

Attack, Suspension, Russian Aid, Diversion: Social Media Round Up

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the Sahel

06 August 2025

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 21 July-03 August 2025, assessing observed narratives based on 14 months of systematic social media monitoring in [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#).



SUMMARY: Between 21 July-03 August 2025, **263 public social media posts** related to the aid sector across Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso generated **1,412 public comments**. Social media engagement with the aid sector surged between 28 July and 03 August, driven overwhelmingly by an outpouring of condolences following the death of a local NGO worker in Mali. Meanwhile, online reactions to other events, including the three month suspension of INSO and Russian food donations to WFP in Burkina Faso, and allegations of aid diversion in Mali, continued to reflect polarised narratives around international actors.

PAST EDITIONS: [Congratulations](#) (14-20 July) | [Good Riddance](#) (07-13 July) | [Very Good Decision](#) (30 Jun-06 July) | [State The Reason](#) (26-29 Jun) | [They Can Never Be Trusted](#) (16-22 Jun) | [May Burkina Faso Also Follow Suit](#) (02-15 Jun) | [All](#)

Correction: Geolocation issue impacted July 14–20 data

In our previous report covering the period [14–20 July](#), we noted a sharp drop in engagement around aid actors, with only 19 comments recorded across all content referencing UN agencies, INGOs, or LNGOs — the lowest weekly total since monitoring began in March 2025. However, a geolocation issue affecting the social media monitoring AI used in our analysis has since been identified. The system appears to have under-detected posts originating from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger due to a technical error in IP-based location tagging. As a result, the low number reported for that week is unlikely to reflect an actual slowdown in activity as previously assumed. The technical issue has not yet been fully resolved, and we cannot confirm whether figures for this subsequent period (21 July–03 August) are complete. It remains possible that this brief may also underreport the number of posts issued with IP addresses in the three Sahel countries. The analysis below is based on the data identifiable by 4 August 2025. We will provide an updated assessment as soon as the technical issue is corrected and retroactive data can be re-processed.

Key Takeaways

Outpouring of condolences following death of LNGO worker in Mali

On 28 July, one Facebook post by a local media outlet in Mali published an LNGO communiqué announcing the death of a national NGO worker in a reported security incident in the central region of the country. The post described an armed attack on a vehicle transporting supplies for displaced populations, resulting in the deaths of two individuals, including the aid worker, and serious injuries to others. The post generated 1,114 comments — a high volume when compared to the weekly average across the monitoring project, which typically records around 500 total comments across all aid-related content. While this figure notably skews weekly data, the surge in engagement is understandable given the gravity of the event. No public social media reactions to the death of an aid worker had been recorded since at least January 2025 within the context of this social media monitoring project. Most importantly, all comments were expressions of sympathy or condolences. There were **no visible instances of anti-aid sentiment, political instrumentalisation, or calls for violence in the response**.

No other posts referring to this incident were identified during the monitoring period from accounts with IP addresses in Mali, Burkina Faso, or Niger.

What This Tells Us

- The incident highlights how the death of a local aid worker can prompt a strong and empathetic public response, even in politically sensitive or insecure settings. The respectful tone of the comments suggests that local humanitarian personnel are recognised and valued by communities.
- For aid organisations, this points to a notable distinction in public perception: while international aid institutions may attract criticism or suspicion, especially in contested environments, individual aid workers, and especially those from national NGOs, tend to receive supportive and sympathetic reactions. This contrasts with the last recorded violent incident targeting an INGO in Djibo, Burkina Faso in [July 2024](#), which did not generate similar expressions of solidarity.

Three month suspension of the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) in Burkina Faso

Between 31 July and 02 August, 13 Facebook posts from edited media platforms in Burkina Faso (11) and Mali (2) reported on the temporary three-months suspension of the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) due to alleged sensitive data collection without proper authorisation. Together, these posts generated 65 public comments, a moderate number for the sensitive nature of the event. The majority (83%) expressed clear support for the suspension. Similar to suspensions in [June 2024](#), comments framed the suspension as a necessary or appropriate measure, frequently citing themes of national sovereignty, public security, and the importance of regulatory compliance. Several users described NGOs as potential vectors of sensitive information, with terms such as “espionage” and “hidden agendas” recurring across comments. Repeated affirmations such as “the country is governed” and “thank you to the government” suggest a broader formal and public approval of recent state decisions regarding international actors by a large proportion of those social media commentators who responded.

Some 17% of comments were neutral in the sense that they did not express criticism or approval of the suspension. Among these responses some sought clarification about the nature of the data allegedly collected without authorisation, or encouraged greater communication between authorities and the public regarding what constitutes sensitive information.¹

“We should even raise awareness among workers, particularly those in international companies, NGOs and projects who could be doing a “job” where they collect and pass on sensitive data to “enemy” third parties without knowing it, under the guise of “professional secrecy” in their employment contracts...” “Il faudrait même sensibiliser les travailleurs en particulier ceux des sociétés internationales et ONG et projets qui pourraient faire un “job” où ils récoltent et transmettent des données sensibles à des Tiers “ennemis” sans le savoir sous couvert du “secret professionnel” de leurs contrats de travail...”

