building was needed. Fighting drug trafficking and creating other ways to earn a living were often mentioned in this context, as well. Additionally, the growing influence of religious institutions in the field of education was mentioned as an issue that fuelled radicalisation.[53] These statements suggest that while fighting terrorism is seen as an important field of engagement, the focus nevertheless was on the socio-economic roots of radicalisation and less on counter-insurgency efforts in the North.

Border management

While perceptions of priorities differed significantly, several respondents expressed that migration and border management were not seen as a priority in the Malian context. Respondents suggested that while it was important to take measures against terrorism, these measures should not keep people from crossing borders. According to these respondents, it was more important to increase information-sharing and good relations between communities on different sides of the border.[54] As one respondent put it: 'It is not a priority for us. We are all people of the Sahel.'[55] Indeed, border management was perceived as an issue more for Europeans. By focussing on border

50 Field notes, Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securite (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015, CICB Bamako; Field notes, Projet Relance Economique et Gouvernance des Affaires Locales – Tombouctou, Mopti, Ségou, Workshop, 28 Jan 2016, Hotel Salam/ Bamako.

51 Interview with EMP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.

52 Background talk with officer of the Malian Ministry of Reconciliation, 03 Feb 2016, Bamako.

53 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with EMP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.

54 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, 25 Jan 2016, Bamako.

55 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Jan 2016, Bamako.

management, internationals would not aim to improve relations at the borders, but to limit people's movements. As another respondent suggested: 'It is important for us but maybe not as important as for the Europeans.'[56] Another respondent stated that the country was too vast for such border control, and that it should be considered as more of a regional responsibility.[57] These perspectives match similar statements of several international respondents who suggested that migration in Mali was indeed seen as a positive factor by the population, creating opportunities and remittances. Moreover, in the ECOWAS area, free movement is also an important factor for the regional economy. Against this backdrop, this study proceeds on the assumption that border management/migration control are fields of engagement that are generally not prioritised by Malian stakeholders.

5.1.6 Important political developments and security-related events

This section focuses on developments and events that were pointed out by respondents as important in terms of security governance in Mali during the research period. It also introduces national strategies to which external actors could align their SSR programming, as a reference for the subsequent empirical chapter.

Adoption of the LOPM (March 2015)

In March 2015, the MoD adopted a framework law on military programming (Loi d'orientation et de programmation militaire, LOPM) for the years 2015-2019, in order to improve the operational capacities of the FAMA (MaliActu.Net, 2016). The LOPM is a decree for the revision of the army structure, comprising recruitment, acquisition of equipment and measures to improve the living conditions of the soldiers. The LOPM is a sectoral reform, which solely pertains to the security forces under the authority of the MoD. This makes it an important factor in the SSR process, because it entails profound measures of restructuring within the security sector. As a classified document, the access of external actors to the provisions of the law is limited. The main implementing partner of the MoD is EUTM, which also advised the ministry during the drafting phase.

The difference stances of external actors regarding the adequacy and relevance of the LOPM for their programming are reflected in the analysis, understood as one nationally designed strategy with (partial) national traction to which external actors could align their support.

Signature of the Peace Agreement of Algiers (June 2015)

[56] Interview with EMP officer, 26 Jan 2016, Bamako.
[57] Background talk with officer of Malian Ministry of Reconciliation, 03 Feb 2016, Bamako.

As the content of the Peace Agreement was largely known to the international community before the formal adoption, it is not expected to be a major stimulus for sensemaking in and of itself. The content had been negotiated under the auspices of the international mediation effort. Also, it was described by respondents as an elitist process, with limited societal inclusiveness, in which 'only the ones with the loudest voices were heard.'[58] A needs assessment had not been undertaken. At the same time, the proceedings of the negotiations had been kept rather secret, with limited information shared with the wider public. These perceptions were shared by other respondents, as well.

However, despite being anticipated and influenced by the international community, the Peace Agreement constitutes a national strategy to which external actors could align themselves, as it encompasses major provisions for alterations of security governance in Mali. The Peace Agreement maps out the conditions of the redeployment of the armed and security forces to the North, stipulates a decentralisation of the security provision, and calls for the creation of a regional police. Moreover, it determines the parameters of the national SSR, DDR and integration processes and calls for the creation of several institutions, including the already envisaged CNRSS (Gouvernement de la République du Mali et Mouvements signataires, 2015, p. 23). Within 90 days of the Peace Agreement's signing, the CNRSS was to map out the agenda for the reform process, based on an inclusive assessment of the security sector that was to be conducted with the support of the international community. The CNRSS was also tasked with undertaking a profound review of the current state of affairs in the security sector and to work out a vision for reform, defining roles and responsibilities of the armed and security forces and reflecting regional diversity. While the ambitious timeframe of the Peace Agreement – not only for SSR provisions – had already been noted by several respondents during the first research trip in June/July 2015, it was also seen by several respondents as a sign of commitment and momentum with a roadmap to accompany it. At the same time, it was already clear that the implications for the SSR process still needed to be worked out.

Anefis process (October 2015)

In October 2015, various armed factions representing Northern communities met in Anefis to debate issues that caused insecurity in the area. Discussions continued for three weeks. External actors were not reported to be present during the process, which led to speculations about which issues were discussed between the participants during this prolonged period. The Anefis process led to several 'honour pacts' signed on

58 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

behalf of the major nomad communities in the region. This 'bottom-up' reconciliation process was assessed by the International Crisis Group (ICG) as an opportunity to restart the stalled national peace process and as a potentially complementing process to the Algiers negotiations (International Crisis Group, 2015). According to this thinking, the Anefis meetings represented a re-appropriation by some local actors of a peace process that, until now, had been largely driven by external partners.

Valetta summit on migration (November 2015)

From 11-12 November 2015, representatives of European and African states met in Valetta to discuss measures to address the European migration crisis. The Malian president participated in the summit. In the aftermath of the summit, the EU established a trust fund in support of measures in African countries to address irregular migration by contributing to stability, development and security (European Commission, 2015). Due to the significant amount, 2.8 billion EUR, that was rapidly mobilised, the summit received much attention. Although the trust fund mainly aimed at resilience, economic development and improved migration management, it also partly targeted security objectives, which impacted the direction of EU support in the African states that participated in the Valetta summit.

Attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel (November 2015)

On 20 November 2015, an attack was waged at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, in which at least 20 people were killed. The terrorist group Al-Mourabbitoun claimed responsibility for the attack (Onuoha, 2016). The attack was terminated by the Malian security forces, with considerable support from international security forces. As the Radisson Blu Hotel is a popular spot for international guests and the expat community in Bamako, this attack garnered much attention and had an impact on international organisations' security protocols. It was also seen by several respondents as proof that the Malian security forces did not have the capacity to adequately respond to a complex terrorist attack within the capital. Since the Radisson Blu attacks, Mali has been in a state of emergency.

Ouagadougou attacks/Grand-Bassam attacks (January/March 2016)

On 15 January 2016, an attack similar to that on the Radisson Blu took place in a hotel and restaurant in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, killing 30 people. On 13 March 2016, an attack on beach hotels in Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast, took place, killing at least 16 people. Both attacks targeted locations that were popular with foreigners. While they did not take place in Mali, they are mentioned here because they

were pointed out by some respondents as important signs of the deterioration of the regional security situation.

Attacks on MINUSMA in Kidal (February 2016)

On 12 February 2016, a complex attack was launched against the MINUSMA camp in Kidal, killing seven peacekeepers and wounding another 30. This was a reason for the strategic review of MINUSMA and for the subsequent reorientation towards counter-terrorism and mission safety. This major attack was accompanied by further attacks on MINUSMA and FAMA in the North in 2016, which are not listed individually.

Attacks on EUTM HQ in Bamako (March 2016)

On 21 March 2016, gunmen attacked the Nord-Sud Hotel, which is the mission HQ of EUTM in Bamako. No casualties on the side of the mission and no major damage to the facilities were reported. One attacker was killed by security guards.

Adoption of the revised decree for the creation of the CNRSS (May 2016)

On 18 May 2016, the decree for the establishment of the CNRSS, which had been under review since the signature of the Peace Agreement, was approved in a revised form (United Nations Security Council, 2016b, p. 3). The council was placed under the authority of the prime minister, while the original decree had envisaged it under the authority of the president. The designation of members of the council by the government and the signatory groups remained pending until the end of the research period.

5.2 UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is the largest of the external actors engaged in the SSR process in Mali. The mission is strongly involved in the implementation of the Peace Agreement. As a large-scale, multidimensional peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA also has the most comprehensive SSR mandate of the external actors treated in this study.

During the research period, 25 interviews and background discussions were conducted with respondents of MINUSMA. Most interviews were conducted with staff working in the SSR-DDR unit and in related departments (Political Affairs, Stabilisation, UNPOL, military section). While some interviews were conducted in the mission's HQ, most interviews were conducted in more informal settings in Bamako. Consecutive in-depth interviews could be conducted with several key respondents, providing insights into sensemaking processes over time. One interview was held with a representative of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). In addition to interviews, one

workshop on SSR, which was co-organised by MINUSMA, was attended in July 2015, providing opportunities for observations and background talks with workshop participants. Secondary literature on MINUSMA's engagements in Mali was reviewed, mostly in the form of short policy briefs, newspaper articles and corporate publications. The mission had also already been the subject of several research endeavours in the field of stabilisation/peacekeeping. The secondary literature is mostly reflected in the section on organisational demands and constraints and in the discussion of the study's findings.

5.2.1 Institutional overview

MINUSMA was established by Security Council Resolution 2100 on 25 April 2013 (Unites Nations Security Council, 2013). The mission is formally led by DPKO, which is located in New York. DPKO provides support on a strategic level, regarding the policy framework. DPKO monitors if the mission's activities are in accordance with the policy framework and the priorities of the UN Security Council. DPKO also prepares the mission's budget. Moreover, DPKO oversees coherent political messaging and reporting and acts as a liaison with and between member states on matters of financial support and staffing.

MINUSMA's field headquarters (HQ) is located in Bamako, with regional field offices in Gao, Timbuktu, Mopti and Kidal. One of MINUSMA's first tasks was to convert the former 6,000 soldiers of the West African AFISMA into blue helmets in line with UN norms (Bergamaschi, 2013). This 're-hatting' effort had to be accompanied by a new force generation process. By March 2016, MINUSMA operated with 12,000 total uniformed personnel (ca. 10,800 military personnel, ca. 1,100 police and 40 military observers), ca. 600 international civilian staff, ca. 650 local civilian staff, and 150 UN Volunteers (United Nations Security Council, 2016a).

MINUSMA's mission is to carry out several security-related stabilisation tasks and to support the political process in Mali. The mandate is renewed on an annual basis. The mission operates under robust rules of engagement, which allows it to conduct operations in cooperation with the Malian security forces, for the protection of civilians or UN personnel within its areas of deployment. While the mandate is robust, it does not encompass counter-insurgency or sustained military operations against armed groups in

the North. In situations of imminent threat, French forces are mandated to intervene in support of MINUSMA, upon the request of the UN Secretary-General.[59]

As an integrated mission, MINUSMA comprises a military, a political and a civilian section. Positioned beneath the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General are the office of the force commander, the office of the police commissioner, the office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) for political affairs, the office of the DSRSG resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator, and the mission support division. The SSR-DDR) section is located under the office of the DSRSG resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator, together with the HIV/AIDS section, the Mine Action Service (UNMAS) section, the office of stabilisation and recovery, the electoral affairs section and the justice and corrections section.[60]

The SSR-DDR section within MINUSMA is, as in most UN missions, relatively small. DDR is the larger unit. Eight to ten people work in the SSR unit, which is organised into three pillars: (1) general defence and security reform, internal security reform (CNRSS/LOPM support), with a staff of three working on these issues; (2) support of parliament and civil society, also with a staff of three; and (3) border security, small arms and light weapons (SALW) control, with a staff of two. Some pillars are reinforced by staff members from other units on occasion (for example from UNPOL).

5.2.2 Policy framework: National ownership in SSR

SSR is a core element of UN peacekeeping missions. The first report of the Secretary-General on SSR, entitled 'Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform' was published on 23 January 2008 (United Nations Secretary-General, 2008). The report acknowledges that up until that point, SSR support of the UN had largely been an ad hoc undertaking, without much guidance given to the actors involved. The report calls for a more holistic and coherent UN approach to SSR, based on common standards and guidelines. Ownership is introduced as a pillar of SSR. The second report of the Secretary-General on SSR as per 13 August 2013 states:

> The question of political space, leadership and commitment is both a precondition for and manifestation of national ownership. A key challenge for operationalising national ownership is ensuring that security sector reform

[59] Together with MONUSCO, MINUSMA has an unprecedented robust mandate. Both missions utilise strategic communication and comprise intelligence units and unmanned aerial surveillance. As such, MINUSMA has been an important subject of the academic debate on 'enforcement peacekeeping', which explores the blurring of lines between peacekeeping, peace enforcement, stabilisation and counter-terrorism missions (Peter, 2015, p. 351-370; Karlsrud, 2015, p. 40-54; Nickel/Pietz, 2015).

[60] MINUSMA organisational charts, provided by a UNPOL officer by e-mail on 9 Feb 2016.

> processes reflect the host Government's primary role, including with regard to the allocation of national resources to the reform process, while promoting inclusiveness. From the perspective of the United Nations, it may mean taking additional steps to ensure that Security Council mandates more visibly incorporate the perspectives of the countries under consideration (United Nations Secretary-General, 2013, p. 2).

The UN Security Council's first stand-alone resolution on SSR from 24 April 2014 reiterated the centrality of national ownership for SSR processes, pointing to the sovereign right of the country concerned to determine the national SSR approach, recognising that SSR should be a nationally owned process and that political leadership and the political will of national authorities are both critical for the progress of SSR endeavours. Member states undertaking reform would need to lead the definition of an inclusive national SSR vision and to set forth priorities, with assistance provided by the UN, regional organisations or other member states (United Nations Security Council, 2014). These policy documents emphasise the pivotal role of national ownership in the UN SSR framework. Having been established by the UN as an international forum, their purview goes beyond UN peacekeeping missions and should also pertain to the UN member states. This makes these policy documents an important reference framework for the other sub-cases discussed in this study, as well.

Besides the Security Council resolution and reports noted above, the UN also adopted Technical Guidance Notes on SSR implementation in 2012, which provide more detailed guidance on how to address ownership in day-to-day programming and implementation (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012). These notes provide more concrete insight into the roles and responsibilities of external actors in SSR processes and how to approach national ownership[61] in the design, planning, implementation, as well as the monitoring and evaluation phases, of SSR programmes. They apply to all staff of peacekeeping missions. According to the Guidance Notes, underpinning ideas of national SSR processes should not be generated wholesale by external actors [UN peacekeeping missions]:

> The fundamental and abiding principle of national ownership is that external support and engagement must be informed, directed and led by national stakeholders. It is therefore crucial, to the extent possible, for external actors to seek to buy into national reform processes, rather than to bring national actors on board for ideas and processes that are externally generated and inspired (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 15f).

The Guidance Notes further stipulate four approaches with which external actors should go about facilitating and supporting SSR processes based on national

[61] National and local ownership are used interchangeably in the guidance document.

ownership: (1) an inclusive *national consultation process*, from which an inclusive consensus on the national security vision is to evolve; (2) an *implementation process that involves national stakeholders* to the fullest extent possible and includes a coordination mechanism between national authorities and external actors in support of the process, in order to achieve coherence and complementarity; (3) the active *involvement of national stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation* of the reform process, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of national stakeholders themselves; and (4) the *financial contributions of national actors* to the oversight of the reform process, to the extent to which this is possible.

While providing guidance on the roles of external and domestic actors, the Guidance Notes also add notions of negotiability and scope for decision-making – for example, by inserting recurrent qualifications such as 'to the extent possible', 'as much as possible', 'where possible' and 'ideally', for example regarding financial contributions from the partner countries. Also, the UN may coordinate international support for SSR if national authorities lack the ability to do so. External actors should support and facilitate SSR processes and may encourage and mobilise national actors to take action pertaining to the objectives of SSR, but they should not direct them (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 21). Moreover, ownership is defined as:

> […] an inclusive and consultative process, methodology and outcome that are predicated on the perspectives, priorities and vision of stakeholders within the society undergoing reform. National ownership promotes effective, accountable and sustainable security institutions that operate under civilian oversight, within a framework of the rule of law and respect for human rights (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 13f).

This definition of ownership is conceptually somewhat similar to the definition of SSR. The conceptualisation as a process, methodology and outcome remains vague regarding how to approach ownership in practice. Furthermore, two particularities stand out in the Guidance Notes, which are discussed in the following because they are important factors that also feature in organisational sensemaking. First, a national vision is pointed out as desirable but not mandatory for commencing international interventions. In the case that there is no clearly defined national vision, the UN can see facilitation of such a national consensus as part of its role in supporting reform (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 19). This issue is taken up in a separate section on how to address national ownership in the absence of political will:

> The normative imperative of predicating international support and engagement on national agendas and processes is often confronted with and frustrated by the absence of clear political will for reform. […] In such cases the United Nations could promote and facilitate national political will through

> sensitization of key national actors on the benefits of SSR, based on the notion of human security and in line with the ten principles espoused in the Report of the Secretary-General on Security Sector Reform (UN, 2008). When/where political will is polarized, facilitating national dialogue on SSR could be of immense benefit in closing the underlying socio-political cleavages (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 16).

Hence, a distinction is introduced between national ownership for an SSR process and the political will to reform. By fostering the latter, the former could be stimulated. Ownership as a crucial pillar of SSR is not questioned, but it is distinguished from something conceptually very similar. This distinction is especially important in view of the vague policy definition of ownership as process, methodology and outcome. With a vague and encompassing ownership definition, it is likely that the separation from political will serves a purpose: While the normative imperative of the ownership concept does not allow for external actors to impinge on national processes, political will is conceptualised as a pre-condition to national ownership and as a subject that can and should be actively fostered, for the purpose of facilitating a shared national vision. According to the Guidance Notes, a reform-friendly environment could be stimulated, for example, by publicising small successes in reform efforts. 'Quick wins' and tangible dividends are pointed out as entry points to bring actors on board and to initiate a discussion on SSR, even if conditions for beginning substantive implementation have not yet been met (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 32).

Second, national ownership is equated with the capacity of national stakeholders to engage in the design/planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SSR process. The Guidance Notes state that 'ownership grows in direct proportion to the capacities of national stakeholders' (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 15), as well as the following:

> […] the higher the national capacity to coordinate international support to SSR processes, the higher will be the degree of national ownership. National ownership is directly related to the human, institutional and financial capacity of national actors to implement SSR activities. From this perspective, national ownership is somewhat synonymous with national capacity (United Nations Inter Agency SSR Task Force, 2012, p. 17).

In the overall picture, both the UN SSR policy framework and the Guidance Notes validate the high status of ownership in SSR.

5.2.3 Institutional demands

This section discusses institutional demands and constraints to which MINUSMA was exposed, in addition to the demand to comply with ownership policy according to the UN SSR framework.

Mandate and scope for decision-making

MINUSMA has a wide-ranging, expanding mandate. The mission's original mandate was to support the interim authorities of Mali with the implementation of the transitional road map and to support the stabilisation of major population centres (MINUSMA, 2016). The mandate was amended by Security Council Resolution 2164 on 25 June 2014 and Resolution 2227 on 29 June 2015, which tasked the mission with focussing primarily on security, stabilisation, the protection of civilians, support of national political dialogue and reconciliation, the promotion of human rights, and support of the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country, especially in the North of Mali. The mission was also tasked with supporting national efforts to rebuild the security sector, including the coordination of international support in this field. Regarding the Peace Agreement, MINUSMA was requested to support the provisions for political and institutional reforms, to supervise the implementation, and to support the redeployment of the Malian defence and security forces to the North. In the mission concept, the mandate was translated into three core objectives: (1) a sustainable and credible peace process with implementation of the Peace Agreement, (2) security and stabilisation in areas critical to the peace process, and (3) the full operational capacity of MINUSMA, including the capacity to protect and sustain the mission and to conduct priority tasks (United Nations Security Council, 2015a, p. 13f).

SSR is a core pillar of MINUSMA's mandate (de Carvalho/Kumalo, 2014). The mission is mandated to 'support national and international efforts towards rebuilding the Malian security sector' (Unites Nations Security Council, 2013, p. 7). With the signing of the Peace Agreement, the security and defence provisions of the agreement became the reference document for SSR support. The mandate's provisions regarding SSR are rather vague. This was confirmed by a member of the SSR-DDR team working on QIPs, who indicated that 'everything can be easily fitted into the mandate'.[62] In principle, MINUSMA was to work on every aspect of the SSR process, unless something was already covered by other external actors.[63] While DPKO provided strategic guidance on SSR, it did not get involved in day-to-day mission activities.[64] This left decision-makers at the field level with a rather wide scope for decision-making. This was also indicated by a DPKO officer who, when discussing prioritisation of tasks in the mission, explained that sometimes HQ had to call back certain actors and their

62 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
63 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
64 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

initiatives, if they had become overenthusiastic about certain activities, which were not in line with 'what the council wants, and the budget allows'.[65]

When discussing coordination between the pillars of the mission, respondents also confirmed that the level of coordination between the pillars depended largely on the leading personnel at the strategic level and their approach towards coordination. The performance of individual leading figures could make a significant difference, regarding the public image of the mission, to coordination with Malian counterparts, and to the routines of coordination within the mission. At the operational level, coordination would also depend on personal relations between individual staff members.[66] The sensemaking of officers in decision-making positions is therefore treated as highly relevant for the determination of MINUSMA's organisational practices.

Organisational culture

MINUSMA is a large, culturally diverse organisation. The main troop suppliers are Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Togo and Senegal (Peter, 2015, p. 356). It is also the peacekeeping mission with the largest participation of troops from Western states (Karlsrud, 2015, p. 46). Lotte Vermeij stresses that as 'the mission consists of a range of different nationalities and cultures, with different norms, values, and work ethics, this has often led to problems related to cross-cultural issues and misunderstandings' (Vermeij, 2015a, p. 3). At the same time, the mission's HQ in Bamako is strongly fortified, with restricted access – hence there are limited day-to-day interactions with the organisational environment. This is also the case for the field offices.

Dissent between members of different contributing states about how to interpret certain developments and come to adequate organisational responses were pointed out by several respondents from different backgrounds. For example, one respondent pointed to a cultural difference between European and African staff members. According to the respondent, Europeans would expect predictability and insist on time frames. However, in Mali, politics were characterised by informality. The Malian army, for example, was, according to the respondent, a powerful actor, which was always consulted informally before political decisions were taken, also by the president.[67] Europeans would have difficulties understanding the power of these informal networks in Mali. Another respondent pointed to cultural differences between contributing states and mentioned that in his opinion, MINUSMA had become 'very African' over time.[68] Bergamaschi, on

65 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
66 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
67 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
68 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

the other hand, points to a 'subordinate role given to Africans in the mission' (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, Vermeij finds that leadership is contested within MINUSMA:

> In most cases this was due to the lack of communication with staff, and the impression that leadership focused most of its attention on external players and factors. Staff also felt that there was no clear strategy or vision, as well as lack of guidance from MINUSMA's leadership. This led to confusion about job responsibilities and rapidly decreasing motivation amongst personnel (Vermeij, 2015a, p. 3).

In addition to culturally different perceptions of staff members, differences between contributing states also pertain to the division of competencies and tasks and questions of leadership (Jeune Afrique, 2013). Even though all MINUSMA contributors should follow the same objectives, some contributing states were pointed out as insisting on the visibility of their national outcomes.[69] Moreover, envy and prejudice against members of other contributing nations could result in limited information-sharing and limited cooperation between different units. These sensitivities between contributing states make it more difficult to align the work of the mission's pillars and to find common ground for strategic actions.

While this study cannot go into more depth about cultural diversity and intra-organisational conflict within MINUSMA, it sees these aspects as an important take-away for the analysis, namely that sensemaking of organisational members probably depends to a large extent not only on their organisational sense of belonging but also on their cultural and professional background. This also has implications for organisational members' belonging to a collective sensemaking group, which does not necessarily have to primarily be their own organisation.

Public expectations and resources

MINUSMA's already comprehensive mandate was significantly expanded after the signing of the Peace Agreement. Consequentially, expectations from the member states of the UN, from the Malian government and from the Malian population, regarding the mission's performance and impact, were high. Having taken over from AFISMA and operating alongside Operation Serval/Barkhane, MINUSMA operated within the trajectories of a military legacy (Aubyn, 2015; Bergamaschi, 2013). This had implications for the expectations directed at the mission, in terms of engaging in the security sector. Member states and the Malian government have pushed for a more robust mandate of the mission (Boutellis, 2015). The mission was expected to step up its

69 Interview with UNPOL officer, 1 Feb 2016, Bamako.

contributions to improve the security situation for the population, for FAMA and for the safety of its organisational members (especially the blue helmets in the field). At the same time, MINUSMA was faced with criticism for violating Malian sovereignty and undermining the legitimacy of the government. During the peace negotiations and the subsequent implementation of the Peace Agreement, MINUSMA was repeatedly criticised for being biased towards one side or the other (MaliActu.Net, 2015). This was also found by Vermeij who noted that 'complex working relationships with the Malian authorities and security forces add further complexity to the situation. Different views on the way forward have led to a tense relationship between the Malian government and MINUSMA leadership' (Vermeij, 2015a, p. 3). Regarding the public reception of the mission in Mali, Festus Aubyn finds:

> MINUSMA as a whole has also been criticized for failing to deploy outside the cities by the government, and for bringing the Malian troops back to the north by the local population. In the capital city Bamako, it was also indicated that some government officials are also unhappy with the presence of UN personnel because they claim the mission has taken over the biggest hotel in the country which used to host state officials and other important personalities in the country. The government also wants the mission headquarters to be relocated to the north instead of Bamako and to remove the MINUSMA logos on their vehicles because it portrays a negative picture about the country. The government also want [sic!] the mission to help extend state authority to the north rather than engaging in the on-going mediation and political processes in the north although it forms part of MINUSMA's mandate (Aubyn, 2015, p. 19f).

Public perceptions of the mission's military legacy were further amplified by the sometimes-lacking distinction between the mandate of MINUSMA and the counter-insurgency activities of Barkhane in the North, which was not always clear to the public, leading to mistrust and disapproval from the Malian population towards MINUSMA. Barriers in terms of culture and language have also found to hinder day-to-day interaction with the Malian population (Vermeij, 2015a). These barriers were reinforced by rather short periods of deployment, especially for military personnel.[70] An opinion poll undertaken by the office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES) in Bamako in 2015 found that only 14.6% population assessed the role of MINUSMA in overcoming the crisis in Mali as sufficient, while 31.8% expressed their opinion that the mission's performance was mediocre, and 37.3% said they were not satisfied at all with the engagement of MINUSMA (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015, p. 39). Public demonstrations against the mission's presence took place in different locations of the country, mostly directed against MINUSMA's cooperation with the French and the increasing risk of

[70] Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Jul 2015, Bamako.

armed groups' attacks on populations living close to MINUSMA bases (Vermeij, 2015b; What's in Blue, 2015; Whitehouse, 2015). Gustavo de Carvalho and Liezelle Kumalo add that it 'became clear that since the conflict is concentrated in the north, the heavy footprint of the mission in Bamako is not only counter-productive, but also has a negative impact on the image of the mission' (de Carvalho/Kumalo, 2014).

In view of the mission's comprehensive mandate and of demands of the Security Council and member states, resources to implement the mission's objectives were perceived to be lacking. Approximately 80% of the mission's resources were deployed to make the mission possible.[71] This strong focus on operativeness was also reflected in the mission concept, which identified the functionality of the mission as a core task in and of itself.[72] At the same time, planning horizons were pointed out as too slow to react to immediate needs or needs that had arisen in the short term – the mission worked on the budget for almost a year before implementation of activities.[73] Therefore, it was important for staff members to have clarity about the feasibility and costs of activities well before implementation was slated to begin. This illustrates that the mission had not only limited resources but also limited budgetary flexibility.

Operating conditions

With a broad mandate and a geographical area of activity in which the state is virtually absent, MINUSMA is widely described as operating in an environment that is particularly challenging for a peacekeeping mission. It was the first UN peacekeeping mission to be directly exposed to violent threats of groups with a terrorist affiliation. When discussing developments and events that have affected MINUSMA's work on SSR during the period of research, several respondents highlighted the security incidents in the North. Furthermore, attacks directed against MINUSMA and MOC bases were perceived as a sign of rising brutality of the terrorists, as attacks would become more severe and more complex. MINUSMA was perceived as being especially exposed to these threats, due to its presence in the North and its leading role in the mediation. The incidents were perceived as signs that the jihadists were able to strike anywhere at will and to occupy cities, while the government would be unable to react. While the jihadists were not able to attack the highly specialised French troops, they could attack 'softer targets' such as the blue helmets and FAMA. This resulted in more and more tension around the mission. As one respondent put it: 'A few more things like that and the whole thing is collapsing. There is serious trouble ahead'.[74] A respondent working

71 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
72 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
73 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
74 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

on mission analysis confirmed that terrorism was very much present for the mission and that the extent to which the signatory groups were involved with terrorist groups was a major concern.[75]

The perception that the security situation was continuously deteriorating was not only emphasised by respondents but also found expression in the status reports of the Secretary-General on the security situation and the work of MINUSMA in Mali, which emphasised increasing threats against the mission and its staff, reporting security incidents pertaining to the mission in detail. During the period of research, the reports perpetuated the assessment that the security situation in Mali was continuously deteriorating (United Nations Security Council, 2015a, p. 10; 2015b, p. 13; 2015c, p. 6; 2016a, p. 13; 2016b, p. 10; 2016c, p. 1). The security incidents discussed above were also reflected in the reports:

> While there have not been any violations of the ceasefire since August 2015, the overall security situation in Mali deteriorated significantly during the past year. Security incidents have increased in intensity and sophistication. Terrorists and violent extremist groups have improved their modus operandi, with a higher level of flexibility that allowed them to quickly adopt new techniques and tactics. These groups have enhanced their capacity to carry out attacks against public targets, as seen in the attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako in November 2015 as well as in Ouagadougou and Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire (United Nations Security Council, 2016b, p. 10).

These statements underline the vitality and presence of the security threats respondents experienced within their organisational context during the period of research. As the reports are prepared with input from the field level, the perceptions presented in the reports are connected to field-level sensemaking. Therefore, they are also partly quoted in the sensemaking section, when they reflect individual perceptions expressed by respondents at the field level.

What is more, MINUSMA had a difficult stance within the SSR actors' landscape in Bamako. Turf wars have been reported with organisations that were active in Mali before MINUSMA's arrival.[76] Tensions over competencies with the EU in the field of SSR were noted on several occasions. Also, the humanitarian community raised concerns about working alongside MINUSMA – for example, due to MINUSMA's deployment of armed escorts. Although foreseen in the Peace Agreement, national SSR structures – as the main counterparts of the mission in the field of SSR – did not become operational during the period of research (United Nations Security Council, 2016c, p. 5) In

75 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 11 Nov 2016, Bamako.
76 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Jul 2015, Bamako.

the overall picture, MINUSMA stood somewhat isolated in the international community working on SSR in Mali, despite its mandate to coordinate international support for the SSR process.

5.2.4 Organisational sensemaking

MINUSMA was found to be a fragmented, culturally diverse organisation, in which organisational members did not necessarily share collective frames of interpretation. Authorised policy was found to be less relevant as a frame of reference and as a source of sensemaking at the field level than at the HQ level.[77] In November 2015, MINUSMA had recently drafted a shared vision for the mission, because confusion about the mission's purpose and objectives had been raised by staff members. The vision document had not yet been endorsed by DPKO but was nevertheless used as an informal working document within the mission.[78] This assessment of fragmentation within the organisation points to heterogeneous sensemaking processes and suggests that collective sensemaking did not predominantly happen within the organisational units. Against this backdrop, an intersubjective sense of shared meanings was difficult to trace for the case of MINUSMA. In fact, inter-organisational relations of MINUSMA staff make it likely that key sensemaking communities might be rather located in the thematic (SSR/security) and social domains. Indeed, within MINUSMA, different social groups were encountered, whose members often shared similar social and cultural backgrounds. These groups crossed the boundaries between units and also the boundaries of the mission (groups encompassing members of other organisations). In several instances, these social groups appeared to be more important for collective sensemaking than the affiliation with a specific unit within MINUSMA. This was, for example, found to be the case when members of a social group would use similar illustrative examples or tell similar stories to make a point, while statements diverged more from statements of other members of their organisational unit. The relevance of this intra-organisational sensemaking is discussed in the results section of the empirical chapter.

Sensemaking of the ownership concept was found to be heterogeneous. This pertained both to diverting perceptions between different pillars of the mission, which have different operating procedures and working cultures, as well as within the SSR-DDR unit, in which different interpretations of cues and events were encountered. Respondents' perceptions of the role of national SSR structures serve as an illustration. Even within the SSR-DDR unit, different opinions on the status of national SSR structures

77 In the following analysis, 'HQ' is used as the term for DPKO in New York, while the MINUSMA headquarters at the field level in Bamako is referred to as 'the mission'.

78 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.

were encountered. While one respondent of the unit believed that much was happening regarding the national SSR setup in November 2015, another respondent of the same unit expressed his impression that nothing was happening regarding the national SSR structures. Contradicting information was also provided in response to the question if structures had already been established and convened. When asked about the role of the national SSR structures for the unit's work, some respondents expressed doubts that progress with the SSR process would accelerate with the establishment of these structures. Another respondent expressed the belief that as soon as the national structures were established, the missing components of the SSR process would fall into place. According to that thinking, the establishment of the national SSR structures was the main challenge that needed to be overcome for the SSR process to truly begin. These examples illustrate that interpretations of cues and events differed not only within the mission but also within the SSR-DDR unit. At the same time, individual SSR-DDR officers at the field level had a rather wide scope for decision-making within their range of duty and within the mandate. Their sensemaking was found to be an important source of decision-making regarding organisational action.

5.2.5 Organisational sensemaking of ownership

Despite the rather heterogenous accounts of MINUSMA respondents, relevant patterns in the accounts of respondents emerged that point to processes of sensemaking that were consequential for organisational practices. For instance, doubts about the level of ownership of the Malian stakeholders to engage in SSR were found to be a recurrent theme in MINUSMA respondents' statements. A lack of commitment from the Malian counterparts in implementing the Peace Agreement and the SSR process was a widespread perception and seen as a major dilemma for the mission. Several respondents pointed to a suspected agency on the side of their counterparts that was perceived to conflict with the agreed-upon SSR framework. How these doubts manifested in respondents' perspectives on working relations with their counterparts, what the implications of these doubts were for the meaning of the ownership concept and its relation to other demands, as well as what perspectives respondents offered as to how to deal with conflicting demands is elaborated in the following.

Ownership in Mali is fluid and nuanced

At HQ level, meanings of ownership in Mali were presented in close relation to authorised policy. A DPKO officer, when asked about ownership for SSR in Mali, referred to the four categories of ownership presented above in the policy section. Coming to discuss SSR in Mali, the respondent explained that if these categories were the

benchmarks, progress was slow, and they were 'not there yet.'[79] According to the respondent, only small steps regarding the SSR framework were taken so far, and no national security vision was in place. Also, the government had not allocated much capacity and funds. The holistic process existed on paper, but the respondent did not perceive much interest on the Malian side in operationalising it. The respondent also pointed to suspected hidden agendas: The agenda of the Malian government was unclear – perhaps there was no pressing agenda for reform.[80] Furthermore, the respondent mentioned doubts about the government being interested in an inclusive peace process, raising the question if the Malian authorities would actually want the North back and suggesting that the international community could not know that this was indeed their priority. Perhaps agendas other than those interested in reform were involved. The respondent also felt that the government showed little willingness to work with the other signatory groups on the security provisions of the Peace Agreement.

Still, this assessment of the SSR situation in Mali did not result in a perceived absence of ownership. Indeed, ownership in Mali was perceived as fluid and nuanced. According to the respondent, the Malians still had the reflex to see SSR as an externally driven process. They felt like the receiving end of the process and not like its drivers. Still, one could not say there was either no ownership or 100% ownership: 'There is a vision but maybe it is in the mind of the people, maybe it needs to be distilled.'[81] Ownership would need to be looked at institution by institution. What was missing, according to the respondent, was the glue, as a broader vision was lacking, and it was unclear if these small steps were coherent. The respondent concluded that the mission had to be patient and to encourage small steps. He added that SSR would not happen in the sense of 100%, as SSR could take generations. Along similar lines, the respondent introduced a level of *distinction within the ownership concept*: The work on a Border Security Strategy, a Counter-Terrorism Strategy and an Internal Security Law, as well as on the training of the police and the small steps undertaken regarding judiciary reform, were seen as *signs of ownership at the component level*. The respondent believed that while there was ownership at the component level, the mission could not be sure about the presence of ownership at a strategic level. This distinction within the ownership concept is not laid out in the policy framework but re-emerged in the sensemaking of other respondents.

The respondent's account underlines the strong connection between the level of the perceived commitment of the counterparts and the mission's abilities to proceed with

79 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
80 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
81 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

mandate implementation, which was also expressed at the field level. At the same time, this account underlines how sensemaking serves to bridge gaps between perceived realities on the ground and the validity of the policy framework. In this case, it enabled the respondent to speak about unfavourable domestic conditions for reform and questionable domestic agendas, while not questioning the general applicability of the ownership concept.

There is political leadership, because it is in the Peace Agreement

Stances close to organisational policy were also encountered at the field level, though respondents at the field level put stronger emphasis on *tangible manifestations of ownership* than on conceptual definitions, such as the establishment of national SSR structures and participation in these structures. The prospect and potential of the establishment of national structures for a nationally driven SSR process was especially pointed out in the beginning of the research period as an important anticipated manifestation of ownership. These statements validated organisational policy, which also emphasises national structures as pivotal for SSR.

