

Social Media Watch

Protecting the Humanitarian Space in Mali

July-September 2024



To support the humanitarian response in the Sahel region, [Insecurity Insight](#) is conducting ongoing social media monitoring to understand perceptions and key concerns around the aid response in Mali, with the aim of contributing to the development of aid agencies' communication strategies in response to community sentiment.

Summary

From July to September 2024, 43 predominantly local aid-related organisations were mentioned in 302 public posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) in Mali. The international organisations included nine aid or development organisations, three UN organisations, three humanitarian organisations, and one aid donor.

Facebook accounted for 78% of all posts, with the rest sourced from X. Social media accounts linked to aid or civil sector networks remained the most important source of content related to aid-related agencies, accounting for around 33% of posts, followed by the local edited media, which contributed 28% of posts. These posts reached an estimated 1.7 million people, averaging more than 5,500 views per post, and generated nearly 11,000 engagements.

Between April and June 2024, four negative posts targeting specific aid-related organisations in a public space were identified. However, no written negative posts targeting specific and named aid agencies in the public space were identified in the period July-September. However, three posts expressed negative sentiment about the aid sector in general during this time, without naming any particular aid provider in their criticism.

Between July and September, 32% of the 304 comments (i.e. responses to posts) expressed negative sentiments towards the aid sector. Negative sentiments in the comments pointed to distrust in international organisations, often portraying them as driven by hidden agendas and supporting Western geopolitical interests, with some equating them to imperialist tools seeking to control or destabilise Mali. Common criticisms included the inefficacy of aid, its role in fostering dependency, and perceptions of opportunism on the part of international organisations.

Eight Mali-based accounts, primarily concerned with political and military content, posted negative narratives about aid organisations in the analysed period. Six of them explicitly supported Mali's military. While most accounts had modest followings, they frequently amplified prominent anti-NGO narratives, reflecting sustained and harmful engagement with anti-foreign-aid sentiment.

Aid-related organisations in Mali's social media sphere

Introduction

Publicly available social media data published in French on X or Facebook related to aid work in Mali between July and September 2024 was analysed using keywords associated with a list of 166 local and international aid organisations known to be operating in the country.

In this period, **at least 43 aid-related organisations operating or present in Mali were mentioned in 302 public posts on Facebook and X**, including 16 international organisations and 27 local ones (see Figure 1). These international organisations included nine aid or development organisations, three UN organisations, three humanitarian organisations, and one aid donor.

In total, 78% of these posts were sourced from Facebook, a very small change from 73% in the April-June quarter, with the rest sourced from X. Most of the posts (68%) referred to international aid organisations, even if these organisations constituted only 16 of the 43 named organisations mentioned on public social media between July and September 2024. Nevertheless, local aid organisations occupied a larger space in this period than the preceding quarter, with posts mentioning local organisations increasing from 21% to 32%.

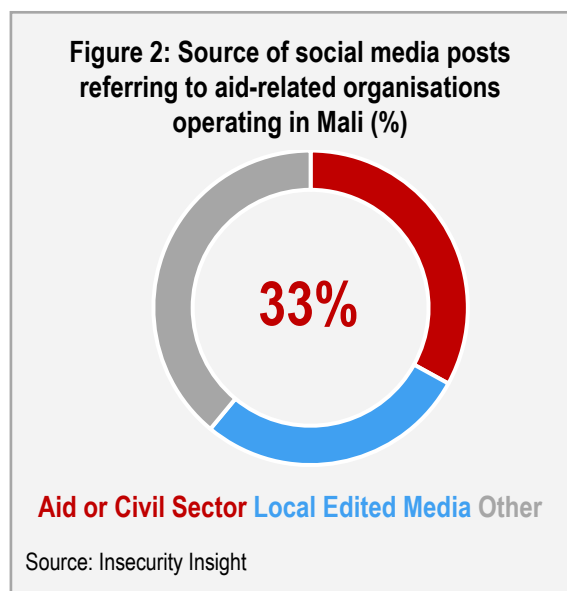
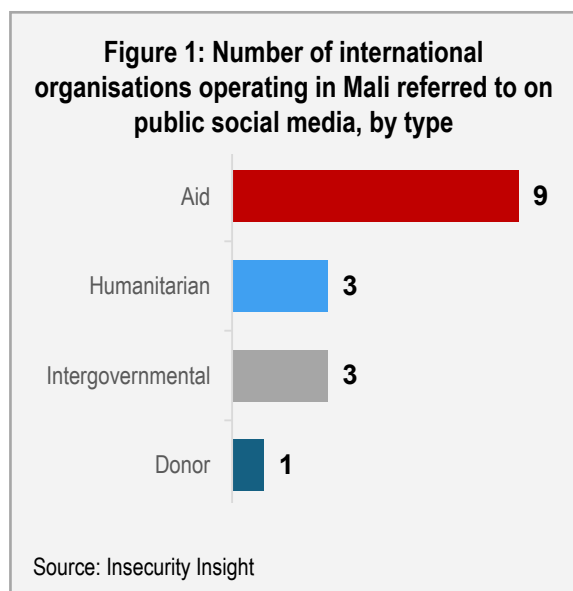
Social media accounts linked to organisations or networks operating in the aid or civil sector were the most important source of content related to aid agencies, accounting for around 33% of posts.¹

