“I want to volunteer 💙” Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from Sudan: 05 - 18 January 2026

26 January 2026

Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations. By tracking both emerging and entrenched narratives on social media, this briefing provides insight into how public sentiment towards aid actors is developing. It aims to support policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

The briefing is the first edition of a longer-term initiative for Sudan to examine how aid agency acceptance or rejection is expressed on social media. The content is selected based on predefined lists of UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations and general key words related to humanitarian and development assistance in Sudan. Comments associated with posts that attracted the highest number of comments were analysed qualitatively to identify dominant narratives. This edition covers examples of

- how local NGOs attract high levels of engagement and expectation, with social media visibility translating into requests for participation, employment, and assistance across multiple regions,
- how Sudanese social media users use online platforms to seek support, information, and accountability from aid actors, despite limited national connectivity, and
- how negative narratives about the aid sector remain limited and issue-specific, with criticism largely focused on transparency, and international involvement.

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in Sudan but highlights the narratives that are most visible within a highly constrained and fragmented information environment. Ongoing conflict has severely disrupted Sudan’s media landscape, with an **estimated 90% of media houses destroyed,** journalists displaced or operating in exile, and independent reporting capacity sharply reduced. As a result, public discourse is increasingly shaped through social media and external broadcast channels, but overall online activity remains uneven and limited by connectivity constraints. Within the dataset analysed, **only around 2% of posts originated from edited media platforms**, a markedly lower share than observed in other contexts where such outlets often drive amplification and narrative formation; the authenticity and provenance of these edited media posts cannot be independently verified at this stage. In addition, this analysis draws only on publicly accessible content and posts with identifiable Sudan-based IP addresses, meaning that discussions taking place in private groups, closed networks, encrypted messaging platforms, or from users masking their location are not captured and may reflect different dynamics. In this environment, social media engagement around aid actors is present but not large-scale, reflecting both structural limits on information flow and a context in which humanitarian needs, displacement, and survival concerns may outweigh sustained online mobilisation. Public sentiment towards the aid sector continues to develop over time, shaped by personal experience, exposure to selective narratives, and evolving conflict dynamics. To build and sustain acceptance in digital spaces, policymakers and practitioners need communication strategies that are responsive to these constraints and sensitivities as part of broader acceptance, access, and security approaches.

Disclaimer: This is the first edition of a long-term initiative to monitor social media perceptions of the aid sector in Sudan. As a foundational release, the methodology, scope, and presentation will continue to evolve. Feedback on format or content is welcomed at **info@insecurityinsight.org**

Key Takeaways

Local NGO generates high engagement and strong community approval

Between 05-18 January a single LNGO generated approximately **37% of all comments captured,** making it one of the most visible and engaged aid actors online during this timeframe. This level of interaction was driven by only 10 Facebook posts, which together generated 419 comments, of which an estimated **82% expressed positive sentiment.** The posts highlighted a wide range of activities across multiple states, including cholera emergency preparedness, psychosocial support, child protection, protection-network coordination supported by UNICEF and UNHCR and capacity-building initiatives in North and West Kordofan, Al-Jazirah, and Al-Qadarif. The most consistent narrative across the 419 comments was a strong **desire to participate** in the organisation’s work. Commenters repeatedly requested information on volunteering, training opportunities, and employment, often explicitly referencing their professional background or skills:

- Health practitioners seeking to join programmes or requesting volunteering and job opportunities
- Social workers, translators, and computer students asking how to register or participate in training initiatives

"You have volunteer or training opportunities in Kassal " "عندكم فرص تطوع أو تدريب في كسلا"

"Good luck and success always, God willing. Is there an opportunity to volunteer?" "بالتوفيق والنجاح دائماً يارب هل توجد فرصة تطوع"

This indicates that the LNGOs visibility is strongly associated with opportunity, inclusion, and access, rather than with discrete project outputs alone.

A second recurrent theme was requests for presence across additional locations. Commenters asked whether the LNGO operates, or plans to operate, in areas including Sennar, Kassala, Port Sudan, Omdurman, Madani, Nyala, El Obeid (Al-Abyad), Atbara, Gedaref, Kosti, Rabak, Blue Nile, and other localities hosting displaced populations.