For example, the adoption of the decree on the establishment of the CNRSS was perceived as a sign of ownership by a respondent of the SSR-DDR unit, who stated that 'in order to reinforce national ownership, the CNRSS was created.'[82] With the CNRSS, decisions would be taken by national stakeholders, with the international community providing support on request. According to this respondent, ownership was with 'the Malian pilot group', who were 'aware and willing'. Now the international community would have to help. On another occasion, a respondent from the political affairs division explained that in order to move forward with the peace process, national law had to be put in place. The international community had supported this process and pushed the government to this end.[83] Likewise, when asked about the commitment of the counterparts to the peace process, a respondent from the SSR-DDR unit stated that 'there is political leadership, because it is in the Peace Agreement. The Peace Agreement says that the leadership is with the government. Implementation is with the three signatory parties, but the leadership is with the government.'[84] When asked the same question, another respondent from the same unit expressed that the fact that the Malian counterparts signed the Peace Agreement and participated in the structures (CSA) was a sign of their commitment: 'They are committed. Of course they are committed,

82 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
83 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
84 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.

because they signed the Peace Agreement and they participate in the structures. We just have to remind them once in a while.'[85]

The association of ownership with the establishment of formal strategies and structures reflects a need to have *actionable expressions of ownership* as well as formal structures which take responsibility for the implementation of the reform process. Interestingly, valid expressions of ownership were mostly seen as connected to national structures and strategies, which were required for external actors to be able to both channel and focus their supporting activities, in line with ownership policy.

Demands raised by national counterparts in day-to-day operations were not necessarily assessed as 'national priorities' but occasionally rather as doubtful expressions of particularistic agency. This finding points to *frictions between the concept of ownership and domestic agency*, which were coped with at the field level by limiting valid expressions of ownership to formal structures (institutions, strategies) that were established in coordination between external and domestic actors. 'Aligning to national priorities' is thereby cognitively limited to the former, while the latter could not be expressed validly without the former. This is a recurrent theme that will be raised again in several of the subsequent paragraphs of this chapter.

In the case of MINUSMA, adhering to ownership policy was thus associated with the requirement to wait for the formal structures to be in place, for the SSR process to begin. Similar rationales regarding national strategies and priorities were also found for the other cases but with different conclusions for organisational responses.

We can help them to put the tracks in place, but they have to provide the train

As the national SSR structures did not become operational during the research period, most sensemaking evolved around the absence of these structures and consequences for one's own organisational role. *Curbed expectations* with regard to what the mission could achieve in the absence of a clear national vision were expressed by the HQ respondent, who underlined that the mission would not push for anything if the time and the context were not right. The respondent reasoned, closely positioned to SSR policy, that ownership was the number two guidance principle for SSR:

> The SRSG told us to not support SSR if it is not anchored in ownership. It is in the guidance. […] There are elements of ownership and we foster them all the time and we know that without ownership, reforms will not be sustainable. There is no support unless things are driven by the Malians.[86]

[85] Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
[86] Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

According to the respondent, MINUSMA provided support on demand. The slow progress of the process was indeed perceived as a sign of the mission's commitment to not supporting processes *not* driven by the Malian counterparts. Against this backdrop, the mission has had to be flexible and to encourage small changes: 'All we can do is to nudge them in the right directions. […] We can help them to put the tracks in place, but they have to provide the train.'[87]

The respondent further stressed that the specific situation in Mali required a 'baby step approach'.[88] Supporting small steps undertaken by the Malian side was what the mission could do when the time for bigger steps was not yet right. These small steps were an opportunity to gain an entry point on a particular issue, then to have a wider conversation with stakeholders on other initiatives. More complicated elements would come as a 'package' at a later point. Otherwise, there would be 'too much to chew' on the Malian side. Similar perceptions about the absence of national will to reform were expressed in the Report of the Secretary-General from September 2015:

> Without the determined will of the Malian parties and their constituencies to move forward with the implementation of all provisions of the Peace Agreement in a parallel and synchronized manner, the impact of the support of the international community will remain limited. The parties must ensure broad and inclusive consultations with all stakeholders, including the signatories, civil society, women and youth, to consolidate the Malian people's ownership of their future (United Nations Security Council, 2015c, p. 15).

While sensemaking was largely fragmented in the organisation, this finding serves as an example of explanatory patters, enabled by prior sensemaking, which permeate organisational narratives directed at the organisational environment.

It is like playing football in the fog

Uncertainty about the question if demands expressed by counterparts were valid expressions of ownership was brought up on several occasions. For instance, a respondent from the SSR-DDR section pointed out that it was difficult to determine if ownership for SSR existed in the Malian context. There would be *certain signs of commitment*, such as counterparts calling and asking for certain support. However, it was not clear with which motives these counterparts were calling and if they would follow up on agree-upon activities. On another occasion, the respondent described that due to the unclear objectives and agendas of the Malian counterparts, MINUSMA's work on SSR in Mali would be 'like playing football in the fog. We are expected to do something but

87 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
88 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

that is difficult, because the Malians have to set out the boundaries.'[89] The image invoked by the respondent points to the perceived dependency of MINUSMA on the government taking a leading role in the SSR process, to be able to implement its mandate.

A lot of people have been repeating what we are saying

When asked about their counterparts' perspectives on border management activities at the field level, a MINUSMA officer expressed that 'a lot of people have been repeating what we are saying. Maybe they came to the same conclusions; maybe they just want to be involved in funds and projects. It is hard to figure that out.'[90] Furthermore, with regard to the establishment of national SSR structures, the respondent suggested: 'It is a bit of a card game; no one wants to play out their cards too early.'[91] Similar to the 'football in the fog' image, these statements point to a high level of *uncertainty about how to read cues from the organisational environment* and to assess in how far these cues are valid expressions of ownership.

Another respondent from the SSR-DDR unit criticised that no proper assessments had been previously conducted to inform project activities, so priorities of the counterparts were not clear in planning activities.[92] This statement also indicates *problems of pinpointing national positions on SSR*. It further suggests that respondents were attentive to their counterparts' behaviour and signal and were looking for cues of ownership but had difficulties in reading and validating these signals and in *demarcating expressions of ownership from inappropriate or particularistic expressions of agency* coming from the organisational environment. Respondents did not rule out that ownership could be present, though it would emerge in a context-specific form that was difficult to assess.

We have a feeling that they are driving this. Of course we pushed them over a year

One respondent expressed the feeling that national ownership for border management activities had been present, though also admitting an active role of the mission in fostering it: 'We have a feeling that they are driving this. Of course we pushed them over a year.'[93] At the same time, the respondent acknowledged that the extent to which border management was a priority for the Malian government was not fully clear. Many people would benefit from the unsecured borders, even within the government: 'It

89 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
90 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
91 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
92 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
93 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.

would be naïve to think that everyone is on it.'[94] Expressions of interest from the counterparts could also be triggered by the migration crisis. All of a sudden, a large amount of money would be available for activities in this field and this would be known by the counterparts.[95] Other respondents also indicated that they had the feeling that the refugee crisis was not much of an issue for the Malian counterparts.[96] Besides, respondents acknowledged that no border security strategy was yet in place, so for them it was unclear how these activities would fit together within a larger border strategy. Still, organisational action in this field progressed regardless of several respondents remaining doubtful about which cues qualified as valid expressions of ownership.

We are too fast for them

The slowness of the SSR process was also attributed to *different paces of external and domestic actors* regarding implementing reform agendas. MINUSMA's implementation speed in the field of border management was perceived as overwhelming for the counterparts. As one respondent put it: 'The Malian authorities are totally not ready for it. We are too fast for them. […] The pace of the Malian authorities is very slow. Still nothing is in place.'[97] In view of these conditions, the mission's pace should be adjusted to the Malian counterparts. Also, developments around the CNRSS were referenced as an example of the perception that the mission should curb its ambitions, in view of operational realities: In June 2015, it was envisaged that the CNRSS was to be headed by the president. A respondent underlined that 'the president has to be involved; otherwise there would be no reform'.[98] The high-level involvement was perceived as a sign of commitment on the side of the Malian government, which would trickle down through the hierarchy. In November, it was noted that the CNRSS would not be headed by the president but by the prime minister and that this decision would render the body ineffective, as decisions would not be made at the right level.[99] In November 2016, the same respondent suggested that the allocation to the office of the prime minister was a good thing, because it should not be assigned to too high a level.[100] Another respondent was of the opinion that the fact that the CNRSS fell to the prime minister's office was a good thing because all ministries would be included and this would increase national ownership of the CNRSS.[101] These statements suggest a level of adjustment to *accommodate perceived domestic realities*, which allowed the respondents to

94 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
95 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
96 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
97 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
98 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
99 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
100 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
101 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 10 Nov 2016, Bamako.

remain operational in view of conditions which had been previously assessed as obstacles. These statements also underline the *evolutionary character of organisational sensemaking*. In this case, the assessment as to which cues indicated ownership or its absence changed over time.

There is no time for organic growth

Conflicts between organisational and environmental demands were widespread and a recurrent issue during interviews. For example, MINUSMA's *limited resources and tight timelines* were mentioned as operational factors conflicting with the need to work on more structural reform steps. Respondents indicated that due to the high costs of the mission, there was a significant amount of political pressure that dictated tangible results and quick successes. There was no time for 'organic growth' according to a shared vision. The tools that the mission had on hand would not be adequate to accomplish the required change in mentality of the counterparts.[102] One respondent pointed to the *high normative demands arising from the policy framework* that did not always resonate well with the facts in Mali on the ground: 'With our norms and values, we will not be able to overcome this problem.'[103] Concepts like leadership could not just be taken for granted but would need to be looked at in the context of the Malian culture. However, while MINUSMA needed to work on structural and behavioural change, this work was not realistically possible. For SSR to be possible, things would have to be laid out in such a way that they were transformed into the Malians' own ideas. For the Malians to 'put their heart into something', the pride and respect of the Malian counterparts would have to be factored in.[104] The Malians needed to be the experts on how to do things. However, due to organisational constraints, this depth of engagement was perceived to be not possible. Other demands were perceived as more pressing, though several respondents expressed frustration about this.

We had to explain a lot to them

In line with the UN SSR policy framework, some respondents drew a line between national ownership and capacities of domestic actors to conduct SSR. According to that thinking, a lack of ownership could be explained by a *lack of capacity for and knowledge of domestic actors about SSR*. This position was encountered, for example, during a sensitisation workshop on SSR for civil society, which was conducted by MINUSMA in cooperation with a civil society organisation in July 2015 in Bamako. A

102 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako; background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
103 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.
104 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.

MINUSMA officer who had participated in the sensitisation workshop on SSR for civil society concluded that the interventions of civil society representatives were not of a high quality and that this was a sign that civil society representatives did not really understand SSR and 'the bigger picture'.[105] Another respondent from the same unit declared that the workshop was overdue in explaining to civil society actors why they should be involved in SSR.[106] On another occasion, when discussing the integration process, the same respondent stated that 'in practice, they do not really have the capacity. How to do it is not really clear in their minds. […] They did not know what to do. We had to explain a lot to them.'[107] However, due to MINUSMA's own limited capacities, a focus on substantial capacity-building of national stakeholders would be difficult. These statements are close to organisational policy, which partly equals ownership and capacities of national actors. This is an actionable perspective on ownership; capacities can be built, and awareness created. For these respondents, the way ahead was clearer than for other respondents, who expressed uncertainty about how to assess which cues constituted valid expressions of ownership.

We do not see much from the government in terms of a vision

Overall, SSR was widely perceived by respondents as not being a priority of the government, and progress on the side of the national partner was perceived to be very slow concerning SSR. This led to frustration on the side of the respondents, who pointed out that for SSR to work, willingness and commitment are required, but that there had even been obstructions from the partner side.[108] In early 2016, when asked about the level of commitment of the government to the peace process, a respondent expressed *uncertainty about how to act in the absence of a national vision*: 'We do not see much from the government in terms of a vision. What is their bigger vision for SSR? How is the integration going to happen, we need to know, so that we also know how to support it. This is the big question to me, and it is not really answered.'[109]

Respondents identified operational dilemmas arising from the perceived absence of national willingness and commitment to engage in reform processes, stating that SSR could not be implemented by the mission as a stand-alone feature.[110] The national SSR structures were envisaged to be a vehicle for many tasks of the mission. Without

105 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
106 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
107 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
108 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.
109 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
110 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako; background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.

it, those activities could not be implemented.[111] Even when the decrees for the establishment of the national SSR structures were signed in later 2016, respondents doubted that this would make a difference for the work of the SSR-DDR unit, because the decrees would look good on paper, while the real issues remained the nominations of members and the decrees' operationalisation.[112] The formal adoption of decrees would not be enough, as the structures would need to be operational. As one respondent put it: 'They say the decrees are ready, as if we could just move ahead, but they are not signed.'[113] Hence, several respondents indicated that the mission was not able to act, in the absence of national steps regarding strategies and structures. In view of this dilemma, one respondent described their work very frankly in the following terms: 'We are trying to look busy and have a lot of activities and full work plans.'[114] Another respondent suggested that certain activities had been taken up because 'we had a lot of time on our hands'.[115] This finding will be taken up again in the section on organisational practices.

Respondents also pointed out that due to MINUSMA's salient role in the peace process, *operational dilemmas arising from the perceived absence of national willingness and commitment* were more pertinent than it was the case for other external actors. Indeed, this dependence was perceived as a unique constraint for MINUSMA. Other organisations would work with the army or the police only and would be less dependent on the cooperation of the entire landscape of domestic actors involved in the implementation of the Peace Agreement.[116]

The government is doing its own thing most of the time

Several statements from respondents underline the ambivalent position of MINUSMA towards their Malian counterparts in the security sector, as well as doubts about *suspected hidden agendas of domestic SSR stakeholders that could conflict with the SSR process*, posing a dilemma for MINUSMA in delivering on its mandate. A respondent from the planning section, when asked about cooperation with national counterparts, said that the government would do its own thing most of the time, unless a large amount of money was involved.[117] According to the respondent, there was more consultation regarding development projects and DDR than with regard to SSR.

111 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 10 Nov 2016, Bamako.
112 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
113 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
114 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
115 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
116 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
117 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.

The government institutions were described as fragmented, which was assessed as a major obstacle to the development of a national vision for peace/SSR. Some counterparts from FAMA were perceived to have reservations against engaging with MINUSMA.[118] Respondents believed that FAMA preferred a military solution in the North together with EUTM, instead of engaging in a comprehensive SSR process. According to respondents, FAMA also had reservations about implementing the reform effort with rebel groups, which caused further delays in the reform process. Therefore, getting FAMA on board for the SSR process was perceived as a major challenge, as they had not been thus far involved and were 'in competition with other security actors'.[119] It was suggested that the army might see the SSR process as potentially challenging or weakening the army's position.

A UNPOL officer expressed his opinion that most trainings offered to FAMA were well appreciated by the given counterparts, but that there was no willingness to change conduct.[120] This was also brought up by another respondent who stated that whenever MINUSMA invited its counterparts to a training session, their counterparts would weigh the benefit of the training and send people accordingly.[121] In general, trainings were well appreciated, especially when conducted abroad, but there was no willingness to change behaviour, as people would stick to their traditional ways of doing things.[122] The expression of 'traditional ways of doing things' was used in this case with a negative connotation, as another form of *domestic agency posing an obstacle to reform*, which was not necessarily connected to questioning the adequacy of MINUSMA's organisational practices.

They want money

These impressions where not limited to the security institutions. According to a respondent from the political section, the government and the signatory parties mainly looked for benefits from the peace process. Regarding the establishment of the integration and DDR committees, the signatory groups were 'not interested in the how. They want money.'[123] A respondent from the same section added to this thought in stressing that when discussing obstacles to the implementation of the Peace Agreement, 'the key driver of instability in this country is the government'.[124] Another respondent suggested that while the Malian counterparts had committed to establishing

118 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.
119 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
120 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.
121 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
122 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
123 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
124 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

national structures, it was likely that they would continue to 'hit the brakes on occasions to slow down the process. They have time at their hands, as if we had unlimited funding.'[125] Similar doubts were expressed about the agendas of the signatory parties from the North, who are also stakeholders of the SSR process. The armed groups were seen as holding back on progress because they would benefit from international support and would be interested in extending the process for as long as possible.[126] These statements illustrate the level of tension with the counterparts and the *difficulties respondents faced in approaching them as eligible voices of ownership*, pointing again to inherent tensions between the concept of ownership and expressions of interest by domestic counterparts. Deliberations were mostly focused on these obstacles, not on potential cues of ownership, pointing towards the profound dilemma MINUSMA respondents saw themselves faced with in the collaboration with national counterparts.

They do not let you look into their kitchen

Respondents also indicated a *limited level of information-sharing* between MINUSMA and their Malian counterparts in day-to-day cooperation. This was perceived as an issue in the case of the limited information-sharing of Malian counterparts with MINUSMA. Domestic processes taking place in the security sector were largely unknown, with the counterparts not wanting MINUSMA to be involved in these processes. This was, for example, mentioned in the context of the co-location model, according to which UNPOL officers work jointly with Malian officers in a 'training on the job' model. A respondent who had been assigned to a Malian counterpart in a co-location model complained that his counterpart never showed up for work and that he also never shared information with him. The respondent expressed his opinion that counterparts do not 'let you look into their kitchen. The only thing they are interested in is getting money from the UN. They did not share any information with me.'[127] As a consequence, the respondent had refused to return to the counterpart's office and had been re-assigned. This story is another illustration of a situation in which a respondent suspected *particularistic agency on the side of his domestic counterpart* – in this case, economic gains – for the formal participation in the co-location process, which was seen as inappropriate conduct and an obstacle to the reform process, not as a potential expression of ownership.

125 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 10 Nov 2016, Bamako.
126 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 10 Nov 2016, Bamako; Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
127 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.

The LOPM is a black box for us

The LOPM process is another example for the *limited access of at least parts of the mission to pertinent information* on domestic political processes as well as suspected particularistic agency of domestic stakeholders. Respondents expressed, throughout the research period, that working on the LOPM process remained a challenge.[128] For instance, when it came to envisaged training and the sensitisation of the Security and Defence commission and civil society, a lack of availability of counterparts to participate in workshops was noted (MINUSMA SSR-DDR Section, 2015). In November 2015, respondents discussed a workshop on the LOPM, which had been organised by FAMA, with support from EUTM. MINUSMA officers had been invited to the workshop but only as participants, not as contributors. Respondents stated that 'the LOPM is a black box for us, it is with the EUTM'.[129] In January 2016, the LOPM was still not fully accessible to at least parts of the mission working on SSR.[130]

At the same time, it was communicated that the LOPM was not considered to be a good process and that the government could not afford it, even though the LOPM had been passed by the parliament. Respondents criticised that the LOPM was elaborated without a national defence review or a policy review and that it was not about SSR but just about a reorganisation of the army. According to respondents, the Malian Members of Parliament had only signed off on it because they would not have been able to reject it, being otherwise accused of weakening the army while the country is at war. As a response, through the sensitisation of the administration, it was envisaged to introduce a mechanism according to which everyone asking for a budget would have to identify where the funds would come from: 'It is a way to tell them – the government adopted it and you cannot implement it – why not go back and revise it again. Nothing has been done on it yet.'[131] According to respondents, the meagre resources available from government funds and bilateral donors should be used efficiently and be accounted for. The fact that the LOPM was implemented in parallel to the peace process was perceived as not conducive to the development of a shared national vision for SSR, as well as not conducive for getting everyone on board for the implementation of the security and defence provisions of the Peace Agreement. Overall, the *LOPM was not seen as part of the national reform process.* Therefore, it would be difficult for MINUSMA to support it. Instead, the mission undertook steps to discourage domestic actors from advancing with the implementation of the LOPM, which was perceived as

128 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
129 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
130 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
131 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.

an unviable process outside the agreed-upon reform effort. The MSCP was discouraged from aiming for a similar document. As one respondent stated: 'The LOPM is very fancy. I hope the police will be aware of the problems before engaging in a similar exercise.'[132] Most respondents did not perceive the LOPM as a reference for ownership, though this could also be affected by the fact that MINUSMA had very limited access to act on it. This makes it likely that in order to remain operational and MINUSMA support to remain pertinent, sensemaking had to focus on the SSR process, for which MNUSMA was mandated, and not on other national processes pertaining to the security sector.

They are creating a parallel process

Another important event in this regard, which was referenced by several respondents as a parallel process was the Anefis process, a negotiation process between armed groups of the North. On the one hand, the process was seen by respondents as a positive sign, because the signatory parties would now speak with one voice, also because there were fewer skirmishes in the area, which made it easier for MINUSMA to fulfil its mandate. On the other hand, it was criticised that the negotiations had been conducted without involving the international mediation team of the peace process, of which MINUSMA is a member. It was unclear for respondents how to interpret the Anefis proceedings and how MINUSMA should act on them. A respondent from the planning section expressed: 'The Anefis process took us by surprise.'[133] While the process could be referenced as a domestic political initiative that could theoretically be supported, it was *too informal* to act as a base for anything solid. A respondent from the political affairs division criticised the non-transparent character of the process: 'They are creating a parallel process of dialogue, outside of the given frame of what has been decided in the Peace Agreement.'[134] The formal process should happen in the agreed-upon national structures.

Moreover, it remained unclear who had participated in the Anefis meetings and which topics were discussed. Three weeks was perceived to be a long time to be only speaking about the issue of security in Anefis, and it was suggested that other issues like the re-routing of existing trafficking routes were discussed as well. One respondent believed that the Anefis process had been an arrangement between the armed groups

132 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
133 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
134 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.

on how to best benefit from international donor support (again, an indicator for *suspected hidden agendas*).[135]

Sorting out the good ones and the bad ones

Tendencies *to avoid engaging with national initiatives outside of the Peace Agreement* were noted on further occasions. For example, the appointment of two governors in the North in November 2016 was handled by the mission with caution, as no other signatory party or international actor had been consulted prior to the appointment. While these appointments would be good in theory, as they were a sign of institutional process in the spirit of the redeployment to the North, it would then be difficult to call it a success from MINUSMA's side: 'Sometimes we have plans ready worked out and then they take us by surprise.'[136]

Regarding non-signatory parties of the Peace Agreement, the mission acted with even more reserve. While the government and signatory parties had clearly defined roles in the peace and SSR processes, respondents pointed to the difficulty of the mission to distinguish between different types of armed groups on the ground.[137] Some of the armed groups were suspected to be affiliated with terrorist groups, which exposed MINUSMA to threats. Also, when interacting with armed groups, MINUSMA would have to pay special attention to not be perceived as biased towards one party of the conflict: 'If you do not pay attention, you might strengthen them. You are forced to work with them, but you do not want to strengthen them. It is important to find the right balance.'[138] The security situation was seen as pushing MINUSMA to 'sort out the good ones and the bad ones.'[139] Therefore, MINUSMA asked the signatory groups to mark their vehicles and announce their movements, as well as to hand out papers to their members that prove their affiliation.[140] These measures suggest that it was difficult for the mission to *identify eligible 'owners'* of the SSR process on the side of the armed groups, which were perceived as largely unknown, unpredictable in their actions – and as sources of potential security threats to the mission.

When it came to the selection of counterparts, the UN SSR framework was not explicitly referenced by respondents at the field level as instructive. The UN Human Rights Due Diligence, however, was mentioned by several respondents as important – both

135 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 11 Nov 2016, Bamako.
136 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
137 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako; Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
138 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
139 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
140 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

as a guideline for whom to train and as a restriction regarding whom the mission could work with.[141] The Human Rights Due Diligence applies to the mission in more general terms. As a due diligence policy, it does not aim at inclusivity in the first place, but at hedging against supporting actors that violate international humanitarian law and human rights.

Ownership is not for all

A *lack of inclusivity* of the internationally driven peace and SSR processes was noted by several respondents as negatively impacting the possibility of these processes to become nationally owned. In more formal interviews, the Peace Agreement was presented as an important manifestation of ownership that provided orientation for external support. However, in more informal background talks, critical questions were raised about the validity of the assumption that the Peace Agreement was an expression of national commitment to reform. According to a respondent from political affairs, the Malian government had been forced into the peace deal, which would put ownership of the process in question.[142] Participants in the peace negotiations had been selected by the international mediation according to non-transparent criteria, which had left many actors feeling excluded. Additionally, other respondents expressed doubts about the inclusivity of the peace process – for example, regarding vulnerable groups. The lack of inclusiveness of the peace process would affect national ownership negatively.[143] One of the respondents drew a line from inclusiveness to ownership, stating in a self-critical manner that 'ownership is not for all. It is usually your government associates, certain champions. Others have problems with capacities and reporting; in the end, few attract all money.'[144] This statement points to limited capabilities of the mission to engage with a broader range of potential 'owners' on the Malian side.

They cannot just decide what they want

On another occasion, respondents from the planning section discussed the relationship between demands expressed by the domestic counterparts and other demands and constraints the mission was faced with. They explained that the government would make plans and inform the international community about their plans, but that it would eventually be up to the donors to decide what would be implementable and feasible in terms of funding: 'It is always haggling. They cannot just decide what they want; it has

141 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako; background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
142 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
143 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
144 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

to be realistic and implementable. It is always up to negotiations.'[145] These statements are a direct reference to the mission's need to *weigh the strength of demands* and subsequently ponder the mission's options to respond to them. Demands expressed by the domestic counterparts were not perceived as the most pressing demands, in comparison with demands arising from considerations of operational feasibility.

They can be slow, and there will be no consequences

One respondent identified *limited incentives* for domestic stakeholders as a key obstacle for the reform processes. The international community would not set out *conditions for support*: 'It is in the Peace Agreement, but they can be slow on that, and there will be no consequences.'[146] This indicates that the respondent assessed a more active stance from the international community requiring the Malian counterparts to commit to the SSR process as an adequate action. On another occasion, with regard to border management, one respondent indicated that the mission should assume a more active role in *steering domestic traction* for the mission's activities by suggesting that 'we need to get them on the same level and persuade them to see the need [for border management].'[147] Similar stances can also be found in official communication: On 1 October 2015, the UN convened a Ministerial Consultative Meeting on the Malian Peace Process and the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, on the margins of the General Debate of the General Assembly. This statement points to the options available to MINUSMA for taking an active stance on requiring the Malian government to engage in the SSR process:

> The participants acknowledged the leadership role played by President Keita and his Government in the implementation of the Agreement and called on them to continue their efforts with all the signatory parties to rapidly implement all its provisions. They urged all the parties in Mali to cooperate fully with MINUSMA in its efforts to carry out its mandate […]. The participants recalled that the United Nations Security Council, pursuant to its resolution 2227 (2015), authorized MINUSMA to take all necessary means to carry out its mandate (MINUSMA, 2015).

The government must be responsibilised

The emerging dilemma of having to wait for voluntary reform steps from the Malian side, while still meeting other institutional demands and expectations, was reflected in the fact that respondents often referred to *pushing national actors* to embrace the peace and SSR processes. For instance, when discussing the prospects of a national

145 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
146 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
147 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.

conference that was scheduled to take place in early 2018 (Conférence d'entente nationale), the DPKO respondent expressed hopes that the international community would put pressure on the government and the signatory parties to ensure that the outcomes of the conference would guide their actions in terms of SSR.[148] At the field level, a respondent from political affairs also stated in November 2016: 'We now need to push things forward and put pressure on the MOC [Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination] and the signatory parties to implement the Peace Agreement. Since 14 May, nothing has been done concretely on the side of the government. […] All the agreements have been signed but they remain on paper. They are not implemented.'[149] On another occasion, the same respondent stated that 'the government must be responsibilised.'[150] Another respondent emphasised that the CNRSS should take up border management activities, as well, and that the mission would 'try to push them to get it done.'[151] These statements point to respondents' perceptions that a more active role in *requesting domestic actors to assume ownership* would be an appropriate response vis-à-vis the organisational environment. This is a shared pattern between HQ and field level respondents.

We are at least able to keep an eye on them

When it came to organisational practices that were deemed appropriate, some respondents pointed to the significance of MINUSMA's *specific institutional characteristics* which would impact on MINUSMA's role in supporting the SSR process. When talking about the mission's role in the peace process, respondents emphasised that MINUSMA had the advantage of being on the ground with the security forces in the North, as opposed to other external actors who were regionally limited to training activities in Bamako. Therefore, MINUSMA was pictured as having the advantage of being able to perform long-term monitoring in the field, to perform joint activities in co-location, and to supervise on site.[152] One respondent underlined that this close interaction in the North was an advantage: 'We are at least able to keep an eye on them.'[153]

There is no absolute sovereignty in a globalised world

Furthermore, MINUSMA was perceived as having a leading role and the most political legitimacy to coordinate SSR support, because it enjoyed the widest representation of

148 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
149 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
150 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
151 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
152 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
153 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

international actors.[154] The mission was authorised through a resolution of the Security Council, after the Malian interim authorities requested assistance from the UN. This authorisation by the Security Council was perceived as a strong normative backing for the mission, coming with many responsibilities and a unique role in the SSR process. This became apparent during an SSR workshop with civil society representatives in July 2015, during which participants criticised that MINUSMA did not treat Mali like a sovereign state. A MINUSMA officer responded that there would be no absolute sovereignty in a globalised world, for example due to regional and international cooperation agreements.[155] On another occasion, a respondent from UNPOL suggested that international engagement would require a basic commitment from the partner side to give up a certain level of sovereignty.[156] These statements can be read as a *qualification of national ownership*, because they underline that national sovereignty is not an absolute value but one principle amongst other international principles that interact with each other in governing external-domestic relations. These statements also point towards a more active role and responsibility of the mission in determining the SSR agenda and bringing partners on board for it, as illustrated in the following paragraphs.

Get the issue out of the development box and into the security box

The perceived deterioration of the security situation was a major factor in respondents' sensemaking of priorities. For example, the strategic review[157] which was conducted in the first half of 2016 was stated to have been conducted because of the deteriorating security situation. According to one respondent, the review was conducted because the mission became more vulnerable to terrorism, so refocussing the key objectives had been deemed necessary.[158] Additionally, the Kidal incidents were mentioned as important in triggering the review. This finding also corresponds with respondents' perception that MINUSMA was more affected by the perceived deterioration of the security situation than other external actors working on the SSR process. Whenever an incident would occur, the mission would be stalled.[159] For example, due to the Kidal incidents, the CSA was not able to convene in February 2016, so no progress was

154 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.

155 Field notes, Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securite (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015, CICB Bamako.

156 Interview with UNPOL officer, 01 Feb 2016, Bamako.

157 The strategic review was supposed to better align the mission's mandate to the situation on the ground. It took several months and included desk reviews and field missions. It was conducted in combination with a strategic retreat, a civilian staffing review and a budget allocation process. The review was mostly conducted by HQ staff, in coordination with mission staff and counterparts. Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

158 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.

159 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 10 Nov 2016, Bamako; Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

made in the peace negotiations. In the aftermath, respondents reported that the discussions in the CSA shifted towards the necessity of improving the security situation.

These statements underline the *close connection between the perceived deterioration of the security situation and consequences for organisational priorities*. For example, when discussing border management activities, it was emphasised that the previous law was outdated and too development-oriented, and it was seen as important that the new one would underline the security-development nexus as an essential basis of border management: 'We want to put more security in it.'[160] Furthermore, with regard to the SSR coordination structure, respondents emphasised that the new proposed structure would 'get the issue out of the development box and into the security box'.[161] Previous coordination mechanisms were seen as too development-oriented, with respondents emphasising that the focus be assigned more to improvements of the security situation. These statements illustrate that MINUSMA respondents also saw themselves as agenda setters in the SSR process, facilitating organisational action.

They have realised the importance of the issue

For several respondents, the Radisson Blu attacks were a tipping point regarding priorities and modes of cooperation with the Malian partners. The attacks were interpreted as a 'reality check' for the Malian leadership, who had not attributed much significance to engagement in counter-terrorism to date and had therefore not prioritised it.[162] After the attacks, respondents suggested that the Malian government had realised the importance of the issue. MINUSMA was requested to do more by the Malian counterparts and to also show short-term results.[163] After the attacks, international and domestic stakeholders were perceived to be more aligned regarding counter-terrorism being a priority. This is an example of how single events like the Radisson Blu attacks serve as cues that *validate and re-affirm an interpretation of a given situation* and facilitate an emerging image of ownership. These events have rendered security-focussed organisational responses more appropriate in the eyes of several respondents.

Now we do not even need to push for it

In line with the stronger focus of the mission on security, it was further emphasised by respondents that MINUSMA focussed on border *security*, while other actors focussed on border *management*. Respondents reported that while in the previous year they had encountered difficulties in selling border security as an important field of activity on

160 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
161 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
162 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
163 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

which to work within the mission, this had changed by 2015: 'It is growing. For a while we thought it is only us pushing for it but in 2015 it became a priority. Now we do not even need to push for it.'[164] This again underlines the high relevance attached to security-related events in informing organisational action. Respondents felt that with the rising threat level, the Malian security forces had also wanted to get involved in border security – and external priorities and national priorities would be more in line, facilitating organisational action. In this case, also the comparatively *strong influence of individual actors' sensemaking* on organisational practices became evident, as border management was not an explicit part of MINUSMA's SSR mandate. In HQ, it was emphasised that border management was not a 'black and white part of the mandate' and therefore not an SSR priority of the mission.[165] Activities in this field would merely be an entry point, to initiate discussions with counterparts on other initiatives. At the field level, it was underlined that border management activities were complementary to the SSR activities and that they would be part of the stabilisation mandate of MINUSMA.[166]

We cannot let this happen on our watch

The influence of individual actors' sensemaking on which organisational practices were deemed appropriate was also found in the case of wildlife protection activities. These activities, which targeted illegal ivory poaching, were pursued with significant personal commitment from members of the SSR-DDR unit. As one respondent put it: 'We cannot let this happen on our watch.'[167] While wildlife protection was not part of the SSR mandate, it was explained as being an important contribution to the reinforcement of state authority, the conservation of national heritage, and the protection of the economic basis of communities, which all qualified as important tasks of MINUSMA. The poaching of elephants was also perceived as a source of income for terrorists.[168] In addition to underlining the important role of individual sensemaking for organisational practices, this again confirms the cognitive link between security-related cues and the appraisal of which organisational responses were deemed appropriate by the mission, as discussed above.

In the meantime, we spend a lot of money on the ground

Finally, in response to the *demand to* show quick and tangible results, some respondents emphasised the importance of QIPs in the mission's intervention strategy. In

164 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
165 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
166 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
167 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
168 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.

official communications, QIPs were presented as a practice that *reinforces national ownership*. This is in line with the UN SSR Guidance Notes:

> In order to promote ownership of and support for the peace process, MINUSMA and the United Nations country team continued to strive to deliver tangible peace dividends to the population through flexible and responsive mechanisms, including quick-impact projects, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Trust Fund in Support of Peace and Security in Mali (United Nations Security Council, 2015c, p. 11).

Respondents explained that even when the political side of the reform process was stalled, QIPs could still be implemented to the benefit of the communities, to 'win hearts and minds'.[169] As one respondent stated: 'In the meantime, we spend a lot of money on the ground. We implement a lot of projects.'[170] This was perceived as a positive sign of flexibility, which allowed the mission to demonstrate its capability to act and its commitment to deliver tangible results, even if the political will to reform and 'ownership' for the implementation of a profound SSR process on the domestic side were largely perceived to be absent.

5.2.6 Organisational practices and ownership adherence

Cooperation with domestic partners

MINUSMA's relations with the Malian government were mostly described as rather tense and characterised by limited trust. The signatory parties were also perceived as difficult partners in the SSR process. One respondent mentioned that 'today, the big challenge is the willingness of the government. Tomorrow, maybe it will be the willingness of the rebel groups. The situation is very volatile'.[171] Respondents were also cautious about working with armed groups in the North. This difficult relationship with the armed groups who did not participate in the peace negotiations in Algiers has also been described by Boutellis (Boutellis, 2015, p. 6). Moreover, the mission took a cautious stance towards national initiatives pertaining to the security sector outside of the Peace Agreement, as discussed above. Respondents pointed to the problem of embracing Malian initiatives if they were not part of the internationally supported peace/SSR processes. In most cases, MINUSMA also had limited access to these processes, which can be attributed to a strained working relationship with the Malian counterparts. At the same time, the mission depended on the commitment of the government and the signatory parties. Both the absence of political will and the suspected hidden

169 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
170 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
171 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.

agendas of Malian stakeholders were perceived as major constraints for the mission to advance with supporting the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

In the overall picture, the relationship between the mission and its Malian counterparts was found to be rather distant and cautious, mostly limited to occasional information-sharing and negotiations about activities. On several occasions, it was also mentioned that the mission would inform the government and the international community of the next steps the mission intended to take, without thorough consultation. Information-sharing was reportedly limited. By the measure of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, these are instances of low involvement of domestic stakeholders in organisational processes, pointing to *avoidance* of cooperation.

Coordination of SSR support

As MINUSMA was mandated to coordinate the international SSR support effort, the coordination structures proposed by the mission serve as an indicator for the level of MINUSMA's cooperation with its counterparts. In discussions between MINUSMA, domestic actors and other international actors, the SSR coordination structure was drawn up with national and international actors being organised in separate hierarchical strands:

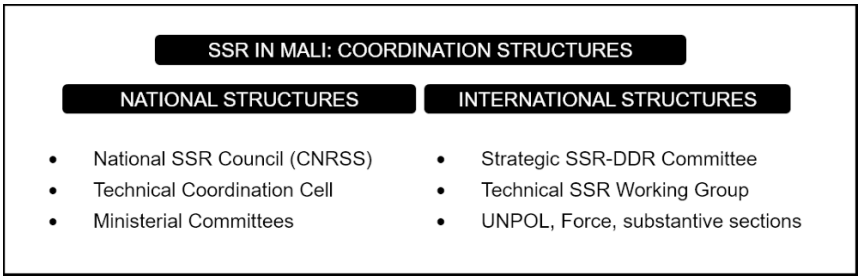

Figure 7: SSR coordination structures, as proposed by *MINUSMA*[172].