“Why three months? Be uncompromising with anyone who does not respect us and whose activities undermine our national security. You know very well that these NGOs are just fronts.” “Pourquoi 3 mois ? Soyez intraitables avec tout ceux qui ne nous respectent pas, et dont les activités portent atteinte à notre sécurité nationale. Vous savez bien que ces ONG ne sont que des couvertures.”

¹ Insecurity Insight’s social media data is based solely on publicly available sources, and all our findings and commentary are published transparently.

What This Tells Us

- The online response to INSO's temporary suspension suggests that the recent suspensions continue to resonate with parts of social media users who choose to share their views on the subject. While this sample does not reflect the full range of public opinion, it does highlight a dominant online narrative that views increased oversight of international organisations as both timely and justified.
- At the same time, the small number of neutral comments point to an interest — albeit limited — in greater transparency and dialogue around the rationale and implications of such decisions.

Russian food donation to WFP in Burkina Faso receives mixed reactions

Between 22–28 July, five Facebook posts from media platforms reported on Russia's donation of 700 tonnes of food to the World Food Programme (WFP) for vulnerable populations in Burkina Faso. The posts included visuals of the donation handover. Public engagement was limited, with 31 recorded comments across the five posts.

Approximately 65% of the comments (20 in total) were neutral or positive, describing Russia as a “reliable partner” or celebrating the donation as a concrete act of support.

“Remember that this is a gesture of friendship, otherwise we would have thousands of Burkinabe currently training in various fields in Russia for the benefit of the Burkinabe people. Thank you!” “Retenez que cela est un geste d'amitié sinon nous avons des milliers des Burkinabès actuellement en formation dans plusieurs domaines en Russie pour le bonheur du peuple Burkinabès merci !”

“Thank you to Putin. I would like him to give us tractors and promote training in the manufacture of herbicides and fertilisers.” “Merci à poutine. je voudrais qu'il nous donne les tracteurs, et favoriser la formation pour la fabrication des herbicides et engrais.”

Among these comments, 35% (11 in total) expressed critical views reflecting the common narrative that question the broader role of aid. Users questioned the long-term value of such assistance, described it as a tool of influence or “neo-colonialism”, or called for structural investments instead. A few voiced concerns about the use of WFP as the delivery channel.

“All this to better colonise us, especially when we see that their ‘aid’ did not prevent Assad's fall. Russia is just another form of coloniser. There is no sovereignty when you are under Russian influence.” “Tout ça pour mieux nous coloniser, surtout quand on voit que leurs “aides” n'ont pas empêché la chute d'Assad. La Russie, c'est juste une autre forme de colonisateur. Pas de souveraineté quand on est sous influence russe.”

“In my opinion, we have other structures that are more reliable than the WFP.” “Pour moi, nous avons d'autres structures plus sûres que le PAM.”

What This Tells Us

- While the donation was substantial, it generated relatively modest public engagement online. The varied reactions — with a notable portion focusing on broader aid dynamics rather than the specific donor — highlight ongoing tensions around the perceived utility and intent of international assistance.

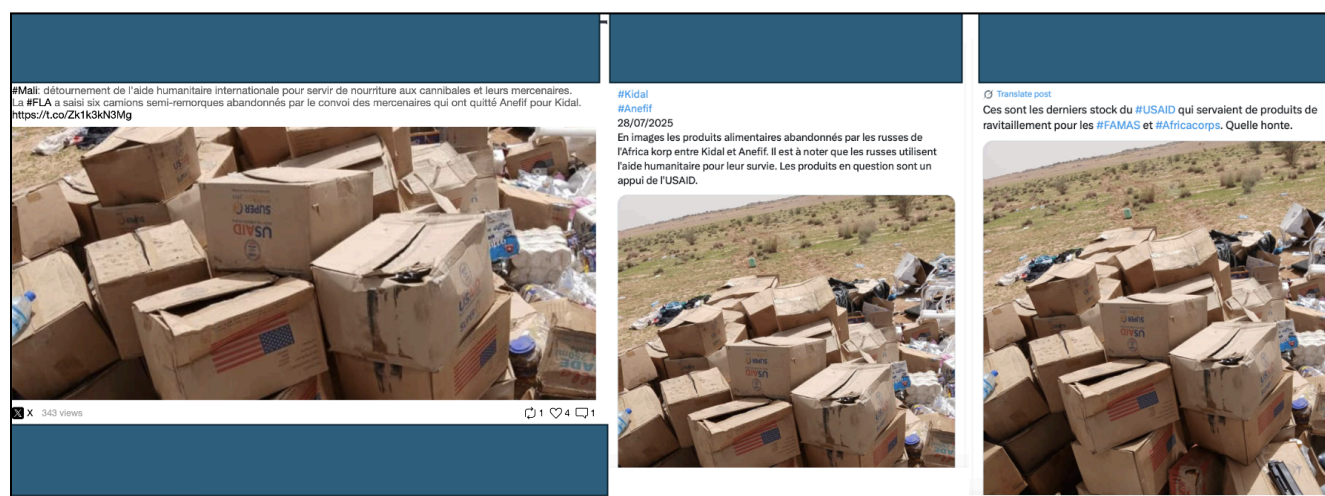
- This suggests a need for clearer, context-sensitive messaging around aid efforts. Communications that explain not just the *what* but also the *how*, *why*, and *with whom* may help address scepticism and support more informed public discourse.