The **local edited media**, which also tend to be an important source of content related to aid agencies, accounted for 28% of posts (see Figure 2).

Other sources, including local authorities, donors, etc., accounted for 38% of content.

In the period July-September 2024, posts that referred to named aid-related organisations in Mali are estimated to have reached nearly 1.7 million people, at an average of more than 5,500 per post. Furthermore, it is estimated that these posts resulted in nearly 11,000 engagement actions in the form of comments, shares and emoji reactions, with an average of nearly 36 engagements per post.

The posts were accompanied by 304 comments related to aid-related organisations (i.e. not counting comments unrelated to such organisations).



Opinions, misinformation, disinformation and hate speech

Of the public posts in the July-September quarter targeting *specific*, individually named aid-related organisations on social media, 31% expressed positive sentiments and 69% were neutral, with no posts found to have expressed negative sentiments (see Figure 4). In the April-June quarter, four negative posts mentioning named aid agencies were identified.

Nevertheless, three negative posts linked to the aid sector in general were identified in Mali's online space, all of them sourced from X. Two of these posts, relaying news about [Nicaragua's banning and closure](#) of 1,500 NGOs in August 2024, expressed agreement with these closures, with one of the posts suggesting that NGOs are a "Trojan horse" in Mali (see Figure 3). The third post criticised international organisations' perceived silence and inaction regarding Mali's malaria crisis: *"Le paludisme fait des ravages au nord du Mali, remplissant les cimetières en une semaine dans le silence des organisations internationales."* ("Malaria is wreaking havoc in northern Mali, filling cemeteries within a week amid the silence of international organisations.")

Figure 3: Example of a post published on X propagating negative sentiment about NGOs



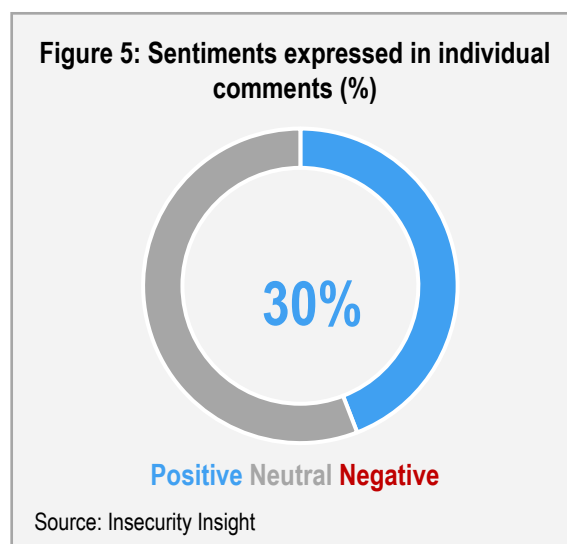
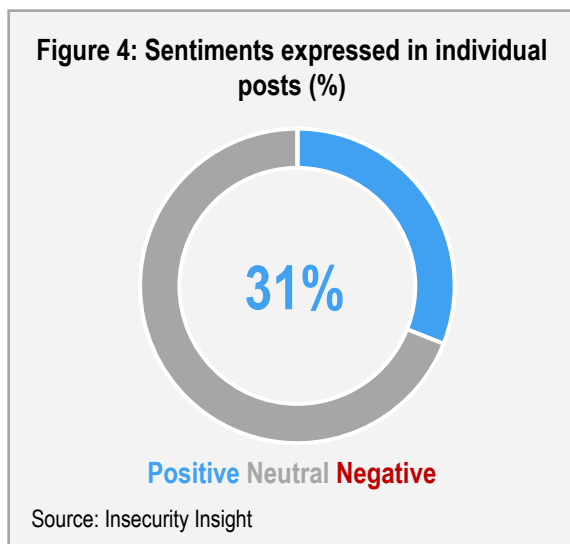
Source: X