The international side was designed as an interlocutor format to the proposed national SSR structures (CNRSS, coordination cell, sectoral committees). It was envisaged as a 'mirroring structure' and a 'clearing house'.[173] National actors could be invited ad hoc to attend the international forums if their presence was seen to add value.[174] On the international side, the SSR-DDR strategic committee was envisaged to coordinate

172 Presentation to civil society during the Atelier Technique d'echanges et de reflexion sur la reforme du secteur de la securité (RSS) au Mali, 23 July at CICB Bamako.
173 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 16 Jul 2015, Bamako.
174 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

SSR support at the decision-making level (ambassadors, heads of missions, presided by MINUSMA's SRSG). The Technical Working Group was established to coordinate SSR/DDR support at the working level (MINUSMA SSR-DDR Section, 2015, p. 10; United Nations Security Council, 2015c). The clear-cut hierarchical strands enabled international actors to retain a higher level of decision-making power as if there would be a joint coordination structure under the leadership of national actors, which would me more in line with the idea of ownership adherence as 'use of country systems'. The coordination structure proposed by MINUSMA is thus also assessed as comprising elements of *avoidance*.

Informal border management coordination mechanism

The proposed formal coordination structure already included a clear separation of national and international SSR actors. However, as discussed before, the national parts of this coordination structure did not become operational during the period of research and gradually lost significance in the eyes of respondents. Nevertheless, an informal coordination mechanism was set up for the field of border management/border control, without the participation of domestic stakeholders. MINUSMA hosted several meetings of this informal 'border security coordination group', in which coordination between external actors working on border management/border security was pursued.[175] These meetings took place outside of the SSR coordination structures.[176] According to respondents, the informality of the group contributed to a good working spirit and including the group in official structures was not seen as beneficial. This turn towards informal mechanisms enabled the unit to remain operational and proceed with the implementation of organisational activities in the field of border security, despite the non-functionality of the national SSR structures. Again, as these activities were performed without domestic participation, they can be assessed as a form of *avoidance* of collaboration.

Prioritisation of tasks[177]

175 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

176 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

177 This section deals with a selection of activities that were pointed out as important by respondents from the SSR-DDR section. This excludes, for example, more in-depth explorations of the work with civil society and in the field of SALW. While featuring in MINUSMA documents on organisational activities, they did not play an important role in respondents' perspectives on their work. While this partly needs to be attributed to the selection of respondents within the mission, it should be noted that the number of respondents consulted, and the range of topics covered in the interviews allowed for a wider picture of organisational practices beyond individuals' direct fields of responsibility.

In July 2015, MINUSMA's mandate was adjusted to support the Peace Agreement's implementation.[178] This by itself is a form of *adherence with national priorities.* However, as the Peace Agreement covered a wide spectrum of tasks, MINUSMA could consider a variety of activities in the field of SSR and was hardly limited in its ability to respond to demands. In November 2015, the SSR-DDR unit's priorities were stipulated as supporting the national SSR structures/Defence Sector Reform/LOPM, civil society, border management/the fight against SALW and support to wildlife rangers (MINUSMA SSR-DDR Section, 2015). Organisational practices within these prioritised areas of engagement are examined in the following section.

During the research period, different dynamics were observed, related to which organisational tasks were considered a priority within the mission and within the SSR-DDR unit. While some members of the unit worked with the objective of generating tangible results in terms of short-term technical support and QIPs, others focussed on activities that did not depend on the establishment of national SSR structures and/or were not part of the SSR mandate of the mission. Both approaches are discussed in the following as instances of *avoidance,* because they were implemented in fields in which the mission did not have to engage in depth with instances of domestic agency.

Defence Sector Reform/LOPM

Respondents suggested that activities in the field of Defence Sector Reform were a priority of the Malian counterparts. This is in line with the assessment of Malian priorities in the introductory overview of this chapter, which qualifies MINUSMA's engagement in this field as a form of *compromise* in terms of priorities. However, it was also pointed out by respondents that in this field, the MoD had already established EUTM as a partner and did not desire the additional involvement of MINUSMA. On that note, the mission's activities in the field of Defence Sector Reform/LOPM remained mostly technical or on the level of QIPs, such as the printing and dissemination of FAMA documents pertaining to the LOPM.[179] These activities are assessed as *avoidance*, because they take place in an un-contested field, as they do not require buy-in from the Malian side. QIPs could be suggested by partners, or they could be designed by MINUSMA staff. A respondent working on the QIPs mentioned that it was envisaged to include more local initiatives into the QIPs but that access to respective local actors was limited.[180] The indication that most projects were designed by MINUSMA staff was confirmed in another interview with a MINUSMA officer, who mentioned an internal

178 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.

179 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako; Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.

180 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.

assessment exercise of how many projects had been initiated based on nationally expressed needs. The assessment found that projects based on nationally expressed needs were barely the case, which led to requesting the counterparts to actively express their needs, albeit with little result.[181] Hence, QIPs are found to be mostly based on the mission's initiative, not on the expressed priorities of Malian counterparts, again demonstrating characteristics of *avoidance*.

Border management

Activities in the field of border management were characterised by elements of *compromise* and *avoidance*. In 2015/2016, a national border review process was ongoing, with regional workshops involving the National Directorate of Border Management and the Ministry of Territorial Administration. This process was supported by MINUSMA. It was emphasised by respondents that the policy review process had already been initiated, such that MINUSMA was supporting something which was already in place. At the same time, it was acknowledged that this field of activity was also taken up in response to member states' requests directed at the mission, in line with the more global shift towards counter-terrorism and migration control. Moreover, the individual initiative of staff members was pointed out as a driving force behind this field of activity. The level of activity in the field of border management increased during the time under research. This was confirmed by a respondent who worked temporarily in the SSR unit, who stated that border management was one of the most important activities of the SSR-DDR unit.[182] Due to the fact that activities were also ongoing, as opposed to other activities which were stalled, border management was also presented as a legacy the mission could leave behind.[183] However, respondents also indicated that it was not fully clear how border management activities would be linked with the peace process, pointing to a prioritisation that emerged from individuals' initiative as well as political traction on the side of the member states rather than from an expression of national priorities.

Wildlife protection

Wildlife protection was an activity of the SSR-DDR unit that gradually gained importance. In January 2016, respondents reported that armed groups at the Burkina Faso border were exploiting the porous borders and shooting elephants.[184] These incidents were also reflected in two UN reports on Mali, which identified the poaching of

181 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
182 Interview with MINUSMA officer, 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
183 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
184 Interview with two MINUSMA officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

elephants and trafficking in ivory as new sources of funding for extremist and terrorist groups, thereby establishing a link between wildlife protection and counter-terrorism/border management activities (United Nations Security Council, 2015c, p. 7). The killing of elephants was also emphasised in an internal presentation of the SSR-DDR section on priorities in November 2015 (MINUSMA SSR-DDR Section, 2015). Activities in this field included the training of rangers, the equipment of wildlife posts, and the provision of support to a wildlife foundation that served as the implementing partner of the project. The determining importance of personal initiative in this field of activity became apparent again in comparison with the HQ perspective. At HQ, it was emphasised that the SSR-DDR unit could support other departments in the field of wildlife protection, as environmental protection and cultural heritage were part of MINUSMA's mandate, while not becoming a priority for the SSR-DDR unit, however.[185] Activities in this field were thus not to utilise too many resources. Expressions of interest from the Malian side to focus on wildlife protection were also not encountered. Therefore, this priority of the SSR-DDR unit is also assessed as a form of *avoidance* by focussing activities on a field that is un-contested and that does not require substantial cooperation with the mission's regular SSR counterparts.

5.2.7 Summary of case findings

MINUSMA was found to be a special case of collective sensemaking. MINUSMA respondents' sensemaking of developments and events and perceptions of ownership varied significantly, even within organisational units. This raises the question if a 'collective intentionality' behind sensemaking existed in this case or if the organisation was too fragmented and tasks were too decentralised for a centre of gravity of sensemaking to emerge.

Coming to sensemaking of ownership in the context of SSR, MINUSMA respondents referenced the Peace Agreement as a sign of national ownership. The connection between ownership and capacities, which is strongly emphasised in UN policy, was less pertinent for respondents at the field level. Indeed, respondents discussed ownership more in the context of *intent* (political will, commitment) than in terms of *ability* (capacity). Ownership was understood as the *responsibility* of the government to implement the measures that had been agreed upon under the international mediation effort. At the same time, Malian actors were perceived as having their own agendas and as being less interested in reform and more in personal benefits, pointing to notions of *particularistic domestic agency* endangering agreed-upon objectives. In the absence of functional national SSR structures, respondents lacked eligible interlocutors that

185 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.

could formulate priorities that would qualify as valid expressions of ownership. Several respondents expressed uncertainty about how to read signals from the counterparts and how to determine which signs of commitment were genuine and valid. Respondents also pointed to a lack of information about political developments regarding SSR and limited information-sharing and participation of their Malian counterparts. The *perceived lack of commitment* of the Malian counterparts was felt to be a major obstacle to organisational operativeness. These findings resonate with von Billerbeck's investigations of ownership approaches in UN peacekeeping. Von Billerbeck finds that UN mission staff members perceive ownership policy as impeding the achievement of the UN's operational objectives (von Billerbeck, 2017).

Several respondents considered a more active role of the mission to 'responsibilise' the Malian counterparts and push the SSR process forward. The legitimacy of the UN as a pivotal actor in the SSR process and the high expectations directed towards the mission mainly served as justification for suggesting a more active stance of the mission vis-à-vis the organisational environment. However, MINUSMA did not assume an active role in effectuating ownership. Organisational practices mostly followed an *avoidance* approach. Several activities required a *limited level of cooperation* with Malian counterparts, who were more on the receiving end of trainings and workshops. Other activities were *implemented in niches*, in which demands were less conflicting. This approach allowed MINUSMA to retain a level of operativeness, while the national institutions (country systems) were not yet in place/not functional and the peace process had made little progress (national strategy).

The reason for the rather passive stance on ownership effectuation of the mission could be that MINUSMA was faced with widespread criticism over overtly interfering with Malian sovereignty, which made the question of respecting ownership a particularly crucial one for *organisational legitimacy*. Moreover, while being tasked with a comprehensive, expanded mandate, MINUSMA's capacities and resources were considered insufficient and the mission's access to Malian counterparts remained limited. The deterioration of the security situation was perceived as a particular challenge for MINUSMA, in comparison with other external actors. Hence, while confirmed as indispensable for the SSR process and progress with implementation of the mission's mandate, ownership for SSR was largely perceived as a phenomenon beyond the influence of the organisation. The mission had to look for small cues from the Malian counterparts to build upon, largely remaining in 'waiting mode'. The mission either *lived with ambiguity* arising from conflicting demands or *took decisions on a situational basis* concerning the most pressing demands.

The findings for MINUSMA suggest that whether an external actor opts for *avoidance, compromise* or *manipulation* of requirements arising from ownership policy dependents on the interplay of the characteristics of the sensemaking institution, perceptions of the institutional environment, and the perceived strength of demands in organisational sensemaking. They further suggest that a more active approach (manipulation, compromise) requires sensemakers to have more access, influence and resources than a passive strategy (avoidance) in terms of actively weakening, strengthening or otherwise changing at least one side of demand, to make conflicting demands more congruent. MINUSMA, with limited capacities, resources and access, was found to have a limited range of response options and mostly engaged in avoidance tactics.

5.3 European Union (EU)

The EU setup in Bamako comprises the EU Delegation, the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and the EU Military Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). The focus of this analysis is on the two CSDP missions. Interviews with EU representatives in Brussels are included as background information on the missions and working routines between the different HQ and field-level institutions of the EU involved in the SSR process in Mali.

In view of the complexity of the EU institutional setup, the analysis does not go into the details of the roles of different Brussels institutions interacting with the missions on the ground. It works with a broader categorisation of 'Brussels HQ' and 'member states' as influencing parties. This distinction reflects statements of respondents in Bamako, who mostly referred to the EU institutional setup as 'directives coming from Brussels' in an indifferent manner.

30 interviews and background discussions were conducted with representatives of the EU Delegation, EUCAP, EUTM and concerned EU institutions in Brussels. One field visit to the EUTM Koulikoro Training Center (KTC) was undertaken, where background discussions with EUTM staff were held.

Interviews with EUTM were more formal in nature than in the case of the other EU institutions. EUTM staff was also encountered less often in social settings in Bamako, which limited options for informal background discussions. Fewer insights into the personal sensemaking of respondents could be gained than in the case of EUCAP. Therefore, it is likely that EUTM statements in the sensemaking section are more influenced by authoritative policy. This might also be the case because military missions are more often subject to critical research on interference with national sovereignty, which could also partly explain the stronger emphasis on ownership policy expressed by EUTM

respondents. This is acknowledged, from the start, as a potential research bias, which will be reflected upon in this chapter's conclusions.

The holistic mode of presentation of 'the EU' as one case was chosen because the EU applies a comprehensive approach in Mali and the wider Sahel area, and because the two missions are part of this comprehensive, 'whole-of-government' approach, which seeks to make different EU financial instruments and institutional objectives more coherent on the ground (Lopez Lucia, 2017). Still, differences in sensemaking and organisational practices are highlighted in the following, to demonstrate how different institutions within the EU setup perceive their environment and act differently.

5.3.1 Institutional overview

The EU and some of its member states have been involved in the Sahel region and more specifically in Mali for a prolonged period of time. Programmes with EU and member state support are implemented in the fields of economic development, recovery, humanitarian assistance, as well as in strengthening institutional capacity and regional integration. In 2011, the EU launched the EU Strategy for Security and Development ('Sahel Strategy'), which is the key framework for bilateral and multilateral engagements in the region. In 2015, a Regional Action Plan (RAP) for the implementation of the Sahel Strategy was adopted. The Action Plan states that the EU supports countries in the region in areas of shared interest and lists activities that are to be implemented 'with the full ownership and under the primary responsibility of the countries concerned' (European Union External Action, 2017).

While the EU put most project activities on hold during the crisis in 2012, it resumed project activities in 2013 and extended its involvement in the context of its comprehensive approach to security and crisis management, combining different instruments of the EU crisis management toolbox (Furness/Olsen, 2016). To date, the EU is the largest development contributor in Mali. With the adoption of the RAP, the EU also became more active in the field of security. SSR is a priority of the EU in Mali and in the region, as part of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU supports the implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement, including the modernisation of the state and the re-deployment of FAMA to the North. The EU also works with the G5 Sahel, which is a forum that is concerned with regional security cooperation.

Two CSDP missions are deployed to Mali. In February 2013, a training and advisory programme was launched for the Malian armed forces, providing advisory services and training combat units. EUTM was the first mission on the ground. It has a technical

mandate and applies technical instruments.[186] EUTM does not get involved in political negotiations. While being part of the EU's comprehensive approach, previous research has pointed to doubts about whether the mission's capacity-building activities targeting the defence sector are fully consistent with the international SSR framework. Its critics point out that EUTM's training approach is mainly directed towards 'counter-insurgency by proxy', neglecting questions of sustainability and civilian control over the security sector (Skeppstroem et al., 2014). Pirozzi points out that EUTM had been conceived and approved before the new EU crisis management procedures had been put into place (Pirozzi, 2015, p. 94). Therefore, while the mission is officially part of the EU's SSR approach in the Sahel, the SSR concept and its underlying principles would be less relevant in the mission's setup. This was also confirmed by respondents at the field level.

EUCAP Sahel Mali was launched in January 2015 to assist the Malian government with the reform of its internal security forces and to provide support to the police, the gendarmerie and the National Guard. Its mandate is closely linked to MINUSMA's fields of responsibility in the field of SSR. EUCAP's mandate is based on a holistic SSR approach. The mandate was significantly enlarged with the addition of new responsibilities, while EUTM's mandate was expanded only slightly.

In addition to the CSDP missions, the EU Delegation is part of the EU setup in Bamako. The EU Delegation represents all EU institutions in-country, coordinates SSR activities within the EU, and ensures a common language vis-à-vis the Malian authorities. The Head of Delegation (HoD) is the political representative of the EU in-country, who oversees political dialogue. The HoD is tasked with aligning policy and tools with conditions on the ground.[187]

5.3.2 Policy framework: National ownership in SSR

The EU's SSR approach has developed in the course of operational experience. During the research period, no common SSR policy framework was in place.[188] Filip Ejdus notes that the concept of local ownership has gained in relevance in EU policy on SSR. He suggests that when looking at the policy, 'the EU puts premium on the principle of local ownership. In fact, the reference to the local ownership principle has become one

186 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

187 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

188 The EU Global Strategy and the EU framework on SSR are not discussed in this section, because they did not gain relevance at the field level during the research period. In November 2016, a respondent form EUCAP suggested that the relevance of these documents for the mission would need to be evaluated in coordination with Brussels, but this had not yet been done. Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.

of the refrains endlessly repeated across EU external policy statements' (Ejdus, 2017, p. 1).

The OECD DAC Reference Document on SSR and Governance, which has been referenced by EU institutions as pertinent guidance for SSR, takes a strong affirmative stance concerning the relevance of ownership (Gross, 2013, p. 12). It underlines the relevance of partner country ownership and buy-in as critical factors determinant of the success of SSR. Donors should be committed to facilitating the reform efforts of the reforming countries:

> Experience shows that reform processes will not succeed in the absence of commitment and ownership on the part of those undertaking reforms. Assistance should be designed to support partner governments and stakeholders as they move down a path of reform, rather than determining that path and leading them down it (OECD, 2005, p. 12).

According to the equally referenced OECD DAC handbook on SSR and governance, solutions are to be developed locally. The handbook encourages donors to carefully foster a political environment in partner countries that is conducive to reforms pertaining to the security sector and to promote a sense of ownership among domestic stakeholders. To this end, donors are encouraged to aim towards the strong participation of domestic stakeholders in SSR programming, towards applying a long-term and context-specific approach, and towards capacity-building for national stakeholders (OECD, 2005, p. 13). If donors were required to take the lead in the initial stages of SSR, this would revolve around the intention of stabilising the security situation, thus providing security governance, while simultaneously building the capacity of national stakeholders to take on a leadership role in the reform process. Other OECD documents on SSR call for a fundamental change in donor conduct and an approach that should 'evolve along defined lines, owned and run by national governance processes' (OECD, 2009, p. 5).

On the other hand, recent policy documents such as the EU's Sahel Strategy also underline the pivotal role of the interests of the EU and its member states in defining what CSDP missions are to achieve. According to Elisa Lopez Lucia, the Sahel Strategy marks a turning point in the EU's discursive and operational practices (Lopez Lucia, 2017). Lucia argues that the Sahel Strategy represents a strategic vision, defining the EU's political and security interests in the region. This would also affect its relations with third parties in the region and the EU's approach to the ownership concept. Lucia identifies a risk concerning 'how the EU envisages "local ownership" within the Strategy'. (Lopez Lucia, 2017, p. 460) She continues:

> Previously, interactions with Sahelian countries were exclusively situated under the Cotonou agreement and managed through jointly negotiated documents such as the EC-WA Regional Indicative Programmes that emphasize "local ownership" and "partnership". The Sahel Strategy is the first EU document concerning the region that has not been agreed upon jointly. […] This is a fundamental departure from previous discursive practices, which depicted the EU as selflessly promoting peace and development in Africa, driven by African interests defined through jointly negotiated documents (Lopez Lucia, 2017, p. 10f).

According to Lucia, the ECOWAS had not been involved in the elaboration phase of the Sahel strategy. Hence, countries of the region would have felt a very limited sense of ownership for the provisions of the strategy. She further states that this likely led to disengagement with West African partners and endangered the process of regional integration.

In 2015, the European External Action Service (EEAS) launched a non-paper on 'Capacity building in support of security and development' in the context of CSDP, for which Mali and Somalia were identified as pilot cases (European External Action Service, 2015). The paper emphasises that the security-development-nexus is the conceptual underpinning of CSDP missions, identifying security as a pre-condition for peace and sustainable development. According to some analysts, this results in a stronger focus on security in what were previously more development-oriented EU activities. Laura Davis, for example, points out that prior to the crisis, the EU was perceived in Mali as a non-political donor, focussing on technical development projects. After the crisis, the EU became more of a political actor, who was involved in the negotiations on the cease-fire and in subsequent peace negotiations (Davis, 2015, p. 278).

5.3.3 Institutional demands

Mandate and scope for decision-making

Brussels' influence and the influence of EU member states on the missions were found to be rather strong in terms of shaping the missions' strategies and activities, allowing limited scope for field-level strategic decision-making. The mandates for both missions were conceived in Brussels. Respondents in Brussels underlined that the missions operate with clear, technical mandates.[189] The technical, state-centred character of the missions' mandates has also been identified by previous research (Pirozzi, 2015, p.

[189] Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.

93). However, both missions' mandates were adjusted and expanded during the period of research, based on strategic reviews, for which also Brussels was in the lead.

EUTM's first mandate was a direct follow-up assignment on the mandate of the French mission *Serval*.[190] The second and third mandates were expanded, including more capacity-building activities and specialist training (Wiklund/Skeppstroem, 2014). EUCAP Sahel Mali has a significantly broader, more political mandate than EUTM. The SSR framework is a mandatory frame of reference for the mission, based on a holistic SSR understanding. In the first half of 2016, a strategic review of EUCAP's mandate was undertaken. Strengthening the security forces' capacity to fight terrorism and organised crime as well as activities in the fields of migration and border management were officially integrated into the mandate and into the operational plan.[191] Both became part of the mission's SSR mandate.[192] Moreover, the mission was tasked with making trainings available for G5 Sahel countries, if invited by Mali, and to progressively move advisory and training activities to the (Northern) regions of Mali.

Apart from strategic inputs on the mandates and working plans, the missions were described by Brussels respondents as enjoying significant independence from Brussels. They would be quite free to take operational decisions within the mandates, if these decisions did not have budgetary implications.[193] Thematic support on SSR implementation provided by Brussels was found to be rather limited.[194] Respondents in Bamako pointed out that directives on SSR implementation would exist but would be of limited relevance at the field level. They were also found to have a dual character. On the one hand, respondents from Brussels underlined that they were the 'watchdog' of the missions' core mandates. On the other hand, the directives were presented by respondents at the field level as the voice of EU member states, conveying priorities to be taken up by the missions.

For EUTM, there was no military HQ in Brussels in place and concerned Brussels institutions formally had an advisory role to the mission.[195] Respondents pointed out that it would be more the lack of means and funds that would limit the mission's options to make decisions than it would be directives from Brussels ('no means, no strategy').[196] This has also been emphasised by Bérangère Rouppert, who conducted research on

190 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
191 Technically, border management was already included in the mandate as a result of a 'mini strategic review' after the Valetta summit in November 2015, because there was strong pressure to get active in this field. Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
192 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
193 Interview with two EU officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
194 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
195 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
196 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.

EUTM and found that at the field level, 'the willpower and initiative of the head of mission are essential in order to give life to the operation' (Rouppert, 2015, p. 241).

Organisational cultures

While the missions are formally part of the EU's comprehensive approach, they were found to work mostly independently from each other. Both missions are characterised by SOPs that stem from a European context. Training templates are standardised by the EU or come from member states, and staff is mostly seconded from EU countries, with limited numbers of Malian support staff. Many of the expatriate staff members have previous experience in other EU missions. Different cultural backgrounds of seconded personnel from different EU countries were mentioned by respondents as playing a role in daily interactions within the missions.

EUCAP's organisational identity was found to be more political and largely defined in deference to MINUSMA, due to overlaps between their respective mandates. While MINUSMA was pictured as being 'too big and too busy with existing' matters, EUCAP was pictured as smaller and more flexible.[197] In 2016, EUCAP had 128 staff members, with the staff number progressively rising towards 150 with the enlarged mandate. The organisations were figuratively compared as 'an elephant and a gazelle'.[198] A partly competitive relationship between the missions was reported on several occasions and on both sides. EUTM also reported that liaison with MINUSMA was limited.[199]

Organisational cultures of the missions differed significantly. EUTM is a tightly structured military mission. The intervention approach is influenced by NATO procedures, as all contributing member states are NATO members.[200] In March 2016, 578 staff were employed by the mission, including ca. 200 instructors (European Union External Action, 2016). Ca. 140 people were based in the field HQ in Bamako, while the majority of staff members were based in the Koulikoro Training Center (KTC), ca. 60 km outside from Bamako. Due to security protocols, EUTM staff members had comparatively limited opportunities to move around Bamako. Wearing uniforms, EUTM staff was very visible in public.[201]

Rouppert discusses the operational challenges EUTM staff faced due to their rapid deployment and short deployment periods. (Rouppert, 2015) For example, French language skills were pointed out as often lacking, which required that the mission employ

197 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
198 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
199 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
200 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
201 Field notes, EUTM Koulikoro Training Center (KTC), 30 Jan 2016, Koulikoro.

translators, which was then seen as hindering direct interaction and trust-building between the trainers and trainees. Troops usually changed after four to six months, while commanders might stay for up to a year.[202] According to Rouppert, several staff members had been struggling with adjusting to the 'African soil and climate' and dealing with 'a cultural gap' (Rouppert, 2015, p. 245). Still, respondents reported that EUTM had comparatively good access to their Malian counterparts. EUTM had an embedded advisory team with direct, daily interactions with their ministerial counterparts.[203] This was perceived to lead to trust-based working relationships with the MoD. Indeed, EUTM was presented as the only external institution that had good access to the MoD and the classified LOPM.

Resources and public expectations

EU member states' expectations had a strong influence on the missions, not least because these states were entitled to approve working plans and delegate personnel to the missions. During the period of research, both the migration crisis in Europe and terrorism were raised by EU member states as relevant issues, urging the mission and the EU Delegation to act on them in Mali. These demands were especially directed at EUCAP. The strong influence of member states on CSDP missions in more general terms has been confirmed by previous research (Davis, 2015; Ejdus, 2017; Furness/ Olsen, 2016).

The Valetta summit in November 2015 was seen by respondents as a game changer for the EU, as an Emergency Trust Fund had been announced, with 400 million EUR allocated for security and migration activities in Mali, in addition to regular development cooperation efforts. According to respondents, the status and voice of the EU had significantly increased along with the additional funds. Again, the influence of the EU members states was deemed important as to how these funds would be spend. As one respondent put it: 'It is a reflection of the priority.'[204] Respondents in Brussels pointed out that due to requests from EU institutions and member states, CSDP missions would always be in danger of enlarging their spectrum of tasks.[205] The core mandate would not always be easy to protect. This is seconded by Rouppert, who finds for EUTM Mali that the 'imperative to conform to timeframes imposed by European institutions makes it increasingly difficult to measure the impact of decisions taken by EUTM Mali staff and their consequences on the ground' (Rouppert, 2015, p. 247).

202 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
203 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
204 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
205 Interview with two EU officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.

EUCAP was involved in the preparations of how to allocate the funds for Mali. This provided the mission with further leeway and political capital in negotiations with Malian counterparts. Besides, in the aftermath of the Radisson Blu attack, the mission's budget was raised in June 2106 by almost 5 million EUR, bringing the overall budget up to 19 million EUR in 2016 (Council of the EU, 2016). As opposed to EUCAP, a lack of funding was more of an issue for EUTM. This did not pertain to regular mission operations but to the acquisition of materials and equipment. If the direct beneficiaries of CSDP capacity-building projects are Armed Forces, legal limitations in terms of equipment arise (European External Action Service, 2015). Additionally, respondents stated that the EU did not favour military projects.[206] Therefore, EUTM depended on individual member states' funding.

Operating conditions

Both missions' movements were mostly restricted to Bamako and the South of Mali. Efforts were made to enable EUTM and EUCAP to expand operations into the North of Mali. However, this did not materialise before the end of 2016 and is therefore not reflected here. The geographical limitation hindered both missions in conducting monitoring activities in the North, and EUTM depended on information from both MINUSMA and Barkhane[207] to gain knowledge about the performance and conduct of soldiers who had been trained by the mission.

On the other hand, both missions were less affected by security incidents in the North than was the case with MINUSMA. EUTM, especially, presented the security situation as relatively stable and undergoing little change. This was even though the mission itself had been targeted in March 2016. Despite the direct impact of the attack on the mission, respondents underlined that the security situation had not degraded significantly.[208] On the contrary, the security situation was even assessed as having improved slightly during the research period, with the signatory groups coming to an agreement on multiple occasions. Incidents in the North had decreased, except for terrorist attacks. The security situation had not impacted the working conditions of EUTM.[209] Besides, the mission was also more or less independent from the proceedings of the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the SSR negotiations, as the mandate was not connected to the Peace Agreement and its SSR provisions.

206 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
207 Operation Barkhane is the French-led military counter-insurgency mission in the Sahel region, which succeeded the aforementioned French Operation Serval.
208 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
209 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

According to several respondents, EUTM enjoyed a high level of popularity with the Malian authorities, which has also been found by previous research (Skeppstroem et al., 2014). In January 2016, it was reported that the president had recently visited KTC and that media coverage of the mission had been positive, despite the fact that the mission was not a 'big spender' in comparison with other external actors active in the field.[210] Moreover, the Mali-Mètre points to a rather high level of knowledge within the Malian population concerning EUTM and finds that in December 2015, 82.2% of the survey respondents expressed a high level of appreciation for the trainings provided by EUTM for FAMA (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015, p. 46). Furthermore, with the Malian counterparts at the MoD, good working relationships overall were reported, though interactions were partly hampered by frequent staff turnover in the partner ministry.[211]

Both missions mostly worked with one ministerial counterpart; EUCAP worked with the MSCP and EUTM worked with the MoD. Both missions have advisors, who were embedded in the respective ministries. EUTM's relations with their counterparts were described as more cooperative than in the case of EUCAP, though EUCAP's relations with their ministerial counterparts were presented as improving slightly during the research period. In November 2016, a EUCAP respondent noted that a new minister was now in office. Since this new minister had assumed office, it was easier for the mission to work with the security forces, as the new minister was reportedly interested in at least a 'limited' SSR process. Hence, individual counterparts at the political level were crucial for the mission's ability to implement its mandate.

5.3.4 Organisational sensemaking

While EUCAP and EUTM are formally part of the EU's comprehensive approach to SSR in the Sahel, the missions were found to operate alongside each other, with limited interactions. This also became apparent in distinct sensemaking processes. While most respondents of both missions believed that Malian ownership for a holistic SSR was very limited, EUTM and EUCAP respondents provided different rationales for this perceived lack of ownership and drew different conclusions regarding adequate organisational action.

EUCAP respondents' sensemaking was more similar to the sensemaking of EU Delegation respondents. Sensemaking within EUCAP was more politically connotated, with staff attempting to anticipate domestic actors' actions and the agendas of other external actors engaged in the SSR process. Staff closely followed up on domestic political

210 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako; Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.

211 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.

developments pertaining to the security sector. As in the case of MINUSMA, frictions between members of different units were informally reported. However, given that the mission is much smaller than MINUSMA, these frictions occurred more on a personal level than between entire sections or groups, as many tasks were performed by single staff members.

EUCAP and EU Delegation staff were also socially connected in the expat community of Bamako and shared interpretations of major domestic developments and events with the wider international SSR community. This was different in the case of EUTM. As discussed, EUTM staff had less freedom to move in social settings in Bamako and therefore had less access to shared sensemaking forums. EUTM respondents indicated that information-sharing between international actors on their activities in the field of SSR was limited, especially with the bilateral donors. Hence, collective sensemaking was more restricted to the mission and dependent on authorised policy. Overall, EUTM respondents were more positive about their operating environment and ability to implement the mission's mandate. While EUTM respondents shared doubts with EUCAP and EU Delegation respondents about the prospects of the more comprehensive SSR processes in the interim or medium term, this was perceived as less of a problem for EUTM's work. This is in line with previous research on EUTM discussed above, which found that EUTM operated somewhat outside of the SSR frame and was therefore able to implement its mandate even if the SSR process did not move forward. This tendency is also reflected in respondents' sensemaking.

The following section is divided into EUCAP and EUTM sensemaking processes. Statements from Brussels respondents are included in a complementary manner, or, in few cases, to illustrate where Brussels-level and Bamako-level interpretations diverged. However, this was rarely the case. Statements in Brussels equalled statements from Bamako more than in the case of DPKO and MINUSMA.

5.3.5 Organisational sensemaking of ownership

5.3.5.1 EUCAP Sahel Mali

What is it the government wants to do?

Throughout the research period, respondents from EUCAP and the EU Delegation expressed doubts about the government engaging in a comprehensive SSR process. This was a recurrent theme in the interviews. As soon as the first field phase in July 2015, respondents expressed that according to their opinion, SSR did not appear to be a priority of the Malian government. An EU respondent pointed out that only the internationals exhibited functional structures and were ready to start implementation.

The Malian structures were not seen as functional, which was perceived as a challenge for EUCAP in implementing its mandate.[212] Several reasons were given for the perceived absence of commitment, which pertained to a general feeling that the political leadership did not want to engage in the holistic SSR process envisaged by the international community and that, at the same time, it remained unclear what the Malian side wanted instead from the SSR process. Overall, there was a *high level of uncertainty about the motivation and interests of domestic counterparts*. This remained so until the end of the research period. As one respondent in Brussels noted in December 2016, when discussing the PARSEC programme: 'The government has not made clear what its plan for the centre [of Mali] is. What is it the government wants to do? It is not very clear.'[213] A domestically-driven SSR strategy was still lacking, and no national SSR structures were in place that could express demands and priorities. Therefore, the government was pictured as not exercising its envisaged role in the process.

Maybe they just agree to please us

While there were widespread doubts among EUCAP respondents about the commitment of the government to a holistic reform process, respondents also presented more in-depth perspectives on their understanding of Malian ownership in day-to-day interactions with counterparts. Several respondents identified *challenges to determining what ownership in the Malian context* in fact was. This suggests that respondents were searching for cues of ownership to 'make sense' of their domestic partner landscape, even if this would mean ownership for activities not envisaged by the international SSR framework. However, respondents pointed out that it was difficult to determine if domestic counterparts were expressing their own *personal interests* or *genuine Malian needs*. This was perceived to be particularly the case due to the high turnover of staff in the MSCP, which made it difficult to obtain information about the motivation of counterparts. One respondent pointed to *difficulties in assessing the validity of claims* for support: 'In order to create local ownership, you need to have meetings and discussions and figure out what is their own interest and what is the national agenda. I think we sometimes have been deceived.'[214]

At the same time, respondents found it difficult to figure out the extent to which there was genuine commitment for planned activities, as there was no clear vision or process from the Malian side for what to do. According to a respondent, the Malian counterparts 'say yes to everything' that was proposed to them.[215] This was attributed to the Malian

212 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
213 Interview with EU officer, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
214 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
215 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.

culture of consensus: The respondent felt that a culture of saying 'no' did not exist and that it was important to save face. This made it difficult to determine for which activities ownership from the Malian side could be expected. A respondent in Brussels expressed a similar perception of *insufficient information about the level of commitment* and the *validity of claims*. According to his perception, it was questionable whether ownership for SSR in Mali was even present: 'Maybe they just agree to please us.'[216]

The president wants a light reform

EUCAP and EU Delegation respondents shared the perception of MINUSMA respondents that there was very limited political will in Mali for embarking on a holistic SSR process. They also pointed *to differences between what the international community defines as an SSR process and what the Malian side wanted to commit to*, which would negatively impact on the level of ownership for the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Several respondents expressed their opinion that the peace and SSR processes were externally driven and were not adjusted to Malian needs and priorities.[217] Therefore, ownership for the process and its implementation was questioned from the very beginning. The SSR process was perceived to have been brought in by the international community. It was not seen as having been a Malian demand. Respondents stated that for many people, the SSR process was not what they wanted – a fact that had an impact on ownership by the government and the signatory parties.[218]

When it came to what the Malian side wanted from the SSR process, besides financial support and equipment, respondents expressed that this was not fully clear. Respondents explained that Malian actors thus far had asked the EU for financial support and equipment, without suggesting a reform process.[219] This was felt to be the case because the EU had been perceived as a donor in Mali, less as a political entity. Respondents suggested that for the Malians, SSR would mean doubling the number of security forces in the coming four to five years, even though the Peace Agreement called for more profound reform steps.[220] The president was seen as having a 'big shopping list for the army' with a desire to exploit the spirit of departure after the signature of the Peace Agreement.[221] According to respondents, the president did not engage with the more holistic SSR process and therefore had shifted SSR to the office of the prime minister. With ownership for SSR by the president lacking, other

216 Interview with two EU officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
217 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako; Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
218 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
219 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
220 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
221 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.

counterparts, who might be more willing to engage in SSR, were also unable to assume ownership.[222]

They have ownership for the security aspects

The perception that the Malian side would only have ownership for the security aspects of the reform process emerged in other interviews, as well. Regarding SSR and commitment for the process, several respondents pointed out that the government was mainly concerned with quickly stepping up the capacity of the army. This was perceived to impact the level of ownership for SSR. A respondent from the EU Delegation pointed out that the international community had two problems in determining the meaning and form of ownership in the Malian context. Sometimes, the *Malians were not able to express their wishes*, and sometimes *the international community was not able to account for them*: 'It is very difficult to find real ownership. When you design a project, you pre-define already what ownership you need. […] I think they have national ownership for the security aspects.'[223]

This statement illustrates that according to the respondent, ownership for certain activities could be there but that the EU was not able to respond to respective domestic demands if they were not compatible with other demands and constraints. This underlines the limited flexibility of the EU to respond to domestic demands that are outside of the pre-determined work plan of the missions.

They only have ownership for their weaknesses

The perception that Malian ownership was difficult to locate was not limited to the political leadership but also pertained to other domestic stakeholders involved in the SSR process. Civil society actors were discussed by respondents as potential subjects of ownership for the SSR process, as this was also part of EUCAP's mandate. The mission conducted capacity-building trainings and events for civil society representatives in the field of SSR. However, respondents described civil society actors as weak, sleepy and clientelist.[224] They were described as only having a *limited awareness of the role that they had to play* in the SSR process. Moreover, respondents criticised that the civil society representatives they encountered did not speak with one voice. The Malian consensus culture was pointed out again as leading to discussions between Malian institutions that went only in circles, with limited progress, thereby hampering the overall progress of the SSR.[225] Different organisations would not work together,

222 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
223 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
224 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
225 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.

and they would not share common objectives. Instead, they were perceived as fractionalised, not trusting each other, and mostly seeking organisational funding. In general, the civil society counterparts would take a reactive stance. Another respondent suggested that civil society representatives would only have *ownership of their weaknesses* and deficits and would expect EUCAP to provide solutions.[226] It would be very difficult to achieve better coordination between civil society actors, so that they would speak with one voice. Internationals would need to steer that process, for it to happen.