Allegations of aid diversion involving USAID supplies in Mali

Between 28–30 July, three social media posts from individual accounts in Mali circulated the same picture of damaged boxes with the USAID logo, reportedly abandoned between Kidal and Anefis. The posts alleged that the food supplies had been used by Russian-linked forces (Africa Corps) or the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa), then left behind. Together, the posts generated only 19 comments.

The authenticity of the accounts behind the posts is difficult to verify. One of the accounts does not use a real profile photo and appears loosely associated with an armed group active in northern Mali. While the imagery used is consistent across posts, there is no independent confirmation of the location, timing, or circumstances under which the photo was taken.

Of the 19 comments, 63% expressed scepticism or rejected the claims of aid mis-allocation. Many criticised the authors of the original posts directly, accused them of spreading disinformation, or defended national forces against the implication of aid misuse. Several pointed out perceived inconsistencies or mocked the idea that American aid would be consumed by Russian personnel. While 37% supported or considered the claims plausible, pointing to the USAID markings as potential evidence of diverted assistance or suggesting that the aid may have been redirected under external influence. One user explicitly framed the episode as indicative of broader patterns of foreign interference and logistical manipulation in conflict zones.



What This Tells Us

- Response to the visually impactful images and concerning claims was mixed and highly politicised. The lack of verifiable information and the contested nature of the accounts involved limited the potential for a fact-based discussion.
- This illustrates the reputational risks that can arise when humanitarian branding appears in contested contexts. Despite the sensitivity of the event, it was only detected three times on public social media with a Malian IP address, though it may have circulated more widely on private platforms, which cannot be verified and is not examined in a discussion limited to open publicly shared information and sentiment. For aid actors, this reinforces the importance of transparent communication, monitoring of supply chains, and rapid response to misinformation.

Patterns of aid narratives on social media continued

Despite ongoing technical issues, available data from the two-week period 21 July–03 August shows a rebound in overall engagement around aid actors compared to earlier in July — though figures should be interpreted cautiously, as some posts originating from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger may not have been captured. Comment volumes rose from 105 in the week of 21–27 July to 1,307 in the week of 28 July–03 August.

- Across the two-week period, **LNGOs** accounted for the majority of engagement — a trend driven by the condolence post.
- **INGOs** saw a slight increase in comment volume between 21-27 July to 28 July-03 August but also experienced a rise in negative sentiment, largely in response to the suspension of an INGO in Burkina Faso.
- **UN agencies**, by contrast, saw relatively low levels of engagement throughout the period, with only a small number of negative comments recorded.

While exact percentage comparisons should be treated with caution due to the ongoing data capture issue, the available evidence continues to suggest that **local NGOs receive more consistent and positive public attention**, while international organisations remain vulnerable to reputational risk during moments of controversy.

These findings are based solely on publicly available social media content and may not reflect activity on private or encrypted platforms.

Other resources

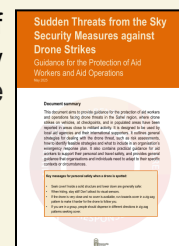
The **Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC)** identified **15 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Niger in 2024**. Health facilities were set on fire and medical supplies looted. Three health workers were killed and three kidnapped. Escalating insecurity and deepened humanitarian crisis strained health care systems. A suspected Niger Armed Forces drone strike hit a clinic treating victims of an earlier market attack in Tillabéri town.

Inadequate access to quality health services is a key driver of malnutrition.. Read the full factsheet in [English](#) and [French](#). Download the [data](#)



Armed drones are an escalating threat in humanitarian settings, with their use expected to grow. Once rare, they are now a defining feature in modern conflicts. Adapting to the growing threat of drones means rethinking security risk measures in high-risk contexts. This practical guide by Insecurity Insight brings together current best practice and is available in [English](#) and [French](#). See also:

- Personal safety: Outside when a drone is spotted: [English](#) | [French](#)
- Personal safety: Inside a building during a drone attack: [English](#) | [French](#)
- Guidance on approaching a landed drone: [English](#) | [French](#)
- Preparing travel: [English](#) | [French](#)



Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research.

This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles.

We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: info@insecurityinsight.org. Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our [Social Media Monitoring](#) mailing list. Find more resources at the [Social Media Monitoring](#) website. **Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link:** <https://bit.ly/21Jul-03Aug2025SMMBrief>

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