Around 33% of public posts on social media originated from accounts linked to aid and civil sector organisations, with much of the **positive sentiment** traceable to individuals connected to these networks, such as employees and volunteers. This suggests that the positive tone is largely driven by those who have a direct stake in or alignment with the mission of these organisations. While these interactions predominantly occur within a self-reinforcing "bubble", they reveal how closely the positive sentiment aligns with the perspectives and efforts of those within these networks, *underlining the impact of their active engagement and messaging on social media.*

The **neutral sentiment** observed in social media posts can partially be attributed to the content produced by local edited media, which accounted for 28% of all posts. These outlets predominantly focused on factual reporting about the activities of aid-related organisations, emphasising information and updates rather than opinions.

A total of 304 **comments** about aid-related subjects were posted in reaction to the 302 public posts on Facebook and X targeting specific, individually named aid-related organisations. The majority of these comments generally expressed positive (30%) or neutral (38%) sentiments. However, 97 comments, or 32% of the total, expressed negative sentiments (Figure 5).

Negative sentiments in these comments referred to four aid-related international organisations: two aid or development organisations, one intergovernmental organisation, and one donor organisation. An analysis of the **negative comments** highlighted several recurrent and interlinked themes, which are discussed below.



Distrust in the intentions of international organisations

Many comments reflect scepticism about the motives of international organisations, portraying them as operating with hidden agendas. For instance, one user commented, *“Un couloir humanitaire pour profiter et faire rentrer des armes de guerre ? Pas question”* (“A humanitarian corridor to take advantage and bring in weapons of war? No way.”). This accusation underscores a perception that humanitarian action is possibly being used as a cover for harmful activities, such as arms smuggling, to undermine the populations that international organisations claim to be serving. Similarly, the association of aid organisations with geopolitical interests is evident in statements like *“Ces gens-là (RFI, les ONG, les terroristes ...) sont les mêmes”* (“These people (RFI, NGOs, terrorists ...) are the same”). This suggests that some social media users see NGOs as being aligned with terrorism and foreign media and portray them as entities connected to hostile external interests.

Critique of dependency and lack of empowerment

Many comments express frustration with how international aid often creates dependency rather than empowering countries and their peoples to become self-sufficient. One user wrote, *“Why not teach them to produce instead of giving these useless things?”* (*“Pourquoi ne pas leur apprendre à produire au lieu de donner ces choses inutiles?”*). Others echoed similar concerns, such as when one person criticised the donation of motorcycle ambulances by a donor organisation, saying, *“It’s an insult! Why give motorcycles when we need real ambulances?”* (*“C’est une insulte! Pourquoi donner des motos quand nous avons besoin de vraies ambulances?”*), highlighting the belief that such aid is inadequate. Another commenter added, *“We need ambulances, not these childish gifts. They should teach us to build our own systems, not just throw money at us.”* (*“Nous avons besoin d’ambulances, pas de ces cadeaux enfantins. Ils devraient nous apprendre à construire nos propres systèmes, pas simplement nous jeter de l’argent.”*).

Conflation of international organisations with broader imperialist agendas

Linked to the preceding point, several comments tie international organisations to broader imperialist or exploitative agendas, framing them as extensions of foreign powers seeking to control or destabilise Mali, such as in the statement by one

user that *“La main qui donne, ordonne toujours!”* (*“The hand that gives, always commands!”*). This sentiment is echoed by other commenters who feel that aid is used as a form of leverage to control countries. One person remarked, *“Les ONG ... servent les intérêts des puissances étrangères”* (*“NGOs ... serve the interests of foreign powers”*).