According to these statements, to qualify as 'owners', certain preconditions must be met: Civil society need to become a more homogeneous entity, speaking with one voice, *expressing one side of demand*. This perception points to an understanding of ownership as *form of power and control over processes*: Only collective actors can express demands in a strong, coherent manner. Additionally, the fact that domestic actors were perceived as having a limited awareness of their roles points to *pre-defined roles that domestic actors are expected to assume*, according to the international SSR framework. A perceived absence of ownership is linked with limited awareness for adequate roles of domestic actors in the process. Moreover, the statements suggest that EUCAP was perceived to be in a position to bring the process on track, while domestic actors would not have the capacity to do this. This implies that an *active, shaping role of the mission* in the SSR process was perceived to be an appropriate response to the organisational situation.

Between a hammer and a hard place

In addition to the limited commitment from the Malian government in implementing a more holistic SSR process and uncertainty about national priorities, other institutional pressures the mission was faced with were a recurrent theme in EUCAP interviews. Respondents specifically pointed to a *pressure to take up certain activities* stemming from Brussels and EU member states, which were felt to not always be easy to respond to. As one respondent put it: 'We find ourselves between a hammer and a hard place.'[227]

Those activities were mostly related to counter-terrorism and migration management. A representative of the EU Delegation also stated: 'We have a lot of pressure in Mali. Border management is now a priority of the EU.'[228] Another respondent confirmed the influential role of the EU member states in urging the mission to work on migration issues. According to the respondent, member states had expressed high expectations

226 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
227 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
228 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.

and were willing to allocate significant funds for these themes. The respondent further expressed a rather self-critical opinion on how this pressure might impact the mission's ability to respond to Malian priorities:

> Our engagement is based on our own visions and the demands of the member states, not on what is needed on the ground. We want stabilisation of the Sahel as a long-term goal, so that less people come. This is what we are here for. […] There is no national vision but a lot of pressure from the member states, who give us the money to be here.[229]

This statement indicates that the *pressure from resource-providing institutions* is perceived as more urgent than the need to adhere to Malian demands, especially in the absence of a formal Malian SSR strategy. What is important, however, is also that the respondent was not comfortable with this situation. Competing logics and frictions between pressures exerted by member states and ideas of ownership were clearly noted and led to personal frustration about the mission's work. This is important because this dilemma was not only seen as a problem in terms of external legitimacy but also raised personal questions on the side of the respondents about the justification of the mission from an inside perspective. It suggests that in the case of this respondent, ownership featured as a *meaningful element in sensemaking* about adequate organisational practices, suggesting that it constitutes an element in logics of appropriateness.

Passive ownership

Besides pressures to take up certain priorities, EU respondents pointed out that the mission was under pressure from EU member states to implement activities quickly and according to plan. This made it difficult to put in the effort required to understand and adequately adapt to context-specific conditions, which would be necessary to understanding Malian ownership. One respondent suggested that there was a *passive form of ownership* in Mali. While ministerial counterparts might not make demands about training curricula, trainees raised interests and demands about how training sessions should be conducted. This was perceived as a passive form of ownership for certain activities, which would have to be unearthed and factored in mission activities over time. Thereby, trainings could progressively be more domestically driven as an *emergent form of Malian ownership*. Responding to these expressions of passive ownership would require the mission to carefully adapt to the conditions in-country and engage with Malian actors on different levels. However, this approach to progressively increasing the level of involvement of Malian actors and accounting for their suggestions would be difficult to bring in accordance with the *need to stick to the mission's*

229 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.

workplan, as the operational plan and the budget would predetermine a certain number of trainees and hours of training, as well as predetermine the content of the trainings, based on EU standard curricula. Hence, the mission would have *limited options to account for these arising demands and interests*. The mission's plans would need to be made well in advance of the implementation phase. However, in view of the volatility of the political situation, counterparts would not make any plans that would exceed a year.[230] Hence, frictions between the mission's plan and the Malian counterparts' expectations would be unavoidable.

Furthermore, a respondent from the EU Delegation underlined that the international community was under pressure to act quickly.[231] The respondent declared that this would be a problem on the international side and that according to his opinion, it would be the external side creating problems with the SSR process, not the Malian side. This again indicates a *high level of awareness of the frictions between the EU's political approach and Malian ownership*, which lead to personal reflection and doubts about the justification of this form of engagement. The respondent also pointed out that this was not the case for EUTM, as EUTM would not be under pressure as was the case for political institutions. This reflects perceptions of EUTM respondents presented in the subsequent section of the chapter.

We are prisoners of concepts

On another occasion, the same respondent expressed his opinion that it would be impossible to implement SSR in the Malian context. The respondent stated that 'we are prisoners of concepts. […] The international community wants to impose the SSR concept and they say "this is good for you".'[232] He added self-critically that according to his opinion, SSR in the Malian context was a concept too complicated to implement:

> We discuss about things that the Malians do not understand. They understand that they need to have a reform, sometimes, but we really have difficulties selling the SSR approach. Maybe SSR is just for the white people or the UN guys. […] Maybe we are blind, and we do not want to listen. We try to push them and set up intellectualist concepts on the ground. I am sure we are making mistakes.[233]

Notions of 'selling the SSR approach' point to an understanding of ownership as *a buy-in of domestic actors* on reform processes and less to an understanding of domestic

230 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
231 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
232 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
233 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.

autonomy as taking decisions about priorities. This is a rather narrow concept of ownership, as discussed in the literature review.

Furthermore, while the respondent underlined that the spirit behind SSR should be promoted, it would also be important to find solutions on the ground and balance expectations. SSR would need to be realistic and perhaps, it would need to be re-invented.[234] He suggested that it might be more advisable to engage in discussions about *reorganisation* and *reinforcement* of security institutions but avoid the SSR terminology, as it would create negative perceptions of intrusion into the Malian system, thus leading to defensive attitudes.[235] Also working on border management, as requested by the member states, would be an opportunity to work on security issues without using the negatively perceived term SSR, as the border management activities could be implemented in parallel to the SSR process. It would not necessarily have to become part of the overarching SSR process. The respondent's accounts point to *an active stance on narratives of engagement,* pointing to manipulation as a relevant organisational response to the perceived absence of Malian ownership for SSR.

The question is how to sell it to them

While respondents stated that counter-terrorism and migration management was taken up in response to EU member states' demands, they also indicated that these activities were not necessarily priorities on the Malian side. Whether border management was or would be a priority was seen by respondents as being unclear, though several respondents indicated that it was a Malian non-priority. Migration was rather seen as a factor positively connoted for Malians, as it created significant returns for the domestic economy. Moreover, respondents were aware that livelihoods in the North depended to a large extent on open borders, through the trafficking of illicit goods.[236] Additionally, as Mali is a member of ECOWAS, even the legal basis for working on restricting migration in the region was found to be somewhat questionable. This again underlines respondents' awareness of *conflicting demands faced by the mission*.

However, despite these perceived frictions between EU and Malian interests and the prerogative given to EU priorities, ownership was still seen as an important factor for EUCAP's engagement in terms of *legitimising activities*. To be able to work on border management activities, a *formal endorsement* by national counterparts was felt to be necessary. EUCAP reached out to the Malian counterparts, to 'create a positive attitude towards migration management' and to convince them to formally declare border

234 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
235 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
236 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.

management a priority.[237] These discussions with Malian counterparts were connected to the prospect of significant EU funds associated with the migration issue, as a form of *incentivisation*. However, EU support had also been *conditional*, coupled with the request that there had to be commitment on the highest level, for EUCAP to be able to provide meaningful support. As a respondent stated: 'We designed a narrative to the Malians, saying that if you decide to do something on border management and make it a priority, the EU will be happy, and this will be an advantage for you. The question is how to sell it to them, in order to convince them.'[238] While respondents acknowledged that this approach could raise questions about genuine ownership for this field of engagement, *EU member states' demands were perceived to be more pressing*. This again points to a more active stance on how the mission should approach the determination of priorities in the SSR process. While engagements with the Malian counterparts at this time were rather close and on a higher level, this did not qualify for 'use of country systems', as the objective of these close interactions was to *convince the counterparts to assume priorities similar to those of the EU*, which points to a manipulation approach.

Sometimes it is not about the voices of all

During a later visit in January 2016, the same respondent confirmed that the president had been informed that the EU would invest money if he would prioritise border management during the La Valetta summit. With a presidential statement on border management being a Malian priority, this could be used by the mission to approach ministerial counterparts with the following message: 'Your president confirmed that something has to be done on this, so now we want to see your commitment.'[239] This was justified by this particular respondent with the perception that with migration, *European interests were what mattered*. As the respondent put it: 'I am all for local ownership, but sometimes it is not about the voices of all but about the voices of the powerful.'[240]

Again, there is a *close connection between ideas of ownership and power*. The respondent was conscious of the constructive character of the form of ownership that was sought for border management at a high level, pointing to the need of the mission for a *justification-rationale based on ownership*. This goes beyond ownership as buy-in, as EU representatives actively influenced influential domestic counterparts to increase *congruency between conflicting demands*.

237 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
238 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
239 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
240 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.

They have not expressed the wish yet

As was the case for MINUSMA respondents, the Radisson Blu attacks in November 2015 were perceived by EUCAP respondents as a crucial turning point in defining relations with national counterparts, which so far had been described as challenging to approach, especially with regard to the more political aspects of SSR.[241] It was stated that the mission's relation to the Malian security forces had improved in the aftermath of the attacks, by emerging as a partner who provided support to the investigations immediately and who supported activities that were focussed on counter-terrorism capacity. After the incident, priorities of the Malian government and the mission were perceived to be *more aligned with EU priorities*. A EUCAP respondent stated that ownership for border management as a type of counter-terrorism measure was now much better than in other fields of SSR. The border commission had presented a good concept. However, he also indicated that this was connected to the significant funds being availed through the Trust Fund.[242]

In January 2016, border management had been integrated into the mission's mandate and the operational plan of the mission. However, respondents also suggested that starting operations on border management as part of migration management would be *hampered by the need to coordinate with the Malian actors*. One respondent stated: 'It is difficult, however, to approach the Malians, as they have not expressed the wish [to prioritise migration management] yet.'[243]

The footprint we want to leave will be difficult to achieve

Without the government's commitment, respondents suggested that EUCAP was able to provide some advice and some training, but it would not be possible to engage more thoroughly. One respondent pointed out that for the mission to move forward, more commitment from the Malian side would be required: 'The footprint we want to leave will be difficult to achieve.'[244] However, while respondents underlined that the commitment of counterparts was important for the mission's ability to proceed with activities, this dependence on domestic commitment – for example, with regard to the national SSR structures – was emphasised significantly less than in the MINUSMA case. The mission was perceived as capable of starting implementation with a formal endorsement from the Malian side, with limited cooperation requirements during the implementation phase.

241 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
242 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
243 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
244 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.

These statements suggest that while ownership was perceived as pivotal for a legitimate engagement in this field, active steps were taken to *evoke expressions of commitment* from Malian counterparts *for external priorities*. This approach diverges from other approaches discussed in this study: In this specific case, expressions of interest from high-level Malian political representatives were sought to justify external priorities, not to primarily convince Malian counterparts of the necessity to engage in this field. In this case, the understanding of ownership that was perceived to be necessary to enable organisational action was less substantial in terms of intention or ability. EUCAP drew on *incentives and conditions*, pointing to an understanding of ownership as a *negotiable subject in a power relationship* between external and domestic actors.

They let the ownership be taken away

Several respondent statements indicated a narrow understanding of ownership. Indeed, many presented ownership as de-facto *control over processes,* which Malians did not retain, and which were therefore taken over by other actors. In July 2015, a EUCAP respondent expressed his impression that the Malian government had let the ownership for the peace process and the SSR process be taken away by other strong, external actors. [245]

Consequently, the respondent felt that some international actors had accepted that there was no genuine political will for SSR. Those who accepted the status quo worked with one of the ministries on one specific issue, which was easier than attempting to initiate a comprehensive reform process with all Malian actors involved. This perception points to a more active understanding of the role of external actors and the limited prominence attached to inclusiveness as a characteristic of ownership. According to this thinking, external actors should ensure that the process continues, at least in some areas. The perception that ownership is a *function that can be taken away* underlines again the close connection between ownership and the ability to exert control over processes, as well as ownership as a subject of negotiation.

We only receive the product

Respondents' perception that EUCAP should exert more control over aspects of the SSR process were expressed on several occasions. For example, a EUCAP respondent discussed the conditions for the integration process, which had mostly been agreed on in informal backdoor discussions.[246] These debates had not been accessible to the mission, even though the mission had been mandated to support the integration

245 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
246 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.

process. Therefore, it was unclear which trainees the mission was to work with, and which training content would be required. The fact that EUCAP would only receive the 'product' and have no influence on the processes beforehand was perceived as a hindering factor.[247] This again underlines the mission's *ambition to exert more control* over the proceedings of the SSR process, to enable operations. According to this thinking, the conditions of the integration process should not be only dependent on Malian actors, but the mission should be involved, as mission activities were connected to the process.

Then we go back and do it ourselves

Discussing difficulties in determining over which things the Malian side would have ownership, a respondent suggested that their counterparts would often agree to proposals 'and then we realise that they do not answer our calls. Then we go back, we do it ourselves and we come back with the strategy. There is no ownership.'[248] This statement again underlines the perception that respondents were unclear over which issue areas the Malian side had genuine ownership. It also indicates a more active stance on how to respond to this situation. As the Malian side was not engaging in the process as expected, activities were implemented at the initiative of the mission. In this case, the mission took the initiative to design a strategy for activities without the close involvement of the Malian side in the process, pointing to an avoidance approach.

We should be able to contradict

In view of demands directed towards the mission from Brussels and the member states, several respondents took a more active stance on how to respond and considered *measures of conditionality*. One respondent expressed that to move things forward, one strong external actor should step up, set a deadline, and get actors moving. Otherwise, the SSR process would not advance. This actor could allocate funds and request the government to instruct them how to spend the money for a certain period.[249] This more active stance on negotiations with the partner side did not only pertain to the government and the involved ministries but also to the signatory partners, whose role in the peace negotiations was also seen as hampering progress. As one respondent put it: 'Are we going to let a few Tuaregs delay all these things because they want per diems?'[250] Similar to perceptions encountered in the MINUSMA case, these statements point to *domestic claims being perceived as expressions of particu-*

247 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
248 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.
249 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
250 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.

laristic agency, outside of the SSR framework and therefore illegitimate. The need to progress with the SSR process was seen by respondents as *justification for exerting pressure on domestic stakeholders to* assume their roles and participate in the implementation.

In Brussels, one respondent also suggested that the international community had to send clear messages, to convince the Malians to speed up the peace process and the SSR process. According to the respondent, the situation on the ground was getting worse, and the government and signatory parties needed to get moving.[251] Another Brussels respondent stated: 'It has to be a dialogue. We should be able to contradict. It is not only about what they want. It also has to be appropriate and sustainable.'[252]

Similar perceptions had been expressed by MINUSMA respondents, who stated that what can be implemented with mission funds does not only depend on the partners' wishes but also on the mission strategy and possibilities to allocate funds. These statements again suggest that ownership is seen as a topic of negotiation, in which *domestic and external interests must be reconciled*. According to this thinking, ownership is not about the autonomous decisions of domestic actors but rather a question of the *lowest common denominator* between actors negotiating interests.

We have to do something on these issues

Regarding the EU Trust Fund, which was also envisaged to work on border management, respondents presented similar perceptions. As an EU respondent put it: 'Local ownership is good, but what do you do if you have a government that takes no decisions with regard to issues that affect Europe? […] We have a lot of money and we have to do something on these issues which are really important for the EU.'[253]

The funds attached to the Trust Fund were pictured as a *game-changer* in engaging with security and migration issues in Mali. Again, this perception underlines that the Malian SSR process was not primarily seen as a solely Malian concern. Instead, justification for *prioritising external demands* was derived from the perception that European interests were affected and needed to be accounted for. Nevertheless, respondents engaged in balancing affirmative stances towards national priorities with bringing domestic stakeholders on board for the process, pointing out that migration/border management were issues in which the divergent interests of the two sides would need to be reconciled. While Malian *buy-in and endorsement* was perceived as important,

251 Interview with EU officer, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
252 Interview with EU officer, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
253 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.

the EU was viewed as the stronger side at the negotiation table, with respondents taking a more *manipulative approach* towards gathering support from the government and convincing the Malian side, with the help of incentives and conditions, that joining these processes was in their interest.

5.3.5.2 EUTM Mali

The appetite to participate is high

Overall, EUTM respondents shared the doubts of EUCAP and the EU Delegation respondents about the willingness of the government to embark on a comprehensive SSR process. According to EUTM respondents, there had been very limited progress on the political level. Issues with the Peace Agreement were perceived as influencing the mission as well, because when fighting in the North, FAMA was not available for training. Queries concerning the integration process were also perceived as influencing the mission, because funds were frozen for a while as a result. As one respondent put it: 'We are the victims of the peace process fallout.'[254] However, the impairment of the peace process was not viewed as being just as critical for the mission's operations as was the case for EUCAP and MINUSMA. While political progress was seen by respondents as slow, it was pointed out that the willingness of the Malian stakeholders to continue engaging in the process was existent. The next two to four years were perceived as an opportunity for reform, because donor money was flowing, which the government could use to their advantage:

> The Malian government is making small steps. However, bigger steps are required. […] At least people are sitting around the table and discussing. This might not be moving fast enough forward, but there is hope that the process will start in the future. […] At least the appetite to participate in the process is high.[255]

Like EUCAP and EU Delegation respondents, respondents in Brussels working on EUTM pointed out that the Malian counterparts had their *own interests and agendas*, which hampered the political side of the SSR process.[256] Sometimes, they were busy with other demands, like the Africa-France Summit, and they thus had limited time for EUTM interactions and for the selection of trainees for the EUTM training courses. As no Malian framework for SSR was in place, respondents felt that internationals worked in silos on their own projects in the sector.[257] This was also seen as the case for EUTM.

254 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
255 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
256 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
257 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

However, while basic perceptions of the Malian commitment to reform were quite similar, the conclusions drawn, in terms of cooperation and priorities, were different.

We should not try to create something

Delays with the SSR process were not perceived as being mostly due to the absence of Malian ownership; other explanations were provided. Due to the scale of the process and the fact that the army was fighting in the North, respondents expressed their opinion that the security forces were at times overstretched, which slowed the implementation process. At the same time, they were seen as over-stretched due to various offers by donors for assistance.[258] The *interference of various external actors was seen as a negative factor*, as it would bind resources of national counterparts.

When discussing EUTM's intervention approach, respondents pointed out that it would be important to *account for the context-specific features of the operating environment*. The MoD would be keen to strengthen the capacity of FAMA in the short term. This also pertained to supporting systems, like the logistics system. Working on higher-level advisory services in the ministry on HR and leadership issues was stated to be a more sensitive matter in the Malian context. Also, counterparts were found to be less interested in large-scale planning exercises.[259] However, from the perspective of the respondents, the lack of planning was also less of an issue than it had been in the case of the EUCAP and MINUSMA respondents. This might be connected to the limited orientation of respondents towards and dependence on a more holistic SSR process. However, respondents also pointed out that eventually, activities like PARSEC, in which EUTM was also involved, would need to be fit within national strategies and connected to the SSR process. This would need to be done by the Malians: "We should be very cautious in our approach. We should not try to create something".[260] These statements point to *a higher status given to Malian priorities as expressions of ownership*. However, conflicting pressures from EU member states, though mentioned, were given less attention by respondents, suggesting that there was less of a need for the mission to reconcile conflicting priorities.

We cannot do more

Perceptions of the willingness of Malian counterparts to engage in mission activities and to drive reform processes were more positive than in the case of EUCAP. Malian counterparts were pictured as willing to come up with a strategy, but due to the

258 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
259 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
260 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.

operational challenges, they would have difficulties implementing a strategic reform process. According to respondents, the LOPM was a good plan for now, while a more strategic SSR framework should be drafted by the CNRSS, which was identified by respondents as the legitimate body for such a task. However, respondents did not see much happening on the more political questions of reform, as long as the SSR process was not brought forward by the Malians: 'Until the SSR process is not being brought forward by the Malians, we continue to work in silos. […] We cannot do more.'[261]

EUTM was pictured as standing ready to become more involved in the integration/DDR process, as soon as these processes had begun to progress. In the meantime, however, mission activities could continue according to the mandate, because they were not as dependent on the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

They decide, we follow them

Domestic agendas were perceived as less problematic than was the case for EUCAP and MINUSMA respondents. EUTM respondents repeatedly pointed to the need to allow processes to be driven by the Malian side. Accordingly, the LOPM, which involved major re-shaping efforts by FAMA, was perceived in a different way than by EUCAP Delegation respondents. An EUTM officer described the LOPM as a good process, because it *made the interests of the Malian side more predictable*.[262] The facts that the budget for implementing the LOPM was approved by the parliament and the Malian side provided a large amount of materials and equipment for the army were seen as a sign of commitment.[263] EUTM supported the implementation of the LOPM and provided advice on how to use existing means: 'They decide, we follow them.'[264]

That is a purely Malian business

Crucial activities within implementation of the EUTM mandate lie with Malian stakeholders – for example, with regard to the selection of trainees for EUTM training courses. It was reported that sometimes the army did not provide the trainings with participants, because the army was stretched thin due to the fighting in the North. Therefore, entire training cycles were sometimes not provided, so that no trainings could be conducted. Also, the number of participants would often diverge from what had been announced, so it was always a surprise for the mission which trainees

261 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
262 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
263 Information on the question of provision of funds for the LOPM implementation differed between respondents. While MINUSMA respondents suggested that government funds were insufficient for implementing the LOPM, EUTM respondents stated that the government was able to cover a significant part of the required funding, while requiring only limited additional external funding.
264 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

eventually showed up.[265] However, this was not communicated as a problem or as lack of control by the mission. According to a EUTM respondent, the selection of trainees was 'a purely Malian business.'[266] EUTM also did not interfere with the ranking and promotion procedures of the Malian army, as they maintained their own systems.[267] The same was the case regarding the integration of the rebel groups into the trainings, which was not the task of EUTM either. EUTM trained whomever the Malian army would send to their training grounds. As another respondent put it: 'We have to bring them to one table and direct them, but in the end, it is up to them. We can only support them. It is their decision at the end of the day.'[268] This statement points to *alignment to Malian priorities,* as long as they did not conflict with the mandate – which, in the case of EUTM, was very technical and specific and perceived to be well in line with Malian priorities.

They must want it

This *alignment-seeking approach* also emerged on other occasions. Respondents in Brussels had a more political perspective on EUTM's engagement than respondents at the field level. Nevertheless, one respondent pointed out that it was important that the Malians initiate changes on their own. While they also had their own interests and agendas, a proactive approach was suggested as a way to reach shared objectives. For EUTM to be able to implement shared activities, 'they [the Malians] must want to do it. You have to convince them that changes are good, so that they are doing the changes. If it is not their idea, they will forget. It has to be sustainable.'[269]

You have to influence the right people

For Malian counterparts to accept changes in behaviour suggested by EUTM, it would be necessary to *trade in technical training and advice.* In doing so, one could bring about some changes in the way FAMA was structured and operated. In the end, this would serve as a contribution to the reform process.[270] SSR was perceived to be a very complicated concept to implement: 'Things on paper are easy but sometimes progress is difficult. It is not Europe. […] You have to influence the right people, to bypass the people who do not want to make it happen.'[271] On the other hand, what EUTM was

265 Field notes, EUTM Koulikoro Training Center (KTC), Medivac Simulation Exercise, 30 Jan 2016, Koulikoro.
266 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
267 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
268 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
269 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
270 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
271 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.

doing could be quite simple. EUTM's contributions were described as only a small part of the EU's bigger ideas in Mali.

These statements suggest that EUTM assumed an active approach in bringing in their perspectives on reform requirements. However, no major conflicting demands were reported – demands that would have been brought into the negotiations with counterparts for the sake of influencing an outcome. Engagements with Malian counterparts were presented as a form of *balancing the expectations of both sides*, with room to accommodate Malian priorities if they did not conflict with the mandate.

5.3.6 Organisational practices and ownership adherence

Though not part of the EU's SSR portfolio in Mali, the PARSEC *(Programme d'appui au renforcement de la sécurité)* programme does pertain to the Malian security sector and is therefore relevant in terms of priorities. The PARSEC programme was conceived with funds from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which had a total budget of 1.2 billion EUR. The Fund was established as a result of the La Valetta Summit on Migration. Most of the funds were allocated for development projects, while a smaller part of the funds was allocated to security projects.[272] The PARSEC programme for the Mopti and Gao areas was financed with funds from the Trust Fund, with a budget of 29 million EUR for 2017 to 2020 (European Commission, 2016). PARSEC aimed at improving migration management, improving governance, and reducing irregular migration. It was aligned with the La Valetta Action Plan's priority domains.

As laid out in the sensemaking section above, PARSEC activities were not conceived based on Malian priorities but directed at meeting the expectations of EU member states. Consultations with the Malian side during the conception phase of PARSEC were reportedly very limited. A respondent in Brussels suggested that PARSEC was initiated at the request of member states and that the way the programme had been handled was not the desired cooperation modus.[273] Activities were negotiated between Brussels, member states, the missions and the EU Delegation. The missions provided support in the identification of potential fields of engagement.[274] Though handled by the EU Delegation, both CSDP missions and especially EUCAP were involved in the concept-drafting and scoping missions in preparation for the PARSEC programme.[275]

The planning of the PARSEC programme illustrates how the priorities of member states directed EU actions in Mali: While implementation depended also on the Malian

272 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
273 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
274 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
275 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.

counterparts, most planning and coordination activities, up to the point at which field-level activities had begun, were conducted within the EU institutional setup. The process of how this priority came about can be described as an *avoidance and manipulation* strategy regarding Malian ownership.

5.3.6.1 EUCAP Sahel Mali

Cooperation with domestic partners

EUCAP deployed a technical, standardised training approach. The training curricula for the trainings in Mali were drafted by EUCAP, based on EU curricula and EU training methods. Training sessions were conducted for the gendarmerie, the police and the civil guard. Workshops and sensitisation were also conducted with members of civil society. EUCAP trainings address participants from high to middle ranks. Nevertheless, EUCAP's approach was comparatively less bottom-up than the EUTM trainings. The mission was also more involved in the selection and appraisal of trainees. In principle, the trainees were selected by FAMA but with support from the EUCAP training advisors. Assessments as to who should receive proximity, intermediate or advanced training were done within the mission.

Overall, EUCAP respondents seemed to be more at odds with the mission's limited control over processes such as recruitment for the internal security forces, active and ongoing in 2016, and the integration process, with which the mission would have wanted to be more involved, particularly in determining selection and processing criteria.[276] As concerns the higher level advisory activities of the mission, stronger efforts were made to ensure that the consultation processes with Malian counterparts concerning border management would result in an agreement for work on a National Strategy for Border Security, which the mission could support. According to one respondent, the coordination of international SSR approaches should take place within the international community, without the involvement of the Malian government.[277] This again points to a stronger wish for control of processes pertaining to SSR vis-à-vis national counterparts, suggesting modes of cooperation that tend towards *manipulation*.

Prioritisation of tasks

In 2016, a Strategic Review of the EUCAP mandate was undertaken. As a result, decentralisation, border management, counter-terrorism and support of the G5 Sahel were included in the mission's mandate. During the review, Malian stakeholders were

276 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
277 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.

consulted. Priorities, however, were identified in Brussels, in coordination with other stakeholders. One respondent in Brussels stated, regarding migration management and counter-terrorism: 'Now we have to see if the Malian authorities are OK with it.'[278] This suggests that the new priorities had been decided with *limited consultation with domestic stakeholders*, which had a more informative than consultant character, displaying characteristics of an *avoidance approach.*

Support for the peace process

After the signature of the Peace Agreement, support for its implementation was included in the mission's mandate, which is a *form of alignment with national priorities*. This support comprised working on the DDR and integration processes, which was presented as a challenge, because the MSCP had decided to initiate a recruitment process outside of the Peace Agreement, hence large numbers of recruits would need to be integrated into FAMA, with unclear training and equipment needs.[279] Additionally, the army would then need to absorb the numbers of new staff members from the integration process. However, supporting the implementation of the provisions of the Peace Agreement regarding SSR in a holistic manner was seen as more of a task for MINUSMA. Like respondents from MINUSMA, EUCAP staff expressed their opinion that the implementation of the Peace Agreement was going too slow. In view of the stagnating peace process, EUCAP opted for a *sectoral approach,* working directly with the MSCP, without having to wait for Malian SSR structures to be in place.[280] This sectoral approach can be considered a form of *avoidance*, as EUCAP focussed on *working with selected actors* who were more inclined to work with the mission, while engaging less with more contested aspects of the reform process.

Border management

In November 2016, border management was integrated into the mandate of EUCAP. This priority arose by the request of EU member states, not by Malian request. One respondent from EUCAP suggested that even though EUCAP had not wanted to take up the issue of border management, due to *demands from the EU member states*, the issue had been integrated into the mission plan as a new priority.[281] According to the respondent, EUCAP always had to factor in what the EU member states expected from the mission. While EUCAP could not work directly on migration issues, it could offer to work on rule of law questions of border management in border areas in the middle of

278 Interview with two EU officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
279 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
280 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.
281 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

the country, which had been identified as a migration route. The perspectives of respondents about the new priority were mixed, especially with regard to their compatibility with Malian interests. In terms of response strategies, this field of activity is considered as characterised by *manipulation* tactics, as efforts were made to elicit statements from Malian counterparts to the effect that border management would be declared a Malian priority.

Crisis management/counter-terrorism

Anti-terrorism activities were described by respondents as a field where international and Malian interests converged.[282] In the aftermath of the Radisson Blu attacks, Malian counterparts had asked the mission to become active in the counter-terrorism field. As a response to these requests, crisis management and anti-terrorism trainings were included in the mission's mandate. This had an impact on the PANORAMA project, which had been initiated by the mission in early 2015, together with the MSCP. Funded by the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IIcSP), the PANORAMA project (Hôtel de Police) originally aimed at providing an integrated training platform for police services, offering training and advice (European External Action Service). With the new counter-terrorism focus, the project was re-directed towards management capacity for crisis situations.[283] Also, a special investigation team on counter-terrorism was in the works. These activities were pictured as complementing the SSR mandate. As counter-terrorism was also a declared priority of the EU member states, it is not assessed as a case of conflicting priorities but as a form of *compromise-building* during the implementation phase, as requests from the partner side are reflected.

Law on Internal Security

Toward the end of the research period, EUCAP began to support the drafting of the LPS, which is an analogous initiative to the LOPM. The mission provided technical advisory services and assisted with the drafting on request. Respondents criticised that the LPS was mostly about recruitment. However, the mission also intended to discuss the priorities of the LPS with the minister and to get more involved in the actual drafting of the document.[284] This is assessed as a form of *adherence*, as activities were undertaken on MSCP request, though the mission also intended to influence the priorities identified in the document.

282 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
283 Interview with two EU officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
284 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.

5.3.6.2 EUTM Mali

Cooperation with domestic partners

EUTM worked with Malian counterparts on different strategic and operational levels. As one respondent put it: 'We try to advise the brain and connect the brain and the muscles.'[285] The training of the battle groups was bottom-up, with participants selected by the Malian army. Trainings were conducted at the KTC training centre, which is a training ground shared by EUTM and the Malian army. While the respective training grounds were demarcated and while there was no direct cooperation in the exercises of trainings provided by FAMA and EUTM, the compounds were in close proximity to each other and allowed for occasional encounters between groups.[286]

Though strongly standardised, the training approach practices at KTC were found to focus on direct peer-to-peer encounters and demand-oriented provision of training modules. After the training, a 'hand-over' ceremony of the troops was undertaken with the Malian counterparts. According to respondents, the EUTM's training approach would have the advantage of being practical; results would be visible and tangible, and the sessions provided would meet the needs of the soldiers to be deployed to the North.[287] While criticism had been expressed about non-transparent selection procedures, based on which very few of the trainees from the North were selected, this procedure provided the Malian side with an important angle *to exert control over important decisions* pertaining to EUTM's activities.

EUTM also had advisors working directly with the MoD. In 2014, the mission initiated a Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and a Logistic Information System (LOGIS), both significantly supported with bilateral funds (European External Action Service, 2015). An INTRANET project for the Malian Armed Forces was also in the planning stage, meant to improve communications and data management. The relationship with the MoD was described as close and cooperative, involving daily interactions. The advisory team also played an important advisory role in the design phase of the LOPM.[288] However, in this field of advisory services, progress was described as taking more time.[289] This embedded advisory model allowed the mission to respond to demands of counterparts, while also bringing in its own initiatives. The *level of cooperation* with Malian counterparts was reported as *comparatively high* – due to the integra-

285 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
286 Field notes, EUTM Koulikoro Training Center (KTC), 30 Jan 2016, Koulikoro.
287 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
288 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
289 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.

tion of advisors in the ministry and direct work with FAMA representatives and Malian soldiers in the training courses.

Prioritisation of tasks

In the case of EUTM, fewer prioritisation exercises took place. EUTM's mandate was only slightly expanded regarding Training of Trainers (ToT) and the decentralisation of training activities, but no entirely new activities arose. Mission activities remained within the fields of advisory services and training, except for the mission's involvement in the preparation of the PARSEC programme. Therefore, the mission's involvement in the LOPM and instances of non-prioritisation will be discussed in the following section.

LOPM

Supporting the design and implementation of the LOPM was a major field of activity of EUTM during the research period. Respondents in Brussels confirmed that the LOPM originated from advisory support on long-term planning provided by the mission. The law would have been drafted by the Malians with support from EUTM.[290] While many respondents from other missions criticised that the LOPM was not part of the SSR process and would constitute a parallel initiative of the MoD that should not be supported – in order to avoid fostering processes outside of the agreed-upon peace and SSR processes – EUTM respondents were of the opinion that the LOPM would be a step in the right direction. The MoD was perceived to have shown much commitment to implementing the new law, and its implementation should therefore be supported. This is assessed as a form of *compromise*, as the mission had engaged in advocacy measures for taking up certain contents in the LOPM, while also influencing the drafting process. Yet overall, the LOPM was widely perceived as an MoD-driven strategic initiative, for which the parliament had allocated resources ('aligning with national strategies').

Non-prioritisation

According to EUTM respondents, border management was not perceived to be a priority of the Malian counterparts.[291] EUTM did not plan to engage in this field of activity. As opposed to EUCAP, EUTM did not get involved in activities aiming at migration management. Additionally, in the case of the PARSEC programme, in which all concerned EU institutions became involved, EUTM did not take a leading role. A EUCAP

290 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.
291 Interview with three EUMS officers, 07 Dec 2016, Brussels.

respondent indicated that EUTM had not been interested in the PARSEC programme, until they had realised that it would be an option to buy equipment for FAMA, which was not possible with EUTM funds.[292] Therefore, the mission had decided to get involved in the implementation and to focus on the re-deployment of troops in this area, within the mandate of the mission. Nonetheless, as border management was not taken up as a priority, this response to external demand can be assessed as a form of *adherence* to national priorities, as it was not perceived to be a priority of the counterparts.

5.3.7 Summary of case findings

Despite the EU's comprehensive approach to the Sahel region, the two CSDP missions worked according to different logics and came to different interpretations of their working environment and adequate organisational responses. EUCAP Sahel Mali respondents expressed doubts about the commitment of Malian counterparts to SSR. At the same time, respondents emphasised strong pressure to work on the proprieties of EU member states in the fields of migration/border management and counter-terrorism. This is in line with Lopez Lucia's research, who found that the Sahel Strategy tended to prioritise EU strategic interests, with potentially negative consequences for the ability of CSDP missions and other EU actors to factor in priorities of Sahel partner countries, thereby negatively affecting domestic ownership (Lopez Lucia, 2017).

Ownership, while pointed out as crucial for the SSR process and the missions' mandate implementation, was presented in the sense of the *ability of domestic actors to actively assume political control* in negotiations between external and domestic actors. According to this thinking, ownership was not a quality that could genuinely only reside with domestic actors as an expression of autonomous agency; as an element of control over processes, ownership could also be 'taken away' by other, stronger actors. Along these lines, respondents engaged with the question of how to *steer domestic traction* for external priorities, in the sense of *financially incentivising* such activities and *conditioning support*. External agency was perceived as justified, as the SSR process would also touch upon European interests. The mission demonstrated a wide range of different response strategies, comprising elements of adherence, avoidance, manipulation and compromise-building. With regard to processes directly linked to EU priorities, EUCAP mostly engaged in *manipulation tactics*, to secure control over processes. In view of the strong favour given to EU strategic interests, which also correspond with respective policy trends, it could be argued that there is a tendency towards *making*

[292] Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.

fundamental decisions in terms of hierarchisation between different demands, at the expense of ownership.

However, it must be noted that some respondents expressed a rather critical perspective on the EU's political approach in Mali, which was not seen as responding to Malian demands but as serving EU member states' interests primarily. This perspective leads to a mixed picture: While some respondents presented a 'realist', pragmatic approach to bringing the EU's interests into the Malian SSR process, other respondents indicated growing frustration with the lack of accounting of Malian interests, indicating a *personal desire to live up to the requirements arising from ownership policy*, in view of organisational legitimacy and staff satisfaction with the mission's intervention approach. While these individuals' sensemaking did not develop an instructive character for field practices, it suggests that, for some respondents, ownership constituted a meaningful *symbol* for a wider concept of national self-determination and featured in *personal logics of appropriateness*.

While EUCAP was an integral part of the Malian SSR setup, EUTM was found to operate somewhat outside the process, as the mission was initiated before the SSR process had been launched. EUTM's national counterparts were perceived as *interested in limited reform processes*. Delays of the SSR process were perceived as being caused by *limited capacity in the overstretched army* fighting in the North, not by a lack of commitment or political will in more general terms. Moreover, EUTM respondents underlined the importance of sticking to the mandate and only supporting processes that were favoured and promoted by their Malian counterparts. *Adherence to Malian priorities* was continuously pointed out as guiding EUTM's interactions with their counterparts. Moreover, Malian counterparts had the possibility of exerting *control over important factors of shared activities* – for example, in the selection of trainees.

