



► Humanitarian Bulletin Mali # 1

February 2022

Theme trends

- Rumors addressed in this report focus on the safety and efficacy of vaccines and their purported side effects.
- This regular collection of information from the community aims to provide recommendations to humanitarian and public health agencies so that they can incorporate them into their risk communication activities, and align them with the perspectives and information needs expressed by the community.



Rooted in Trust au Mali

The Rooted in Trust project aims to strengthen the information ecosystem and to mitigate the risks of misinformation for vulnerable populations affected by humanitarian crises during the COVID-19 pandemic, by responding to their concerns and information needs. In Mali, the Rooted in Trust project focuses on listening and documenting rumors about the virus, vaccination and COVID-19 response on social media and in face to face activities, particularly among displaced populations and host communities in the Bamako District and in the regions of Sikasso, Ségou, Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu.

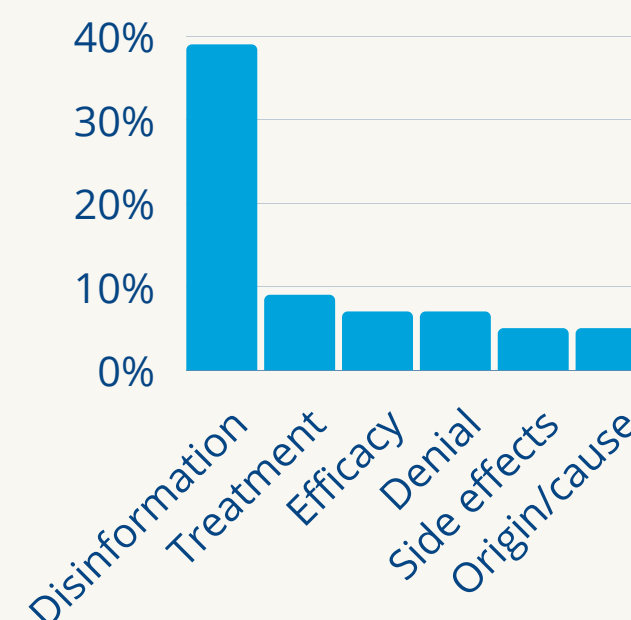
Methodology

Data collection is done in the field with field workers, through community radios and through monitoring of social media platforms and spaces where communities are active (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, posts, comments and stories) The data collected is cleaned, analyzed and categorized by topic and according to risk level. Selection for this bulletin is based on a risk assessment matrix considering topic frequency, rumor credibility and potential impact on the community and on humanitarian and health services.