Accusations of inefficacy and opportunism

International organisations are also criticised for their perceived inaction or inefficacy, particularly during crises. For example, one commenter questioned, *“Les ONG attendent que la catastrophe arrive pour se montrer et distribuer de l’aide, mais pourquoi ne pas agir avant?”* (*“NGOs wait for the catastrophe to happen to show up and distribute aid, but why not act beforehand?”*). This highlights a recurrent critique in the comments that international organisations only show up when a crisis has escalated, using crises as opportunities to claim relevance and provide aid, rather than working on preventive measures. In another comment, one user remarked, *“Ils sont toujours là après que tout soit détruit, mais jamais quand il faut. C’est de l’opportunisme pur et simple”* (*“They are always there after everything is destroyed, but never when needed. It’s pure and simple opportunism”*).

In sum, the analysis of negative comments reveals a profound distrust of and scepticism towards international organisations, reflecting multiple interlinked concerns. Central to these criticisms is a recurring critique of the inefficacy of international organisations, with accusations that they intervene too late or only to maintain their relevance rather than to address pressing issues proactively. Another major theme is the perception of dependency, where aid is seen as a tool for sustaining long-term reliance rather than empowering local communities. Many commenters argue that international aid often fails to provide lasting solutions, with some even questioning the sincerity of the assistance, viewing it as a form of control or exploitation. Finally, accusations of hidden agendas are prevalent, and international organisations are often linked to geopolitical interests or imperialist aims, with aid perceived to exert influence over an aid beneficiary country’s national sovereignty. These themes collectively paint a picture of international organisations as opportunistic, ineffective, and complicit in broader global power dynamics, further eroding trust in their motives and actions.

Reach of social media profiles

Eight accounts that posted negative content about aid organisations in Mali between July and September 2024 were further analysed. Of these, six explicitly supported Mali’s military. Gender identification among the account holders varied: three explicitly identified as male and featured private profile pictures, one identified as female, and four used anonymous profile pictures devoid of personal images or a disclosed gender. These anonymous accounts were notably less detailed, focusing predominantly on resharing the political narratives of others and avoiding direct personal engagement.

All eight accounts were based in Mali, and their content was predominantly political and military in nature. This reflects a concentrated engagement with Mali’s evolving political climate, with the narratives often aligning with anti-foreign-aid sentiments. Some accounts also engaged with international topics, such as the conflicts in Ukraine and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Six accounts had fewer than 2,000 followers, while two had more significant followings of 10,700 and 26,100. Despite their modest direct influence, these accounts often amplified narratives from more prominent influencers. One account was also analysed for anti-NGO sentiment during the previous reporting period ([April-June 2024](#)), indicating a consistent presence in the online discourse. Two accounts displayed particularly harmful misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH) directed against aid agencies, including one with broader regional influence, as examined below.

<h2>Profile analysis</h2>	
<p>Profile: @DelphineSankara</p> <p>Gender: Female</p> <p>Platform: X</p> <p>Location: Mali</p> <p>Reach: 26,100 followers</p> <p>Profession: Likely full-time influencer</p> <p>Post frequency: Multiple times a day</p> <p>Language: French</p> <p>Account active since: January 2023</p>	<p>This social media user is a regional influencer with significant reach. She actively engages with political narratives, particularly those supportive of Mali's military and critical of international aid organisations. Her content aligns with pro-military and anti-NGO sentiments, framing these entities as extensions of Western influence that undermine Mali's sovereignty and self-governance.</p> <p>Research published on Assoblog reveals that "Sissoko Elvis" has operated multiple accounts under aliases such as "Sissoko Elvis Demba", "Sissoko Sora Elvis" and "Issa Sissoko Elvis". Additionally, she managed another account (@ForceVengeresse) created in 2012, which was used to disseminate MDH before being suspended.</p> <p>For example, a recent post (left) accused an international NGO of attempting to reduce the size of the African population. This account's very frequent posting, regional influence, and alignment with pro-military and anti-NGO ideologies make it a significant player in the digital discussions shaping Mali's political landscape.</p>
<p>Profile: @AmadouD57946497</p> <p>Gender: Not specified</p> <p>Platform: X</p> <p>Location: Mali</p> <p>Reach: 221 followers</p> <p>Profession: Self-labelled media company</p> <p>Post frequency: Multiple times a day</p> <p>Language: French</p> <p>Account active since: September 2024</p>	<p>This social media user is a vocal participant in Mali's digital space, although his/her reach is limited to 221 followers. The account is highly active and contains content that is predominantly Mali-focused, often targeting opponents of the transitional government such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. Posts are characterised by their polarising tone, frequently attacking opposing viewpoints and labelling them as disinformation.</p> <p>The account consistently expresses pro-military sentiments and shares unverified information. In response to a malaria epidemic in northern Mali, the user advocated the exclusive use of Malian doctors to address the issue, citing concerns about foreign actors infiltrating the country. On the left is an example of the user directly targeting an NGO with MDH.</p>