The reason for these different impressions of and approaches to ownership could be that EUTM and their Malian counterparts as military institutions had a more similar perspective on how to reform the Malian security institutions, thus *demands were perceived as less conflicting*. As opposed to other external actors, the LOPM qualified as a *manifestation of ownership* in the eyes of EUTM respondents that was supported by the mission. As the mission's mandate was mostly in line with their Malian counterparts' priorities, the mission engaged in activities that followed logics of *compromise.* This is especially interesting because EUTM as a military training mission also placed the least importance on ownership adherence in official communications, though the SSR framework is formally applicable to all CSDP missions.

In view of the fact that the EU's negotiating capital increased significantly during the research period, enabling EUCAP and the EU Delegation to draw on incentivisation and conditioning, the findings confirm the suggestion made for the MINUSMA case that the perceived strength of demands and the characteristics of an external actor (especially the resource base) are decisive for the range of response strategies with which conflicts between demands can be managed.

5.4 Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) is a comparatively small organisation that is specialised in SSR support. In Mali, DCAF has a limited mandate to provide technical SSR expertise and advice to the Malian government. DCAF does not have an office in Bamako but operates through frequent short-term missions from Geneva to the field level. Of the cases discussed, DCAF policy is the most adamant in terms of the prerogative of ownership in SSR. Ownership consistently runs through DCAF policy and is the number one principle of SSR support.

During the research period, ten interviews and background discussions were conducted with DCAF staff on field mission in Bamako, with DCAF consultants, and with DCAF staff working on Mali in HQ in Geneva. Most interviews were conducted in the second half and towards the end of the research period. Given that sensemaking pertains to past events and only few months had passed between trips, this is not seen as a major issue regarding this case's comparability with empirical material from other organisations. Background discussions were also conducted with other external actors who cooperated with DCAF at the field level and with donor representatives who funded DCAF activities in Mali. For this case, it must be noted that the empirical material is more limited compared to the other cases. Especially opportunity for follow-up interviews were limited. Hence, the analysis is more tentative than in the other cases. This factor needs to be considered when coming to the generalisability of the findings and will be discussed further below.

In view of the vast SSR guidance provided by DCAF, several pertinent DCAF publications have been reviewed and included in the analysis, to provide insights into institutional positions on ownership and roles of third parties which are considered appropriate. Hence, the section on the policy framework is lengthier than it is for the other cases, because DCAF policy is more elaborate and specific on how to approach ownership in SSR support. Moreover, interesting conceptual questions relevant for this study arise already at the policy level, which occur also reflected in field-level sensemaking. Therefore, comparatively more space is given to organisational guidance and debates at the policy level.

While DCAF publications play an important role in the international policy and academic discourse on SSR, barely any secondary literature is yet available that analyses DCAF as an external actor in SSR. Therefore, no secondary literature on DCAF as an organisation is included in the analysis.

5.4.1 Institutional overview

DCAF is an international foundation that was established in 2000 on the initiative of the Swiss government. The organisation assists the international community in pursuing good governance and a holistic SSR agenda (DCAF, 2017e). DCAF has about 170 staff members and is based in Geneva, with permanent offices in Beirut, Brussels, Ljubljana, Ramallah and Tunis. In 2015, DCAF had a budget of 35 million Swiss francs, half of which was provided by the Swiss government, the other half provided by other governments. DCAF develops and promotes SSR norms and standards at national and international levels. It comprises a research division and provides policy guidance and advisory support at the field level (operations). The International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISAAT[293]) of DCAF works on building capacity in the international community for the sake of support to SSR processes. It maintains a community of practice and focuses on practical tools. ISAAT has about 20 staff and about 45 experts on its roster.[294]

DCAF works with national SSR stakeholders, bilateral donors, multilateral institutions and expert networks. International partners of DCAF include, amongst others, the UN, EU, ECOWAS, the African Union and NATO. The organisation's main fields of expertise are parliamentary oversight of the security sector, police and border-police management, defence reform, intelligence governance, private security governance, gender and security, public-private partnerships and ombudsman institutions for the armed forces (DCAF, 2017e). Its main services are as follows: strategic advice to government and international organisations on the development of SSR policies; practical field support and technical assistance with the implementation of SSR policies and programmes, assessments, programme design, monitoring and evaluation, tools and guidance development; capacity-building and training of institutional partners and knowledge services; and development of knowledge products for SSR practitioners (DCAF, 2016b).

293 In the following, the organisation will be referred to as DCAF, regardless of which section is concerned, unless it seems significant that it is ISAAT which is operating and not DCAF as the umbrella organisation.

294 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

DCAF has been working in Mali on SSR-related activities since 2010, when Mali joined DCAF's foundation council. In 2014, DCAF was formally invited to support the national SSR process, with a focus on governance. Its support aims at the establishment of an effective coordination mechanism which drafts a national vision for SSR and clarifies the role of different actors in the SSR process, improving the cooperation between the security establishment and democratic oversight bodies, leading to better resource management systems within the security institutions, and producing assessments of reform needs through participatory research and analysis (DCAF, 2017e).

5.4.2 Policy Framework: National ownership in SSR

DCAF has published extensive guidelines on SSR programming. Ownership plays a particularly vital role in DCAF's policy on SSR support. According to DCAF policy, ownership is a key feature of SSR – both as a normative requirement and as a means to achieving efficacy and sustainability of reform processes. DCAF's 2016-2019 strategy identifies ownership as 'an absolute precondition for the legitimacy and sustainability of reform' (DCAF, 2015) and as a core guiding principle of the organisation. ISAAT also teaches ownership as being the first and most important principle to be pursued in SSR programming:

Figure 8: DCAF-ISAAT: 1-2-3 of SSR, as per organisational website (DCAF, 2017a).

Several organisational publications deal with the question of how to accomplish ownership in SSR programming. In 2015, a toolkit was published for SSR actors in West Africa. Ownership featured prominently in Tool 1 on Political Leadership and National Ownership of SSR processes and in Tool 4 on Effective Management of External Support to SSR (Moderan, 2015; Yankey-Wayne, 2015). The toolkits provide practical guidance on SSR in the ECOWAS context. They primarily target national stakeholders of SSR but also serve as a source of information for external actors. By providing guidance to a national audience, these documents focus on how national ownership can

be achieved by domestic actors. They provide detailed insights into how domestic actors can demonstrate ownership for SSR and how they should engage with external partners while retaining ownership of the process.

Tool 1 on Political Leadership and National Ownership puts forth that for SSR to be effective, national institutions and executive leaders must be the driving force behind reform processes. The commitment of key decision-makers is required, while, for the reform to be holistic, a critical mass of citizens would also need to be involved in the design and implementation of the reform endeavour. The guidance document states that while state leadership is a matter of national sovereignty, wider ownership is required for the reform process to be legitimate and for its outcomes to be sustainable. Hence, the tool distinguishes between *national ownership*, which would pertain to the wider population (shared vision, national consensus), and *political will/leadership*, which would pertain to national authorities' determination and abilities to reform.[295] Determination and leadership are also seen as mutually reinforcing:

> Political will plays a great role in defining priorities and shaping national agendas, while political leadership is instrumental to bring about institutional and societal change. […] Political will is needed to make democratic governance of the security sector an integral part of that shared national project, while leadership is required to boost the reform process (Moderan, 2015, p. 8).

Demonstrated political commitment and the leadership of national actors are required to increase external partners' trust and to facilitate the mobilisation of external funding for SSR. National authorities could demonstrate their commitment, for example, by initiating the definition of a national vision, by encouraging the adoption of parliamentary resolutions expressing the importance of SSR or by allocating state resources to the process. Effective communication of commitment could entail official statements on SSR, such as adopting high-level decrees, the creation of an SSR coordination structure, and including SSR on the agenda of the council of ministers:

> Like all aspects of the SSR process, communication must be planned in such a way as to demonstrate high-level political commitment. Getting key messages directly delivered by state leaders on official occasions helps to bring out political leadership (Moderan, 2015, p. 37).

These official announcements by national actors should be followed, however, by subsequent actions, to support national ownership. The guidelines further list options for national actors to demonstrate ownership in relations with external partners and to

295 The terms national ownership, political leadership and political will are used in an interdependent and overlapping manner in the guidance document.

foster buy-in – for example, by making a national request for SSR assistance, allocating funds to SSR, demanding the right to inspect external actors' activities, and coordinating external contributions to SSR. The tool further makes explicit reference to implications of national ownership for external engagements:

> International assistance to SSR must be demand-driven, and the demand must be home-grown. No international actor should therefore take part in the process unless duly invited. National authorities should emphasise this requirement as a fundamental principle for intervention by external actors (Moderan, 2015, p. 44).

According to the guidelines, external actors should not pre-determine the SSR process or work with SSR standard approaches, as this would be averse to ownership. Moreover, external actors should not pressure national authorities to speed up certain processes, such as the national consensus-building phase. External actors should also *not intervene outside the framework of national priorities*, which is in line with the Paris Declaration's call for 'aligning to national priorities'. External actors should further *manage projects through national structures*, in line with 'using country systems' (Moderan, 2015, p. 45).

Tool 4 on Effective Management of External Support to SSR is also addressed at countries aiming to implement SSR, and it reinforces the core messages on ownership and leadership of Tool 1. Tool 4 applies a similar terminology but additionally refers to national commitment. The tool begins with the following statement:

> Most critically, the value of partnerships that aim at filling the resource gaps of a national SSR process should be balanced with the necessity of maintaining national ownership and leadership of the reform process, regardless of the origins of complementary funds supporting it. Indeed, it is common for sovereign states to express reservations against opening up to international partnerships that bear the risk of resulting in external interference in core domestic affairs, such as defence and security-related issues (Yankey-Wayne, 2015, p. 1).

Regarding external actors, the guidelines underline that it would be legitimate for external actors to focus on their priority areas of intervention and insist on working according to their values. While not directly approving of conditionality, it suggests to national actors to not categorically reject all forms of conditions put forward by external actors, for the sake of trust-building (Yankey-Wayne, 2015, p. 12). Instead, conditionality should run both ways. Involving a broad constituency of national stakeholders would contribute to ownership and establish a 'more legitimate and credible framework for external partners to buy into' (Yankey-Wayne, 2015, p. 14).

While providing guidance to national actors on how to demonstrate ownership and political will and how to work with external partners according to these principles, both tools describe ownership according to the norms and standards of the international SSR framework. This makes the guidelines not only instructive for managing partner relations. They also constitute a proactive push for international SSR norms and standards. For example, gender as an integral aspect of an SSR process is strongly emphasised in the document:

> The readiness of external partners to support gender equality initiatives in SSR is an underexploited opportunity for West African governments. Government institutions engaged in SSR programming should proactively seize this opportunity, by not only using gender terminology as a set of buzzwords but actually taking the lead in addressing grassroots and concrete expressions of gender inequality as a challenge for good security governance. Gender equality must neither remain nor continue to be considered an agenda pushed by outsiders (Yankey-Wayne, 2015, p. 57).

The above quote illustrates the fine line between incentivising domestic actors for principles of the international SSR framework and retaining a categorical stance on the primacy of 'home grown' interests at the same time, which is a recurring phenomenon in DCAF's SSR policy and has implications for the organisation's understanding of what constitutes 'genuine' ownership. It calls for nationals to take the initiative in engaging with gender issues, presupposing that national intention to work on gender issues exists. At the same time, it hints that expressions of interest in working on gender issues are likely to be met with external support, incentivising national actors to declare an interest in working on such issues. While emphasising the requirement of a national expression of interest for external actors to engage with the issue, the question as to what might have led to a national expression of interest, in the first place, is left open.

Regarding external actors, Tool 4 also identifies several implications for ownership-adherence, which are in line with the implications put forward in Tool 1. For example, it emphasises *national demand* as the most important benchmark for the relevance of external assistance (Yankey-Wayne, 2015, p. 25). External actors should complement national efforts and avoid delivering assistance in a supply-driven or overly technical way. If national structures are too weak to allow for partners' alignment, external actors should not establish their own implementation systems but strengthen the national systems as they stand. This is another strong call for 'using country systems'.

In addition to these guidance tools, DCAF and ISAAT engage in a debate on ownership in SSR in various forums. Several statements of DCAF staff on ownership illustrate the importance attached to the concept. Their statements provide insight into different organisational perspectives on operationalising ownership in SSR programming. While

the tools discussed above are directed toward a West African audience (hence, they are pertinent for Mali), other statements are directed at the wider SSR community. Therefore, these statements have been discussed here, as well. They suggest that, while ownership is equally emphasised, the messaging is slightly altered when addressing other stakeholders. They illustrate that ownership for SSR is perceived as *a condition that can be actively brought about* as a *common effort by external and domestic actors* – for example, through capacity-building measures. External actors are more strongly encouraged to incentivise national actors' willingness to engage in SSR. According to DCAF's 'SSR in Practice' forum:

> [It] is a well-established fact that regular political level discussions and engagement lead to greater ownership of the reform process. At the same time, ensuring the much needed local ownership can be a daunting task and a challenge for donor countries and institutions. Even if there is interest, it is often not easy to maximise local ownership when there is little or no organizational capacity to execute and bring the necessary players to the table (DCAF, 2017c).

Ornella Moderan states that a perceived lack of political will and leadership is indeed a 'lack of awareness of key decision-makers of their roles as drivers of the SSR process' (Moderan, 2015, p. 9). This is in line with Thammy Evans' perspective, who states that the absence of political will cannot be an excuse for the failure of SSR programmes to advance. She further states that 'there is always political will, it is much more a matter of where that political will is directed, and how it can be incentivized to enable effective and accountable reform of the security sector' (Evans, 2016). According to Evans, different approaches could be considered for building and incentivising political will, among them identifying entry points, 'where there is a balance of willingness and traction, options for conditionality (i.e. ensure that train and equip or infrastructure programme [sic!] don't end up a freebie without bridging to accountability), and makes [sic!] good use of potential capacity' (Evans, 2016). Moreover, the capacity of partner institutions should be strengthened 'at a pace that builds on their strengths' (Evans, 2016).

Finally, DCAF policy states that external actors should assume a non-intrusive, supportive role in SSR processes and that they should take a more active role in *fostering* and *incentivising* ownership and political will for SSR. External actors should further foster *technical capacity* for SSR. *Participatory approaches* are recommended to encourage the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders and to invest in local and regional networks. Working with local partners in report-drafting and debriefing sessions, where reports are presented to national stakeholders, would be examples of entry points to ownership. Moreover, 'locally appropriate terminology can be useful to

re-frame JSSR programmes and eschews suggestions of foreign interference allowing local stakeholders to take the lead' (DCAF, 2017c).

In the overall picture, it can be concluded that according to DCAF policy, national demand is a key manifestation of ownership and makes adherence mandatory for external support. Clear rules for using country systems and complying with national demands are set out for external actors. Relevant is also the *distinction between ownership, leadership and political will*, while those concepts are not clearly differentiated in the referenced documents. When it comes to how to effectuate ownership, it is presented as a status that can be achieved through common efforts of national and external actors. Domestic actors can utilise the concept to acquire external support. External actors are requested to foster and incentivise the determination and willingness of national actors to assume ownership for SSR and to build capacity for SSR in national partners. Conditionality could be applied cautiously, within the boundaries of international norms and standards. Potential areas of tension are identified between principles of the international SSR framework and the emphasis on national actors' primacy in determining reform agendas, as demonstrated with the gender example above. This kind of tension has thus far played an important role in sensemaking in the MINUSMA case and will be taken up again further below.

5.4.3 Institutional demands

Mandate and scope for decision-making

DCAF's official work on SSR in Mali started in 2014, after the Malian president stated his objective to reform the army and after SSR had become a part of the peace process. In comparison with other external actors working on SSR in Mali, DCAF has a narrow mandate. DCAF supports the Malian government with technical advice to establish an inclusive SSR process, reinforced by robust national institutions (DCAF, 2017b). DCAF focuses on governance and external control of the security sector, gender, and knowledge transfer on SSR, including the training of trainers (ToT). The organisation works with a double-track approach, focussing on fostering a political climate conducive to implementing SSR and enhancing the knowledge of key stakeholders. To this end, it combines strategic advice to high-level national authorities with planning and operational support to selected security institutions, as well as capacity-building measures for oversight institutions and civil society actors. Gender is a core pillar of DCAF's mission in Mali. Therefore, it is always considered a priority.[296]

[296] Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

DCAF has organised its support in Mali into one programme, which comprises one team supporting the national-level authorities, one team supporting civil society actors, one team supporting the parliament, and one team working with the MSCP. Trainings for international partners are conducted by ISAAT. To national partners, the DCAF engagement is communicated as one holistic undertaking.[297]

When it comes to individual SSR programmes, a lot of decision-making power sits with the DCAF project coordinators, who are mostly based in HQ and travel to the field on a regular basis, to conduct project-related activities. This is also the case in Mali. According to a DCAF respondent, there was not much interference from donors in DCAF's work in Mali, as opposed to other country contexts.[298] Hence, programme managers were reported to have wide discretion to make decisions on engagement within the organisational mandate.

Organisational culture

DCAF perceives its organisational role in a way that is distinct from other external actors engaged in SSR in Mali. According to DCAF's self-representation, it is an organisation which promotes SSR without its own agenda.[299] In contrast to other external actors, DCAF sees itself more as an *intermediary between the domestic and the international side* of the SSR process, with a close relationship to the domestic side. It does not necessarily see itself as being affiliated with the overall internationally driven peacebuilding endeavour in Mali. Respondents expressed that some other external actors would see national actors as instruments in implementing their projects, thereby binding the time of counterparts who were already stretched in terms of resources, while DCAF had the advantage of being able to provide high quality inputs and engage in the long term, with a non-intrusive approach. These convictions point to a distinct role that DCAF sees itself in within the international community.

While conducting regular field trips and maintaining a network of contacts and partners at the field level, the organisation remains HQ-centred. DCAF does not have a permanent office in Bamako. In Bamako, DCAF had a local consultant and interlocutor on the ground, but the person did not speak in an official function on behalf of DCAF. Mobile staff members from HQ flew in for field missions on a regular basis.[300] Staff members pointed out that they would meet representatives of other international organisations working on SSR when they were in on a field mission.[301] However, since

297 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
298 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
299 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
300 Background talk with two DCAF officers, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
301 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

they were not present in Bamako with a permanent basis, participation in coordination meetings was usually not possible. Hence, ties are not as close with other external actors at the field level. Therefore, organisational culture rather pertains to the organisation's HQ in Geneva. Experts occasionally teamed up for missions to Bamako, but their temporary interaction at the field level did not suggest an organisational culture that significantly diverged from HQ level.

Regarding the organisational culture, it is also important to point out that the ISAAT division has a specific status within DCAF. ISAAT works with the DCAF member states. It has its own governing structure and its own budget. While ISAAT also draws on DCAF resources – for example, research and admin – it enjoys a certain autonomy within DCAF'.[302] According to a respondent working in the ISAAT division, ISAAT's work was very different from DCAF's role. A respondent from the regional department also underlined that ISAAT had completely different tasks.[303] According to the respondent, one might think that DCAF and ISAAT were two different organisations with different mandates. Respondents also made references to occasional competency conflicts between DCAF and ISAAT.[304] These frictions are an argument in favour of paying specific attention to the role of ISAAT in the Mali context.

Public expectations and resources

DCAF has a strong standing in the international SSR community as the core expert organisation on SSR. Due to its strong commitment to SSR principles and ownership, a respondent suggested that DCAF had been well-received in Mali, because of its high level of expertise and because national actors saw it as a neutral organisation without a hidden, political agenda.[305] Accordingly, demonstrating ownership adherence was crucial for the organisational reputation.

In Mali, funding for DCAF activities was mainly provided by the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. Because these countries have a strong focus on gender, the gender issue is also reflected in DCAF's Mali programming.[306] Furthermore, other external actors provided co-funding for activities and requested DCAF to provide technical support and conduct trainings for them.[307] In December 2016, a DCAF respondent confirmed that DCAF had conducted gender-related activities in Mali in 2015 and that they had intended to follow up on these activities with the gendarmerie but that the Netherlands

302 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
303 Stronger integration of DCAF and ISAAT through a restructuring process was planned for 2017.
304 Background talk with diplomat, 04 Feb 2016, Bamako.
305 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
306 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
307 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

had reduced their funding in 2016 and conducted a review on the impact of their money. Therefore, gender-related activities were put on hold.[308] The same respondent pointed out that in order to resume gender-related activities in 2017, the organisation would have to find funding. This illustrates that DCAF depends on donor demands, which was also confirmed by a DCAF consultant.[309] Responding to donor demands was of specific importance to ISAAT, which received its budget directly from the DCAF member states. ISAAT becomes active when the member states want it to become active.[310] This was mentioned as an issue if donors would only commit to short-term funding, while DCAF advocates for continuity and long-term commitments.

Operating conditions

DCAF staff from HQ remained within Bamako. Activities in the different regions could only be performed together with local partner organisations. Therefore, security developments affected the organisation indirectly in the case that the priorities of partner institutions in the security sector changed, but they did not affect the organisation's operations directly. Accordingly, the deterioration of the security situation perceived by other external actors was not mentioned as a factor affecting DCAF's work. It was also stated that the SSR process in more general terms could still proceed, even if the Peace Agreement would fail, if a minimum level of stability and security would still be in place.[311] This suggests that DCAF's work was *less dependent on progress with the Peace Agreement* than was the case for MINUSMA, for example. DCAF only worked with the government and civil society actors and not with the other signatory parties of the Peace Agreement. The groups in the North would only become partners when they joined the CNRSS.[312] Accordingly, the Anefis process was not referenced by respondents as impacting on DCAF's work.

Due to its emphasis on close interactions with Malian counterparts, institutional developments in the security sector were identified as having a rather strong impact on DCAF's work. Most consultations in-country focussed on national actors, with the government being DCAF's primary partner. According to a DCAF consultant, DCAF had 'the ear of quite a few people'.[313] Also, respondents from other organisations noted that due to extensive sensitisation exercises, DCAF officers had a strong influence on

308 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
309 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
310 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
311 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
312 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
313 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

key actors of the SSR process.[314] However, frequent turnover of staff in the partner ministries was mentioned as hampering trust-building.[315]

5.4.4 Organisational sensemaking

DCAF respondents shared perceptions of MINUSMA and EU respondents to a certain extent, for example regarding the slowness of the SSR and the delays with the establishment of the national SSR structures. The political situation in Mali was not perceived as conducive and sufficiently stable for SSR. The absence/non-functionality of the national SSR structures was experienced as the most challenging constraint for the organisation's work at the field level. However, while perceptions of the SSR process being slow and hampered were shared, the reasons provided for this and the consequences for organisational action were quite different in the case of DCAF.

DCAF staff members were more of a *collective sensemaking community* than in other cases, also because interactions with other external actors at the field level were more limited than in the case of larger, more heterogeneous organisations. Due to its self-representation as an intermediary and the absence of a field office in Bamako, sensemaking of developments and events was more organisationally distinct. Similar interpretations and wordings which had been encountered in the aftermath of incidents like the Radisson Blu attacks for the case of MINUSMA and EUCAP, which suggested shared sensemaking within the 'Bamako bubble', were not encountered for the case of DCAF. The sensemaking within DCAF was more homogenous than in the cases of MINUSMA and the EU. Interpretive patterns and a shared understanding of the situation in Mali were more clearly identifiable in DCAF interviews. These were also more based on authorised policy than in other cases. The organisation was more policy-centred, and sensemaking revolved around the principles of SSR. The ownership concept played a major role in staff members' interpretive processes. DCAF respondents engaged with the ownership concept and its application in the Malian context. This made it possible to also engage with respondents in more conceptual debates about ownership characteristics and its application. The closeness between authorised policy and respondents' sensemaking in different interview situations suggests that ownership policy was not primarily referred to in a legitimatory function. In this case, ownership can be considered a resource in the sense of an *organisational script for sensemaking* of the organisation's own role and raison d'être.

314 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.
315 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

5.4.5 Organisational sensemaking of ownership

There is still not a critical mass who understands

While DCAF respondents noted the slowness of the SSR process, this was not seen as equivalent to an absence of ownership for SSR. Ownership for SSR was perceived as a characteristic of domestic actors that could be fostered by providing information about SSR and building the capacity of domestic actors over time. A lack of noticeable ownership would then mean that domestic actors did not have *sufficient knowledge about SSR* or that they did not have the *capacity to assume ownership*. This perception is close to organisational policy. A DCAF respondent narrated how the president had ensured that DCAF was requested to support a national reflection process on how to reform the security sector. This had occurred despite the fact that at this stage, domestic actors had probably not known exactly what SSR entailed.[316] At an early stage of the cooperation, a lack of engagement of domestic actors did not necessarily mean that there was a lack of political will but rather a lack of information on what SSR is about, as well as a lack of knowledge as to what could be done. This lack of knowledge was also referred to by two other DCAF consultants. One consultant, when discussing SSR in Mali, suggested that SSR was a new concept in the Malian context and that SSR was not well understood in Mali.[317] The other consultant indicated that the knowledge of SSR in Mali was limited: 'There is still not a critical mass of Malians who understand what SSR means.'[318]

Along similar lines, a lack of noticeable ownership was also explained as stemming from a potential *lack of capacity* in national institutions. A respondent elaborated on support provided to national security institutions in the field of gender equality. For example, templates for the integration of gender in activities had been provided.[319] However, not much had happened lately regarding gender activities. Therefore, the respondent felt that it now remained to be seen if the national partner institution indeed had the capacity to work with DCAF and to take up gender as an issue. This perception further substantiates the perspective that ownership is a question of knowledge and capacity.

In response to these information and capacity deficits, DCAF provided technical support and knowledge transfer. A lack of political would need to be addressed with more *awareness raising and training*. At later project stages, when there had been enough

316 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
317 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
318 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
319 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

exposure, ownership of national actors was expected to become more visible. National actors were expected to take over the process, with DCAF providing backstopping if required.[320] According to this thinking, ownership may only become visible over time. This enabled the organisation to perform activities, even though the domestic leadership that would be required according to policy was not noticeable yet.

We are pushing for national ownership

The need *to actively foster ownership* for the SSR process as part of the advisory work was emphasised by DCAF respondents on several occasions. When DCAF started operations in Mali, it engaged in regular trust-building activities with national key stakeholders and provided technical advisory services, such as tools, concepts and advice. With the establishment of the reflection group on SSR (GPRSS), DCAF engaged with the group in knowledge transfer on SSR and supported the body in identifying problems and needs for change. According to a DCAF respondent, DCAF lobbied in high-level meetings for national SSR structures: 'We are pushing for national ownership.'[321] A donor representative confirmed that DCAF had been pushing for a nationally led SSR process in Mali.[322] DCAF also advised the GPRSS on drafting a national SSR framework. Being involved in the early stages of an SSR process was felt to be important. As one respondent put it: 'If you write the document [SSR framework] already that gives you some power, it is your angle for later.'[323] A DCAF consultant confirmed that DCAF had been involved in the SSR process since the beginning: 'DCAF is selling the idea.'[324]

DCAF also supported national buy-in and sensitisation of the Malian population, to foster ownership of the SSR process among the wider population. This included assisting the government in communicating what they intended to do and making the people *understand their roles in the process*.[325] This was done on a central but also a regional level, to foster a bottom-up process. *Buy-in* meant explaining which decisions have been taken and for what reasons. Respondents emphasised that in the end, the SSR was the reform of the Malians.[326] Moreover, DCAF worked with civil society organisations (CSOs), in order to *create a critical mass of voices advocating for SSR* at the political level.

320 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
321 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
322 Background talk with diplomat, 04 Feb 2016, Bamako.
323 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
324 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
325 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
326 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

Not the money should be on the table first

The priorities of the partner side were given strong consideration by DCAF respondents. When discussing ownership in SSR, a respondent explained that it was part of the organisational self-conception that DCAF only gets involved in SSR processes at the request of the government.[327] According to the respondent, there had to be an official demand and a declaration of political will. It was further explained that ownership was not about external activities being taken over by national actors but about national actors initiating reform processes. This statement is situated very close to organisational policy. Along these lines, the respondent criticised the notion of ownership as 'appropriation': 'Not the money should be on the table first but the demands of the government.'[328]

Another DCAF respondent suggested that Malian actors would need *incentives* to work on specific issues. For example, with regard to border management, national actors did not see how activities in this field would be beneficial to them, as they benefitted more from remittances and free passage at borders: 'They will do it if they think that it is for them and not for others.'[329] Therefore, border management would not work in Mali.

One step removed

Most DCAF respondents differentiated between the international community and DCAF's role in Mali. As one respondent put it, DCAF was 'one step removed'.[330] Critiques of practices of the international community were not perceived to be applicable to DCAF, as DCAF was perceived as having a distinct role.

This distinct self-perception had implications for organisational practices deemed appropriate by respondents. DCAF's policy as well as practitioners' discourse emphasise the importance of political engagements. External support should not be limited to technical assistance but should be backed by political support. In Mali, respondents also suggested that political resources were required to improve the political situation and to make it more conducive for SSR. Respondents criticised that political dialogue did not take place in Mali, because international partners did not bring it to the table on their own initiative. DCAF was perceived to be not well-positioned to engage politically. Instead, DCAF saw itself in a role of providing neutral, strategic support and technical expertise to national counterparts. According to respondents, other donors in Mali had

327 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
328 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
329 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
330 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

a mandate to engage in a political dialogue – for example, the European Union and bilateral partners.[331] DCAF was presented as supporting other actors to push for change but could not be everywhere at once. While it is in line with DCAF's policy to limit the organisation's role to technical inputs, these statements point to inherent frictions when it comes to the political engagement of external actors and their requirement, according to ownership policy, to align with national priorities and to not push for their own priorities. While asking for more political engagement for SSR, DCAF respondents also criticised external actors in Mali for engaging (politically) according to their own agendas and their own security interests and not according to the roles they should play according to SSR policy.

Sometimes political will does not go forward with the same pace as courage

Another organisation-specific interpretation that was observed pertained to thinking of ownership not as a binary category (present/absent) but as a condition that could be *located on different levels* and change over time. According to one DCAF HQ respondent, the ownership concept was *not bounded*. It had a multi-faceted nature. According to the respondent, ownership rarely existed on all levels. One could spend the span of an entire project just talking to all actors involved. In the Malian case, the respondent felt that ownership might be limited to a too-small number of stakeholders within government institutions and civil society – those who had been previously exposed to SSR awareness-raising, coaching and mentoring. This again underlines the perception that ownership can be fostered through capacity-building and knowledge transfer.

It was not only the concept itself that was perceived as multi-layered. Ownership was also put in relation to and qualified in view of concepts with very similar notions. A DCAF respondent stated that it was important to distinguish between *political will and courage*. In Mali there 'has been political will but sometimes will does not go forward with the same pace as courage'.[332] This was also perceived as a reason for the slowness of the SSR process: Inaction could also be a sign of the imbalances of political will and courage. Regarding DCAF's work, all theories were seen as being on the table at this point, but now a theory of change and an action plan for SSR were required to proceed. Therefore, DCAF had to work on ownership on two different levels, namely communication and implementation.[333]

These statements point to a *conceptual compartmentalisation*. Ownership could be in place on different levels and with different stakeholder groups. On some levels, it might

331 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
332 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
333 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

already be in an emerging stage, increasing with exposure to knowledge transfer but not yet visible. Therefore, ownership could be fostered on different levels and with a step-by-step *sequencing* approach.

DCAF has the ear of quite a few people but also has to keep its donors happy

The perceived absence of domestic commitment to SSR gradually emerged as more of an obstacle towards the second half of the research period. Although a lack of tangible ownership was perceived as not much of an issue in the beginning, it appeared to become more of an issue over time, as the envisaged commitment from domestic stakeholders did not emerge. In 2016, respondents appeared more concerned about the failure of the equation of more knowledge and capacity with increased domestic ownership to materialise. A DCAF consultant also stated that the government had not indicated priorities regarding SSR. For now, DCAF had implemented trainings, workshops and sensitisation for roles and responsibilities. However, it was unclear how to proceed.[334] The non-establishment of national SSR structures, especially, was pointed out as a dilemma for DCAF activities, in view of other demands directed at the organisation. National SSR structures were seen as crucial to continuing operations: Key SSR processes were expected to only start when members of the CNRSS had taken office.[335] Another DCAF consultant explained that up to that point, activities were undertaken that aimed at the sensitisation of national decision-makers and knowledge transfer, but now would be the time that substantial steps on the Malian side would be needed in order for DCAF's engagement to continue, specifically with regard to the establishment of national SSR structures. Without these steps from the Malian side, the role of DCAF from here on would be uncertain. He further stated that 'DCAF has the ear of quite a few people but also has to keep its donors happy.'[336] This suggests that also DCAF was faced with *external demands for showing results*.

That does not help us if we have timelines

Dilemmas arising from the prolonged delay of the establishment of the national SSR structures mainly pertained to the organisational resource base. According to a DCAF respondent, DCAF's theory of change meant a change of mindset for national stakeholders. The emergence of local ownership over time was at the heart of the organisation's engagement philosophy. It would be DCAF's task to influence state actors in the direction of this change. However, 'that does not help us when we have timelines. If they are not ready, they are not ready. Then they are not part of the design process.

334 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
335 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
336 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

We do not have set rules for dealing with that. We have red lines, for example when we are uncomfortable with something, but we also have necessities.'[337] Red lines could mean not enough time being allocated to the performance of a specific request or acting against national interests.

Dilemmas related to the dependence on external resources were found to be particularly pertinent for the case of the ISAAT division. Member states could call on the division throughout the year and if their demands were acceptable, they were implemented. However, this *dependence on donor priorities* was not only found to be the case for ISAAT but also for DCAF's work in Mali, in more general terms. A DCAF respondent stated that the gender study conducted in Mali in 2015 was implemented by request of the Dutch. The impulse to conduct this exercise had not come from the national institutions, but DCAF had at least ensured that the process of conducting the exercise involved national counterparts.[338] Hence, despite the high relevance of ownership, DCAF also had to account for other demands when it came to deciding on organisational actions.

It is about things they want and things we want

The need to balance different demands was also encountered in other discussions with DCAF respondents. A respondent at HQ level expressed, on a more general note, that the nature of ownership and the question as to at which levels it was genuinely present were difficult to figure out during the limited lifespan of a project. Domestic stakeholders also regularly expressed conflicting interests.[339] While some actors within institutions were champions of change, others benefitted from the status quo within the organisation. There were also conflicting interests with other institutions and communities. Moreover, domestic ministries gave in to donor-funded priorities and paid lip service in response to incentives, such as cars and equipment: 'They want stupid things all the time. […] It is about what they want and things we want, like governance.'[340] Therefore, the respondent felt that is was not enough if domestic actors only expressed their demands. Ownership understood in the broadest sense could be understood as the requirement for external actors to follow national priorities regardless. The respondent noted, however, that not all requests from domestic partners should be responded to by external actors. He suggested that ownership in practice was foremost about *coordination*. National actors should not be able to turn to the next donor to ask for equipment. Requests for 'goodies' needed to be bounced off and channelled

337 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
338 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
339 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
340 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

through donor coordination. Taking the Malian case as an example, the respondent noted that national authorities had expressed their determination to respond to short-term security challenges but did not appear willing to allocate resources to long-term reform processes. However, DCAF supported certain processes, like inclusive planning, not responding indifferently to all items from a national wish list. This suggests that DCAF, despite its neutral stance, has its own agenda in terms of what kind of support it will provide as the 'keeper' of the international SSR framework.

Mali is becoming a laboratory for SSR support

In January 2016, the implications of the peace process for the SSR process were described as still unknown. Up to that point, no national SSR structures had been established. Due to the interlinkages between the SSR and the peace process, one process lagging would in turn affect the other process.[341] Preparatory activities had been conducted, but according to respondents, the Malian government did not have the means to act on these activities. Being preoccupied with security threats, particularly terrorism, the president was perceived as not having maintained his public commitment to SSR. Accordingly, the government did not express its priorities and did not proceed with the establishment of national SSR structures. This was experienced as a major dilemma, calling the future direction of DCAF's engagement into question. According to a DCAF consultant, there was currently no leadership, no courage and no commitment on the side of the Malian government. Therefore, for the international community, Mali was becoming 'a laboratory for SSR support'.[342]

The need of DCAF for the SSR process to unfold within the foreseen SSR structures was also identified in the *cautious stance of DCAF respondents on domestic agendas*, which were perceived to potentially hamper the holistic SSR process. For example, the LOPM was not seen as part of the SSR process. According to a DCAF respondent, the LOPM was solely meant for the fight against terrorism. It did not address governance issues. The population was not consulted or informed of its implications. A similar stance was taken towards the MSCP's envisaged LPS.[343] Moreover, respondents felt that the government did not have the means to implement the LOPM and the LPS, despite having approved the plans. Also, a DCAF consultant pointed out that the government should have *one* strategy. The LOPM was perceived as something different and as constituting a challenge to the holistic reform process.[344]

341 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
342 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
343 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
344 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.

Furthermore, the competitive relationship between the MSCP and the MoD was experienced as a major obstacle to the reform process in terms of *particularistic domestic agency*.[345] The MoD and the MSCP were perceived as moving forward with their own conceptions for reform. Moreover, conflicts between the MSCP and the Ministry of Decentralisation were noted.[346] The MoD minister was perceived as mostly concerned with the fight in the North and less with reforms. DCAF's abilities to engage with the MoD were reportedly limited.[347] Additionally, respondents expressed reservations about the plans of external actors to establish coordination forums on security aspects outside of the envisaged CNRSS[348].

