

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

25 March - 1 April 2024

Weekly brief #113

Top concerns

[Online users across Southern African countries complain of extreme weather conditions, including abnormal dryness, insufficient rainfall, and floods](#)

The increasing interplay between climate change and health is becoming more apparent throughout Southern Africa. Presently, discussions primarily revolve around the profound impact on livelihoods and ongoing monitoring is needed to ensure timely responses to emerging concerns.

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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 March 25 - April 1 in Africa.

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Online users across Southern African countries complain of extreme weather conditions, including abnormal dryness, insufficient rainfall, and floods

Engagement: **29 posts, 41k likes, 7908 comments**

- [Malawian](#) and [Zambian](#) and [Zimbabwean](#) authorities have declared drought a national disaster and emergency.
- The northern region of **Malawi** is at risk of flash floods, as highlighted by [Zodiak online](#) while the southern and central areas can anticipate dry weather conditions. As a result of extreme weather, online news agencies have brought to attention recommendations that can be adopted, such as planting hybrid seeds that are resistant to pests and diseases and crop diversification to avert hunger.
- Likewise, monitored discussions around heavy rains in Maputo, **Mozambique** reflect an [apprehension](#) about leaving homes, particularly on 5 April when rainfall is expected to begin. The intense weather has already forced [600 people in Maputo to evacuate](#), with many finding shelter in accommodation centres.
- Similarly, two online posts originating from **Botswana** shed light on different types of recommendations. On the Facebook post of the [Sunday Standard](#), online users expressed sadness upon learning about selling cattle in large numbers as a potential recommendation to mitigate potential losses in livestock. Additionally, there were users from Zambia interested in importing brachiaria grass to drought-prone areas due to its advantages listed on the Facebook post by [Supergrow seeds Botswana](#).
- In **Zimbabwe**, discussions surrounding the relationship between local leadership and drought are beginning to surface online [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. Nelson Chamisa, a Zimbabwean politician who is a member of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has pointed out that the inadequate preparedness for potential hazards by local authorities has exacerbated the impact of drought conditions in the country. In the same line of thought, online users commenting on a video posted by VOA studio 7 about President Mnangagwa's declaration of drought have drawn a connection between alleged corrupt financial practices and the current "state of disaster".
- Political figures have contributed to 50% of 12 monitored posts on Facebook and X regarding drought in **Zambia**. These encompass strategies for addressing

drought, such as [reassessing agricultural practices](#) and [collaborating with international organisations](#). Across all posts, the majority of online users commend the efforts of local authorities in tackling drought.

- Across media commentary from international media agencies [[Malawi](#), [Zambia](#), [Zimbabwe](#)], interviewees (including farmers) complained about the loss of crops, food insecurity and the devastating impact of drought on their livelihoods.

Why is it concerning?

- Key messages about the impact of climate change, driven mainly by human activities, are shared in the [analytical fact sheet released in April 2024 by the WHO-integrated African Health Observatory](#).
 1. “Droughts alone affected 88.9 million people in Africa in 2022”.
 2. “Weather events such as storms, extreme heat waves, floods, droughts, and wildfires result in adverse health outcomes, including high mortality and morbidity among affected populations due to injuries, heatstroke, drowning, waterborne diseases, zoonoses, vector-borne diseases, malnutrition, non-communicable diseases, and mental health issues”.
 3. “Africa experienced the highest impact from droughts, with 64% of its land area affected by at least one month of severe drought annually from 2013 to 2022, a significant increase from 9% in 1951–60”.
- Drought has numerous effects on public health including the proliferation of vector-borne diseases, an increased risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, and human well being. A study titled “[Public Health Implications of Drought in a Climate Change Context: A Critical Review](#)”¹ details how the current climate change is exacerbating the functioning of public health and public health systems.
- A scientific paper titled “Health effects of climate change in Africa: A call for an improved implementation of prevention measures” outlines strategies for reducing the effects of climate change on health. These include “[improved surveillance, information dissemination, reducing poverty and health inequalities, and improving research on the health effects of climate change](#)”².

¹ Salvador, C., Nieto, R., Vicente-Serrano, S. M., García-Herrera, R., Gimeno, L., & Vicedo-Cabrera, A. M. (2023). Public health implications of drought in a climate change context: A critical review. *Annual review of public health*, 44, 213-232.

² Moyo, E., Nhari, L. G., Moyo, P., Murewanhema, G., & Dzinamarira, T. (2023). Health effects of climate change in Africa: A call for an improved implementation of prevention measures. *Eco-Environment & Health*, 2(2), 74–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eehl.2023.04.004>

- In the new guidance on climate change and health titled [“Communicating on climate change and health: Toolkit for health professionals”](#), WHO defines who is the most susceptible to the harms of climate change, which include include smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fishing communities, all of which were mostly seen in social listening findings.

What can we do?

- Continuously monitor discussions regarding climate and health, identifying and addressing any misinformation or concerns expressed by affected communities.
- Advocate for increased research on the intersection of climate and health in Africa, with actionable recommendations for implementation across various levels, including research initiatives, high-level advocacy, and the development of innovative strategies to enhance resilience against human-induced climate change.

Persistent trends

Ten individuals in Mozambique go blind after using urine to treat hemorrhagic conjunctivitis

Engagement: **9 posts, 9482 likes, 1126 comments**

- A Facebook video shared by [Tv Successo Moz](#) highlighted that ten individuals in Zambezia went blind after attempting to treat conjunctivitis with urine.
- We have highlighted in previous reports a similar incident and how individuals opt for home remedies instead of seeking medical assistance in hospitals. Some of the affected patients followed recommendations from acquaintances who claimed that urine could cure the disease. One patient mentioned using urine for three days but ceased due to increasing eye pain.
- The [central hospital of Maputo](#) has raised concerns about self-medication and pharmacists medicating patients without prior diagnostic or examination at a health facility.
- However, online users contest this assertion, arguing that certain private [pharmacies have been more efficient than hospitals](#). They highlight issues such as [medication shortages in hospitals](#) and high prices of medications to treat hemorrhagic conjunctivitis.
- A Facebook video by [TV Miramar](#) highlights how hemorrhagic conjunctivitis puts pressure on care services at Maputo Central Hospital. **“This is happening at a**

time when the country's largest health centre should also be on standby against water-borne diseases.”

- Online users engaging with a post by [UNICEF Mozambique](#) outlining preventive measures for hemorrhagic conjunctivitis expressed deep concern regarding the disease's spread. They mentioned that family members were impacted by the illness and discussed various products they use for treatment, including laundry soap.

Trends to watch

Online users in South Sudan stress the need for a measles vaccination campaign amid the rise of cases in Western Equatoria state

Engagement: **3 posts, 137 likes, 13 comments**

- [Eye Radio](#), a South Sudanese online radio station, relayed the Minister of Health's plea to the national government for urgent intervention amid a worsening measles outbreak in Western Equatoria state.
- Online users stressed the need to launch a [measles vaccination campaign](#), hoping that local authorities will [respond swiftly](#) to the escalating number of cases.
- MSF confirms that [90%](#) of the children affected by the outbreak had never been vaccinated against measles.

Key resources

Climate change

- [WHO](#), Communicating on climate change and health: Toolkit for health professionals
- [WHO](#), analytical fact sheet released in April 2024 by the WHO integrated African health observatory
- [UNEP](#), climate adaptation, resources & multimedia
- [Yale program on climate change communication](#), Extreme weather and vulnerability

Methodology

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

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 (siloes 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.