The data at a glance

In the third quarter of 2024 (July-September), 43 aid-related organisations were mentioned in 302 public posts on Facebook and X in Mali, compared to 54 during the second quarter. These 43 aid-related organisations included 16 international organisations – including nine aid or development organisations, three UN organisations, three humanitarian organisations, and one aid donor – and 27 local ones.

The social media platform Facebook accounted for a higher share of social media posts compared to the second quarter, rising from 73% of posts to 78%. In turn, social media accounts linked to aid or civil sector networks remained the most important source of content referring to aid-related agencies in the third quarter of 2024, accounting for around 33% of posts, followed by the local edited media, which contributed 28% of posts. Other sources, such as local authorities, donors, etc., accounted for a total of 38% of content.

These posts reached an estimated 1.7 people, averaging 5,500 views per post, and generated nearly 11,000 engagements. Posts about specific aid-related organisations were either positive or neutral (98% in the April-June quarter and 100% in the July-September quarter). While four negative posts singling out individual aid-related organisations were noted in the April-June quarter, none were collected in the July-September quarter. However, three posts discussing the aid sector in general and expressing negative sentiments were collected in the latter quarter.

These 302 posts generated 304 comments on social media platforms, an increase from 173 comments in the previous quarter. The sentiment expressed by these comments also changed, with a significantly larger proportion of negative sentiment: 30% of the comments were positive (66% in April-June), 38% were neutral (32% in April-June), and 32% were negative (up from 2% in April-June). The increase in the proportion of negative sentiment was mainly linked to a specific post that generated dozens of negative comments.

Negative comments linked several individual international organisations to alleged Western interests, manipulative social agendas, potentially harmful vaccine programmes, economic exploitation, espionage, and pervasive corruption.

Conclusion

- From July to September 2024, social media activity in Mali indicated that discussions around aid-related organisations and activities were strongly present in the country's social media space. At least 43 such organisations were mentioned, including 16 international organisations and 27 local ones. The international organisations included nine aid or development organisations, three UN organisations, three humanitarian organisations, and one aid donor.
- Posts on Facebook rose slightly from 73% to nearly 78% of aid-related content, indicating the important role that this social media platform plays in the online humanitarian space. X accounted for the rest. Social media accounts linked to aid or civil sector networks remained the most important source of aid agency-related content, accounting for around 33% of posts, followed by the local edited media, which contributed 28% of posts. Other sources, such as local authorities, donors, etc. accounted for 38% of content.
- Mali has a growing social media sphere, with posts referring to named aid-related organisations in Mali reaching an estimated 1.7 million people.
- During the April-June 2024 quarter, four negative posts targeting specific aid-related organisations were noted, but none was observed in the July-September quarter. However, in this quarter, three posts expressing negative sentiment towards the aid sector in general were collected. Two of these posts sharing news about Nicaragua's ban on and closure of 1,500 NGOs expressed support for the closures. The third post criticised international organisations for their perceived silence and inaction in response to Mali's malaria crisis.
- Comments expressed deep scepticism towards international organisations, accusing them of having hidden agendas, fostering dependency, and using aid as a tool for political control or exploitation.
- Criticisms highlighted the inefficacy of these organisations, with many social media users perceiving them as reactive, opportunistic, and failing to provide long-term, empowering solutions for the affected communities.
- Events in distant countries (such as a policy decision to ban and close 1,500 NGOs in Nicaragua) are important in triggering sentiments in other parts of the world, such as Mali, which implies that social media platforms have created a form of global village.