We take political will for granted

Statements gradually became more uncertain about the potential of SSR in Mali. Mali was described as a difficult context for SSR. Much of the effort was described as blocked at the time and SSR was perceived to be trapped in a political stalemate. No one really knew what SSR was and would become in Mali; the concept had not been tailored to the context. However, there was so much money involved that it was difficult for a government like that of Mali to resist. According to the opinion of this respondent, SSR might just not be the right concept for Mali.[349]

The perception that there was currently no genuine high-level commitment to SSR was confirmed in HQ discussions.[350] According to one respondent, this was a problem, and it would thus be important to proceed very cautiously concerning SSR. High-level commitment for the SSR process was a working assumption that had been taken for granted.[351] While good ideas, laws and regulations were in place, what was still missing was implementation. Another respondent raised the question whether genuine political will for SSR in Mali existed, or if it was just pushed for by international actors: 'We take political will for granted. When the president says something, we all come running, but maybe they have other agendas they do not share information on.'[352] Here, the respondent's statement points to *uncertainty about potential particularistic agency of national stakeholders* – a perception that had also been widespread among MINUSMA and EU respondents. The DCAF respondent stated that the organisation

345 Interview with DCAF consultant, 02 Feb 2016, Bamako.
346 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
347 Background talk with diplomat, 04 Feb 2016, Bamako; background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
348 For example, in the case of the coordination forum envisaged by the US embassy (see: next chapter, United States Security Cooperation).
349 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
350 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
351 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
352 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

was currently asking itself who the right people were to work with, who had the power for political decision-making, how could blockages be addressed, and how could the MoD be involved in SSR. This illustrates that DCAF was in a state of *uncertainty about appropriate organisational action*, in the case that the assumption of high-level political commitment for SSR was no longer maintainable. During the last visit, respondents indicated that no further training or advice could be envisaged without a national vision for SSR taking shape and without the CNRSS becoming operational.

5.4.6 Organisational practices and ownership adherence

Cooperation with domestic partners

In 2015/2016, in anticipation of the larger SSR process to unfold, DCAF engaged in several preparatory activities. With access to defence actors being limited, DCAF opted for supporting a sectorial level process led by the MSCP. As relationships with ministerial counterparts in the MSCP were described as close and cooperative by different sides, these activities were characterised by *seeking compromise* (close alignment with counterparts, support in setting up country systems for SSR while also bringing in one's own SSR agenda) but with elements of *avoidance*, as the cooperation was limited to one of the two ministries envisaged to have important roles in the SSR process.

Towards the end of the research period, the stalemate of the SSR process and the absence of national SSR structures were found to be more of a challenge for DCAF, as the mission's mandate was limited to SSR support. The narrow mandate limited options for shifting to other fields of engagement, such as, for example, in the case of MINUSMA. *Dilemmas* arose from the perception that previous sensitisation and awareness-raising activities had not arrived at the envisaged results in terms of the emergence of ownership. Few activities were implemented in 2016 which aimed at *prolonging the presence on the ground*, while national SSR structures were not in place, and mostly pertained to a stock-taking of the security sector (for example, support to a self-assessment of parliamentary oversight capacity, a survey on the integration of gender within the security sector in Mali, the mapping of the private sector industry in West Africa and of SSR stakeholders in Mali). Moreover, the organisation was mostly engaged in a *self-reflection process* on how to proceed. These modes of engagement are assessed as being characterised by *compromise* and *avoidance* but with a stronger tendency towards avoidance, as they were partly internal and required *less direct cooperation* with national counterparts.

Despite the important role of civil society in DCAF SSR policy, few activities with civil society actors were conducted during the research period.[353] This might be due to the fact that several activities with civil society actors had been implemented in the years prior to the research period (DCAF, 2016a, p. 36). During the research period, DCAF conducted trainings on gender and SSR and facilitated workshops for women civil-society organisations, to connect women from the North of Mali with Bamako. Moreover, DCAF supported CSOs in the development of advocacy strategies. One respondent described technical assistance and the mobilisation of civil society actors to advocate for SSR vis-à-vis state actors as one measure that could be *implemented in the meantime*, while the SSR process was stalled. DCAF would need to adjust and work with civil society, while the political process did not proceed, to enable them to push for SSR.[354] Hence, this practice could be seen as a form of *adherence* to ownership policy (civil-society actors as owners) but also as a form of *avoidance* of the more contested political SSR forum.

Prioritisation of tasks

Major prioritisation processes did not take place during the research period, due to the ongoing review. The following is not a conclusive list of all DCAF activities during the time under research but an overview of activities that respondents pointed out as important regarding their own work at the field level and regarding the organisation's approach to SSR in Mali.

Support to the establishment of Malian SSR structures

Reinforcing existing national SSR structures was at the heart of DCAF's intervention approach. However, for activities to unfold, a national strategy was required, which did not materialise during the research period. Therefore, DCAF's activities were limited in this field. DCAF engaged in providing sensitisation and advocacy for SSR, also at the governmental level, as well as advisory services to the already established secretariat of the CNRSS on how to plan for the time when the council would become operational. Given that DCAF waited for national priorities to be declared and country systems to emerge, this is assessed as a form of *adherence* to ownership policy.

Advisory support to the MSCP

DCAF opted for a sectoral approach, supporting reform initiatives of the MSCP, without an overall SSR process gaining traction. DCAF worked with the MSCP and the

353 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
354 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

gendarmerie on internal accountability mechanisms. In 2016, a compilation of national laws pertaining to the security sector was undertaken for the MSCP, including recommendations for review. Moreover, an assessment of internal accountability had been conducted and an action plan for the work on internal control with the MSCP had been developed. However, measures regarding oversight were pictured as being in an 'embryonic stage'.[355] This is assessed as a form of *compromise* with a tendency towards *avoidance*, because activities were drawn up with the partner side but did not, in part, involve a strong continuous engagement with this partner side (compilation of documents).

Mapping of external SSR support

ISAAT conducted a mapping of donor support in Mali (and Nigeria) in 2016, focussing on the criminal justice chain. This exercise aimed at further building German SSR capacity (DCAF, 2017d). The mapping was undertaken by ISAAT. The field mission involved consultations with:

> […] donors, implementing partners of SSR projects and international NGOs, as well as national institutions of the security and justice sector, including relevant ministries. The subsequent reports will then be shared by the joint Germany-ISAAT team across the international community active in the countries through an in-situ workshop that could also include discussions on how to further consolidate international support (DCAF, 2017d).

The mapping exercise was initiated in coordination with the German Federal Foreign Office. While national SSR stakeholders were consulted during the mapping exercise, they were neither the initiating actor behind it nor the primary audience of the final report. Since the mapping primarily focussed on donor activities and not on needs (national priorities) and was not conducted primarily in cooperation with Malian partners (country systems), this activity was characterised by *avoidance*.

Review of DCAF engagement

While not being an SSR intervention priority, one of the major activities of DCAF in 2016 was a review of DCAF's engagement conducted with Dutch support, which aimed at examining lessons from the first project phase and coming to recommendations on how to proceed going forward. The assessment was conducted by an external consultant with DCAF field support. While the research period in country was short (one week) and domestic interview partners of the consultant had been pre-identified by DCAF, the assessment was mostly undertaken independently by the consultant. It entailed a high number of interviews with Malian SSR stakeholders. The review was

355 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

expected to provide crucial insights into results of DCAF's engagement today and recommendations on how to engage in the future, under the assumption that high-level political commitment for holistic SSR cannot be taken for granted. This is assessed as an activity aiming at *compromise,* as it aimed at bringing DCAF's current approach and partner expectations closer to each other.

Non-engagement

Additionally, fields in which the organisation decided to *not* engage in are conclusive regarding the direction DCAF's engagement could take in-country. In January 2016, a DCAF respondent stated that border management would not be taken up by DCAF, despite requests from other external actors to engage in this process, given that there was no national ownership for activities in the field of border management. If external actors' activities in this field were conducted for the sake of internal security, ownership might exist, but not if activities had the aim of solving Europe's migration crisis.[356] In December 2016, the respondent reemphasised that DCAF would stay out of activities aiming at counter-terrorism and border management. This is assessed as a form of *adherence*, because Malian priorities were stated as being fundamental to determining adequate organisational action.

5.4.7 Summary of case findings

In Mali, DCAF had a limited, technical SSR mandate. DCAF staff saw themselves in a different role than other external actors; connections with counterparts were perceived to be closer and DCAF did not have a particularistic organisational agenda to pursue. DCAF respondents presented a strong organisational commitment to adhering to ownership policy. Discussions of ownership were more focussed on the subject than in other cases, as organisational members engaged more explicitly with its conceptual underpinnings. DCAF put strong emphasis on *national demand* as a manifestation of ownership and on its guiding character for external engagements. Ownership was closest to representing an *organisational script*, which 'supplies knowledge about expected sequences of events and then guides one's behaviour so that it is appropriate to the given situation' (Gioia/Sims, 1986, p. 10). While validating the precedence of ownership in SSR processes in the sense of adhering to Malian priorities and strengthening country systems, DCAF respondents also took an *active stance on fostering the commitment* of Malian key decision-makers to the international SSR framework. Ownership was presented as a characteristic of domestic actors that could be actively fostered by external actors. *Knowledge transfer* and *capacity-building* would put domestic actors

[356] Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.

in a position to assume ownership over time. This was enabled by *conceptual distinctions between ownership, political leadership, commitment, political will* and *courage*. This distinction enabled DCAF respondents to doubt the presence of political will and to criticise a perceived lack of commitment in their counterparts, while not questioning the prerogative and guiding character of ownership of the overall SSR process.

The high relevance of ownership in SSR guidance appeared to be conducive for concept adherence in this case. DCAF was found to be a case in which Mosse's suggestion of donors being 'disciplined by their own discourse' is pertinent (Mosse, 2004, p. 649). However, the level of doubt about the domestic commitment to SSR rose during the research period. Domestic actors were perceived as continuing to prioritise short-term, tangible results in the security sector over long-term governance reforms. DCAF's dependence on donor funding was perceived to be a cause of conflict, if donors prioritised activities that were not prioritised by Malian counterparts. This was especially the case for respondents from the ISAAT division, who also pointed to the importance of their clients' priorities. Moreover, DCAF, as an organisation strongly committed to the international SSR framework, depended on the establishment of national SSR structures, to proceed with SSR activities in Mali. DCAF also had limited options for engagement with domestic agency beyond the internationally codified SSR framework.

In terms of organisational practices, DCAF was found to opt for practices that resembled *adherence* but also accommodated other organisational demands, which suggests a strategy aimed at *compromise*. Tendencies of *avoidance* were partly encountered at the field level, as well. These allowed the organisation to remain operational also when the SSR process did not advance. Options for avoidance were limited, however, because the mandate was limited to specific fields of engagement. In 2016, DCAF conducted a review of its engagement, which was expected to lead to a programmatic re-orientation in view of limited operational leeway to support a stalled process. As an institution not mandated to engage politically, DCAF was perceived to have reached an operational impasse.

Hence, it is concluded for the DCAF case that even if ownership adherence is a strong organisational demand, full adherence is not a viable option in terms of organisational responses, as it means risking organisational gridlock – in this case, organisational inaction would even be preceded by coherent sensemaking. This explains organisational tendencies to also apply compromise and avoidance tactics, in order to respond to other demands and to remain operational, ensuring organisational survival.

5.5 United States (US) Security Cooperation[357]

The US Government (USG) is the largest bilateral actor in the field of security cooperation, in terms of funding. The US-Malian security cooperation dates back well before the introduction of the SSR concept and the 2012 crisis. The history of the US-Malian security cooperation is briefly discussed, because it provides important insights into the current thinking of respondents on their engagement in Mali.

In view of the distinct character of the nature of US-Malian cooperation, the extent to which the cooperation effort is part of the Malian SSR process must be discussed. SSR policy seems to be only partly relevant for this form of cooperation. Nevertheless, the close interaction of the US respondents with Malian counterparts from the security sector and the strong security interests of the USG in the region make it a relevant case for discussing sensemaking of ownership in security-sector-focussed cooperation projects. This analysis is focussed on the activities of the US embassy in the field of security cooperation and not on USAID, because the embassy's activities were more closely linked to the Malian security sector, while USAID focussed on the justice sector. Still, USAID respondents' statements have been partially integrated if they provided insights into processes such as the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), which are also relevant for the field of security cooperation.

It must be noted that the US Security Cooperation is the case with the most limited access to empirical sources substantiating the analysis. Therefore, the analysis must be understood as a snapshot in time, based on perceptions of a limited number of key respondents with certain areas of responsibilities within the portfolio of the US embassy. Deductions drawn from respondents' statements regarding organisational sensemaking are based more on a personal assessment of the researcher than in the cases with more options for conducting complementary interviews and background discussions. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted point to pertinent sensemaking processes that make the US Security Cooperation a relevant case for comparison. During the period of research, four interviews with five respondents were conducted in Bamako. Three of these interviews were in-depth, with one interview conducted with two respondents lasting three hours. Participation in a workshop on military justice in November 2016 in Bamako furthermore provided the opportunity to conduct background discussions with workshop participants from the US and Malian side. Additionally, project documents on the US Foreign Military Assistance and the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) Agreement in Mali were made available. These documents

[357] The terms Security Assistance and Security Cooperation are not consistently distinguished in pertinent policy documents. Here, Security Cooperation is chosen, because it is more frequently used in recent publications.

also provide insights into intervention rationales and priorities of engagement. As these documents were drafted with the strong involvement of key respondents, they are also considered in the sensemaking analysis.

Secondary literature on the USG's development and security cooperation in Africa is available, though few publications pertain to the current engagement in Mali. Against this backdrop, this chapter largely draws on the perspectives shared by key respondents. Due to the wide range for the decision-making of key actors at the field level, discussed in the section on results is the extent to which this case qualifies as an instance of collective sensemaking or whether it should rather be understood as a case of individual sensemaking with a strong impact on organisational processes.

5.5.1 Institutional overview

The USG established diplomatic relations with Mali after the country's independence in 1960. Bilateral development cooperation and military assistance increased from the nineties onward, when the country underwent a transition towards a democratic system. Today, US foreign assistance in Mali is administered through a whole-of-government approach, involving different US departments and agencies. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Department of State finance programmes in Mali. At the field level, the US Embassy in Bamako is the main institution in charge of project design and in supporting implementation. Programmes in the field of Security Cooperation are handled by the Defence Attaché Office (USDAO).

Foreign Assistance in 2014-2017 ranged between 120 and 130 million USD per fiscal year. The largest amounts of funds were spent on health and economic development. In 2016, 3% of the planned funding (4.28 million USD) was allocated to 'Peace and Security' (Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation, Stabilisation Operations and SSR, Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime) and 5% (6.1 million USD) to 'Democracy, Human Rights and Governance' (Good Governance, Civil Society, Political Competition and Consensus-Building, Rule of Law and Human Rights) (ForeignAssistance.gov, 2017). Mali was a 'Relief to Development Transition' (R2DT) focus country and an important partner of the USG in the fight against terrorism in the region. The US-Malian cooperation was based on a number of security-relevant agreements, among them the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) (U.S. Embassy in Mali, 2016a; USAID, 2014, p. 9).

Coming to the US Security Cooperation in Mali, the 2012 crisis along with security developments in the wider region were described as the starting point for a

paradigmatic shift of US engagement in Mali. Previously, support had mostly been provided in the form of train and equip programmes. In retrospect, these programmes were criticised for being ineffective and for potentially indirectly helping rebel groups (Whitehouse, 2014). For example, Captain Amadou Sanogo, who had led the coup overthrowing the government in Bamako, was a Malian officer who had previously been included in US military training abroad. According to US Africa Command (AFRICOM) commander Carter F. Ham, previous training endeavours had focussed on tactical and technical matters, less on rule of law and military ethos. He stated that this approach had potentially led to unintended consequences in the security sector (AFRICOM, 2013). In the aftermath of the crisis, debates were initiated on how to reorganise US Security Cooperation in the region of AFRICOM's responsibility. SSR was identified as one major field of engagement in which cooperation with the Malian Armed Forces would be resumed (Whitehouse, 2014). This paradigmatic shift is further discussed in the section on cooperation with domestic partners.

5.5.2 Policy framework: National ownership in SSR

US policy and guidance on SSR is scarcer than in the other cases. The responsibility for SSR lies with different agencies and different offices within the agencies. Historically, the Department of State holds the primary responsibility over US foreign assistance and security assistance. However, since 11 September, the Department of Defence (DoD) has had a more important role in Security Assistance programming, most prominently in Afghanistan and Iraq (Cohen/Gingerich, 2009, p. 9). Most relevant for assessing the status of ownership in the US policy framework is an SSR policy guidance paper from 2009, the US Security Governance Initiative (SGI), which was launched by Barack Obama in 2014 and aims to strengthen partner countries' security sector institutions, military doctrine on SSR support, and the US National Security Strategy. These are discussed in relation to each other in the following.

The most pertinent reference document for US SSR support is a guidance note for SSR practitioners, which was jointly issued by USAID, the DoD and the US Department of State in 2009. The SSR guidance paper underlines that US support should be delivered according to a holistic approach, drawing on a range of diplomatic, development and defence assets to support SSR in partner nations. Hence, SSR support requires the support of other federal departments and agencies with a role in SSR endeavours in foreign partner nations. The document aims to reflect international best practices in the field of SSR support and points out that USAID has endorsed the OECD's publication on SSR and Governance: Policy and Good Practice – on behalf of the US Govern-

ment[358] (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, this OECD publication, which strongly emphasises the importance of ownership for SSR, can at least formally serve as a benchmark also for US Security Cooperation. Moreover, ownership is also mentioned in the SSR guidance document itself. The number one guiding principle identified for SSR practitioners is the provision of support to host nation ownership:

> The principles, policies, laws, and structures that form an SSR program must be informed by the host nation's history, culture, legal framework, and institutions. As a result, the needs, priorities, and circumstances driving SSR will differ substantially from one country to another. Accounting for the basic security concerns of the host nation population for attaining buy-in is essential to the success of SSR programs. To ensure the sustainability of reforms, assistance should be designed to meet the needs of the host nation population and to support host nation actors, processes, and priorities (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2009, p. 5).

However, apart from this section, the terms *partnership, cooperation* and *capacity-building* are used more often in the document than the term ownership. Moreover, the definition of ownership in the SSR guidance document is less comprehensive than in other cases that put more emphasis on the dominant role of national actors in the design and implementation of SSR endeavours. The definition provided in this guidance document focuses on ownership as a feature serving the *effectiveness* and *sustainability of intervention*, characterised by national *buy-in*. This is also reflected in the stronger emphasis placed on US interests in the context of SSR interventions.

According to the guidance note, SSR serves *both US and partner nation priorities*. With regard to US interests, the document emphasises the relevance of the US National Security Strategy from 2006. Meanwhile, this has been replaced with the National Security Strategy 2015, which is more pertinent for the period of research. The National Security Strategy of 2015 identifies protecting the American people as the greatest responsibility of the USG (The White House, 2015, p. 7). Moreover, underwriting international rule-based security is identified as a key responsibility:

> […] because it serves our interests, upholds our commitments to allies and partners, and addresses threats that are truly global. […] In doing so, we will prioritize collective action to meet the persistent threat posed by terrorism today, especially from al-Qa'ida, ISIL, and their affiliates. In addition to acting decisively to defeat direct threats, we will focus on building the capacity of others to prevent the causes and consequences of conflict to

[358] This OECD publication is already discussed in more detail in the chapter on the EU, as the EU had previously also referred to this OECD publication in its SSR framework.

> include countering extreme and dangerous ideologies (The White House, 2015, p. 7).

Hence, the National Security Strategy puts a *strong emphasis on security issues*. Mali is pointed out as an example of a deepened security partnership with African countries and institutions. The guidance note also states that the USG prefers to 'partner with those fragile states that have a genuine political commitment to establishing legitimate governance and providing for their people' (The White House, 2015, p. 10). Another important policy framework for US Security Cooperation is the SGI (see above), in which a similar terminology is applied as in the National Security Strategy. Mali is one of six African countries that participate in the SGI. The SGI also focuses on partner countries that demonstrate the political will and leadership to undertake reforms aimed toward improved security sector governance (The White House, 2014). The terminology of ownership is not applied. Rather, the SGI aims at partnerships and results, based on shared priorities (The White House, 2014). However, according to the SGI Review 2016, partner priorities were at the heart of the cooperation:

> SGI targets assistance to focus on partner priorities. Through consultations and a joint analysis of the current environment, the United States and partner governments identify areas where U.S. assistance can have the most impact, and where it can complement and leverage other efforts. SGI aims to garner high-level interest, attention, and commitment to undertake difficult and sensitive reforms. […] A serious and demonstrated commitment is required by partner countries and U.S. Government interagency partners for SGI to succeed (U.S. Department of State, 2017, p. 2/4).

In addition to these more development-oriented policy documents, military doctrine is also a relevant source of policy guidance. In military doctrine, ownership is also referenced as a guiding principle. The handbook for military support to RoL and SSR from 2009[359], which is directed at US military commanders and planners, underlines that national ownership and leadership are essential for effective SSR processes:

> Providers should avoid creating an SSR process made up of stand-alone projects with little or no coordination or consideration of larger national frameworks. Strategic coordination is time consuming and hindered by differences in political and bureaucratic agendas, but it is essential for a successful reform process (United States Joint Forces Command, 2011, p. 63).

According to the manual, training partners in strategic planning and policy-making is the most effective way to ensure that over time, the host nation takes ownership of SSR. The manual further references the OECD handbook on SSR on several occa-

[359] The handbook is a non-authoritative supplement to the stability operations doctrine discussed in the following, as well.

sions. The commitment to support host nation ownership is stated in a similar way in the manual on stability operations, another element of US military doctrine, which was published in 2008. The manual emphasises:

> Ultimate responsibility for SSR rests with the host nation. Commanders clearly must respect the views and interpretations of the host nation regarding what it perceives the security architecture should look like. The host nation bases its perception on threats and its broader security needs. SSR programs nest within existing host-nation social, political, and economic institutions and structures. Commitment and constructive engagement by the host nation's leaders ensures that institutions, capabilities, and forces developed under SSR will be enduring, appropriate to the needs of the host nation, and trusted by the host nation government and its population (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2008, p. 54).

In the overall picture, most pertinent US policy documents on SSR endorse the formal validity of the international SSR framework, which puts strong emphasis on ownership. As the USG seeks to support SSR according to a whole-of-government approach, this also applies to the US Security Cooperation. However, other guiding documents frame the modes of cooperation in a way that differs from the established ownership narrative. Interventions in the context of the SGI aim at results in prioritised areas of cooperation. In these documents, the relationship between US and partner priorities remains ambivalent. On the one hand, partner priorities are pointed out as the focus of the cooperation. On the other hand, special emphasis is placed on US security interests in the context of the security partnership. This is where the USG and the EU's contemporary policy-making show similarities, with EU policy also moving towards a stronger focus on strategic interests. Ownership features as a means to the effectiveness and sustainability of external intervention. However, besides suggesting that ownership develops through exposure to US military training, limited guidance is provided on how to operationalise ownership.

5.5.3 Institutional demands

Mandate and scope for decision-making

As a permanent diplomatic representation, the US embassy did not have a specialised SSR mandate. SSR support was part of its activities, amongst other programmes. As discussed above, directives on SSR programming came from different departments. Regarding foreign policy and national security considerations, USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) states:

> The Mission's portfolio will contribute to US foreign policy and human development priorities, as well as USAID *Forward* goals of host-country

> systems, evaluation, innovation, and financial inclusion. The CDCS will also directly support a multitude of key Washington foreign policy and assistance priorities […] This CDCS is supports [sic!] GOM [Government of Mali] priorities and takes into account various overarching documents and strategies that guide the international community, including the USG and USAID, at the macro as well as sector levels (USAID, 2014, p. 10f).

This mission statement enables a range of potential activities in the field of SSR, which suggests a rather *wide leeway for decision-making at the field level*, which was confirmed by respondents. Funds for Security Cooperation were administered by a small team within the embassy. Staff members, especially if directly working on mentoring and training the ministerial counterparts, suggested that they had a lot of discretion to make choices how to cooperate.[360] Also, the country strategy was reported as being mostly drawn up by the embassy team, to be validated by the Department of State. When advisors from HQ came in, they were prepared by the country team. Continuous interactions with the counterparts were handled by the country team. As one respondent put it, 'if Washington says go that way, we go that way, but we are still in the middle of a dialogue'.[361]

However, guidelines from HQ were also pointed out as having directive character for field level programming.[362] Throughout the research period, respondents indicated that while they had a lot of leverage on the ground, they were also being pushed from HQ in Washington. HQ relations existed with various departments. The DoD focussed on reform processes of the armed forces across the operational spectrum, while USAID focussed on capacity-building for security and justice governance (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2009, p. 3).

In the aftermath of the 2012 crisis, a paradigmatic shift in US Security Cooperation in the region was announced, which also impacted the work of the US embassy in Mali. The framework for US Foreign Military Assistance to Mali outlines the new paradigm of cooperation:

> Rather than focusing on unit-level train and equip missions, Security Cooperation targets institution and regime building efforts at the Ministry of Defense level. […] The preventive hypothesis of Security Cooperation (SC) is the concept that U.S. investment in foreign militaries contributes to their capacity to act as a stabilizing force in their respective states. Recent findings (RAND 2014) indicate that the correlation between SC activities and the reduction of instability is dependent upon: 1) the strength of partner states' existing institutions and 2) the ability to uniformly apply services throughout

360 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
361 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
362 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

> their territory. In concert with RAND findings, SC activity in the U.S. Africa Command area of engagement has already shifted in light of the same revelation. Rather than emphasizing the primacy of specific military competencies and capabilities in fragile states, SC targets the defense institution itself in order to support the preventive hypothesis (Office of Security Cooperation, 2015, p. 1).

This shift from train and equip of special forces to addressing the institutional backing of the security forces was confirmed by respondents at the field level.[363] In this respect, the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) was mentioned as an important new policy document for the work of the US embassy in Mali. According to USAID respondents, the SGI was the main driver of US programmes in Africa. While previously many projects had focussed on train and equip, 'now it is all about governance'.[364] However, other respondents indicated that SGI was a funding source with a certain philosophy behind it, while the tools applied on the ground remained the same. Indeed, respondents pointed out that discussions with counterparts on programming were already ongoing at the time when the SGI initiative was launched.[365] This indicates a rather limited impact of the SGI on the US Security Cooperation, though it can be assumed that additional funds were made available in the context of the focus on rule of law.

Coming to the HQ structure, the Department of State carries the leading responsibility in SSR. It is in charge of country policies and programmatic oversight. Furthermore, AFRICOM as the unified military command for Africa created by the DoD in 2007, is in charge of coordinating all US military and security activities in Africa. AFRICOM is a regional combatant command of the US Armed Forces. It oversees military relations with African states and is therefore also relevant for Security Cooperation. AFRICOM is located in Stuttgart, Germany, thus regionally disconnected from the field. AFRICOM staff comes to Mali on a regular basis – for example, to conduct assessments or specialised trainings. However, respondents in Mali described AFRICOM as a centralised structure, which was mostly important for operations and 'big moving plans'.[366] AFRICOM's relevance for daily interactions with counterparts and programming was described as limited, though they would validate the country coordination plan. This also suggests that the *sensemaking of individual staff members* at the field level is important for determining organisational practices in day-to-day programme implementation.

Organisational culture

363 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
364 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.
365 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
366 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

Within the embassy, different sections worked on the embassy's portfolio (consular services, management section, political & economic section, public affairs, regional security, Defence Attaché Office–DAO). The DAO handled a variety of programmes in the field of Security Cooperation. Being a rather small office, few key actors oversaw a broad portfolio, in coordination with HQ. Members of the DAO, encountered during the research period, had a military background and were deployed to Bamako for a limited period before re-assuming positions in the US military. This was also the case for the embedded US military advisors. This suggests that hierarchies and working cultures were influenced by standard operating procedures in the US military.

Moreover, the security protocol of the embassy was comparatively strict. Personnel was discouraged from holding meetings in public places. Hence, interviews were conducted in the embassy and in the residencies of embassy staff. According to respondents, this was also the case for most meetings with counterparts, who were received by embassy staff within the embassy or in private places. Hence, interactions of staff with the organisational environment were more limited than in other cases, and personal security played an important role in perceptions of the environment. At the same time, respondents had access to high-level Malian counterparts, not least because of frequent high-level visits of military commanders from the U.S., who came to Bamako to support counterpart interactions. This suggests *close but also limited counterpart interactions*.

When it came to interactions with other external actors, respondents indicated that *information-sharing* between different external actors involved in the security and justice sectors was *limited*.[367] Between EUTM and the US embassy, there was very limited direct cooperation, while information was shared on an occasional basis. According to the respondents, there were many overlaps between external actors' activities – for example, regarding assessments undertaken. Every actor coming in brought in their own strategies and preconditions and had to respond to the expectations of their own governments.

EUTM was found to be an important reference to emphasise differences in intervention approaches.[368] While respondents expressed appreciation for certain EUTM initiatives (HRM/logistics information systems), EUTM's approach of engagement was also criticised – for example, for applying standardised procedures based on European templates and therefore not being sufficiently able to respond to conditions on the ground.

367 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.

368 On the other hand, respondents from EUTM indicated that they had limited information on what the US was planning and that there was a need for coordination on how to work in a complementary manner. Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.

A respondent expressed the opinion that EUTM had established a 'European factory' but was not working on replacing it with a 'Malian factory'.[369] Moreover, EUTM was pictured as limited in terms of whom the mission could talk to, and EUTM deployment periods were described as too short for developing a broader picture of the long-term implications of external engagement. According to US respondents, both MINUSMA and EUTM staff often came in for only few months and tried to make something happen during this time.[370] Respondents were also critical of other external actors' approaches to build up and finance single ministries, without paying due attention to sustainability. According to their perceptions, this caused further fragmentation. After the cessation of support, these ministries were seen as likely to collapse.[371]

The embassy's staff in charge of Security Cooperation was seen as having the advantage of being on the ground for several years, hence learning from engagements, coming to realistic assessments, and being able to monitor the consequences of initiatives over time. This suggests that the organisation's self-perception was partly based on *boundaries* and *comparative advantages* compared to other external actors' engagements in the field.

Resources and public expectations

Funds for Security Cooperation were mostly provided by the Department of State, with limited funding also granted by the DoD. However, a respondent reported that the budget for Mali was small. For example, the budget for Security Cooperation in Niger was much bigger, even though Niger had a much smaller army.[372] This corresponds with the figures on different funding streams provided above.

During the research period, the SGI was introduced as an additional funding source for governance-related activities. However, respondents pointed out that governance was difficult to measure. Hence, they felt that the need for funding for governance activities was difficult to communicate to the US Congress. Therefore, the governance budget had been cut in half after the coup in 2012, while other budgets had been increased. According to respondents, the embassy handled more funds than USAID at the field level and was therefore more influential in decision-making on the portfolio.[373] Conflicts between the different objectives of different funding lines were not reported.

369 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
370 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
371 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
372 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
373 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.

In the international community, the USG was mostly seen as an external actor with substantial financial means, but also with strong bilateral interests driving the security cooperation in Mali. International respondents underlined that the USG had quite the means to train people on American strategic thinking. However, what was missing was both a clear strategy and alignment to the SSR process.[374]

Operating conditions

The security situation played an important role in respondents' perceptions of their working environment. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Radisson Blu and the Ouagadougou attacks, several restaurants in Bamako were declared off-limits for US embassy personnel. Moreover, an authorised departure was initiated, meaning that family members could leave the country if they wished to. A respondent expressed the opinion that in case of a severe attack, the security forces would not be able to handle the situation.[375] Hence, embassy respondents' radius for interactions with counterparts and other external actors was more limited than in the other cases.

While the security situation in Bamako had a rather strong impact on US embassy personnel, the security situation in the North was described as having little impact on the US Security Cooperation planning. When discussing the envisaged 'Command & Control' (C2) project (see below), a respondent expressed the view that 'to some degree, I try to ignore the North. For this to work, we have to ignore it to a certain degree.'[376] Otherwise, one would have to tell the counterparts that at the moment, it would not be possible to just increase the army's capacity to fight in the North, as the project mostly focussed on institutional reform.

In July 2015, the Peace Accord was also not perceived as influencing the current thinking in terms of security cooperation. The USG could not commit to anything less strategic than what was already in the planning stage.[377] Along similar lines, the LOPM was not seen as a guiding document. It had been drafted without US involvement and decided upon before the C2 programme had been introduced. Also, it did not contain a military justice component, on which the US embassy intended to focus. However, during the first visit, the respondent also expressed the opinion that the law could still be changed. During later visits, opportunities to influence the LOPM and its implementation were perceived as more limited.

374 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
375 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.
376 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
377 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.

Furthermore, respondents expressed on occasions that they had limited access to information on certain domestic processes in the context of SSR. For example, one respondent expressed difficulties in July 2015 with getting a hold of the 'centre of gravity' of the MoD.[378] Also, at this point, the respondent did not have access to the operational budgets of the MoD. On another occasion, respondents indicated that the MSCP recruited many new personnel for no apparent reason.[379]

5.5.4 Organisational sensemaking

Sensemaking processes differed from the other cases from several perspectives. First, individual sensemakers had a comparatively strong role in interpretive processes that resulted in organisational responses, because they oversaw major steps of project design and implementation of a wide Security Cooperation portfolio. This is relevant for the comparison with EUTM – in both cases, organisational culture was found to be military-dominated and organisational processes were standardised. However, in the case of the US Security Cooperation, this military culture did not hinder individual sensemaking processes that had an impact on organisational practices.

Furthermore, due to the spatial seclusion of key respondents, sensemaking seemed to be an internal, partly individual process, rather than a standardised organisational process. Interactions with other external actors and integration into the international SSR setup were described as limited.[380] Due to a strict security protocol, social contacts were also more limited than in other cases. Sensemaking processes were informed by embedded US advisors, who had regular access to counterparts.

Moreover, respondents were more outspoken about the underlying rationales of engagement and the primacy of strategic interests. As such, sensemaking was found to be more coherent than, for example, in the case of MINUSMA. Less attention was paid to meeting different demands, because the ownership paradigm was perceived less as an organisational demand, and legitimation for engagement was derived from other sources (for example, meeting the expectations of Congress/the American people). The term 'ownership' itself played a minor role in sensemaking processes, in comparison with interviews with respondents from other organisations. Nevertheless, the formal validity of the concept was acknowledged, and respondents emphasises the relevance of ownership as *buy-in*. Therefore, while ownership was less of an issue as a policy concept that was perceived as demanding certain forms of organisational adherence, observed sensemaking processes provided pertinent insights into respond-

378 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
379 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
380 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.

ents' perceptions of adequate interactions with domestic counterparts and adequate organisational responses to arising demands.

5.5.5 Organisational sensemaking of ownership

Assets appear as free to them

Overall, respondents shared the assessment that there was limited domestic traction for a holistic SSR process in Mali with respondents of other organisations. However, the reasons behind this assessment differed from the perspectives of other respondents. While in other cases the lack of capacity and knowledge about SSR (DCAF) or divergent political agendas (MINUSMA) were seen as the reason behind a lack of commitment, in this case, the fact that previous support of the US embassy in the field of security cooperation had mostly taken the form of train and equip measures was identified as a major reason for a perceived absence of domestic counterparts' willingness to engage in reform efforts. According to a respondent, the Malian counterparts had not been required to make commitments in return. This procedure had led to a mindset on the side of the Malian counterparts, according to which cooperation was understood as 'charity'. According to the respondent, the counterparts 'remember the times when money and tactical train and equip missions were just thrown at them. There was no need and time to think. Assets appear as free to them, as they have always been taken care of by others.'[381] The respondent further explained that when Malians were asked what they required, they brought up equipment that would enable them to achieve military wins. On another occasion, respondents suggested that ownership was not a topic of discourse in the Malian context, because partners were used to everything being provided for them since the nineties.[382] This indicates that ownership was perceived as connected to the *commitment* of domestic counterparts.

They sit back and do nothing, because things will be done for them

On other occasions, ownership was more associated with *control* over processes. The inaction of counterparts was not perceived as a lack of capacity or of knowledge about SSR but indeed rather as an expression of domestic agency and a *strategic approach to maximise benefits*. The respondent suggested that domestic counterparts approached external actors with tactical objectives. For example, they would be aware that MINUSMA and EUTM staff were often only in-country a few months, and they were required to deliver something during this time span. Therefore, 'they sit back and

381 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
382 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

do nothing, because things will be done for them'.[383] Along similar lines, the respondent expressed, during a later visit, that SSR appeared to be impossible in Mali, as the process had become a subject of political manoeuvring. According to the respondent, the beneficiaries had realised that they were in the driving seat and now used the situation to provide for their people. Hence, the formal process was experienced as very slow, and 'it all became politics'.[384] This underlines a tactical perspective on domestic actors' agency in the SSR process.

On another occasion, the respondent expressed the perception that the ministers had been told by the government that they had to find external sources for their ministry's activities, as funds would no longer come from the government. Therefore, the ministers began to function as 'fundraisers'.[385] This was also perceived to be the reason for why the LOPM was not made publicly accessible, as there was no advantage in making available funds public. Along similar lines, respondents suggested that the Malian side re-wrote strategies and policies to meet the demands of other external actors, not on their own initiative.[386] These statements suggest that the fact that domestic actors did not make major contributions to advance the SSR process was perceived as a form of exerting control and of following one's own agendas, differing from the international SSR framework. However, as the USG's approach to security cooperation was less connected to the SSR process, respondents took more of an observer role in these developments and felt less affected in terms of organisational action.

They need something like this here

During the first visit, a 'Command & Control' (C2)[387] project was in the planning stage, which aimed at encompassing the focus on rule of law decided upon in Washington as well as the Malians' interests in improved military capacity (for times of conflict). A thorough command and control structure had not yet been implemented in Mali, but, from the perspective of the respondent, was required. The envisaged structure was seen as a mechanism for change in terms of training and doctrines, comprising a Joint Doctrine Center and a Training Directorate: 'They need something like this here.'[388] According to the respondent, it was important that the structures proposed were not only adopted but also staffed, so that the counterparts would work for themselves, without others working for them. As the activity aimed at meeting Washington's focus on rule of law and the expressed interest of the Malian counterparts in better military

383 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
384 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
385 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
386 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
387 Intervention strategy concept provided by US Embassy Staff in July 2015.
388 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

capacity, the focus area was the *lowest common denominator* in terms of identifying a field of engagement that met the interest of both sides.