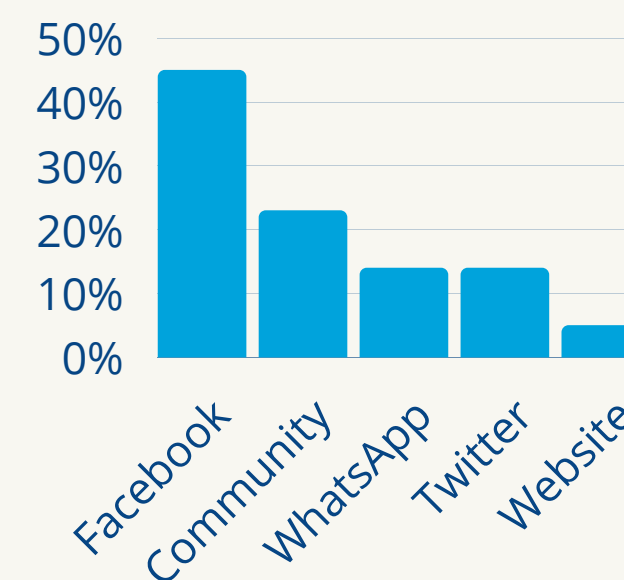


44 rumors collected

Top themes

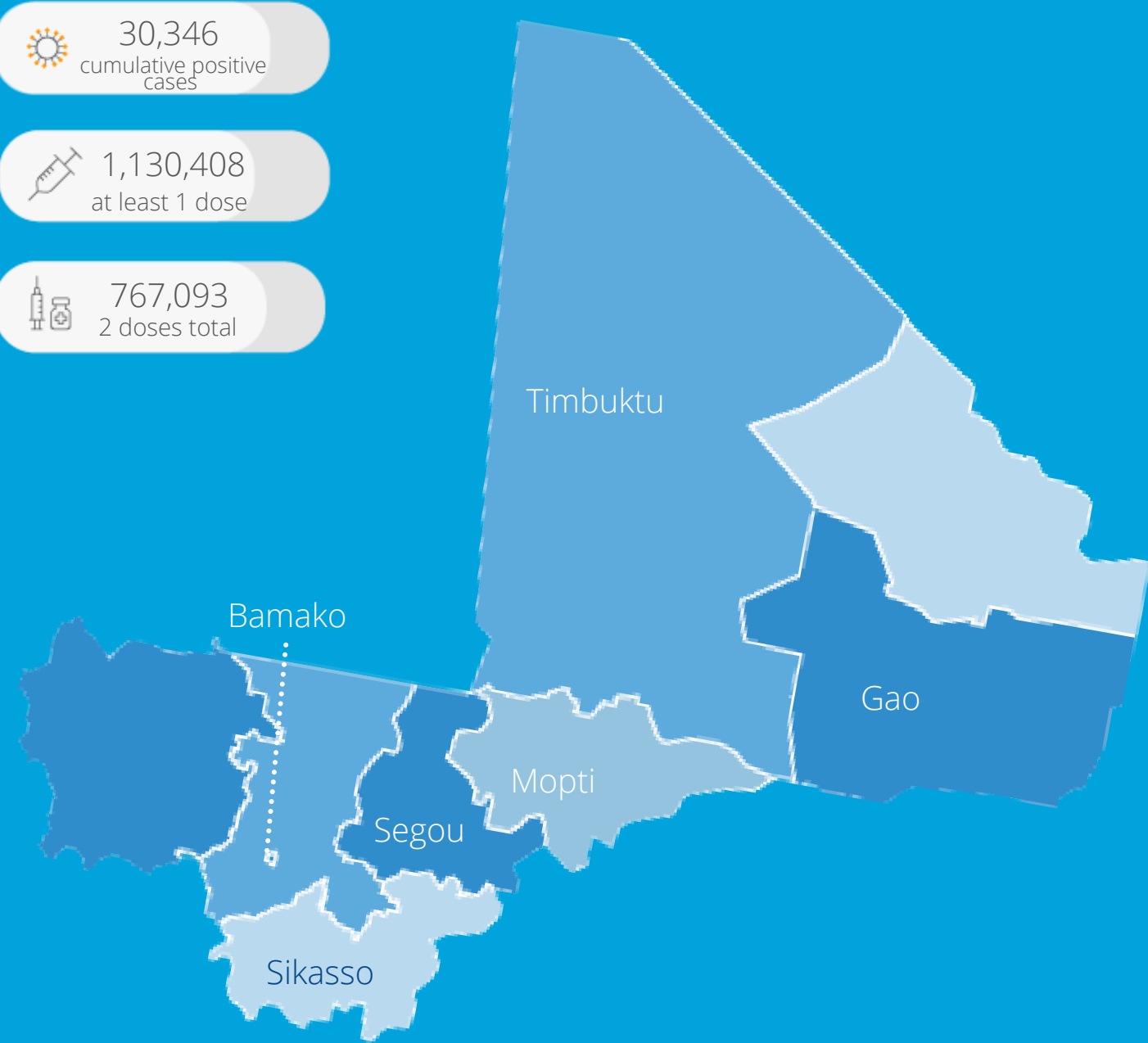
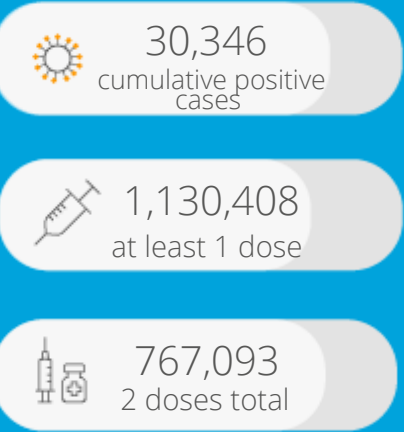


Sources of rumors



Covid-19 situation

21-02-2022 - Mali



01.