In addition to praise and participation requests, many comments shifted toward direct aid-seeking and needs articulation. These included:

- Requests for humanitarian or financial assistance
- Appeals on behalf of displaced families, widows, and orphans
- Requests for school materials, first-aid kits, hospital equipment, and community supplies
- Inquiries about how to contact protection networks or social services

"Can we register even if we are not members of the organization to benefit from it?" "ما ممكن نسجل حتي لوما تابعين للمنظه للاستفاده"

"There is a hospital in my area that lacks mattresses, beds, and tables." "هنالك مستشفى بمنطقتي تفتقر للأشياء من مراتب وسراير وطرابيز"

Negative or hostile comments were present but marginal relative to the overall volume. These included accusations of corruption, politicisation, or alignment with conflict actors. While limited in number, such comments carry reputational risk if amplified or reframed elsewhere.

What this tells us

- The LNGOs social media presence commands disproportionate attention, accounting for over a third of all comments during the monitoring period. This reflects strong community approval and trust, but also generates high expectations around volunteering, employment, training, and direct assistance.
- Social media functions as a de facto access and accountability space, where visibility is rapidly converted into demands for inclusion and support. While negative sentiment remains limited, unmanaged expectations, geographic overreach, and information integrity risks could create future challenges if not addressed through clear, repeated communication on scope, eligibility, and verified contact mechanisms.

Social media users requesting direct support from aid agencies

Comments expressing interest, requests for information, job or volunteering inquiries, and constructive feedback accounted for around **24% of all comments in the dataset**. Of these, over **80% were directed at Local NGOs (LNGOs),** with the remainder responding to UN agencies, INGOs, the Red Crescent, or donor-linked content. This imbalance highlights LNGOs' role as the most accessible and trusted entry point for communities seeking engagement with the aid sector.

This engagement clustered around seven posts that, while covering different actors and sectors, shared features that consistently triggered participation-seeking behaviour.

1. **Training, workshops, and skills development:** Posts referencing training or learning opportunities—such as cholera Rapid Response Team training, and UNICEF-supported e-learning initiatives—generated the highest volume of interest. Commenters repeatedly asked where workshops were held, how to register, and whether participation was open to non-staff. Any mention of "training" was widely interpreted as an opportunity for inclusion, reflecting strong demand for skills in a context of disrupted education and unemployment.

"I'll be with you at the next workshop, God willing." "معاكم في الورشة الجايه ان شاء الله"

2. **Health and protection activities with visible outcomes:** Health-focused posts, particularly those highlighting concrete results (e.g. caesarean sections, cholera preparedness, support to returning displaced families), prompted offers to volunteer, especially from nurses and public-health graduates, alongside requests for similar services elsewhere. These posts reinforced perceptions of aid actors as legitimate, active responders, encouraging affiliation and participation.

"I want to volunteer as a nursing graduate." "عايزه اتطوع خريجة تمريض"

3. **Institutional and development messaging:** Content framed around recovery and development—such as the official meetings between UN and governing officials—also triggered information-seeking and accountability-oriented comments. References to water systems, livelihoods, agriculture, and reconstruction raised expectations about who benefits and how individuals might access support, even when posts were descriptive rather than programmatic.

"We live in besieged areas where food supplies do not reach us and cash assistance is limited to those who registered previously. We were unable to register, so we kindly ask you to reopen the electronic registration for cash assistance because cash support is a lifesaver for us." - comment written in English

What this tells us

- With an estimated **34% of the population having access to cellular mobile connections**, online engagement in Sudan reflects the perspectives of a **partial but influential segment** of the population, rather than society at large. Within this context, social media nonetheless functions as a **visible and accessible interface** between aid actors and connected communities, particularly in urban areas and among displaced, educated, or professionally connected users.

- This 24% of engagement likely reflects high acceptance combined with acute socio-economic need. Social media functions as an informal access, recruitment, and accountability channel, where visibility rapidly translates into expectations of participation and support. For LNGOs in particular, managing interest-driven engagement through clear communication on scope, eligibility, geography, and contact pathways is critical to sustaining acceptance and preventing frustration from unmet expectations.

Negative sentiment toward the aid sector: low volume and topic-linked

Only **30 comments (around 3% of all comments analysed during the selected period)** expressed explicitly negative sentiment toward the aid sector. When these comments are compared against the **topic of the posts they appeared under**, a limited but consistent pattern emerges (noting that, with negative comments representing only around 3% of the dataset, this analysis is not prescriptive of which topics should or should not be communicated, nor does it indicate clear causation between content type and negative sentiment):

- **Infrastructure and service delivery content:** A small number of negative comments appeared under posts announcing **i**nfrastructure or service-related interventions, such as solar energy installations, water systems, or agricultural inputs. These comments typically questioned whether activities were fully implemented, visible, or fairly distributed, rather than rejecting the intervention outright.