We know their problems

On another occasion, a respondent applied the metaphor of operating a machine for the operations and functions of an army. The respondent considered it important to not only work on the engine and a few parts but to support the whole system. As opposed to respondents from MINUSMA and EUCAP, the respondent did not express uncertainty about potential agency of the domestic actors involved and the most appropriate intervention approach. According to the respondent, the problems were clear. Nonetheless, buy-in of the counterparts was important: 'We know their problems. We know how to do it, but they have to tell us what they want and what they need from us to make that happen.'[389] This statement suggests an ambivalent stance towards implications of the ownership concept. While the way forward was perceived to be clear based on a personal assessment ('they need something like this here'), the respondent still suggested that the initiative and the request for support should be expressed by the Malian counterparts.

At the same time, the respondent indicated limited faith in the capability of the Malian side to take over activities. For example, regarding ToT-approaches (the training of trainers), the respondent expressed doubts about their viability. The respondent illustrated these doubts with a short scenario in which someone would teach a younger son how to drive. Then, the respondent raised the rhetorical question if one should, in the next step, ask the son to teach his younger brother to drive.[390] Many activities required years of training, and follow-up processes needed to be organised, which made short-term ToT-approaches, in which responsibilities are to be handed over immediately, rather problematic in the eyes of the respondent. From this perspective, the possibility of assuming ownership is based on a certain *capacity that allows an actor to take up certain responsibilities*. The Malian counterparts were not perceived as having this capacity yet.

What is the political will and is it worth our investment?

Regarding other institutional demands, *directives from Washington* were mentioned on several occasions as impacting field-level programming. However, these directives were not perceived as a source of conflict. Apart from meeting directives, the embassy also had to ask the Department of State for funds for activities. Sometimes, funds

389 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako
390 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako

needed to be pulled in, while other funding sources were perceived as more 'aggressive', pushing themselves on the country, as they wanted to be involved in said country.[391] In such a way, respondents felt that *funds could become political*. However, the country strategy in Mali was rather broad, so different programmes such as the SGI fit into the portfolio. In the end, respondents underlined that it was important to *identify and measure the political will* in the country. The embassy had to assess 'what is the political will, is it worth our investment or is it time for a strategic pause?'[392] This statement underlines, again, the leeway provided the country team in taking decisions on organisational practices as well as the perception that engagements should be based on the lowest common denominator for both sides.

It takes quite some selling

In this regard, a respondent explained that the C2 project was first presented in the U.S. and then, as a next step, in Mali, to achieve buy-in. The messages had to be adjusted, according to the audience. In this function, the respondent presented himself as a salesperson of the planned project: 'I am a salesperson on both sides […] It is required to sell the Americans and the Malians on this. It takes quite some selling.'[393]

However, while it was emphasised that the interests of both sides were relevant for determining priorities, these statements also suggest that the project proposal first had to fit US priorities, then the partner was approached about if and how to implement the project in the Malian context – thus *US priorities taking precedent over domestic demands*.

I give them homework

When ownership emerged as a topic in discussions, respondents engaged with the concept and its implications for organisational practices. Ownership was described as becoming apparent if Malians came back to the external actor with an *active share,* such as a mission statement. According to a respondent, Malians said 'yes' to everything, but with an active share, statements took on a certain *meaningful commitment*. The respondent asked the counterparts to provide active shares ('I give them homework').[394] It was a good sign if they came back and proposed activities and parts of the train & doctrine framework. Indeed, Malian counterparts were perceived as sometimes running ahead of the respondent and preparing more than what had been agreed. On the other hand, the boundaries set by USG priorities for which activities could be

391 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
392 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
393 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
394 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

implemented were also underlined. On another occasion, a respondent stated that 'we got the leadership to ask for things that are not guns. […] It took me six months before they realised that we will not finance that'.[395]

This statement again illustrates the active role that the respondent attributed to the US embassy as an external actor, in terms of achieving an overlap in what the USG intended to provide and what the Malian side expressed as priorities. The respondent perceived an *active stance on shaping the requests* made by the Malian counterparts as an adequate procedure to facilitate a congruency of demands. This need for an active role was made even more explicit when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of short- and longer-term engagements of external actors. According to the respondent, a long-term perspective should not be an excuse for remaining passive. In the eyes of the respondent, this was the problem with the prevalent narrative of 'in the end, it is up the Malians. It is their process. Then what are we doing here?'[396] This perspective reveals similarities with the EU's stance in the debate on migration management with the Malian counterparts, in which EU interests were also perceived as a justification for pursuing strategic interests in the context of SSR.

Capacity to absorb more advanced activities

A section of the Foreign Military Assistance framework for Mali exemplarily highlights that support was not provided in any field of request and that proposals were conditioned in terms of future support. For example, regarding the focus on rule of law and the C2 project, the framework states:

> Mechanisms of diffusing laws are the target. The mechanisms and conduits of sophisticated C2 that link the MoD/GS [General Staff] to the individual soldier must be ultimate focus of DIB [Defence Institution Building] activity in Mali. Once such mechanisms take hold, the MoD/GS may increasingly be regarded as a center of gravity for future DIB activities. […] Based on recent studies and assessments, OCS Bamako believes that emphasizing Command and Control (Rule of Law) through these mechanisms will significantly ameliorate the MOD's institutional endowment and capacity to absorb more advanced DIB activities such as logistical systems and aircraft sustainment (Office of Security Cooperation, 2015, p. 2f).

This section underlines strategic interests of the USG as a driving force behind project rationales, for which 'absorption capacity' would need to be put in place. Here, ownership is linked to capacities.

395 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
396 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

You can see a lot in what people ask for

On several occasions, respondents underlined that they only worked with *like-minded actors*. A respondent suggested that in order to identify counterparts to work with, it was important to *see what people asked for* – to search for *cues of ownership.* It made a difference if people asked for training, infrastructure and equipment or if they asked for advice, education and exposure visits. This was part of the tasks of the embassy team on the ground – to figure out whom to work with. The respondent underlined that no support was provided to people who only asked for infrastructure. People needed to be curious and needed to want to see things: 'If they are not like that, I do not work with them at all.'[397] This suggests an *exclusive approach of selecting counterparts* based on how they fit with other institutional demands, like strategic directives from Washington.

We think they think like us

Respondents suggested that there was a small number of people who wanted to do things which would be in the interest of the American state. Those people needed to be in the driving seat. Cooperation could happen with a selected group of people but eventually, a critical mass of people with whom to work was required. In the end, activities should not look like an American initiative. It was important to build up political capital for champions and their initiatives and to 'put the spotlight on them, for a while'.[398] However, this would not work if people were not already in the right place: 'These people are our best advantage. We think they think like us, they are progressive, ambitious and in a position of power.'[399]

We have to pick our horse

Actors who thought in line with USG interests were chosen for activities aiming at empowerment. As one respondent put it: 'We have to pick our horse.'[400] *Closer alignment in terms of thinking* was achieved through military training. Military training was considered key to gaining traction for certain activities. According to respondents, sending people to the US for training and study tours *changed the way they thought*. The rationale behind these initiatives was to put promising candidates into training and into important positions.[401] Respondents explained that the participants were proud to have participated in trainings abroad. Even if trainings were short, certificates were issued,

397 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
398 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
399 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
400 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
401 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.

and participants wore their pins from the training on their uniforms for years. This was assessed to be better than train and equip programmes: 'This is the way forward, I could see. This is the way America thinks we should engage.'[402]

It all started with an offer and a bit of pressure

The active role of the US embassy in steering requests from the partner side was also emphasised regarding the inter-ministerial coordination structure on national security matters that had been proposed to the Malian government by the US side. Respondents indicated that options to support this structure financially had been communicated as a limited time offer, which is a form of *conditionality*. As one respondent put it: 'It all started with an offer of schooling and a bit of pressure.'[403] This *connection to financial/ resource incentives* that was added to some strategic initiatives can be illustrated by a statement issued by the US Embassy in Bamako in the context of the capacity-building project for the special forces: 'To illustrate this new partnership and to magnify its commitment to the Malian Armed Forces, […] the Embassy delivered a batch of 50 bullet-proof vests to Commander Diawara for immediate use by his units' (U.S. Embassy in Mali, 2016b). Against this backdrop, the US approach case can be compared with the EU's approach of incentivising and conditioning support, in view of increased funds from the Emergency Trust Fund.

He was already leaning in this direction

The active stance of the US embassy on incentivising certain priorities manifested on other occasions as well. The commitment to sending Malian participants to long-term courses in the US had been conditioned on the agreement that the participants would work in the structures to be established later. However, US respondents underlined that the process was not only based on financial incentives because the counterparts had expressed their wish to implement similar activities. Despite references to incentives/conditionality, respondents continuously underlined that the US embassy only offered support. According to respondents, the USG's proposal of the inter-ministerial coordination mechanism also had just come at the right time. As one respondent put it, regarding the Malian minister of defence: 'You never know if you convinced someone. I think he was already leaning in this direction.'[404] In the end, the Malians were in the driving seat, and continuity rested with the Malian counterparts. This ambivalence between the means of conditionality and Malian expressions of interest was also found in the Foreign Military Assistance framework for Mali, which dealt with the Foreign

402 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
403 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
404 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

Military Financing (FMFP) programme: 'FMF cases require an official Letter of Request (LOR) from the Minister of Defense. To date, the MoD has been minimally responsive in providing LORs for these initiatives' (Office of Security Cooperation, 2015, p. 8).

This quote from the Foreign Military Assistance framework underlines that on the one hand, *principles of ownership are validated*: The request for support should come from the counterparts, as an expression of domestic priorities. On the other hand, the absence of respective requests was presented as an obstacle, in this case, regarding implementing envisaged initiatives. The MoD being described as 'minimally responsive' suggests that also in this case, an active stance on approaching the Malian counterparts with the objective of prioritising certain activities had been assumed by the DAO, pointing to manipulation tactics.

This well-resourced program must be used as leverage

According to respondents, it was an essential sign of commitment that the Malian side allocate resources to joint activities. Part of the messaging to the counterparts in the context of the inter-ministerial coordination mechanism had therefore been: 'It you do not spend money on it, it is the same as saying you are not interested.'[405] This is important because one policy take on ownership states that ownership is expressed in domestic actors' allocation of resources for processes either alone or as a contribution to external funds, which is also the case here. The need for counterpart commitments as a *precondition for support* was also expressed in the Military Assistance framework in a section describing envisaged activities in the field of seminars. Regarding a planned seminar on the C2 Strategy, the framework reads:

> The Minister of Defense gave his approval of this initiative on 03 May and stated that he would appoint a team to begin laying the groundwork. Such has yet to materialize and DAO/OSC assesses that security sector reform is more or a talking point for the GoM than an actual priority. This initiative remains in development, but the initiation will progress in concert with the GoM political will for reform (Office of Security Cooperation, 2015, p. 5).

This suggests that future support was conditioned on concrete steps to be taken by the Malian side. While ownership is not explicitly mentioned, ownership is closely connected to the idea of 'political will for reform'. However, in this case, it is again more about domestic actors *assuming responsibilities* and *demonstrating commitment*, to be eligible to receive external support. Another section explicitly refers to conditionality in the form of *funding being used as leverage* to lobby for certain priorities. It describes

405 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

activities in the field of humanitarian mine action and counter-improvised explosive devices, which is:

> […] an outlier among Security Cooperation programs in that it is a tactical level train and equip mission. As such, the program will be closely monitored to avoid subsidizing an unsustainable program that fails to build institutional capacity. Conversely, this relatively well-resourced program must be used as leverage to move the MoD closer to initiatives aimed at security sector reform (Office of Security Cooperation, 2015, p. 7).

We can add some sense of urgency

Still, these active stances on the role of the embassy in lobbying and incentivising certain activities were accompanied by references to the active role to be played by the domestic side in initiating joint activities. Regarding the inter-ministerial coordination structure, respondents indicated that a national decree on establishing a similar structure had already been issued in 2004 but that it had never been implemented. This was perceived to be due to the Malian mentality of first wanting to solve their imminent problems and postponing reforms to a later stage. However, according to respondents, the decree was a sign that the Malian side indeed wanted to implement a coordination structure, though forces which wanted things to stay as they were also at play. As an external actor, the US embassy could 'add some sense of urgency to it. […] They have to do the inside baseball.'[406] The DAO could work with 10% of the stakeholders but not with 0%. Hence, also in this case, a certain level of *like-minded, elite ownership* in the sense of the commitment of the partners was perceived as a requirement for the implementation of activities.

This is a 100% Malian initiative

Indeed, while ownership was not a major frame of reference for respondents when discussing adequate organisational actions, the concept was confirmed as relevant when brought up explicitly. Regarding the C2 project, a respondent confirmed that ownership on the Malian side was important for the sustainability of projects. Therefore, counterparts needed to indicate how they wanted their C2 to look, so that it was what they wanted and so that it was their idea, ultimately. According to the respondent, in the end, it would be a 100% Malian initiative.[407] On another occasion, the respondent underlined the importance of 'indigenous growth' and that it was difficult to figure out how to achieve it.

406 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.
407 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

These statements are mentioned in the end of this section because they stand somewhat apart from previous statements and do not fall in line with previous sensemaking statements on the relationship between the USG and Malian counterparts in the design and implementation of projects in the field of security cooperation, which emphasised the *prerogative of US interests*. While other sensemaking processes were coherent in terms of prioritising demands arising from USG interests in determining adequate organisational action, these references to ownership and the need for initiatives being driven by the Malian counterparts point, rather, to frictions between *legitimatory frames the respondents adopted* and project realities in terms of organisational practices. The strong emphasis of the role of domestic counterparts in the design of projects appeared to be triggered by the high normative status of the ownership concept in the international discourse, suggesting that ownership and adherence to its implications was not perceived as irrelevant for organisational legitimacy after all. It also suggests that in this case, the relationship between talk and action could be assessed as *decoupling*, which is further explored in the following section on organisational practices.

5.5.6 Organisational practices

Cooperation with domestic partners

The paradigmatic shift in the aftermath of the 2012 crisis from train and equip of special forces to addressing the institutional backing of the security forces was emphasised as important for determining adequate organisational responses by respondents at the field level.[408] With the SGI, respondents suggested that engagements with partners had moved away from train and equip to institutional reform, direct work with staff in the ministries, and the embedding of experts in the ministries. Moreover, assessments were conducted in a more thorough way.[409] Respondents further underlined that they had close relations with key ministry counterparts, which were also involved in project development phases.[410] During the period of research, at least one new embedded US military advisor joined the SC embassy team. As these advisors arrived with directives from HQ but would also engage closely with ministerial counterparts on their priorities, this approach displays characteristics of *manipulation* and *compromise*.

Despite this conceptual shift towards institutional change and closer direct interactions with counterparts in the ministries, respondents also suggested that in the end, the tools applied in Mali were still the same as before. While a transition in terms of modes

408 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
409 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.
410 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.

of engagement might have been envisaged, most SC projects still consisted of financing activities in-country and trainings abroad.

Training programmes/study tours

Many of the US SC initiatives focussed on sending people to the US for training, to expose them to Western military training and to create good relations and loyalties, which were to improve the USG's access to information.[411] During the research period, various scholarships and other educational and exchange programmes for high-level trainees of the Malian Forces were granted. For example, in June 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the US embassy and the GoM on the Crisis Response Team (CRT) Programme, which covered counter-terrorism, tactical and operational training assistance, as well as delivery of protective equipment and mentoring by US security experts (U.S. Embassy in Mali, 2016c). Another MoU signed in April 2016 concerned a US-Malian partnership programme that aimed at providing training in advanced combat tactics, to be conducted for special forces of the police abroad. This programme was aimed at better responsive management capacity in cases of terrorist threats and other crises. Moreover, a group of Malian trainees were sent to attend a master course in the U.S., to work in the inter-ministerial coordination structure later, which was meant to be established upon their return to Mali (see prioritisation below). As these training approaches involved *close interactions with selected counterparts* but also aimed at actively shaping the demands expressed by the partner side ('change the way they think'), this approach is characterised by *compromise* as well as *manipulation* tactics.

High-level visits

According to respondents, senior military leaders from the US came to Mali for discussions with Malian counterparts on a regular basis.[412] This was pictured as favourable for facilitating access to Malian decision-makers and convincing counterparts of certain projects proposed and was also noticed by respondents from other organisations as an approach that added leverage to US strategic proposals. As with the training programmes and study tours abroad, respondents suggested that high-level visits from the States were appreciated by the counterparts as a sign of appreciation for the cooperation. Additionally, these visits aimed at actively shaping the demands expressed by the partner side. Hence, also this approach is characterised by *compromise* as well as *manipulation* tactics.

411 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
412 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

Prioritisation of tasks

While several activities were implemented in the trajectory of conventional SC engagements, two priorities played a major role in the sensemaking of respondents: (1) An envisaged inter-ministerial coordination structure for national security matters, which had also received much attention from respondents of other organisations (for example MINUSMA, where respondents were concerned about the planned establishment of a parallel institution to the CNRSS) and (2) a new focus on support to rule of law/military justice, which entailed major adjustments in programming and was referenced by respondents as the most important new area of engagement.

SGI Joint Country Action Plan for Mali – Inter-ministerial planning and coordination

The priorities of SC were indicated in the SGI Joint Country Action Plan for Mali, which was endorsed in October 2015. The document identified three focus areas as well as cross-cutting themes. The first focus area in the document is 'Aligning MoD Resources to real operational needs', focussing on strategic planning and financial resource management, human resource management and logistics. Recommendations partly refer to the LOPM and EUTM activities in these fields and suggest additional activities or complementary measures. The section takes up some ideas of the originally proposed C2 project. The second focus area is on 'Police Human Resource Management', pertaining to the recruitment, qualification and career management of police personnel. In this case, it is not clear how the recommendations proposed relate to EUCAP and UNPOL activities, which are not referenced in the document. Focus area three is on 'Positioning the Ministry of Justice to implement Justice Strategy by improving Human Resource Management'. This focus area is not further discussed here, because it pertains more to the mandate of USAID than to SC. However, while the narrative of the Action Plan is focussed on institutional reform processes, many activities that would fall under focus areas one and two were found to be implemented in a 'business as usual' fashion, meaning that implementation was envisaged to be conducted through the established modes of mentoring and training discussed above. These are not considered to be processes of prioritisation. More relevant in terms of prioritisation is the cross-cutting theme of 'inter-ministerial planning and coordination', which was already referenced above. The Country Action Plan reads:

> 'Partnership through SGI provides an opportunity to identify structures and mechanisms, appropriate to the environment in Mali that would best allow the GOM to coordinate and manage security efforts across ministries' (United States Government and the Government of Mali, 2015, p. 12).

The proposed structure aimed at improved coordination capacity on key security issues in a forum separate from the CNRSS, the Council of Ministers meeting and the President's National Security Committee. Like the US National Security Council, this proposed structure was envisaged to advise on national security policy and to translate policy directives into ministry-specific responsibilities and tasks. As discussed above, this structure was envisaged by the US side and proposed to the Malian side, together with incentives to engage in implementation. In June 2016, the embassy announced that it would assist in capacity-building for the new inter-ministerial coordination structure, in the context of the National Security Fellowship (U.S. Embassy in Mali, 2016c). 12 young professionals from the armed forces were sent to the U.S. to obtain a master's degree in National Security Affairs and receive practical training. As this structure was proposed and incentivised by the US side, it points towards a *manipulation* approach.

Rule of law focus/military justice

In order to better reflect governance issues and institutional change as envisaged by the SGI, a rule-of-law focus was established for the SC. According to a respondent, this focus was first agreed upon based on the *lowest common denominator* ('overlap') of interests between the DoD and the Department of State. In the next step, the Malian side was approached to ascertain where there would be overlaps with Malian interests to identify fields of shared interests in which SC could be implemented. The Malian interest (MoD/GS) was identified as increasing military capacity for wartime.[413] Hence, fields where US and Malian priorities overlapped were then reflected in the SGI Joint Country Action Plan. This procedure of prioritisation is characterised by elements of *manipulation.* First, agreement on priorities was reached within the external setup; partners were then identified based on who expressed interest in this field of activity.

At the same time, field-level programming within the focus area was found to be rather flexible. While, during the first visit, the C2 project was in the planning stage, the C2 focus had been mostly abandoned for the sake of a new activity that was presented as an 'offshoot' of the originally planned project: a military justice project, which mostly consisted of one embedded US advisor and related activities. In November 2016, a three-day workshop on military justice was conducted at the Military Justice Directorate in Bamako, with ca. 60 participants from the Malian security forces. One participant from the US side expressed the opinion that it was not entirely clear how the focus on military justice had come about. [414] The respondent referred to an initial assessment

413 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.

414 Field notes, Cooperation Mali – USA en matiere de Justice Militaire, Renforcement des Capacities en Resources Humains de la Justice Militaire, Workshop, 16 Nov 2016, Bamako.

and the wish of the embassy to work on an issue with a wider range. Other options had been excluded because people did not want to cooperate and there were no options for sustainability. According to the respondent's opinion, the choice of the military-justice focus, which was implemented in cooperation with the Malian Military Justice Directorate, was more the result of a principle of exclusion and availability of individuals to work on this issue than a strategic decision. Another respondent also described the shift within the focus area as a learning experience, stating 'what I have learned is that plans are good for specific reasons at certain points in time and then they are not useful anymore'.[415] Respondents explained that there had been many reservations on the side of the counterparts about what would be prosecuted, but eventually it had been possible to convince the MoD to support this focus on military justice. Hence, programming within the rule-of-law focus was also characterised by elements of *compromise,* because demands of the Malian counterparts were accounted for within the pre-established focus area.

5.5.7 Summary of case findings

The USG has endorsed several international SSR documents that postulate an ambitious ownership concept. However, ownership as 'usage of country systems' and 'alignment with national strategies' was found to play a significantly less prominent role in the sensemaking of the US SC than in the other cases, both in terms of policy guidance and in terms of relevance for determining adequate actions. While the *validity of the ownership concept was confirmed*, it was not referenced as a guiding principle in determining organisational practices. Indeed, the *precedence of strategic USG interests* was underlined in several interviews. Areas of operations were identified in which US and Malian interests overlapped, with ownership being sufficiently accounted for if a *lowest common denominator* could be identified. In the US case, the qualification of the ownership concept in favour of other institutional demands became particularly evident. Indeed, ownership was described as a *means to the effectiveness and sustainability of US investments in the security sector*, which could be achieved through *buy-in*. Comparatively, this is a very narrow, functional conception of ownership. This impression is further substantiated by the observation that the US embassy identified the *most like-minded actors* to work with, applying a selective approach to eligible owners.

At times, references to ownership appeared inconsistent in this case. Respondents underlined that all activities of the embassy were based on Malian ownership, even though US priorities were explicitly identified as the driving force behind SC projects. Respondents reported a need to mitigate between US interests for investment and the

415 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 08 Nov 2016, Bamako.

interests of their Malian counterparts. Still, while ownership was perceived to be important for the joint implementation of activities and for *legitimatory purposes*, most accounts of respondents suggested that organisational practices were mostly self-designed and initiated by the US side. This disparity between different intervention logics is a form of *decoupling* that enables organisational operativeness under conditions of competing demands, if one demand (in this case: ownership adherence) is particularly weak and, in the absence of public accountability mechanisms beyond effectiveness, can be handled on a mostly narrative level.

Overall, organisational practices were mostly assessed as forms of *manipulation* with elements of *compromise*. On several occasions, similarities in sensemaking and action between the US embassy and the EU were identified, in terms of assuming an active role in shaping Malian ownership towards *making domestic expressions of interest more aligned with external demands, by drawing on incentivisation* and *conditioning tactics*. In the case of the US embassy, this strategy was more explicit and already laid out in organisational policy. This could be because both institutions have a political mandate. However, this is also the case for MINUSMA, for which avoidance was found to be a defining characteristic in terms of organisational practices. Therefore, this case supports the suggestion that the ability of an external actor to engage in more active response strategies like manipulation depends largely on the *organisational resource base*. The US embassy had significant funds to spend on SC in Mali, which was also the case for the EU. Both institutions engaged in *incentivisation tactics* and *conditioning of support*, to shape domestic demands in a way that made them more congruent with strategic priorities.

6 Conclusions of the study

This study has asked how external actors make sense of ownership as a policy concept (in an environment of competing institutional demands), how this translates into their respective practices at the field level, and which factors influence this process. The research question is based on the premise that external actors implementing SSR interventions in areas of limited statehood are faced with a multitude of demands. Adhering to the principles of ownership policy, which requires external actors to align with national priorities and to use national country systems is one, yet crucial institutional demand external actors are morally expected to respond to. However, ownership adherence is a demand that is frequently found to conflict with other demands. Dilemmas arising from conflicting demands can inhibit organisational action, unless organisational sensemaking provides the interpretative bridges required to make decisions about adequate actions. This study assumed a sensemaking perspective and explored how different influencing factors shaped staff members' perceptions of how to cope with conflicting demands, enabling these staff members to determine organisational responses that are deemed appropriate, while retaining coherent self-representations as supporters of a nationally driven process.

Accounts of respondents from different organisations on the characteristics and application of the ownership concept were diverse. Together, they did not form a coherent picture of what 'genuine' ownership was in the eyes of external actors engaged in SSR interventions or how it could be effectuated. Different interpretations of domestic developments and events existed within organisations in parallel, and even the sensemaking of individual respondents was not necessarily coherent at times when it came to ownership, supporting the suggestion that ownership effectuation is a case of a 'prolonged puzzle'. Indeed, despite the considerable academic and practical attention that has been given to ownership policy, fundamental frictions remain regarding the *core characteristics* of the concept and its effectuation.

Sensemaking processes were largely found to be reactive ways of coping with acute puzzles and pressures in an *ad hoc* and context-dependent manner, characterised by uncertainty and perceived operational dilemmas. As already described by March, respondents had limited access to information about their quickly evolving environment and limited abilities to anticipate the consequences of their actions, in view of competing demands (March, 1991, p. 97). These findings suggests that organisational cognition and practice, at least when explored at an emerging stage, are less driven by

K. Eickhoff, *National Ownership and Security Sector Reform in Mali*,
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coherent strategy, vested interests and clear intentions – as often assumed by both functional and critical scholars – but are rather reactions to perceived dilemmas arising from the institutional environment, which are dealt with on a situational basis.[416] Under these conditions, basic assumptions of models of organisational decision-making as intentional choice and consequential action are critically challenged.

6.1 Implications for the academic debate

The study largely confirms the finding of previous research that a wide gap exists between policy aspirations, in terms of ownership adherence and external actors' field practices. The legitimatory and operational dilemmas associated with ownership policy and other demands identified in this study are not new to the academic debate. However, this study did not only compare policy requirements and external actors' field practices but engaged in a more in-depth analysis of how these factors are linked.

Recalling the two perspectives on policy as either a vehicle for increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of governance transfers (the functional perspective) or as an instrument of power and external control (the critical perspective), this study concludes that both positions in isolation have limited explanatory value and do not account sufficiently for the empirical findings of this study. Looking at the wide gap between policy requirements and the affirmative stances of respondents on the concept's validity, on the one side, and actual field practices of external actors across cases, Mosse's propositions on the relationship between policy and practice are found to be pertinent. Mosse suggests that external actors are mostly driven by external requirements and constraints, while the main function of policy is to serve as a narrative of authoritative interpretation, perpetuating coherent self-representation and concealing operational realities of non-adherence. This study found that ownership policy indeed served on occasions as a narrative of authoritative interpretation, while operational realities of non-adherence were concealed. Moreover, external actors were found to perpetuate their self-representation as instances of authorised policy and thereby engaged with the ownership concept, implying that policy is not irrelevant for practice, as Mosse suggests as well. Therefore, the ownership concept is found to constitute an

[416] These findings are probably amplified by the fact that the analysis focussed on antenarrative, as a pretext to more coherent, authorised narratives, when 'sense' is in an emerging stage (Boje, 2001). Antenarrative can still encompass competing logics. However, this study argues that insights into these processes of 'raw' sensemaking in between policy and practice can advance organisation research on how organisational cognition and action relate and which factors influence this process. Options for future research in this regard are taken up in the last chapter of this study.

'idea with power' (Mosse, 2004, p. 665), which interacts with institutional practices at the field level.

While Mosse's propositions are largely confirmed, this study aimed at advancing the state of research by empirically investigating the 'black box' in between policy and practice and thereby aimed at being more precise about *how* policy is relevant for practice. The study found that while a 'gap' between policy and practice might look similar at first glance, if only 'input' and 'output' are compared, this study engaged with *underlying processes of sensemaking* that connect policy and practice. While Mosse focuses on the legitimatory function of ownership directed at the institutional environment for the sake of securing sustained external support, the findings of this study suggest that *policy can serve various functions* in linking organisational interpretation and practices. Likewise, policy and practice can relate to each other in different ways, depending on the characteristics of actors involved, their perceptions of the institutional environment, and the interplay and perceived strength of demands that actors must make sense of to determine adequate organisational action. Against this backdrop, this study makes a case for differentiating between different and potentially unique ways policy can relate to and impact organisational practices.

6.1.1 Sensemaking patterns

While sensemaking and organisational practices were found to be intricate, constantly evolving and at times contradictory, the study identified *three patterns* of external actors making sense of ownership, which correspond with certain organisational practices and influencing factors. These patterns were not exclusive and depended on the sensemaking situation. Ownership featured in sensemaking as a (1) *resource* that respondents referred to in order to interpret developments and events and select adequate courses of action. This sensemaking pattern corresponds with organisational practices of adherence and compromise. On other occasions, respondents engaged with the characteristics of the concept itself, with the aim of reducing conflicts between demands and enabling organisational action. In these situations, the ownership concept became (2) a *subject* of sensemaking itself. This sensemaking pattern corresponds with organisational practices of manipulation. Lastly, respondents perceived the ownership concept as (3) an *obstacle* to sensemaking, as it was required from an organisational perspective but was largely perceived to be empirically absent, leading to conflicts between demands that could not be resolved. This sensemaking pattern corresponds with organisational practices of avoidance, and, at times, stagnation.

Pattern	Influencing factors	Organisational sensemaking	Organisational practices	Ownership adherence
Ownership as a *source* of sensemaking	• Organisational policy/ guidance on ownership operationalisation • Institutionalisation of ownership policy within the organisation	• Ownership features in logics of appropriateness on adequate actions • Ownership as means to effectiveness and sustainability of SSR, pertinent for success	• Alignment with national strategies/priorities • Identification of partners according to organisational guidance on ownership • Cooperation routines	• Low level of conflict between demands: Adherence, compromise • High level of conflict between demands: Ownership becomes an obstacle for sensemaking (pattern 3)
Ownership as a *subject* of sensemaking	• External demands that conflict with national priorities • Resource dependence from external sources • Wide scope for action (consolidated capacities, budget increases, strategic relationships)	• Other demands perceived as more pressing than ownership, domestic priorities not valid expressions of ownership • Altering concept characteristics of ownership to make demands more congruent	• Incentivising • Conditioning • Agenda setting	• Manipulation
Ownership as an *obstacle* for sensemaking	• External demands that conflict with national priorities • Resource dependence from external sources • Limited scope for action (limited capacities and resources, access constraints) • Organisational fragmentation	• Living with ambiguity between demands – dealing with conflicts on a situational, ad hoc basis • Uncertainty about adequate organisational conduct	• Escaping to uncontested niches of engagement • Working with limited partner involvement • Stagnation	• Avoidance

Figure 9: Sensemaking patterns, author's representation.

Ownership as a resource for sensemaking

Practitioners engaged with the requirements of the ownership concept, as they were required to 'make sense' of the concept in their daily work. Strong tendencies were observed of making the concept fit into the bigger picture of the organisational engagement in Mali and of acknowledging its importance despite operational difficulties to adhere to it in daily practice. In these situations, the ownership concept was found to serve as a *resource* of sensemaking, which supports *functional perspectives* on the relationship between policy and practice. Some respondents applied the concept according to the international SSR framework like a lens on the actors' landscape, to *identify eligible counterparts* for SSR activities. Indeed, national SSR structures were desired by most respondents, to have a formalised SSR counterpart who would endorse expressions of 'national interest' as valid, instead of engaging with a diverse landscape of domestic stakeholders. This confirms Brown's suggestion on the pivotal role of national strategies in the eyes of donors, as a *tangible manifestation* of ownership (Brown, 2017, p. 5). For other respondents, demonstrating adherence to ownership policy served as a source of organisational legitimacy. This need to demonstrate ownership adherence was found to not only serve *external legitimatory functions*, directed at the organisational environment with the purpose of securing external support; it was also found to be a factor that *added meaning* to an organisation's identity as rightful external interveners, following appropriate *scripts of engagement* (inclusiveness, alignment with national priorities). For these respondents, the normative underpinnings of ownership resonated with their values and normative principles. As such, ownership emerged as a normative and cognitive template that featured in respondents' *logics of appropriateness* of adequate organisational conduct, requiring the actors to *adhere* to national strategies and *seek compromise* with domestic counterparts.

However, this pattern could only be sustained if no major conflicts with other demands arose, which was rarely the case, in view of the widely shared perception that national ownership for SSR in Mali was very limited. Under these circumstances, perceiving of ownership as a source of sensemaking resulted in organisational dilemmas, as the case of DCAF shows. While DCAF displayed the most 'coherent' sensemaking of ownership and the strongest tendency towards adherence, it also struggled most with determining organisational practices. In the DCAF case, fully coherent sensemaking of ownership could have resulted in the necessity to disengage, as ownership was not perceived to emerge over time. However, other institutional demands pointed to retaining operations in-country, which lead to a situation of *stagnation.*

This observed category of *stagnation* is important because it is not foreseen in Oliver's model, as it does not qualify as a strategic organisational response. This has two implications for the academic debate. First, the study questions the widely shared assumption of sensemaking theory that weak sensemaking systems are likely to lead to incapacitation, while strong sensemaking systems are likely to increase organisational success (Weick, 1999, p. 40). In view of the ambivalent situation of ownership policy at the interface of organisational effectiveness and legitimacy and the disputed relationship between these two concepts, potential consequences of different modes of 'making sense' of ownership and adhering to requirements arising from the ownership concept, as concerns organisational practices, are less clear to external actors at the field level.

Ownership as a subject of sensemaking

Making sense of one demand side was found to be a form of *interpretative bridging* between competing demands, enabling coherent organisational self-representations and facilitating subsequent organisational action. As ownership lacked conceptual substance, it was found to be subjected to sensemaking processes aimed at the *alteration of ownership adherence as a demand itself*. These sensemaking processes pertained to the *characteristics* of the concept and the *effectuation* of ownership in SSR programming. This sensemaking of the concept's characteristics and effectuation itself partly happened in accordance with and in reference to organisational policy, either in the form of *equation* (ownership equals capacity/knowledge) or in the form of *demarcation* (ownership vs. political will, ownership vs. domestic agency).

UN guidance was the most explicit in this regard, as it equates ownership to domestic actors' capacity, suggesting that ownership for SSR increases in parallel with an increase in domestic actors' capacity. DCAF policy also highlights the strong connection between ownership and knowledge/capacity, with the level of ownership expected to increase with strengthened capacity over time. Hence, ownership effectuation was approached either through *capacity-building* and *knowledge transfer* on SSR for counterparts or, on a less ambitious level, through *(passive) participation* and *sensitisation* in workshops and events. Only DCAF respondents explicitly highlighted the importance of national *intent* to implement SSR, which could be fostered but not taken for granted. On other occasions, the concept of ownership was *broken down* and *compartmentalised* ('component ownership', political will vs. political courage) in the context of the intervention. If organisations were bound by the SSR framework, respondents were also more likely to point to differences between valid expressions of ownership and

domestic agency, which was perceived as potentially particularistic and as diverging from the international SSR framework (LOPM, Anefis process).

Moreover, the *sequential position* of ownership was altered through sensemaking: While policy mostly stipulates ownership as the starting point for external intervention, at the field level it became more of a condition that needed to be achieved through active *fostering* of external actors. From this perspective, ownership was not perceived as a principle governing external action, but it became a subject of policy transfer itself, as a *condition to be evoked* in the area of intervention. Also, while policy describes ownership as a feature governing a national reform process, respondents at the field level thought of ownership more in the context of their interventions and mused about how ownership could be secured for programme components and certain policies or activities, thereby *limiting the purview* of the concept. Regarding the *level of ambition*, different approaches were encountered: Policy, in all cases, failed to make clear if ownership is about the *intention* of domestic actors to engage in SSR processes or if it is about their *ability* to do so. These sensemaking processes that aimed at the active alteration of ownership policy as a demand side support more *critical perspectives* on the relationship between policy and practice, as they were closely linked to *manipulation tactics* of organisational practices.

Ownership as an obstacle to sensemaking

Most respondents did not perceive ownership policy adherence as a simple means towards effectiveness in the context of their interventions. Mostly, the opposite was the case: Respondents perceived the requirement to use country systems and align with national strategies as hampering their operations, in the absence of national structures. Across cases, respondents expressed a perceived lack of commitment from Malian actors to engage in reform processes in the security sector and a lack of political will to establish an SSR strategy that would guide external support. This was particularly problematic for actors who were strongly bound by the international SSR framework and committed to supporting the peace and SSR processes (MINUSMA, EUCAP, DCAF), based on ownership principles. From this point of view, requirements arising from the ownership concept were a major *obstacle to sensemaking*: While ownership was, from an external perspective, largely perceived to be empirically absent and not achievable, external actors depended on its presence to maintain self-representation as supporters of a nationally driven process, from a normative point of view. At the same time, organisational pressures to show progress and achieve tangible results dictated an assumption and ideally an expansion of organisational activities, with or without the empirical presence of ownership. Most organisations did not have policy

guidance on how to proceed in the perceived absence of ownership, resulting in *organisational uncertainty* and operational dilemmas, thus triggering the need to engage in sensemaking processes in the first place. The operational dilemmas observed at the field level put purely functional perspectives on policy into question. Indeed, the findings suggest that ownership adherence was associated with the slowing-down of organisational processes, negatively impacting organisational effectiveness at the field level: under these conditions, more 'coherent' sensemaking does not necessarily lead to the resolution of frictions and conflicts. In the cases under research, more engagement with conflicts between ownership policy adherence and other demands did not mean that sensemaking resulted in the issues being solved. Instead, the most likely response strategy encountered was *avoidance*, by escaping to undisputed (technical) fields of engagement or by implementing activities that did not depend on domestic counterparts' commitment and cooperation.

