

“These Aren’t Journalists, These Pawns”: Reactions to Journalist Training in Mali and Other Narratives

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

20 November 2025

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 10-16 November 2025, assessing observed narratives based on 14 months of systematic social media monitoring in [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#).



Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical, as social media narratives shape community perceptions, operational access, and staff safety. By tracking emerging narratives, and shifts in sentiment, this briefing offers an early warning system that helps organisations understand local sentiment, strengthen community acceptance, and navigate a rapidly shifting operating environment.

Past editions: [I Don't Think He's A Civilian](#) (20-26 Oct) | [The Country Is Now Governed](#) (13-19 Oct) | [We Must Kill Them](#) (06-12 Oct) | [Without Transparency](#) (29 Sept-05 Oct) | [It Is A Disgrace](#) (15-28 Sept) | [Keep Eyes on Agadez](#) (01-14 Sept) | [All](#)

Mali: On or around 6 November 2025, influencer Mariam Cissé, who regularly posted TikTok videos supporting the Malian military, was abducted while filming at a market in her hometown of Tonka in northern Mali, and executed in the town square by armed men, reportedly jihadists on [motorbikes](#). This brutal murder underscores a highly volatile environment shaped by persistent jihadist threats. Public activity on social media appears to be a significant risk factor, particularly for women and individuals seen to support the armed forces. At time of publication, there is no indication that the influencer posted content related to humanitarian or aid-sector work, and there are no direct aid-related links to this incident discussed on social media platforms.

Key Takeaways

Burkina Faso: UNDP Community Development Project

On November 14, 2025 a post highlighting UNDP’s collaboration with a private-sector partner on community development and resilience work generated 27 comments. Although engagement was limited it was the most commented UN-related item during the monitoring period. The discussion was largely favourable, with 14 positive comments, 12 neutral and only one negative.

Most users expressed appreciation for the initiative, emphasising its perceived benefits for local communities.

“**Good initiative**” (“bonne initiative”), “**Strength to you**” (“force à vous”),

The single negative comment called for more evidence of impact and transparency on the result. The user explicitly distinguished their comment as an observation rather than an accusation.

“**I think it’s time you published some results demonstrating the effectiveness of your project. For several years we’ve seen launches, but concrete results in the field are rare. Far from being an accusation, just an observation.**” (“Je pense qu’il est temps que vous publiez quelques résultats temoignant l’efficacité de votre projet. Depuis plusieurs années on voit le lancement mais les résultats sur terrain se font rares. Loin de toutes accusations, juste un constat.”)

Because the comment questions how aid organisations operate and implies that impact is not visible, this comment is still coded as negative sentiment toward the organisation.

What this tells us

- UNDP's collaboration with the private sector mining company in Burkina Faso appears to be perceived positive and beneficial **among the small group of users who engaged**, with comments stressing expected positive impacts for local communities.
- Supportive comments are very emotional, which suggests these users like that the initiative is presented as a responsible, long-term effort to help communities and promote sustainable development and social responsibility.
- Although this was the most commented content in the period, engagement was still limited with only 27 comments, and the discussion stayed contained, with encouragement but no visible controversy. This contrasts sharply with the much higher levels of engagement seen around **UNGA** and **INSO** - related posts in the previous monitoring period.

The Burkina Faso Red Cross Vaccination Awareness Session: Limited But Vocal Pushback

Two posts on 15 November, 2025 highlighted the local Red Cross awareness session on vaccination for 25 people with disabilities in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, with a focus on protecting pregnant women and children under five as part of the second phase of its "Saving Lives and Livelihood" project. The first post reached an estimated 2,412 users and generated no comments, while the second post reached around 69,499 users but generated only four comments in total - three negative and one neutral - this suggests how limited active engagement remained despite relatively wide exposure.

Narratives observed

- **Vaccines as poison and dependency:** one comment portrayed vaccination as contradicting aspirations for sovereignty and self-reliance.

"Why are you letting them poison you? I thought you wanted to be independent" ("Pourquoi les laissez vous vous empoisonner ? Je croyais que vous vouliez être indépendants ?")

- **Conspiratorial, anti-Western framing** portrayed vaccines from the West as a threat to Africans framed through a protective lens toward women and children, amplifying emotional resistance to vaccination.

"Let's stop accepting vaccines on our western women and children. Since when do you confine child custody to a pedophile? Do you lock your safe to a rapist? So why do you entrust the lives of Africans to our enemies knowing that they are trying to make us disappear by any means?" ("N'acceptons plus de vaccins sur nos femmes et nos enfants venus de l'occident. Depuis quand on confie la garde de son enfant à un pédophile ? Est-ce qu'on confie son coffre fort à un violeur ? Alors pourquoi confiez-vous la vie de des africains à nos ennemis sachant qu'ils cherchent à nous faire disparaître partout les moyens ?")

The comment argued that Africans should never entrust their lives to perceived "enemies", reinforcing an image of Western-backed health interventions as fundamentally unsafe and malicious. It is important to note that none of the comments engaged specifically with the inclusion of people with disabilities; instead, they targeted vaccination and foreign influence more broadly.

