

# Conference Debate

## Forum on Digital and Social Cohesion

Social Media & Personal Data Protection  
in the Digitization Era of Malian Society

June 9th, 2023

Bamako, Mali

On June 9th, 2023, Search for Common Ground, in collaboration with the Citizens' Alliance for the Support of Reform of the Security Sector (AC-RSS), the Faculty of the Department of Public Rights of the University of Bamako, and the Authority on the Protection of Personal Data (APDCP), hosted a conference debate on the protection of personal data in the era of digitization in Mali. The conference provided a forum for debating institutional and legal frameworks for protecting personal data to promote better appropriation and principles for collecting and treating personal data by researchers, practitioners, youth, and civil society.

*“The lack of regulation of the web, benefits malicious practices going as far as misinformation and cyberattacks. This implies the need for state intervention in terms of legislating this sector in order to further reduce the harms that could possibly result from it.”*

- **Boureima Soulo**

(Association des Blogueurs du Mali)



(Conference Debate, Bamako Forum 2023)

### **Purpose of the Bamako Forum:**

With the ever-expanding digital access in the Sahel, millions of people are coming online for the first time. Through our work in other contexts around the world, Search for Common Ground sees the way online dynamics can transition into real-world harm. By bringing together journalists, bloggers, academics, practitioners, and policymakers around a shared goal of guiding online space development, Search looks to create a healthy online ecosystem through the guidance and recommendations of the Bamako Forum. As a part of Search's expansion into the digital peacebuilding realm, the Bamako Forum will be a primary convener of policy and advocacy activities that seek to draw clear guidelines for online space regulation in relation to freedom of expression, data privacy, social media, and preventing disinformation/hate speech.

With the conference being the initial activity for the Bamako Forum, we look to build off the discussions on June 9th with research products that capture the shifting online environment in Mali and the broader Sahel. The Bamako Forum's mandate looks to advance advocacy and policy around online space regulation and ways to mitigate the risk of online conflict and polarization.

### Points from the Conference:

- Panelists identified two significant challenges related to the diffusion of information in Mali: first, it is difficult to distinguish between journalists and other users of social media purporting to share unbiased news; second, as data increasingly moves online, journalists do not have the proper skills for ethical research and data collection.
- Improving digital literacy can be a vital stalwart against the spread of mis/disinformation and digital harms. Educating youth and journalists about the proper use of social networks can eliminate some of the risks associated with their use.
- Social networks have vastly restructured conflicts and conflict management. Panelists argued that social networks have given everyone a voice and rendered conflict no longer solely in the purview of authorized individuals. This changed landscape results in cyber-attacks, theft, and online and offline delinquency.
- In Mali, victims have recourse for online offenses such as insults or false information. Victims must first contact the alleged offender or author of the site to request data removal and can also file complaints with the APDCP or public prosecutor.
- Lack of sufficient state regulation of the web allows malicious practices such as disinformation and cyberattacks to flourish. Panelists recommended increased state regulation and punishment of users engaging in disinformation.



*“The challenge facing journalists is adapting to the use of new (online) information platforms. For this, journalists are called upon to train in their use in accordance with the ethics and professional conduct of their field of intervention, journalism.”*

**- Awa Traore  
(Nouvel Horizons)**

### What's Next:

As Search for Common Ground continues to interact in the digital peacebuilding space in Mali, the Bamako Forum will work within the nexus of digital expansion and social cohesion. Search looks to build upon the conversations and recommendations made at the conference debate with an official **launch of the Bamako Forum on Digital and Social Cohesion on September 12th-13th, 2023 in Bamako Mali**. This anticipated launch will set the course for how the Bamako Forum navigates policy and advocacy on online space management in Mali, with the goal of expanding this topic to the wider Sahel. By including local organizations, journalists, bloggers, academics, practitioners, and policymakers, the Bamako Forum intends to be at the forefront of digital peace in Mali. If you would like to learn more information or attend the Bamako Forum launch please email Philip Oke-Thomas at ([pokethomas@sfcg.org](mailto:pokethomas@sfcg.org)).



(Conference Debate, Bamako Forum 2023)

*“These two panels were important and contributed to the Forum's two objectives. The first is to create a space for multi-stakeholder discussion, bringing together state actors, researchers, civil society, young people, bloggers and experts. Secondly, the idea is that what emerges from these meetings should be useful to decision-makers here in Mali, in the Sahel region and in West Africa, but also that it should be heard at a global level, including by the decision-makers of technology giants.”*

**-Habibou Bako**  
**Policy & Outreach Officer**  
**(Search for Common Ground)**