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CERAP EGAP SMALL GRANTS AWARD

RESEARCH PROJECT

"Investigating Sustainable Peace Expressions in Bamanankan to Counter Hate Speech in the South of Mali: The Case Study of the Conflict in the Commune of Koumantou"

Interview realized by Amnis VIGAN

RESEARCHER BIOS

Dr. Aboubacar Sidiki Coulibaly is a Malian researcher and lecturer at the University of Arts, Literature and Humanities of Bamako-ULSHB, Mali.
He holds a PhD in African Studies obtained from the University of Education Winneba, Ghana and a Master in Cross Cultural and Literary Studies obtained from the University Mohamed Ben Abdallah of Fès, Morocco.
Dr. Aboubacar Sidiki Coulibaly is now a full professor and the Director of the Laboratory of Research in Languages, Literature and Society (LaReLso).

He published several scholarly articles and three books on issues related to African studies and cultural issues.

He has led several research projects. He was an awardee of the CERAP EGAP's SMALL GRANT FUND 2023.

The project led under this grant is entitled as follows:

"Investigating Sustainable Peace Expressions in Bamanankan to Counter Hate Speech in the South of Mali: The Case Study of the Conflict in the Commune of Koumantou"

Dr.COULIBALY Aboubacar Sidiki, Ph.D. Full Professor and Associate Professor (CAMES)

- Specialist of Cross-Cultural and Literary Studies, and African Civilization and Literature.
- Head of External Relations and Cooperation of the University of Letters and Human Sciences of Bamako-Mali
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UNIVERSITÉ DES LETTRES ET DES SCIENCES HUMAINES DE BAMAKO-MALI

Q1- How can you define Hate speeches ?

Sidiki : Hate speeches are the offensive words that communities use against each other to stir up conflict within the community of Koumantou

Q2- Could you tell us what are the causes and consequences of hate speeches within communities based on your study?

Sidiki : We have been able to identify seven causes which are: land issues, abuse of power, social networks, intolerance, problems of access to resources, and insecurity. Some of the consequences are: social tensions over land ownership, food insecurity, marginalization, more terrorist militants, displacements, violation of human rights,etc

Q3- Your study focused on the case of koumantou in Mali, What are the vectors for the dissemination of hate speech among the population of the commune of Koumantou?

Sidiki : The main vectors for the dissemination of hate speech among the population of the commune of Koumatou are primarily due to the following: ethnicity, religion, politics and cultural differences.

Q4- What are the means of preventing hate speech according to the communities themselves?
Sidiki : According to the communities investigated the means of preventing Hate speech is to undertake all the actions (institutional measures and traditional authorities's involvement) to prevent one party using negative words to offend the other party.
A large sensitization through local media is another option suggested.

Q5- For this project, you collaborated with LARELSO. Were you already in collaboration with them before this project began, or did you establish the partnership in order to answer the questions raised in this project? Were there any obstacles in implementing this intervention?
Sidiki : We have collaborated with the University of Arts and Humanities of Bamako (ULSHB) through The Laboratory of Research in Languages, Litterature and Society (LaRelso). In fact, Iam the current Director of the foregoing laboratory and we did not encounter any major difficulties while implementing the project.

Q6- How did your collaboration with the institution helped implementing your sudy, what were the benefits ?

Sidiki : Our collaboration with the University of Arts and Humanities of Bamako helped us implement the project easily because the laboratory that I am the Director is hosted by this university. Besides, the search for funding and implementing projects of this kind are the integral part of the activities of the university through its laboratories of research.

Q7- This study highlighted the importance of sustainable Peace Expressions in Bamanankan to Counter Hate Speech in the South of Mali, Koumantou. What were the primary findings from this project that you would like to highlight?

Sidiki : The project highlighted five key findings:
- *Awareness and Education:*

It is crucial to develop targeted educational programs for different age groups — young men, women, and adults — to inform them about the harmful effects of hate speech and to promote values of mutual respect and tolerance.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Awareness and Education • Strenghtening Regulation Promotion of intercommunity Dialogue • Accountability of Digital Platforms • Support for Local Peace Building Initiatives

- *Strengthening Regulation:*

There is a need to either introduce or enhance regulations and laws specifically aimed at curbing hate speech, particularly on online platforms. This must be done carefully to balance the suppression of hate speech with the protection of freedom of expression and avoidance of undue censorship.

- *Promotion of Inter-Community Dialogue:*

Fostering dialogue among diverse communities can help resolve conflicts peacefully. By promoting collaboration and mutual understanding, these initiatives work toward bridging divides and building stronger, more resilient communities.

