"Hope They Aren't Wearing Microphones And Tracking Devices": Tractor Donations In Burkina Faso

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the Sahel
08 January 2026.

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 15 December 2025-04 January 2026, 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 and entrenched narratives, this briefing offers indications on sentiments to support organisations strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

Past editions: Madam, You Are Mistaken, You Are Not Nigerien (08-14 Dec), The AES Must Continue Its Fight (01-07 Dec), Let's Say No To Gender-Based Violence (17-30 Nov), These Aren't Journalists (10-16 Nov), Without Women, Peace Is Incomplete (27 Oct-09 Nov), 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), All

Key Takeaways

Spotlight: Social Media Discussions in Mali and Niger on Venezuela Events

Between **3–4 January 2026**, social media discussions in Niger and Mali referenced the **U.S. strikes/operation in Venezuela on 03 January and the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (and his wife, Cilia Flores)** an action the U.S. framed as law-enforcement, while multiple governments described it as a breach of international law.

The analysis here is limited to comments in response to edited media posts that discussed the issue with reference to the United Nations because of the connections often made between the United Nations and the wider aid system. The analysis is based on **12 posts:** three **from Niger and nine from Mali** which generated **69 comments**. Almost half of these comments (**27) were** negative toward the **UN/international community**, portraying it as ineffective and biased and arguing that "international law" is applied selectively. Other comments used the incident to reinforce **sovereignty and power-politics** narratives.

> **"The UN doesn't exist; it's the law of the strongest that prevails. ✓✓✓"** ("L'ONU n'existe pas, c'est la loi du plus fort qui s'impose ✓✓✓")

> **"…It's that so-called "law" they impose on Africans; but when their own interests are at stake, they don't care about that law at all."** (" c'est ce soit disant droit qu'ils imposent sur les Africains sinon s'ils visent leur intérêt, ils s'en fichent complètement de ce droit.")

> **"There's no democracy in the world, they manipulate us."** ("Y a pas démocratie au monde ils nous manipuler")

Others referenced international law with a sense of frustration that it is not applied:

> **"...A head of state in office is protected by international law. He represents his country, so other states cannot arrest him, even if they suspect him of crimes..."** (..."personnelle - Un chef d'État en exercice est protégé par le droit international. - Il représente son pays, donc les autres États ne peuvent pas l'arrêter, même s'ils le soupçonnent de crimes…")

Burkina Faso: Reactions to WFP Agricultural Equipment Donation (18-19 Dec)

Between 18–19 December 2025, 12 social media posts (5 on X and 7 on Facebook) reported on the donation of agricultural equipment by the World Food Programme (WFP) to the Burkinabè Ministry of Agriculture. Collectively, these posts reached an estimated 750K social media users and generated 107 comments. Overall sentiment was positive, with only 17 comments expressing negative views toward WFP or the aid sector. Social media comments focused less on the contents of the donation itself and more on how it was perceived to affect national development and sovereignty.

The most recurrent theme across comments was approval for aid that enables production rather than consumption. Many users explicitly contrasted tractors and equipment with past food distributions, framing the shift as a correction of earlier aid models:

- **32 percent of comments** stated that tractors, irrigation, and agricultural inputs are preferable to food distributions, which were described as ineffective, or dependency-creating.

  "A useful gift, the lesson was well received. Teach people to fish rather than giving them fish." ("Un don utile, la leçon est bien passée. Apprendre aux gens à pêcher plutôt que de leur donner du poisson")

Expressions of national pride:

- Comments praised Burkina Faso for "imposing respect" on partners and forcing a change in donor behaviour.

  "WFP equipment! Unheard of! Congratulations to the Ministry for this acquisition! Burkina Faso now stands out from banana republics and partnerships that promote dependence! Let the trash countries continue to open themselves up to waste! Burkina Faso is moving forward with dignity!!!" ("Des équipements PAM ! Du jamais vu ! Félicitations au Ministère pour cette acquisition ! Le Faso se démarque désormais des républiques bananières et des partenariats promoteurs de la dépendance ! Que les pays-poubelles continuent à s'ouvrir aux déchets ! Le Burkina avance avec dignité !!!")

Negative commentary:

- Some users dismissed the donation as symbolic or insignificant, criticising the scale relative to national ambitions.

  "Insignificant coming from the WFP, just pretending to help. Otherwise, if our president gets angry, he'll collect a lot more and bring it here again. There's nothing serious about these organizations." ("Insignifiant venant du PAM,faire semblant d'aider seulement.Sinon notre président s'il s'énerve il va ramasser ça beaucoup venir déposer ici encore.Il n'y a pas serieux dedans ces organisations.")

- Others accused international organisations of exaggerating figures, acting belatedly, or attempting to reclaim credit for Burkina Faso's agricultural progress.

  "Hmm, WFP, little machines like that, and then they'll inflate the figures, IMF." ("Hum, PAM, des petits, petites machines comme ça et après ils vont gonfler les chiffres, FMI")

- A small number of comments rejected international aid actors outright, urging vigilance and questioning their intentions, even when the assistance aligned with local priorities.

“Be very careful and remain vigilant when dealing with these international organizations.” (“Faites très attention et restez vigilants face à ces organismes internationaux.”)

What This Tells Us

- WFP’s tractor donation was widely interpreted as recognition of Burkina Faso’s agency, illustrating how alignment with sovereignty narratives can significantly shape online reception of aid-related actions. Aid framed as productive investment can be better received than consumption-based assistance.
- Acceptance is conditional, rooted in perceptions of national strength, autonomy, and control rather than humanitarian need.
- Low levels of outright hostility do not equate to unconditional legitimacy; scepticism toward international aid actors remains present beneath supportive discourse.