Although the number of comments is very small, these reactions should not be dismissed as irrelevant. They reflect broader anti-vaccine and anti-Western narratives seen elsewhere in the region and show that even limited health interventions can provoke strong distrust among some online users. At the same time, the absence of countervailing voices acknowledging the preventive benefits of vaccination illustrates how critical narratives tend to dominate online spaces. Through repeated messaging, these voices can gradually influence perceptions among passive social media users.

Mali: UN Training for Journalists

On 16 November 2025, a post reported that the UN agency had trained 50 Malian journalists in Bamako (11–13 November) on countering disinformation, ethical and conflict-sensitive journalism, and promoting a more responsible media ecosystem. Online engagement with this post was very limited: **a single post generated only three comments, two negative and one neutral.**

Narratives observed:

- **UN as a manipulative actor**

“What are we going to do with journalists trained by this mafia-like organisation? They’re not journalists but theorists, fit only to repeat the narratives.” (“Qu’est-ce qu’on va foutre avec des journalistes formés par cette organisation mafieuse ? Ils ne sont pas des journalistes mais théoriciens aptes à répéter les narratifs”)

- **Journalists depicted as “pawns”**

One comment claimed “These aren’t journalists, these pawns” (“C’est pas de journalistes ce de pion”)

What this tells us:

- Calling the UN a “mafia organisation” and its trainees “theorists” or “pawns” presents the UN as pushing propaganda rather than supporting free, professional journalism, and suggests that journalists in these trainings may be seen as less independent or at risk losing their credibility.
- The low level of engagement, as evidenced by the few comments, suggests limited public willingness to engage around the subject of ethical journalistic practices.
- The absence of alternative views on social media highlights the shrinking humanitarian space that has left journalists reluctant to share alternative perspectives publicly online, further contributing to limiting public discourse.
- The sentiment expressed presenting the UN-led media programs in Mali as intending to control narratives rather than strengthen the media sector risks further eroding trust not only in the UN but also in the broader media landscape, especially among passive social media users.

Patterns of Aid Narratives on Social Media Continued

Data from the period **10 - 16 November 2025** indicates a continued slowdown in online engagement with aid-related content across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. A total of **229 public posts** were identified, generating **262 comments**, marking a further slight decrease in online engagement of around 9% from **289 comments** between **03-09 November**.

The distribution of negative sentiment shifted compared to last week. Of the nine negative comments identified between 10–16 November, **66.7% targeted UN agencies and 33% targeted LNGOs**, while **INGOs drew no negative comments (0%)**.

This contrasts with the previous week, when **57% of negative comments targeted INGOs and 42.9% LNGOs**, and UN agencies attracted no explicit negativity. Although the absolute volume of negative comments remains very low, this week’s sample shows a temporary concentration of criticism on UN actors rather than NGOs.

The distribution of engagement by organisation type was very similar to last week, with:

- **UN agencies: 53%**
- **INGOs: 20.6%**
- **LNGOs: 26.7%**

The modest increase in engagement around local NGOs may be linked to the continuous visibility of community-level gender and health initiatives.

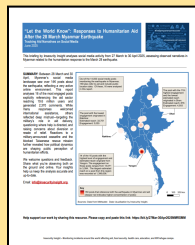
As in earlier periods, these findings should be read with caution. Technical issues affecting geolocation may still lead to under-detection of posts from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These findings are based solely on publicly accessible content and may not reflect discussions on private or encrypted platforms.

Other resources

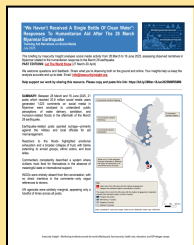
Perceptions of the aid sector on social media platforms

Intentions and practices of the aid sector are often misunderstood on social media. Being aware of how aid activities are discussed and perceived online is an important element of reputation management and is essential for maintaining access in crisis contexts. Insecurity Insight has been analysing social media discussions in Myanmar to better understand how the earthquake response was perceived. During this process, we identified how civilian activities are called into question following the bombing of schools and hospitals, and how the lack of visible aid efforts contributes to misinformation and misperceptions. Read our five briefs below:

"Let The World Know"



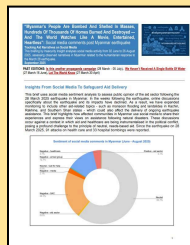
"We Haven't Received A Single Bottle Of Water"



"Is This Another Propaganda Campaign"



"Myanmar's People Bombed"



"The UN Shouldn't Even Exist Anymore"



The Shrinking Humanitarian Space on Social Media: This report provides an in-depth analysis of how public online narratives are reshaping the operating environment of the aid sector in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It focuses on the risks and harms posed by harmful public narratives that frame aid as illegitimate, politicised or foreign controlled. These narratives are steadily shrinking the humanitarian space. As online and offline threats increasingly converge, the report argues that safeguarding digital legitimacy is no longer optional - it is essential to the continuation of principled, neutral, and effective humanitarian action. The findings are especially urgent given the fragility of the Sahel context.. In [English](#) and [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/10-16Nov2025SMMBrief>**

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