- *Accountability of Digital Platforms:*

Enhancing the responsibility of digital platforms is essential. Collaborating with women's and youth groups on social media can improve how these platforms moderate and remove hate content, ensuring that they act effectively while respecting freedom of expression.

- *Support for Local Peace-Building Initiatives:*

Providing both financial and institutional supports to local peace-building efforts. Such supports help a lot in resolving and managing conflicts locally, championing diversity, and reinforcing social cohesion.

Q8- What could you say about the perspectives of prevention of hate speeches ?

Sidiki : the study highlights that preventing hate speech effectively requires a comprehensive strategy that combines proactive community education, fair and consistent legal practices, and the use of traditional crisis management methods. This balanced approach does not only address the root causes of hate speech but also provides practical means to prevent, manage and mitigate its effects when they arise.

Q9- Based on these results, what are the policy implications of these findings on sustainable peace in Mali?

Sidiki : The findings have several important policy implications for sustainable peace in Mali:

1. Integrated, Community-Centered Approaches:
   - Cultural Relevance: Policies should leverage local and traditional crisis management mechanisms that communities already trust. This can lead to more effective and culturally appropriate responses to hate speech and potential conflicts.
   - Community Engagement: Encouraging inter- and intra-community dialogue and awareness programs helps build social cohesion. By investing in community outreach, policies can address underlying tensions before they escalate into violence.

2. Strengthening Legal Frameworks:
   - Impartial Enforcement: Ensuring that laws are applied fairly and consistently is key to maintaining trust in state institutions. This can prevent perceptions of bias and marginalization, which are often drivers of conflict.
   - Balanced Regulation: While curbing hate speech is essential, policies must balance this with the protection of freedom of expression. This delicate balance helps prevent the misuse of legal tools for political or ethnic targeting.

3. Holistic and Preventive Strategies:
   - Early Intervention: Preventive measures, such as awareness-raising on the dangers of hate speech and the importance of social cohesion, contribute to early intervention. This can reduce the likelihood of conflicts escalating.
   - Cross-Sector Collaboration: Policies should encourage collaboration between governmental bodies, civil society, and traditional leaders. Such multi-stakeholder partnerships ensure that diverse perspectives are included in the peace-building process.

4. Long-Term Peace-Building:
   - Resilient Social Fabric: By addressing hate speech through education, sensitization, fair legal practices, and traditional conflict resolution, policies can help create a resilient social fabric. This does not only prevent immediate violence but also lays the groundwork for enduring peace.
   - Empowerment and Ownership: Empowering local communities to manage conflicts and build trust among diverse groups promotes a sense of ownership over the peace process. This grassroots approach is vital for sustainable, long-term peace.

For any related studies in Mali, we would recommend a multi-faceted research agenda that both deepens our understanding of local dynamics and broadens the scope to offer comparative insights. Here are some key recommendations and perspectives for future research:

1. In-depth Local Analysis

- Community Based Conflict Management: nvestigate traditional and local crisis management mechanisms in depth to understand their effectiveness and potential for formal integration into national conflict resolution strategies.
- Cultural and Social Dynamics: Examine how local cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic factors influence both the emergence and prevention of hate speech. This can reveal context-specific triggers and protective factors that might be unique to Mali.

2. Evaluation of Preventive Interventions:

- Impact Assessment of Awareness-Raising Programs: Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of inter- and intra-community educational initiatives in reducing hate speech and enhancing social cohesion.
- Legal Framework Efficacy: Analyze the implementation and outcomes of legal measures against hate speech, assessing both the short-term deterrent effects and long-term impacts on community trust in the justice system.

3. Digital and Media Studies:

- Role of Social Media: Investigate how digital platforms contribute to the spread of hate speech and explore strategies for improving platform accountability while respecting freedom of expression.
- Media Literacy and Communication: Research the role of media literacy in preventing hate speech, including how digital literacy programs could be tailored to various demographic groups.

4. Participatory and Action Research:

- Community Engagement: Foster participatory research methods that involve local communities, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders in both the design and evaluation of intervention strategies. This ensures that research outcomes are grounded in local realities and more likely to be effectively implemented.
- Policy Feedback Loops: Establish mechanisms for continuous feedback between researchers, policymakers, and communities to refine and adapt strategies in real time based on emerging challenges and successes.

5. Intersection with Broader Peace-Building Efforts:

- Integration with Peace and Security Studies: Explore how hate speech prevention strategies interact with broader peace-building and counter-radicalization efforts. Understanding these linkages can provide insights into comprehensive approaches for sustainable peace in Mali.
- Gender and Youth Perspectives: Focus on the roles of women and youth in both the propagation and prevention of hate speech, and assess how targeted programs can empower these groups to act as agents of change.