

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

**13-19 June 2023**

**(Weekly brief #76)**

# Top trends

## [HIV found in COVID-19 vaccines](#)

Regional and International tweets have circulated this past week to engage African users in discussions around COVID-19 vaccine ingredients.

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## Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from June 13-19 in Africa.

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## Nigeria, South Africa

### HIV found in COVID-19 vaccines

**CONTEXT:** Regional and International tweets circulated this past week to engage African users in discussions around COVID-19 vaccine ingredients.

**Engagement:** 2 posts, 2804 likes, 1908 retweets

#### Nigeria

- A [tweet](#) shared by [DR. Kek](#), a Twitter account with a substantial following of 104.3k users, garnered significant attention via retweets by multiple individuals in Nigeria.
- DR. Kek's account is known for actively participating in discussions related to [conspiracy theories](#).
- The tweet reads: “Nobel Prize winner found dead after exposing HIV in the COVID Vaccines”.
- The tweet made references to Luc Montagnier, a French virologist and joint recipient of the 2008 Nobel Prize in Medicine for his discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus in 1983. He said in the video: “there was “a manipulation done on the COVID-19 virus [...] but on this model someone added on top of that some sequences including HIV, the virus for AIDS.” Montagnier's conclusions were rejected by the [scientific community](#).

#### South Africa

- Similarly, a [study](#) titled “HIV-Infected Green Monkey DNA Found in COVID-19 Vaccines” has been retweeted by a [user](#) in South Africa, and shared by multiple users globally that engage with discussions around conspiracy theories. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- The study was shared by “[The People's Voice TV](#)”, a South African media platform founded by David Icke, a prominent conspiracy theorist and anti-vaccine advocate. The platform gained attention for promoting controversial and unscientific views since 2013, including spreading misinformation about vaccines and promoting conspiracy theories related to various global events.
- It's noteworthy that a “fact-checked” icon in the article has been included in an attempt to verify its credibility to the audience.

## Why is it concerning?

- International anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists have the ability to influence African media users by employing tactics that aim to enhance their credibility. That includes sharing claims that reference scientific and accredited figures, along with the use of “fact-checked” icons that have been increasingly accepted as a form of validation against misinformation.
- COVID-19 conspiracy theories are still a point of interest for many online users even following the declaration of the end of the emergency phase of the pandemic. Anti-vaxxers might have used this opportunity as a fertile ground to push for the emergence and dissemination of misinformation.
- COVID-19 conspiracy theories might offer simplified explanations or present alternative narratives that appeal to people seeking answers related to COVID-19 adverse reactions or deaths related to inoculation.

## What can we do?

- Amplify fact-checked articles by credible sources. A recent [article](#) by AP Fact check found no evidence to support the claim that the COVID-19 vaccines contain monkey DNA.
- Continue to promote VFA content, including COVID-19 videos on vaccine safety and approval [[ENG](#), [FR](#)]
- Regularly monitoring websites from official sources including pharmaceutical companies to seek up-to-date [information](#) about vaccine production and ingredients.

## Persistent trends

### Conversations about cholera outbreaks

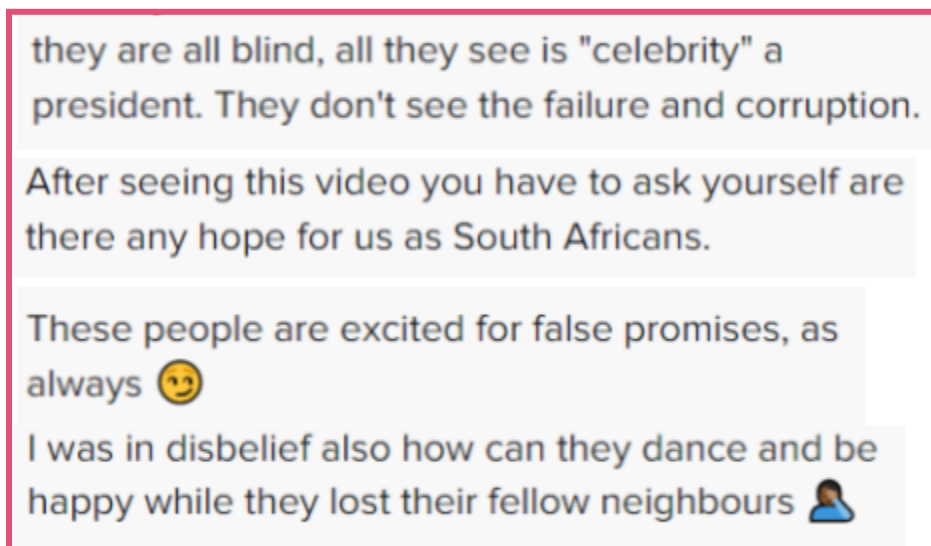
#### South Africa

#### Fear grasps residents in regions outside of cholera epicenter

- In a recent YouTube [video](#) released by SABC News (South African Broadcasting Network) on June 14th, a growing concern was discussed among residents of Ha-Mutsha, a village situated roughly 150 km from Musina town near the border of Zimbabwe.
- The video shed light on their apprehensions regarding the potential escalation of cholera transmission due to the lack of access to safe water sources in their community. The residents' displayed sentiments of fear and worry amidst the ongoing cholera outbreak.