"Where are the photos of the solar panels, the pump, and the water tanks? ... 😐😐😐Then, what did the Minister of Agriculture and government representatives contribute to the people's voluntary efforts? 🧐And are these agricultural tools new and do they come with a tractor? 😏😏😏I hope this charity organization is not just a front for corruption. 😬😏" وين صور الواح الطاقة الشمسية و الطلمبة و صهاريج المياه؟ ... 😐😐😐بعدين و زير زراعة و ممثلين حكوميين دخلهم شنو بعمل طوعي من مجهود الناس؟ 🧐و الأدوات الزراعية دي طورية و معاها تراكتور؟ 😏😏😏منظمة صدقات .... اتمني ما تكون منظمة لغفات من لغف 😬😏"

Another comment questioned distributional fairness:

"It's better to stop it because it only reaches a specific group. But if there are people who are truly, truly in need, it overlooks them. So there has to be fairness—or else no help at all, because it's unfair aid." "سن تقيف لأنها بتوصل ل فئه معينه بس في حاله انو في ناس محتاجة جد جد بتتخطاهم ف العدل لازم يكون أو بلاها مساعدات غير عادله"

- **Livelihoods, recovery, and development-focused messaging:** Isolated negative comments also appeared under posts framed around livelihoods, recovery, or development, particularly where international or UN actors were prominent. These comments reflected discomfort with foreign involvement, or argued that priorities were misaligned with immediate needs.

"The issue involves foreign organizations and the United Nations, which are not entirely trustworthy (in some respects)... When efforts and work are purely national, that is truly gratifying and reassuring for the future of the country. God willing." "من الموضوع يكون فيه منظمات خواجات وامم متحدة اصله ما بكون شيء مكتمل الفرح بيه (في شيء من حتى)...المجهود والعمل لما يكون وطني خالص دا البفرح جد جد وبطمنك على مستقبل البلد .الله المستعان"

- A very small number of comments reflected broader harmful narratives that have been observed in other conflict settings, including claims that humanitarian organisations act as "agents" or "spies," rather than criticisms linked to the specific activity described in the post.

"Be aware all organizations are agents and spies." "احزروا المنظمات كلهم عملاء وجواسيس"

Although few in number, negative comments could be more likely to appear when posts included:

- **Broad or high-level claims** about impact or progress without detailed explanation
- **Infrastructure-focused narratives**, which may raise expectations of immediate, tangible benefit
- **Content perceived as distant from everyday needs**, particularly in livelihoods and recovery contexts

What this tells us

- Negative sentiment during the monitoring period was limited, issue-specific, and closely tied to content type. It reflected contextual frustration or scepticism, rather than sustained opposition to the aid sector. The small number and dispersed nature of these comments suggest that careful framing, clear explanation of scope, and realistic presentation of impact can further reduce the likelihood of such reactions, particularly for posts related to infrastructure, livelihoods, and recovery.

Key numbers:

Social media is a fast-moving space, requiring analysis to be focused on clearly identified subjects and questions. The figures below describe how a much larger online communication was reduced to a manageable sample of comments by focusing on posts with the highest engagement around topics that contribute to shaping public perceptions of aid actors. Because social media connects local experiences with external audiences, comment language is a key indicator of how local and external narratives interact. The distribution of comments by organisation type reflects the complex structure of the aid sector, in which UN agencies, international organisations, and local civil society operate with different mandates and levels of visibility, and are therefore perceived in distinct ways. Negative sentiment is highlighted separately because, even when limited in volume, it can play an outsized role in generating harmful narratives, including misinformation, delegitimisation, and disinformation, with implications for acceptance, access, and staff safety.

Scale of analysis

- **Posts analysed**: **206**
- **Estimated total reach: 2.5 million social media users**
- **Total comments analysed: 1,128**

Comment language

- **Arabic**: 1,016 comments (90%)
- **English**: 35 comments (3%)
- **Emojis / no text:** 77 comments (6%)

Although **90% of comments were written in Arabic,** Arabic-language posts accounted for only 56% of the posts analysed, indicating a clear mismatch between posting language and audience response. English-language posts—predominantly published by UN agencies and INGOs (81 posts, compared to 9 by LNGOs)—generated only 46 comments in total, while Arabic-language posts, including those by both INGOs/UN (71 posts) and LNGOs (45 posts), attracted the vast majority of engagement

Comment distribution by organisation type

- **Local NGOs / CSOs**: 53%
- **UN agencies**: 39%
- **International development actors:** 0.7%
- **International humanitarian actors:** 4%
- **UN system (general):** 0.6%

Negative sentiment

- **Negative comments:** ~3% of all comments

The data below reflects the subset of posts with identifiable regional IP addresses, which provides an indicative — but partial — picture of where online discussions are most active, as location data can be obscured by VPN use.

