Building community resilience to misinformation in the northern and central regions of Mali

More than eight years after the start of the most severe security, political and humanitarian crisis in its recent history, Mali remains profoundly destabilized. Inter-community conflicts intensify, leading to mass atrocities, targeted killings, sexual and gender-based violence, and intimidation. In this context of violence, hate speech, rumours and misinformation multiply in the media and on social media, exacerbating tensions and conflicts between and within deeply divided communities.

With funding from the Canadian government’s Peace and Stabilisation Operations Programme (PSOP), Search is partnering with Mali’s National Early Warning Centre (CNAP - Centre national d’alerte précoce) to build community resilience to misinformation in the northern and central regions of Mali to improve conflict prevention and the security situation.

Launched in February 2021, our 24-months "Tabale Kunkan" project, which means the tam-tam’s sound, harnesses the collective imagination where the chief’s tam-tam announces the right information and opens dialogue to prevent violent conflict. Our initiative is threefold:

- Strengthen collaboration between state, civil society, and community actors to prevent rumors and hate messages;
- Improve access to and sharing of verified, credible, and conflict-sensitive information and alternative narratives that promote social cohesion;
- Support coordination and information sharing on the security situation and intra- and inter-community conflicts.

COLLABORATE TO PREVENT RUMORS

*Strengthening the capacities of community and state actors*

Search provides leadership and social communication training to 90 key actors, including local authorities, defense and security forces, community leaders, media professionals, and community and state actors active in local conflict prevention. This training equips them with the necessary tools to manage rumors, advocate for peace, and generally communicate and inform from a conflict-sensitive and social cohesion perspective.

*Community initiatives to counter misinformation*

Once trained, Search assists community and state actors from the various peace, security and reconciliation committees in developing an action plan to prevent and manage rumors and misinformation. Based on this plan, the peace ambassadors
(women, youth, traditional communicators) trained by Search during the first phase of the project implement community initiatives. These initiatives, including dialogues, mediation sessions, inter-and intra-community rapprochement activities, and media content production, also build trust and collaboration between communities.

**Open dialogue on the impact of rumours**

With Search’s support, local authorities organize **84 Town Hall Meetings (THM) to exchange with community actors on the impact of rumors, misinformation, and hate speech** on the social and security situation and on the peace process. These meetings also allow all actors to reflect on the best ways to prevent and respond to misinformation.

**IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND SHARING OF INFORMATION**

**Strengthening the capacities of media professionals and influencers**

Media professionals who do not sufficiently master information verification techniques often unintentionally relay false information (infox). Once shared on the radio and social networks, these infox contribute directly to conflicts’ dynamics by fuelling retaliation cycles.

As a result, Search trains 75 members of radio and television stations, print media, and influencers (activists, bloggers) in conflict-sensitive journalism, and fact-checking techniques. This training strengthens their capacity to disseminate verified information but also to decipher rumors and react appropriately.

**Production of conflict-sensitive media content**

Once trained, these media professionals and influential people track down hate speech and rumors relayed by the media and social networks that can be factors of conflict or tension. They then produce media products, "info-intox," to deconstruct them using neutral and conflict-sensitive arguments based on credible and verified facts. We also support participants in creating social network campaigns, including competitions, debates, and videos, to encourage the public to analyze the information critically.

Relying on its extensive radio partners network, Search’s media team produces spots, a magazine, and radio spots calling for vigilance against rumors and hate speech. The monthly magazine "Ziri! Naam! (Once upon a time...)") is based on real facts and mobilizes the collective imagination through stories and founding myths that promote peaceful coexistence. This media content and an illustrated version of the magazine are also disseminated on social media.

**COORDINATION AND INFORMATION SHARING ON SECURITY**

**Operationalization of a early warning system**

The CNAP’s early warning platform aims to monitor potential security risks and provide early warning alerts to facilitate prevention and rapid response measures. The platform not only collects information, for Search and the CNAP, on incidents related to the early warning mechanism (misinformation, security situation, crime, and protection of civilians). It verifies them and informs the civil and military authorities if an intervention is necessary. Thus, to create a coherent database for the PAP, the CNAP trains collectors, peace ambassadors, and media professionals in data collection and report writing.

**Awareness-raising and Advocacy**

Search leads **awareness sessions for local actors**, including community leaders, administrative and regional authorities, of the importance and role of the CNAP’s early warning and risk response mechanism. These awareness-raising sessions also highlight the need for all stakeholders to collaborate on data collection and information sharing on conflict dynamics to improve the effectiveness of the PAP and thus increase community safety.

Finally, Search supports the CNAP, community leaders, and local authorities in developing an **advocacy strategy at regional and national levels**. This strategy aims to ensure that national authorities integrate the PAP recommendations and perspectives into the security decision-making process.