### Blame to local authorities

- A TikTok [video](#) posted by Renallogouws, a private user, gained significant attention from his 379k followers.
- Many online users amplified their lack of trust towards local authorities. These comments reflect the continuous frustrations of online users shared across multiple platforms. Below are some comments:



### Democratic Republic of Congo

- According to an [article](#) posted by Radio Okapi, a radio network based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, twenty deaths related to cholera have been recorded since April 2023 as a result of the cholera epidemic in three health zones in the city of Bukavu, in the province of South Kivu.
- Almost two hundred additional cases have been recorded every week for the past two months at the cholera treatment center at Bukavu's general referral hospital, according to medical sources cited in the article.
- The lack of access to drinking water is one of the causes of this epidemic according to Dr. Guy Mulinganya, the medical director of the Bukavu provincial general hospital, which houses the cholera treatment center. The slackening of hygiene measures against Covid has also exacerbated the situation, with barrier measures no longer respected by the population. He also added that preventive measures against COVID-19 and Ebola have been relaxed lately, and with this “an upsurge of cholera cases has been noted”.
- It's noteworthy that community members have brought in some patients to seek care at the cholera treatment center, but have succumbed to the disease before receiving medical care.

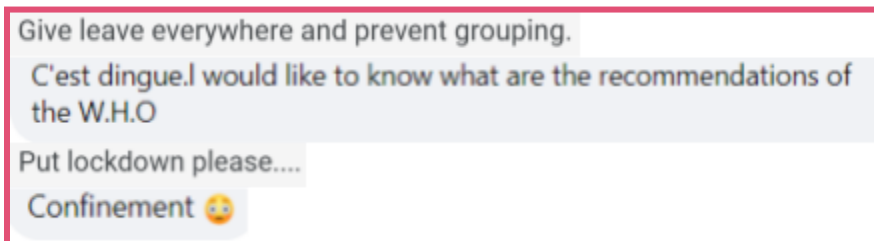
- According to the local infodemic management team in the DRC, the problem is attributed to a lack of information within the community, some of whom are unaware of the criteria for defining cases of cholera in the commune, making it difficult to recognize the disease in time and take the appropriate action.

## Trend to watch

### Dengue outbreak in Mauritius

Engagement: **11 posts, 2.5k likes, 320 comments**

- After the [detection](#) of dengue cases in Mauritius, the news was widely disseminated by multiple local news media outlets. However, the level of public engagement, as reflected in the number of comments, remained relatively low.
- One fact that may have contributed to this is the [low internet penetration](#) among the population in Mauritius.
- On a Facebook [post](#) by "L'Express Maurice," a prominent French-language daily newspaper in Mauritius with 887k followers, commentators expressed their requests and expectations regarding lockdown announcements. Additionally, they called on the authorities to provide mosquito nets to high-risk locations and schools.
- Notably, one commentator specifically inquired about the recommendations of the World Health Organization regarding the situation. Below are comments, some of which were translated from french:



- According to WHO's [fact sheet](#) on dengue and severe dengue fever, dengue is a viral infection caused by the dengue virus, transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes. To prevent dengue, it is crucial to focus on prevention and control measures, such as using mosquito nets, applying repellents, and wearing protective clothing that covers the body.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, confinement measures aimed at containing the spread of the pandemic have been at the forefront of people's minds. Consequently, the awareness and implementation of accurate preventive measures for dengue may have inadvertently been overlooked.

## Key resources

### Cholera

- Cholera [social kit](#) VFA
- [Call](#) for urgent and collective action to fight cholera
- Global Task Force on Cholera Control Cholera [roadmap](#)

### COVID-19

- [CDC](#), COVID-19 vaccination, adverse events
- [CDC](#), Clinical considerations: Myocarditis after COVID-19 vaccines
- [Social media toolkit](#) with all recent Viral Facts videos on COVID-19 (ENG, FR).
- [Social media toolkit](#) with all recent Viral Facts videos on Myocarditis (ENG, FR)
- [WHO](#), What's the difference between Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and pandemic?
- [WHO](#), Preparedness and Resilience for emerging threats.
- [Internews](#), Let's talk vaccines: A free course to help journalists translate the language of vaccines.
- [Internews](#), Keeping the COVID-19 story on the news agenda

### Dengue

- [WHO](#), Dengue fact sheet

## Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English, and Lusophone-speaking countries.

The social media analysis for French-speaking countries is conducted by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Guinea, the one for Lusophone-speaking countries by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Angola, and the one for English-speaking countries by a WHO AFRO social media officer.

The final report is a combination of the three analyses and recommendations.

The shift from a social media listening monitoring conducted by only one person for the whole African region into a combined one based on the analysis conducted by three different people may result in a less detailed and exhaustive report.

Engagements, otherwise known as interactions, **refer to the number of likes, comments, reactions, and re-shares on a post.**

This is not a perfect measure of engagement:

- Some may have seen the post and chosen not to interact with it;
- Commenting on or re-sharing a post may constitute a more meaningful form of engagement than simply reacting to it;
- We are not systematically distinguishing between the types of responses that each engagement generates (e.g. while a post may contain misinformation, people may be countering/ debunking it in the comments).

We seek to mitigate these limitations by:

- Scanning comments and monitoring reactions to qualitatively evaluate responses to each post;
- Assessing the velocity of a post (i.e. how fast is it obtaining reactions, likes, and shares) and the re-emergence of specific themes;
- Identifying whether the post is shared across a variety of platforms and sources (broad engagement), or simply soliciting a high level of attention within a given community/ platform (siloeed engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Crowdtangle, Google Trends, and UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards as well as the WHO EPI-WIN weekly infodemic insight reports and the WHO EARS platform.

As a result, data may be biased towards data emerging from formal news outlets/ official social media pages and does not incorporate content circulating on closed platforms (e.g. Whatsapp) or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on our fact-checking partners, who provide invaluable insights into relevant national and regional trends or content, as well as country-level reports, including the South Africa Social Listening Weekly Report and the Mali Social Listening Weekly Report.

In producing these summaries and recommendations, we have consulted community feedback survey reports, as well as monitoring and recommendations from AIRA partners. We also draw from WHO EPI-WIN weekly reports and UNICEF monthly reports to formulate recommendations. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.