- Khartoum : 159 posts
- Red Sea: 22 posts
- River Nile: 4 posts
- Al Jazirah: 3 posts
- Northern: 3
- Southern Darfur: 3
- South Kordofan: 3
- Al Qadarif: 2

The social media monitoring platform identified 455 posts originating from Sudan using aid related keywords, of which this table includes only the smaller subset with identifiable regional IP addresses. Source: *Insecurity Insight / Topics (Powered by Radarly)*

Cash-for-work projects: engagement shaped by livelihoods expectations, location, and perceptions of fairness

Five Cash-for-Work–related posts generated 202 comments, with the majority responding to content that explicitly mentioned the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP. Overall engagement was mixed but predominantly constructive or supportive, with a smaller subset expressing criticism, scepticism, or frustration. A large share of comments focused on how to sustain cleanliness, including calls for:

- More waste bins and garbage trucks
- Laws or fines to deter littering
- Public awareness and education on environmental responsibility
- Tree planting, sidewalks, drainage, and recycling

These comments were generally solution-oriented, addressing gaps in urban services rather than questioning the legitimacy of the project itself. Some commenters asked about where the work was taking place, whether similar activities would expand to other neighbourhoods, and whether temporary employment would be available to others.

A small number of comments expressed criticism or distrust, most of which appeared under posts highlighting UN and international involvement. These included:

- Ideological objections to foreign or UN-linked organisations, framing reliance on international aid as undesirable or humiliating.

“These organizations do more harm than good. They were in Darfur—what did they do? Self-reliance and national civil society organizations, and with the hands of our charitable youth, we will build a homeland.” “المنظمات دى ضررها اكثر من نفعها (امعه) كانت فى دارفور ماذا فعلت الاعتماد على النفس ومنظمات المجتمع المدنى الوطنى وبسواعد شبابنا الخيريين نبنى وطنا”

- Fairness and transparency concerns, including claims that employment, or benefits were unevenly distributed or insufficient.

“Liars. No financial or in-kind support ever reaches the citizens living in the area. They come, register people, put on a show, then run off with the grants and donations. God is sufficient for us, and He is the best disposer of affairs against you.””كصابين مافي اي دعم مادي او عيني بيصل المواطنين الساكنين في المنطقة يجو يسجلو ويعملو شو ويزوغو بالمنح والطيباتحسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل فيكم”

- Quality and sustainability concerns, with a few comments questioning engineering standards, long-term maintenance, or describing the work as cosmetic or temporary.

“It’s appreciated work, by God, but this cleanliness should continue even after people return to their homes.” "عمل مقدر والله بس المفروض النضافة دى تستمر حتى بعد الناس ترجع لبيوتنا"

What this tells us

- Engagement with Cash-for-Work content reflects high expectations and lived experience, rather than broad rejection of the programmes. Most comments treated the interventions as useful but incomplete, situating it within wider concerns about livelihoods, services, and the sustainability of recovery.

- The presence of UN leadership increased visibility but also introduced ideological and accountability-focused scrutiny. Overall, the discussion suggests that Cash-for-Work projects are broadly accepted, but that clear communication on scope, duration, access, and limitations is important to manage expectations—particularly when projects are publicly endorsed at senior international levels.

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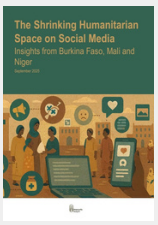
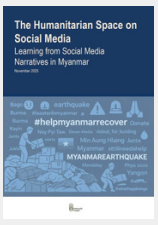
Other resources

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.



Humanitarian action in the DRC is increasingly shaped by public digital narratives that the aid sector cannot afford to ignore. The distorted nature of some online discussions about aid can at times feel shocking or uncomfortable. While they may be dismissed as expressing the views of marginal voices, their growing reach and impact make it essential to understand the motivation behind them. The Humanitarian Space on Social Media: Learning from Social Media Narratives in the DRC shares findings from social media sentiment monitoring in the DRC, with the intention of helping aid organisations to better understand and track emerging narratives and shifts in sentiment. By monitoring online discourse on the humanitarian space that go beyond the brand name of individual aid agencies, aid actors can anticipate local attitudes, build community acceptance and adapt to a rapidly evolving operational environment. 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. Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link: https://bit.ly/05-18Jan2026SDNSMMBrief

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