Niger: Closure of Save the Children “Wadata” Programme (U.S. Embassy Niamey)

Between 31 December 2025 and 02 January 2026, social media discussion around the closure of the 5-year Wadata programme in Niger, a USAID-funded programme implemented by the Save the Children that supported food and water security, **community resilience**, and **improved mobility** through support to local institutions and infrastructure. This topic appeared in **three public posts**: **one post from the U.S. Embassy in Niamey** and **two edited media articles**. The three social media posts reached 6,678 social media users. The two media articles **did not generate any comments**, while the Embassy post generated **29 comments**, with 14 negative comments toward the U.S fund. The Embassy post highlighted the **closeout of the project**, describing support to local partners (including **10 vehicles and 47 motorcycles that remained with the community after project closure**) intended to strengthen mobility, maintain essential services, and support development objectives, alongside a quote from the Governor of Zinder emphasising governance, security, and wellbeing.

Key Narratives

- **Rejection of U.S. assistance:** Some commenters openly rejected U.S. support and called for an end to cooperation, reflecting a continued anti–foreign aid sentiment observed since the **USAID freeze was announced**.

  “What part of "we don't want you anymore" don't you understand?” (comment is originally written in English**)**

  “May Allah show us the end of relations with the United States of America.” (“ Que Allah nous montre la fin des relations avec les Etats unis d'Amerique”)

- **Sovereignty framing:** Commenters questioned why Niger should accept donations and argued that aid as politically incompatible with a sovereignty posture.

  “If not we Nigeriens 🇳🇪 don’t even need you—our dignity above all ✊✊✊” (“Si non nous les nigerien 🇳🇪non même pas, besoin de vous n'autre dignité avant tout ✊✊✊”)

- **Distrust and diversion concerns:** One commenter raised fears that the donated cars or motorbikes could contain surveillance devices, a narrative often evoked when vehicles are donated, familiar to suspicions monitored in past social media comments to a UN agency

motorcycle donation. Another user warned that the vehicles could be diverted to armed actors in an insecure environment.

"Let's hope they don't have microphones and trackers on them." (" Espérons qu'ils ne portent pas de micros et des localisateur.")

"... And these vehicles could end up in the hands of jihadists if the opportunity arises." ("...Et ces véhicules pourraient finir dans les mains des djihadistes si l'occasion se présente.")

- **Positive reinforcement and calls for continued support:** Supportive commenters thanked the U.S., congratulated the implementing team, and called for additional funding—though these comments were less frequent than critical comments.

What This Tells Us

- **Legitimacy and intent are central:** Comments indicate that aid-related posts are quickly filtered through questions of motive, credibility, and political legitimacy.
- **Sovereignty framing is prominent:** Nationalist and sovereignty- oriented comments continue to shape how foreign aid is interpreted in the Sahel region.
- **Certain theories are repeatedly suggested:** When vehicles or motorbikes are donated, some social media users claim that they contain tracking devices. It is unclear whether these claims are deliberately promoted or whether they have circulated on social media for so long that an increasing number of ordinary users now genuinely believe donated vehicles are tracked.

Patterns of Aid Narratives on Social Media Continued

Between 15 December 2025 and 04 January 2026, online conversations about aid across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger showed a notable increase. A total of 743 **public posts** were identified, generating 1.471 **comments**. This increase could be attributed to the posts on the social media posts on the Venezuelan incident that mention the UN, which generated 82 comments, in addition to the post of a WFP donation of 15 tractors and 8 motorcycles to the department in charge of agriculture, which produced 96 comments.

Week	Organisation type	Number of comments	Number of negative comments
15-21 December	UN	246	**30**
	INGOs	191	**1**
	LNGOs	158	**6**
22-28 December	UN	80	**4**
	INGOs	46	**3**
	LNGOs	153	**1**
15 December-04 January	UN	274	**53**
	INGOs	97	**17**
	LNGOs	240	**3**

The distribution of engagement by organisation type between 15 December 2025 and 04 January 2026:

- **UN agencies: 46.7%**
- **INGOs: 23.1%**
- **LNGOs: 30.2%**

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.

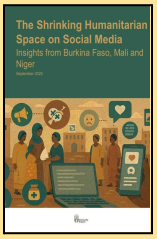
Other resources

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 brings together current best practice and is available in **Burmese**, **English**, **French** and **Spanish**. Individual resources:

- Outside When a Drone is Spotted: **Arabic**; **Burmese**; **English**; **French**; **Spanish**
- Inside a Building During a Drone Attack: **Arabic**; **Burmese**; **English**; **French**; **Spanish**
- Responding to Drone Attacks on Aid Work : **Burmese**; **English**; **French**; **Spanish**
- Traveling in High-Risk Areas: **Burmese**; **English**; **French**; **Spanish**

Adapted for the protection of health services based on case studies on Myanmar in **English** and **Burmese**.

Public online narratives are reshaping the operating environment of the aid sector in the Sahel. *The Shrinking Humanitarian Space on Social Media in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger* 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. In **English** and **French**.



Public digital narratives about humanitarian operations shape access, safety, and legitimacy for aid agencies and their partners in Myanmar. *Learning from Social Media Narratives in Myanmar* **explores** the implications of online narratives for communication strategies, policy decisions, and accountability to aid beneficiaries in one of the world's most restrictive and polarised digital environments. Drawing on seven months of public social media monitoring, the report highlights how narratives around aid delivery, health care, displacement, and access blockades intersect with conflict dynamics. The findings are designed to offer contextualised, actionable insights for humanitarian actors seeking to safeguard the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality while navigating Myanmar's contested information space.

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/15Dec2025-04Jan2026SMMBrief**

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