Vaccine efficacy and variants

"Following the vaccination teams' brief visit, many people are complaining of Covid vaccine side effects, especially in the rural areas in Dioila Cercle. Not being close to hospitals, sick people are often left at the hands of their families, who use traditional treatments which may in turn lead to further complications." Male, Facebook

"The new variants are caused by the vaccines." Female, Discussion group for displaced persons in Ségou

What's behind the rumor?

Despite official communications on COVID-19 and the vaccination campaign, accessing information remains difficult for many, particularly internally displaced persons. A widely held notion in public opinion is the dangerous nature of these vaccines, which are often described as vectors of disease or variants. Rural areas may encounter additional difficulties in accessing information as well as in the availability of vaccines and local healthcare facilities. Also, the use of traditional medicines and their associated beliefs is firmly rooted in Malian society and may thereby make up for the lack of information, resources or trust in healthcare services.



Fact checking

Upon verification with the regional health and administrative authorities, it would appear that no serious side effects have been identified thus far by the local authorities in Dioila.



According to the same authorities, awareness-raising measures were carried out at the beginning of the vaccination campaign within Dioila's communes and villages. Also, according to Dioila's chief medical officer, the local healthcare facilities spread across Dioila's Reference Health Center (CSREF), community health centers (CSCOM) and community health workers in communes and villages, help meet the needs of the people, whether they be in relation to COVID-19 or other healthcare matters.

However, some commune and village officials maintain there has been a lack of or delay in communicating and sharing the vaccine and vaccination campaign information. Community leaders were hardly involved, if at all, which may have led to the people's vaccination hesitancy.

Sources:

Telephone interview with Dr Abdrahamane Diabaté, Dioila's Chief medical officer, Yacouba Mariko, Mayor of Dioila and Modibo Mariko, President of Dioila's Civil Society. 2 February 2022.

Telephone interviews with Malick Dembélé, deputy mayor of the Kilidougou commune and Batchi Traoré, village leader of Maban, Dioila Cercle

Why is it important?

- Vaccination uptake is likely to be further hindered should communities be concerned about travelling to the vaccination sites and other health centers or should they also continue being afraid of the vaccination teams visiting these rural areas. What is more, concerns expressed about leaving communities in the care of their families may indicate a growing mistrust of healthcare professionals and other first responders. In addition to fears that vaccines may be responsible for the variants, this way of thinking could fuel additional resistance to humanitarian programming and ultimately threaten not only the COVID-19 response itself, but also other healthcare responses and routine vaccination efforts that the children so desperately need.

Recommendations

- Use or introduce **two-way communication channels** to listen to the communities' needs, concerns, reactions and complaints so as to ensure they actively participate in and help guide the emergency response.
- **Addressing the information needs identified** in the community would make it possible to simultaneously reduce misinformation and mitigate the negative impact of rumors, thus strengthening the people's trust and participation in this response.
- **Further engage community representatives and organizations** when designing programs, strategies and communication activities with the communities.

What's behind the rumor?

Despite being approved and monitored on a regular basis by national and international healthcare institutions, public opinion doubts remain as to the efficacy and safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine. This vaccine, which was widely used as part of the COVAX Facility at the start of the pandemic, is considered less effective than the other more commonly used vaccines in the West.

The fact the European Union decided to temporarily stop the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine because of a suspected link with the formation of blood clots may have also fueled the mistrust towards this vaccine.

Limited understanding of the disease and vaccines as well as limited access to contextualized and relevant information may facilitate the enduring negative perceptions of these vaccines within the communities.

Also, the perception that COVID-19 doesn't exist or is behind us now may support this type of rhetoric and mistrust of local authorities endorsing these vaccinations.

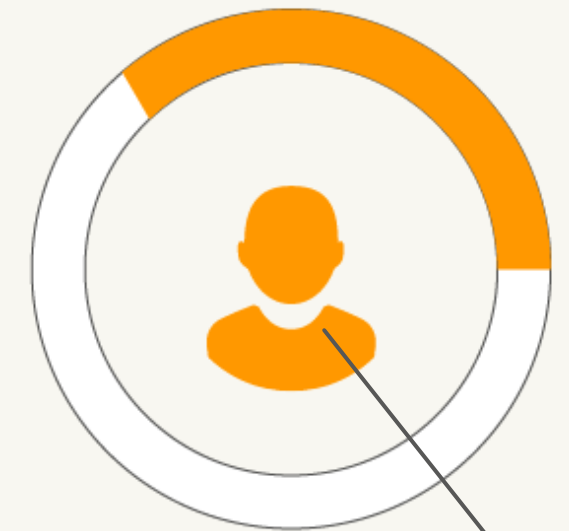
02.