6.1.2 Ownership adherence

Full adherence with requirements arising from ownership policy was not encountered as a consistent organisational response. Full ownership adherence was associated by respondents with an unfeasible trade-off between ownership policy adherence and organisational operativeness. This supports positions that emphasise that legitimacy and effectiveness in the context of governance interventions are not necessarily mutually reinforcing but rather require trade-offs at the field level. Not even actors with a strong requirement to adhere to ownership policy consistently displayed practices resembling adherence; DCAF also engaged in compromise and avoidance tactics to sustain operations. This finding suggests that *full adherence* with ownership policy is not a viable strategy for external actors who must remain operational and sustain external support. It also suggests that sensemaking that lives with ambiguity or facilitates decisions on a situational basis is conducive to operativeness as a *cognitive equivalent to processes of decoupling*.

Neither *defiance* nor *open rejection* of adherence requirements in the form of dismissal, challenge or attack as an organisational response to conflicting demands and constraints were encountered either. Even if the need to demonstrate ownership adherence was not very strong, respondents made no explicit statements that would question the validity and pertinence of the concept. For example, in the case of the US embassy, ownership was confirmed as important, which appeared to be triggered by the high normative status of the ownership concept in international discourse. This suggests that the representation of ownership is important for the organisational image in the eyes of constituents and external support. Hence, the study finds that *open*

defiance of the necessity to adhere to ownership policy is not possible, as demonstrating ownership adherence is vital for coherent self-representation and for legitimising external intervention. As discussed above, some respondents also pointed to the intrinsic normative value of the concept, supported by expressions of personal frustration about the inability to adhere to ownership policy brought up by respondents in the EUCAP case. Against this backdrop, ownership could not be *negotiated* or *challenged* without risking reputational damage and loss of legitimacy, thereby excluding defiance and open rejection as options for adequate organisational responses. These findings conform with Zimmermann's claim that full rejection and full adoption of norms in norm translation processes are the exception and not the rule (Zimmermann, 2014).

Overall, *avoidance, compromise* and *manipulation* tactics defined the spectrum of organisational responses encountered, as phenomena in between full rejection of and full adherence to ownership policy. MINUSMA mostly engaged in avoidance tactics in the form of symbolic actions and dealing with demands independently, which is a form of *living with ambiguity* between different demand sides. According to Zimmermann et al. living with ambiguity only qualifies as an organisational strategy if it is intentional (Zimmermann, 2014, p. 49). In the case of MINUSMA, the acceptance of ambiguity appeared to be rather the result of the absence of operational alternatives. Still, living with ambiguity was found to be the only viable coping strategy for MINUSMA. In the case of the US embassy and the EU, more active stances on altering the nature of one demand side with the aim of making demands more congruent via manipulation tactics were observed. EUTM and DCAF mostly engaged in approaches seeking compromise, which also aimed at making demands more congruent. Manipulation and compromise approaches involved decisions on which demands were more pressing on a situational basis. Fundamental decisions in terms of hierarchisation between different demands were not encountered, though the consistent privileging of external priorities in the cases of EUCAP and the US embassy over demands arising from ownership policy points towards a qualification of the ownership concept at the policy level, which could result in a more explicit policy hierarchisation of demands in the future.

6.1.3 Influencing factors

For the question as to whether an actor opts for an avoidance, compromise or manipulation approach, the study suggests that the most likely approach depends on perceptions of the institutional environment, the perceived strength of demands and organisational characteristics of the sensemaker. The findings do not support propositions of conceptualising organisational practices as 'functions' of certain factors. No factor could be termed a 'predicator' or 'determinant' of organisational practices. Still,

certain constellations of perceptions and organisational characteristics were identified as making certain responses more likely.

Perceptions of the environment

The enactment of the organisational environment by organisational members is a crucial component of organisational sensemaking processes. Developments and events within the organisational environment are subjected to collective processes of evaluation and interpretation. As environments are complex and ambiguous, these sensemaking processes involve a pragmatic reduction of environmental complexity and selective noticing of events that lend themselves to established explanatory frameworks. Across cases, environmental conditions were perceived as mostly adverse to organisational operativeness, with respondents' mostly engaging with *domestic politics* and the *security situation*. Regarding the domestic political situation, respondents shared the perception that ownership for SSR in Mali was mostly absent and that a national vision for SSR did not emerge. Regarding the security situation, no respondent described the situation as conducive for operations in the field of SSR. While actors with a physical presence in the North of Mali perceived the security situation as deteriorating and strongly affecting the operativeness of the organisation, other actors who were mostly confined to activities in Bamako attributed less relevance to the security situation and its effects on organisational activities. Still, very few respondents identified conducive environmental factors for organisational action at all. These findings confirm previous empirical findings from the literature that political will for SSR in Mali is largely perceived to be lacking and that conditions are not perceived as conducive for comprehensive reform processes in the security sector (for example Bergamaschi, 2014). While similar perceptions of the institutional environment would suggest a rather similar way of respondents to make sense of their organisational situation, respondents came to different conclusions about appropriate organisational responses. This suggests that the perceived strength of demands and organisational characteristics play a major role in decisions on appropriate action as well.

The perceived strength of demands

According to the policy-oriented literature, demonstrating ownership adherence is one of the strongest sources of procedural legitimacy for external actors in contemporary aid, development and peacebuilding relationships. As such, ownership policy adherence pertains to the *core system of organisational values and goals*. External actors are expected to demonstrate adherence to these policy prescriptions, because these prescriptions are widely considered to be proper and morally right. The strong

normative connotations of the concept suggest that external actors can be expected to perceive the need to demonstrate adherence to ownership principles as pressing, given that organisational goals are at stake. Thought of as a norm, challenging the applicability of ownership could risk causing the organisation severe reputational damage and loss of external support. Strong policy statements that reaffirm the universal validity of ownership as a governing principle of external-domestic relations in aid, development and peacebuilding relationships confirm this perspective. Hence, ownership could be expected to take precedence over demands that are located at a lower organisational 'means' level (strategies, processes), which are more flexible and negotiable (Pache/Santos, 2010, p. 460).

However, in most cases, ownership adherence was perceived as a rather weak demand in comparison with other demands. Organisational *demands pertaining to the organisational resource base*, such as meeting mission objectives and donor demands, were pointed out by respondents as sources of pressure to proceed with operations regardless of the level of ownership. Actual adherence to ownership policy was perceived as involving *forgoing crucial decision-making power* (prioritisation) and *control over vital organisational processes* and resources. What is more, ownership as a demand had virtually no *internal representation* within the institutions – for example, as a component in monitoring & evaluation, in the form of 'ownership focal persons' or representatives of domestic counterparts embedded within the external organisation. However, DCAF respondents perceived ownership adherence as a rather strong demand. Ownership enjoyed a particularly high status in DCAF policies and guidance. These findings suggest that the *level of institutionalisation* of ownership as a demand impacts on its perceived strength.

No measures of *enforceability or sanctions* were found to be attached to ownership. Domestic SSR actors were found to have *limited options to enforce their priorities or to sanction the non-adherent* behaviour of external actors, which has been pointed out by critical authors before. This perceived weakness in comparison with other demands was further aggravated by the prevalent *absence of institutional rules for cases of conflict* between different demands. Therefore, other demands and constraints were mostly perceived as factors that had a stronger impact on organisational sensemaking. Consequently, organisational sensemaking mostly evolved around altering ownership as a demand side, to make conflicting demands more congruent.

Organisational characteristics

Organisational characteristics (resources, abilities, access) were found to have a strong impact on the way actors made sense of their institutional environment and adequate responses, in terms of language applied and shared interpretations of developments and events. Overall, this study finds that if external actors have the means, they opt for active manipulation in the form of co-optation, influence and control, to change the shape and direction of certain institutional demands and to make them more congruent. The EU and the US embassy were found to command significant *resources* and *means of coercion* to reinforce their position in negotiations with counterparts, in the form of incentivising priorities and conditioning support. This allowed both actors to assume a more active approach in dealing with conflicting demands. In sensemaking, this strong position of the own institution and the priority of external interests were validated. MINUSMA did not have the institutional capacity, access and resources to engage more actively with conflicts between demands, while MINUSMA also perceived external demands as pressing. Against this backdrop, sensemaking processes unfolded around the responsibilities of the domestic side, while MINUSMA was nor perceived to be able to assume a more active role. Hence, sensemaking processes prepared the ground for avoidance tactics.

DCAF also did not engage more actively, but in this case, the approach chosen was found to be characterised by Mosse's proposition of external actors being 'disciplined by their own discourse' (Mosse, 2004, p. 649). In this case, ownership appeared to feature more strongly in *logics of appropriateness,* which prevented the organisation from assuming a more active role in altering ownership adherence as a demand side. Also, self-critical statements of respondents outside the context of authorised policy, mostly observed for the EUCAP case, point to individual cognitive needs of adhering to normatively validated policy requirements such as ownership. From this perspective, ownership was found to not only feature in organisational self-representations and authoritative narratives but to also resonate with people's internalised values and moral beliefs, while organisational non-adherence resulted in cognitive dissonance and personal frustration. These findings suggest that logics of appropriateness can strengthen ownership as an institutional demand.

6.1.4 Collective sensemaking

Organisational sensemaking was found to be more homogeneous in the cases of smaller organisations (DCAF, EUTM, US embassy) than in larger organisations, where sensemaking was found to be more diverse and fragmented (MINUSMA). Given that this was also the case for EUCAP, where interviews and background discussions were held with a comparatively large group of respondents, this suggests that this finding

does not only arise from the fact that in smaller organisations, also fewer people were interviewed. Sensemaking processes were indeed strongly influenced by social aspects and by the organisational culture. Moreover, within whole-of-government approaches, sensemaking differed between institutions with different organisational rules and cultures (EU). Furthermore, sensemaking was found to be more homogeneous in organisations that were characterised by standardised procedures and whose organisational members had less access to extra-organisational social settings within the international community (EUTM, DCAF). These are observations in favour of this study's approach to analyse sensemaking as a social phenomenon and not as a purely individual cognitive undertaking.

However, a pertinent locality of sensemaking was encountered that was not dependent on institutional structures. Sensemaking theory suggests that actors share interpretations and take decisions contingent on the behaviour of other actors. This does not necessarily have to be bound to an organisational unit. Indeed, it was found that collective sensemaking of the international community did not only happen within formal organisations. Interrelations between organisational members from different institutional backgrounds were observed, which were found to impact on collective sensemaking processes. Regarding the cases under research, this was mostly relevant for MINUSMA and EUCAP, less for the US embassy, DCAF and EUTM, where the institution itself was found to be at the center of collective sensemaking.

External actors' staff members working on SSR were a rather small group of experts, who were in positions with scope for decision-making that was consequential for organisational action. They spent a significant amount of time in the same events and gathered in social spaces. Thus, they were part of an *informal elite community* within Bamako. This community was mostly limited to social interactions in Bamako, due to organisational security regulations that discouraged movements beyond the capital. This sensemaking community was found to be temporary and non-static. It played an important role in shaping how people saw their institutional environments, what they learned about domestic processes and what meaning they attributed to events. The attacks on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako in November 2015 are only one example in which interpretations and implications regarding appropriate organisational action of expats from different organisational background were very similar, down to the wording. Members of this informal community shared more cultural references amongst each other than with their institutional environment. Hence, this community was a significant locality for processes of interpretation and enactment that preceded organisational decision-making about adequate responses vis-à-vis the environment. Together, its members enacted a temporary 'SSR arena', in which they became the 'locals' for a

certain period. Its members determined authoritative interpretations of developments and events in the context of the SSR process that fed into the international discourse on peacebuilding and SSR. Nevertheless, engaging in joint processes of attributing meaning to processes and events did not necessarily include extensive knowledge-sharing. Institutional reservations and competition also affected what was discussed and what was not discussed in this social community.

This informal expat community resembled what Autesserre described for expat communities in the context of peacebuilding interventions (Autesserre, 2014b). According to Autesserre's findings, the everyday life and social habits of expatriate staff working in areas of limited statehood fundamentally shape their understanding of their environment. Contemporary research has a share in perpetuating these circular processes of enacting and sharing interpretations within a small expert community as well, as many consultants and researchers who collect data at the field level and who feed their collected data into the policy discourse favour external actors as interview partners. This research endeavour is no exception in this regard, though it aimed at making these circular processes of enacting and sharing interpretations within exclusive communities, as well as the selectivity of cues employed by external actors in sensemaking, transparent.

6.1.5 Generalisability of the findings

While this study has taken ownership policy as a concrete example, the findings are also relevant for the more general academic debate on how external actors translate an abstract policy concept into their respective interventional field practices. However, SSR is a sector of intervention with specific characteristics. Ownership perceptions and the dynamics that the concept unfolds at the field level are expected to look different in other sectors, in other country contexts and among different constellations of actors. SSR was purposefully selected as a case with especially unfavourable conditions for external actors, as a 'maximum stress test' for the ownership concept, illuminating its contradictions and making frictions and challenges arising from the concept more evident. If the study had focussed on other sectors of aid or development cooperation, it is likely that results would have been different.

Besides, the findings of this study are situated in the context of their construction; they have a limited spatial and temporal scope. An exploratory research approach was applied, and the findings are based on a small sample and a limited amount of empirical material collected in one context with restricted access to information. Therefore, the study cannot establish broad empirical generalisations with a claim of validity beyond

the case under research. Neither can it provide general explanations of cause-effect relationships, focussing rather on case-specific insights into interdependent relations between factors that play a role in external actors' sensemaking about adequate field practices. A next step for increasing the generalisability of the findings could be to explore if they also apply for other SSR/peacebuilding interventions implemented under comparable conditions. South Sudan and the Central African Republic could be cases that lend themselves to such a comparison; researchers could engage with the claims made in this study and subject them to further, more rigorous empirical testing. This is also taken up in the last chapter on recommendations for future research.

6.2 Implications for the policy debate

This empirical investigation did not aim at solving the various operational dilemmas associated with the ownership concept. However, it contributes to discussions on the 'operationalisation' of the ownership concept: Better understanding the links between external actors' sensemaking of demands and field level practices can help to identify angles for organisational change.

Organisation research suggests that organisational systems cannot live with inherent inconsistencies over a prolonged period. Incoherent sensemaking that leads to the decoupling of talk and action or of different lines of talk might facilitate organisational action for a time, but in the long run, incoherent sensemaking is expected to be counter-productive to organisational effectiveness. A purely ceremonial adaption of processes is difficult to sustain over time and is expected to eventually trigger corrective action (Boxenbaum/Jonsson, 2008, p. 88). Otherwise, organisational 'pathologies', as described by Schöndorf, can be a consequence (Schoendorf, 2009). What is more, if an organisation's self-representation is assessed as hypocritical by its staff members, work ethic and staff motivation will be affected. Inquiring into the sensemaking processes of key decision-makers can serve as an 'early warning system' for these developments, as it precedes formal decision-making processes.

From a functional perspective, the gap between policy and practice can be reduced by formulating more adequate policy, corresponding to *logics of appropriateness* associated with the concept. Following a more critical logic, ownership could be *strengthened as an institutional demand.* In line with its position between the two perspectives, this study combined these angles and suggests that both approaches are necessary to effectuate a higher level of adherence of external actors to the ownership principle at the field level.

6.2.1 Specification of the SSR framework

Of the three most important influencing factors identified (perceptions of environment, perceived strength of demands, organisational characteristics), organisational parameters and operating practices (rules, guidance, SOPs) are the most feasible for external actors to work on, to facilitate organisational change. Or in other words, it is more realistic for policies to account for social reality than for social practice to adapt to organisational policies.

Therefore, the study argues that it is in the interest of external SSR actors to engage explicitly with conceptual ambiguities of ownership policy principles and conflicts with other demands, to reduce organisational uncertainty and facilitate field-level programming. Speaking for themselves and not on behalf of their respective organisations, many respondents were rather critical of their own organisations' coping with ownership requirements and indicated a desire to come to more coherent approaches to ownership. This underlines a desire for establishing more certainty in a largely uncertain environment that accounts for logics of appropriateness, of which ownership is one part. While these individuals' perspectives have not yet penetrated authoritative organisational narratives and working routines, their perspectives can provide new impetus for the conceptual debate on the ownership concept.

The domestic side needs to be included more prominently in this debate, as discussions still take place mostly in donor circles at an international level. While the Paris Declaration has been a major step in this regard, it appears to not yet have put sufficient measures in place for real impact on external actors' field practices. The debate should follow an inclusive approach that accounts for political and social fault lines which divide societies in conflict. Too often, external actors reduce notions of valid ownership to government counterparts and elitist civil society representatives. The debate should engage with the following concept characteristics, to 'make better policy':

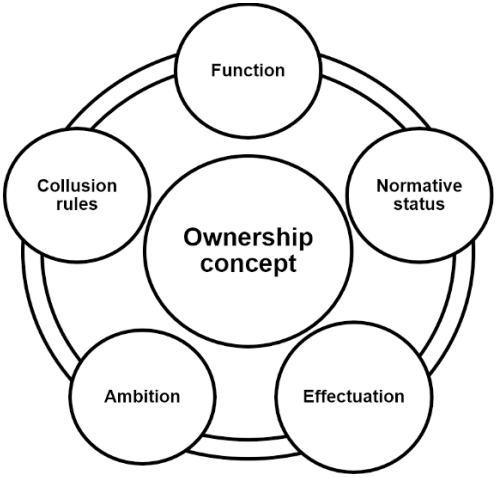

Figure 10: Issue areas for a conceptual debate on ownership, author's representation.

The function of ownership

Policy debates need to engage with the question in how far ownership policy stipulates external actors' adherence or domestic actors' responsibilities. At the policy level, both implications of ownership are found. They are presented as two sides of the same coin. To counter criticism of undue interference with domestic affairs, the adherence side is highlighted at the policy level, especially in the case of the OECD and the UN, which are also dominant in the policy discourse and formally serve as a reference point for many other external actors in the field of SSR. However, at the field level, ownership conceptions turn into a *characteristic to be evoked in domestic actors*, instead of a principle governing policy transfers and limiting the discretion of external actors. Most practitioners at the field level emphasise the requirement that domestic actors need to assume responsibility for the SSR process and SSR programmes. However, from a normative perspective, the responsibilities arising from the concept should stay with external actors, preventing the concept from being stripped to appropriation, focussing instead on *fostering conducive conditions for domestic actors to make autonomous choices.* As Fraser puts it, 'only where communities are self-determining is there any hope of greater democratic or popular control over the policies and projects pursued in the name of the people' (Fraser/Whitfield, 2008, p. 6). While Fraser advocates for a domestic realm protected from external influence as a necessary pre-condition to strengthening self-determination, Martin and Moser suggest the following:

> […] [to] base the international presence around a perpetually renewable contract, in which international actors recognise, reassess and continuously reconfigure their responsibility […] in conjunction with local actors. Discussion about responsibility and engagement should take place in 3 settings: between international actors, between local actors and between locals and internationals (Martin/Moser, 2012, p. 24).

Both positions call for external actors to take their responsibility to adhere to ownership requirements more seriously, focussing less on the responsibilities that domestic actors should assume.

The normative status of ownership

Policy debates also need to engage with the question if ownership policy is a means to the effectiveness and sustainability of external interventions or if it should be pursued as an end with an intrinsic value. Engaging with this issue area is especially crucial because empirical findings suggest that ownership adherence can be contradictory to external actors' organisational effectiveness. Being more abstract, the subject was only touched on in few discussions, and it is assumed that it does not play much of a role in field-level decision-making. Some respondents presented ownership as an end in itself, while most respondents pointed to the need to effectuate ownership in order to be able to hand over activities and facilitate an eventual exit. However, it remains a fundamental question if ownership is a functional tool to facilitate organisational success or if it is a value that should guide organisational action. Approaching ownership as a concept with an intrinsic value would account for calls to direct the debate on ownership more towards notions of autonomy and self-government (Bargues-Pedreny, 2015). It would also entail thinking of ownership more as *entitlements to control over processes and property* than in terms of responsibilities and responsibilisation.

The effectuation of ownership

Another question the policy level needs to engage with is the question if ownership is meant to be the starting point (basic condition) or the end of an intervention (can it be effectuated by an external intervention)? Policies and guidance documents are not clear on the question of the *sequential position* of ownership. While various references can be found that suggest that national initiatives should be the starting point of external interventions, as 'home grown' ownership, other references underline that ownership can be promoted as a norm to be internalised by domestic stakeholders. UN policy is especially relevant in this regard, as it equates ownership with the ability or capacity of domestic actors. DCAF guidelines also suggest that ownership increases with capacity-building and knowledge transfer. At the field level, respondents mostly

approached ownership as a *characteristic to be evoked*, as a result of external fostering processes, suggesting that ownership is perceived as the end point of a successful intervention, with a state of ownership being achieved.

The ambition of ownership

Another question arising from the findings of this study is the question if ownership is about the *intention* or *ability* of domestic actors? Does ownership stipulate (passive) internalisation or (active) initiative? The level of ambition of the ownership concept is connected to the question of effectuation. However, the question is not only about the sequential position but also about what needs to be achieved for a state to qualify as being a state of ownership. This touches on the question if ownership means that domestic actors intend to embark on a reform process in the first place or if domestic actors are to assume responsibilities according to the international SSR framework. At the field level, many respondents expressed reservations against domestic initiatives, which were not part of the consented SSR process. The refusal and non-engagement of domestic actors in certain activities was perceived as a sign of the absence of ownership, not as valid *expressions of agency* that could qualify as representing ownership. However, according to Pierce et al., resistance to change can also be an indication of psychological ownership, for instance if the change is seen as 'imposed, revolutionary, and subtractive' (Pierce et al., 2001, p. 303). Hence, an ownership concept that is unable *to stretch sufficiently to embrace expressions of agency* as manifestations of ownership is not viable, if the concept is meant to comprise stronger references to national autonomy and self-determination.

Procedural rules for demand collusion

Finally, the policy debate needs to engage with the question as to which demands are to be qualified in view of others? Due to the high normative status of the concept, there are no explicit rules for conflicts between demands in place at the policy level or in organisational guidance that allow for fundamental decisions in situations of field-level collusions. What is more, the validity and relevance of ownership is not negotiable, further adding to organisational uncertainty about how to translate the concept into field practices. Against this backdrop, actors qualify different demands on a situational, non-regulated case-by-case basis, with ownership adherence being perceived as the weaker side of demand. To establish certainty, the hierarchisation between different demands would need to be made more explicit at the policy level. To this end, policy actors need to explicitly *acknowledge divergent interests of external and domestic actors* and engage in a debate about the governing principles of external-domestic

interactions. This debate should be morally substantiated, not solely focussing on the effectiveness and sustainability of external intervention but also dealing with tensions between international intervention and supervision, post-colonial trajectories of intervention, power imbalances and notions of self-determination, while openly pondering trade-offs, moving beyond policy assumptions of measures serving the organisational effectiveness and organisational legitimacy being mutually reinforcing by default.

6.2.2 Strengthening ownership as an institutional demand

Several institutional factors were found to have an either conducive or hampering influence on ownership adherence vis-à-vis other demands. These factors can be influenced with the aim of strengthening ownership as an institutional demand. First, the lack of *internal representation* of ownership as a demand and the absence of institutional *mechanisms for enforceability* and sanctions could be addressed. This could, for example, comprise the institutionalisation of ownership focal persons/units within organisations, tracking ownership compliance indicators. Second, domestic counterparts could be integrated over longer periods of time within organisational units, as a measure of exposure and to *increase domestic actors' access to information, inclusion in decision-making,* and *control of organisational processes*. This could lead to domestic actors' long-term association with shared objectives, which would be in line with Sieger et al.'s propositions on psychological ownership (Sieger et al., 2013). Third, ownership could be included as a benchmark in programme *monitoring and evaluation*, like the OECD-DAC criteria. This would also make ownership the subject of more documentation, which in turn would make it more attractive for empirical research.

6.2.3 Expanding trust-building measures with the institutional environment

The case under research showed that a state of mutually perceived ownership is hampered by a limited level of knowledge-sharing and trust between external and domestic actors. The limited willingness of external actors to embrace the consequences of ownership adherence in practice seems to be largely based on a lack of knowledge and a lack of trust by external actors towards other stakeholders (domestic and other external actors) in their institutional environment. This is especially the case in SSR, where the stakes of all actors involved are high. *Policies on trust-building* as an important objective in SSR and peacebuilding should thus be extended from promoting trust-relationships between local actors or communities and state institutions in conflict towards also enabling more trust-based relationships and information sharing between external and domestic actors.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

To expand the generalisability of the findings of this study, further empirical research that provides fine-grained data from other country contexts, intervention sectors and actors' constellations is needed. Intervention areas that are less sensitive than the security sector should be investigated, with the intention of determining if the concept's characteristics and application are equally contested. Also, country contexts that are usually discussed as cases of comparatively high commitment to reform processes in the security sector should be reflected upon, such as Rwanda, Angola and South Africa (Ansorg, 2017). Ideally, these investigations would explore different sequential stages of SSR processes and be longer term in nature, to track changes in perceptions over time. Strengthening the empirical basis of the debate on ownership in SSR would be equally fruitful for the SSR and peacebuilding research community, as well as for organisation research. The following fields are suggested as topics of engagement for future research.

Perspectives of domestic actors

This study focussed on external actors' perceptions. However, background interviews with Malian stakeholders suggested that ownership, though largely perceived as an external policy concept, is a subject of negotiation for domestic actors as well. Respondents for example stated that Malian ownership should mean that Malians say what they want, not just sign off on things that have been prepared for them.[417] Ownership was pictured by domestic respondents as more than appropriation: 'It is up to us to decide what we want.'[418] Previous research also found that the ownership concept can serve as an instrument of domestic actors in negotiations with international counterparts – for example, as a means to resist external demands for reform (Rayroux/Wilén, 2014). Bringing external and domestic perspectives on the concept together and observing its instrumentalisation at interface negotiations would greatly add to the picture of how actors make sense of ownership and how this impacts organisational practices. Moreover, brokers/intermediaries as another category of governance actors could be included in the analysis, as they are located at the critical interfaces that connect different knowledge systems (Hoenke/Mueller, 2018).

Regional ownership conceptions

[417] Interview with three representatives of local NGO, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako.
[418] Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.

Background interviews with regional actors conducted in Accra, Ghana suggested that security and development in the ECOWAS region are largely perceived as a regional issue to be engaged with. The G5 Sahel coordination mechanism is an offshoot of these regional advancements in the security sector. Along similar lines, the African Union (AU) adopted a policy framework for SSR which introduces the concepts of *African* and *regional ownership* in conflict prevention, post-conflict and peacebuilding contexts (African Union, 2013, p. 9). While the AU could not be reflected in this study for methodological reasons, it would be important for future research to also reflect regional dimensions of the ownership concept.

Different organisational characteristics of external actors

Exploring organisational characteristics in more detail could provide further insights into the status and relevance of organisational and environmental demands and their role in organisational sensemaking. This study has provided information on organisational logics and characteristics, to the extent that they could be collected during the period of research. While this enabled a contextualisation of organisational sensemaking processes and served as basic background information for understanding the linkages between cognition and action, future research should provide more in-depth information on organisational characteristics. It would be particularly important to reflect on different organisational cultures and their impact on collective sensemaking. The case comparison suggests that it makes a difference if organisations have a political, development or military-dominated working culture and if their organisational survival depends on engaging in SSR programming, as well as if they have a wider portfolio basis. For the case of SSR, it would also be relevant to turn to bilateral actors who are so far less reflected in the academic debate on SSR and peacebuilding, such as China, India, Russia, Turkey and states from the MENA region, which apply different intervention approaches and whose conceptions of ownership are likely to differ as well.

While France was not chosen as a case for this study, it should be noted that background discussions with respondents from the French military, who were engaged in security cooperation in Mali, brought about perspectives on the rationales of French-Malian security cooperation that were quite similar to the US embassy case; neither the SSR process nor the concept of ownership played a major role, but French security interests, according to a 'win-win model' of cooperation with the Malian side, were identified as the driving force behind the cooperation. While this could not be explored in more detail in the context of this study, is it noteworthy for future research that might explore common characteristics of bilateral security cooperation in more detail, as well as account for the impact of colonial relations on ownership conceptions.

Informal interpretive communities beyond institutions

While individual and organisation-based collective sensemaking have already been the subject of organisation research, future research should also turn towards informal sensemaking communities and their impact on individual decision-makers. The cross-organisational 'interpretive community' that was identified as an important locality of sensemaking would be particularly interesting for anthropological research exploring everyday dynamics of external intervention (Autesserre, 2014a; Duffield, 2012; Mosse, 2005a; Rottenburg, 2002). Additionally, it is also relevant for organisation research dealing with open systems. As John Child has already noted: 'There is a growing body of evidence indicating that the managers of different firms within an industry do share perceptions and cognitive maps and that these are enacted through common environmental relationships' (Child, 1997, p. 55). Future research could ask about the extent to which shared interpretations within informal communities are strategic and where this strategy might come from, given that its members have different organisational backgrounds. Focussing on informal sensemaking communities could comprise social media analysis, next to participatory field research.

Individual sensemaking factors

Different ways of mitigating between an individual and a collective perspective on sensemaking are a subject of debate in the literature, as both approaches make methodological trade-offs necessary. This study opted for a collective perspective on organisations. While information on the individual backgrounds of respondents was collected, the research methods chosen did not encompass a more in-depth inquiry into individual biographies. Individual factors were marginally included in the discussion of the role of individual decision-makers within the institutions. However, the information collected suggests that individual sensemaking factors, such as the respondents' level of technical expertise, experience from other country contexts, deployment times, frequency and level of work satisfaction and professional ambitions play an important role in individual sensemaking processes. As one respondent put it: 'When I leave, I would like to leave a footprint. I am investing quite a piece of my life here, so I want to see something resulting from it.'[419] In view of the important role played by individual decision-makers in SSR, these individual characteristics should be investigated in more detail. Future research should turn to individual decision-makers within institutions and explore their personal histories, to account for individual processes of sensemaking and processes of individual norm internalisation or resistance.

[419] Interview with UNPOL officer, 1 Feb 2016, Bamako.

Additional benchmarks for ownership adherence

This study has focussed on cooperation and prioritisation as crucial benchmarks for ownership adherence. These two aspects were chosen because interventions were at an early stage, such that longer-term implications could not yet be reflected. However, in view of the purview of the ownership concept, the net could be cast wider – especially if cases are researched that have been ongoing for a longer period and in which routines of cooperation between external actors and domestic counterparts become clearer. Future research could, for example, take up the following factors as adherence benchmarks:

- *Inclusiveness*: Whom do external actors engage with in daily practices? Are civil society actors and communities included in programme design and implementation in a meaningful way?
- *Programmatic steering:* Do interventions have steering units with decision-making power regarding design and implementation? Are domestic actors members of these steering structures?
- *Monitoring and evaluation*: Do external actors provide domestic actors with access to documents/knowledge management, for them to appraise external interventions? Does ownership as a standard feature in programme evaluation?

Ownership and norm theory

This study has shown that ownership is an emerging concept with a high normative status in the policy discourse. As ownership policy provides regulatory instructions on the expected conduct of actors involved, future research should consider drawing on theories of norm interpretation, norm evolution and norm contestation to further advance the debate. Theoretical models derived from these fields of research resonate with the findings of this study on the strength of demands in sensemaking. The challenge will be to promote a dialogue between scholars who work on highly abstract concepts and scholars who provide empirical insights from the 'micro' level. The debate on the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) illustrates trajectories this debate in the context of norm theory could take. After all, the concept of ownership in SSR is at the heart of the debate on the legitimacy of external intervention in domestic affairs, while still comprising major conceptual ambiguities.

Long-term perspective on sensemaking

This study analysed living stories, at a state when respondents' sensemaking was in flux and could still encompass competing logics. In retrospect, stories of respondents are expected to become more coherent storylines and more aligned with authorised policy. As sensemaking is ongoing, the interpretations of respondents concerning developments and events treated in this study might change over time. Future research could thus explore what organisational narratives on engagements with counterparts and rationales for prioritising certain actions might look like in the future, say, in five to ten years.

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No.	Interview details
1	Interview with diplomat, 13 Jul 2015, Bamako.
2	Background talk with MINUSMA officer (military section), 14 Jul 2015, Bamako.
3	Interview with Ecole de Maintien de la Paix (EMP) officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.
4	Interview with UNDP officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.
5	Background talk with GIZ officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.
6	Interview with GIZ officer, 15 Jul 2015, Bamako.
7	Interview with embassy staff, 16 Jul 2015, Bamako.
8	Background talk with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.
9	Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 17 Jul 2015, Bamako.
10	Background talk with UNOCHA officer, 19 Jul 2015, Bamako.
11	Interview with two diplomats, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako.
12	Interview with three representatives of local NGO, 20 Jul 2015, Bamako.
13	Interview with two US embassy staff members, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.
14	Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, 21 Jul 2015, Bamako.
15	Interview with diplomat, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
16	Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
17	Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
18	Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
19	Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 Jul 2015, Bamako.
20	Background talk with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR section), 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
21	Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR section), 23 Jul 2015, Bamako.
22	Interview with UNOCHA officer, 24 Jul 2015, Bamako.
23	Interview with representative of local NGO, 24 Jul 2015, Bamako.
24	Background talk with MINUSMA officer (Human Rights section), 26 Jul 2015, Bamako.

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25 Interview with GIZ officer, 26 Jul 2015, Bamako.
26 Interview with two representatives of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
27 Interview with representative of local NGO, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
28 Background talk with two DCAF officers, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
29 Interview with diplomat, 27 Jul 2015, Bamako.
30 Interview with two representatives of political foundation, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
31 Interview with representative of local NGO, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
32 Interview with US embassy staff member, 28 Jul 2015, Bamako.
33 Background talk with MINUSMA officer (political section), 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
34 Interview with EUTM officer, 29 Jul 2015, Bamako.
35 Interview with GIZ officer, 30 Jul 2015, Bamako.
36 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
37 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
38 Interview with African Union (AU) MISAHEL officer, 31 Jul 2015, Bamako.
40 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
41 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2015, Bamako.
42 Interview with two MINUSMA officers (SSR-DDR unit), 15 Nov 2015, Bamako.
43 Background talk with diplomat, 16 Nov, Bamako.
44 Background talk with EUTM officer, 16 Nov 2015, Bamako.
45 Interview with EMP officer, 17 Nov 2015, Bamako.
46 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 17 Nov 2015, Bamako.
47 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
48 Interview with three EUTM officers, 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
49 Interview with two MINUSMA officers (SSR-DDR unit), 19 Jan 2016, Bamako.
50 Interview with DCAF officer, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
51 Background talk with DCAF consultant, 20 Jan 2016, Bamako.
52 Interview with EMP officer, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.
53 Interview with US embassy staff member, 21 Jan 2016, Bamako.
54 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
55 Interview with AU MISAHEL officer, 22 Jan 2016, Bamako.
56 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 24 Jan 2016, Bamako.
57 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, 25 Jan 2016, Bamako.
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59 Interview with EMP officer, 26 Jan 2016, Bamako.
60 Interview with EMP officer, 26 Jan 2016, Bamako.
61 Interview with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Jan 2016, Bamako.
62 Background talk with officer of Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Jan 2016, Bamako.
63 Interview with two MINUSMA officers (planning unit), 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
64 Background talk with MINUSMA officer, 29 Jan 2016, Bamako.
65 Background talk with EUCAP Sahel officer, 31 Jan 2016, Bamako.
66 Interview with MINUSMA (UNPOL) officer, 1 Feb 2016, Bamako.
67 Interview with MINUSMA (UNPOL) officer, 1 Feb 2016, Bamako.
68 Interview with DCAF consultant, 2 Feb 2016, Bamako.
69 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 2 Feb 2016.
70 Background talk with officer of Malian Ministry of Reconciliation, 3 Feb 2016, Bamako.
71 Background talk with diplomat, 4 Feb 2016, Bamako.
72 Interview with UNDP representative, 4 Feb 2016, Bamako.
73 Interview with DPKO officer, 30 Sep 2016, phone call.
74 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 6 Nov 2016, Bamako.
75 Interview with two US embassy staff members, 8 Nov 2016, Bamako.
76 Interview with representative of EU Delegation, 9 Nov 2016, Bamako.
77 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
78 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
79 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 09 Nov 2016, Bamako.
80 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 10 Nov 2016, Bamako.
81 Interview with MINUSMA officer (SSR-DDR unit), 10 Nov 2016, Bamako.
82 Interview with MINUSMA officer (mission analysis), 11 Nov 2016, Bamako.
83 Interview with MINUSMA officer (UNPOL), 13 Nov 2016, Bamako.
84 Interview with EUCAP Sahel officer, 14 Nov 2016, Bamako.
85 Interview with two EUTM officers, 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
86 Interview with MINUSMA officer (planning section), 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
87 Interview with MINUSMA officer (political section), 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
88 Interview with MINUSMA officer (stabilisation unit), 15 Nov 2016, Bamako.
89 Interview with Malian police officer/EMP, 18 Nov 2016, Accra.
90 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
91 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
92 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.
93 Interview with DCAF officer, 24 Nov 2016, Geneva.

94 Interview with three EUMS officers (EUTM), 7 Dec 2016, Brussels.
95 Interview with two EU officers (EUCAP), 7 Dec 2016, Brussels.
96 Interview with EU officer (Mali), 7 Dec 2016, Brussels.
97 Interview with EU officer (SSR policy), 7 Dec 2016, Brussels.
98 Interview with EU officer (SSR policy), 7 Dec 2016, Brussels.

List of field notes[421]

No.	Details (type of activity, date, location)
1	Field notes, Atelier Technique d'echanges et de réflexion sur la réforme du secteur de la sécurité (RSS) au Mali, 23 Jul 2015, CICB Bamako.
2	Field notes, Projet Relance Economique et Gouvernance des Affaires Locales – Tombouctou, Mopti, Ségou, Workshop, 28 Jan 2016, Hotel Salam Bamako.
3	Field notes, EUTM Koulikoro Training Center (KTC), field visit, 30 Jan 2016, Koulikoro.
4	Field notes, Cooperation Mali – USA en matière de Justice Militaire, Renforcement des Capacitiés en Resources Humains de la Justice Militaire, Workshop, 16 Nov 2016, Bamako.

[421] The field notes are archived by the author.

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