Recommendations

- **Enhance communication and transparency.** Transparency about an aid-related organisation's activities, goals, and outcomes helps to counteract mistrust and negative sentiments. Regularly updating the public with clear information about projects and successes can help build trust and dispel misconceptions.
- **Engage with the community.** Active engagement with local communities and stakeholders on social media can help to address concerns and provide feedback. This involves responding to comments, clarifying doubts and participating in open discussions. Such engagement can turn unfavourable opinions into constructive feedback and improve an organisation's reputation.

- **Develop strategic counter-MDH campaigns.** Targeted campaigns should be implemented to counter MDH. These campaigns should include fact-checking services, collaboration with local media, and partnerships with influencers to disseminate accurate information and debunk false claims.
- **Monitor and mitigate risks.** Social media should be continuously monitored for negative sentiments and MDH targeting aid-related organisations. These organisations should develop and deploy MDH mitigation strategies, such as training staff in digital literacy and risk management, to safeguard against potential security threats and ensure the safety of staff and the efficacy of aid operations.

Methodology and limitations

Publicly available social media data published in French on X or Facebook related to aid work in Mali between July and September 2024 was analysed using keywords associated with a list of 166 local and international aid organisations known to be operating in the country. To do so, Insecurity Insight used proprietary technology powered by an artificial intelligence tool to identify pertinent data on various social media platforms. The collected data was subsequently analysed, and the findings are presented in this brief. For ethical and technical reasons, the data does not include private social media content. Moreover, the analysis does not include sentiments expressed in languages other than French and is only based on the analysis of written content.

What can be analysed on public social media ?

The main components of public social media data are posts and comments. A post refers to the uploading of fresh content by a user account or page that would appear both on the account or page “wall” and followers’ timelines. On X, a post would usually be referred to as a “tweet”. In this document, both Facebook “posts” and X “tweets” are referred to as posts.

A comment is different from a post and refers to a social media user’s reply or response to a post in the form of a comment that appears in the commentary section of the social media platform.

In addition to posts and comments, social media data also includes various types of user engagement with posts and comments, such as in the form of “likes” and “shares” (or “reposts” on X).

Some organisations, including edited media outlets, NGOs, local authorities, political actors and others, participate on social media by uploading posts or publishing comments for a variety of purposes, including to disseminate information.

Private social media channels (including WhatsApp and Telegram) and content set to “private” (including private Facebook groups), are excluded from public social media sentiment analysis due to their closed nature and restricted access. Unlike public platforms like Twitter or Facebook, these channels typically involve private conversations among groups of individuals that cannot be accessed without consent. As a result, while they may play a significant role in shaping public opinion and discourse, this information cannot be included in sentiment analyses of publicly accessible data. This limitation means that private conversations could potentially reflect sentiments that differ from, or deepen, those expressed on more open forums.

Endnotes

1 This figure does not include content produced by the organisations themselves. For example, if organisation A publishes a post to publicise the work it is conducting, this post is not included in the data. However, if organisation A publishes a post regarding organisation B, then the post features in the data.

Should you wish to provide us with any feedback or to get in touch, kindly write to: info@insecurityinsight.org

Other resources

Protecting the Humanitarian Space in Burkina Faso: Aid-related organisations were less frequently mentioned on social media between July and September 2024 than between April and June. However, in the smaller number of identified mentions, the proportion of negative content was higher and positive sentiment less frequently expressed than in the April-June period. Full briefing available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Applying an Anticipatory Action Mindset to Addressing Conflict and Food Insecurity in Mali: Over the past few months, Insecurity Insight has developed a series of reports on region-specific briefings focused on the application of an anticipatory mindset to conflict-driven food insecurity in Mali. This involves proactively monitoring violent events that pose risks for food security so that their worst foreseeable consequences can be mitigated or prevented through early conflict-sensitive actions. The briefings cover [Gao](#), [Ménaka](#), [Mopti](#), [Ségou](#) and [Timbuktu](#).

This document is published by Insecurity Insight. The analysis and opinions expressed in this report belong solely to the publisher, Insecurity Insight. Insecurity Insight is a Humanitarian to Humanitarian ([H2H](#)) organisation committed to the [Humanitarian Principles](#). This document is funded and supported by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union. The opinions expressed in it do not reflect in any way the position of the USAID, the U.S. Government or the European Union who are not responsible for the content expressed in this document.

Insecurity Insight. 2024. Protecting the Humanitarian Space in Mali July-September 2024. Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. bit.ly/MLISMMDec2024EN