Vaccine safety

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" Our troops, overseeing this delivery, have brought a new vaccine called AstraZeneca. If you get vaccinated with this vaccine, I swear to God, it'll kill you, I'll show you the evidence." Video in Bambara shared on Facebook

"If you get this vaccine, you'll only live for 5 years after it. " Female, Discussion group on website for displaced persons in Ségou



Shared on Facebook, over 2000 likes, 458 comments, page with 332,142 subscribers



Fact checking

At the beginning of 2021, European countries temporarily suspended the AstraZeneca vaccine for fear of a link with an increased risk of blood clots. However, after investigation the European Medicines Agency found it to be "safe and effective" and countries on the continent thereby resumed its roll-out.



Cases of blood clots and Guillain-Barré Syndrome were identified following the AstraZeneca vaccination. However, these cases are extremely rare. Africa CDC and the WHO emphasize that the benefits of vaccination to protect against COVID-19 largely outweigh the risks incurred.

Mali's initial decision to introduce the AstraZeneca vaccine through the COVAX Facility from March 2020 was based on the easier storage conditions for this vaccine at the start of the pandemic at a temperature of 2-8 °C. These doses have since been used and the country is now continuing its vaccination campaign using other vaccines.

Sources :

- Dr Ibrahima Diarra, Head of the Immunization Department of the Disease Control Prevention Division/Mali's Directorate General of Public Health and Hygiene). Interview conducted in December 2021
- WHO. Questions and answers on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines Regional WHO Office for Africa. 21 June 2021
- WHO. The Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine (chAdOx1-S [recombinant]): What you need to know. Updated 5 January 2022

Why is it important?

- These rumors fuel the misinformation and concerns surrounding the vaccine's safety and could thereby dissuade people from getting vaccinated or from detecting it, thus increasing the risk of the virus spreading in the community and especially amongst the most vulnerable.

Recommendations



- **Adapt or develop communication activities/content** for different audiences and communities in their preferred language and communication spaces/places to provide contextualized and relevant answers on the disease and vaccinations in a timely manner.
- **Regularly share new information on COVID-19 and vaccination campaigns with key influencers, such as religious and community leaders.** They can be major allies in combatting misinformation as they are often the preferred source of support and guidance for the communities they serve.
- **Further engage community and local media** on a regular basis in the community engagement strategies on vaccination and its related advantages.

Other rumor trends

Traditional treatments/remedies

Traditional treatments or remedies have a prominent role in community beliefs. In view of the mistrust of the pandemic's existence/management or vaccination uptake, these medicinal options may be a familiar and reassuring alternative akin to the communities' sociocultural perceptions and may also be more accessible for the most vulnerable.

Communities may choose to use plant-based remedies to treat mild symptoms, such as sore throats or coughs. However, it is vital they understand these treatments will not cure or treat serious symptoms. Confusion surrounding this matter may prevent them from seeking healthcare when needed. Also, using traditional medicines instead of vaccinations may put communities at risk by exposing them to the disease and its serious forms, thus enabling variants to spread.

Fraud or corruption allegations

Rumors of COVID-19 patient mistreatment and medical staff corruption have also been circulating on a regular basis since the pandemic began. The recent misappropriation of COVID-19 funds may have a negative impact on the people's perceptions of healthcare facilities and workers alike, thus increasing vaccination hesitancy.

This kind of rumor may deter people from health centers as a whole and hinder vaccination uptake. As well as having a negative impact on the perception of humanitarian and healthcare actors' COVID-19 response interventions, this could potentially lead to mistrust and anger-fueled attacks against these healthcare workers.

Rooted in Trust collects, analyzes, and responds to rumors in 10 countries with the generous support of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). Our goal is to provide journalists and humanitarian communicators with the tools they need, in the languages they prefer, to fight rumors and misinformation in the COVID-19 crisis. For more information on the project, visit www.internews.org.



**Want to give us feedback, get involved or share data?
Get in touch with us!**

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