

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**13-20 May 2024**

**Weekly brief #120**

# Top concerns

## [Anti-vaxxers and known disinformation groups spread disinformation about the pandemic agreement ahead of the World Health Assembly](#)

Ahead of the World Health Assembly (27 May - 1 June), known disinformation groups incite followers to rise against the pandemic treaty saying the WHO will have “absolute control over anything related to an alleged health emergency” and the power to legally compel all countries to vaccinate their populations. Known disinformation figures leverage local authorities under the guise of African sovereignty to promote their ideas.

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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 13-20 May in Africa.

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### Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana

#### Anti-vaxxers and known disinformation groups spread disinformation about the pandemic agreement ahead of World Health Assembly

Engagement: **7 posts, 1022 likes, 133 comments**

- Ahead of the [World Health Assembly](#), we are monitoring the types of disinformation being propagated by known disinformation groups. This week, we tracked anti-vaxxers and known disinformation groups with chapters in Africa, inciting their followers to rise against the [pandemic agreement](#). [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- This is being mostly shared on Telegram accounts against the WHO [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and through offline meetings (such as [conferences](#) or [rallies in front of UN headquarters](#)).
- In South Africa, the [African Christian Democratic Party](#) is a political party, with 4 representatives in the Parliament. It is known for its “Christian democratic orientation and for advocating for policies based on Christian values and was critical of the South African government's strict lockdown measures, arguing that they caused significant economic and social harm. The party expressed concerns about COVID-19 vaccines, reflecting a cautious or sceptical stance on vaccination. [By opposing the pandemic treaty](#), the ACDP aims to rally voters for the upcoming general elections in South Africa (29th May), who are sceptical of international agendas and who may feel that their values and freedoms are under threat.
- In Kenya, advocacy groups focused on ensuring equitable access to healthcare [are opposing the pandemic treaty](#). They argue that the treaty allows wealthy nations to behave as they did during COVID-19, hoarding vaccines and other resources.

They also argue that there is inadequate access to health products: only 20% of pandemic-related health products are guaranteed to the WHO, leaving the remaining 80% susceptible to market forces and international competition.

- In Uganda, disinformation groups including [Children Health Defense \(CHD\) are amplifying conspiracy theories](#) about COVID-19, the HPV and malaria vaccines and [fostering anti-vaccine sentiment](#). CHD claims that the proposed amendments to the WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR), turn the WHO "from an advisory organisation into a governing body", a misleading claim, debunked by the [WHO](#).

### Why is it concerning?

- The level of engagement on the pandemic treaty and the World Health Assembly is relatively low on Facebook according to crowdtangle data (13-20th of May).

However, the engagement by disinformation groups on X and Telegram is increasing and coincides with the deadline of the pandemic agreement negotiations ahead of the World Health Assembly.

Posts on social media platforms such as Rumble, Telegram, and X might increase during the assembly week and decrease right after.



**Source:** Crowdtangle, 13-20 May, Keywords: Pandemic Accord, Pandemic Treaty, Pandemic Agreement, World Health Assembly

- The disinformation groups monitored leveraged generally accepted values such as family and African sovereignty to promote disinformation agendas against the WHO. According to the deputy editor of the Health Policy Watch, ["making the WHO a target in the "culture war" has serious implications for global health, as well as solidarity and human rights."](#)
- Comments on the monitored posts showing support for the "anti-WHO" and "anti-western" sentiment :

The WHO is not a political thing. It is a attack on humanity. Their health! The whole world is in danger. What political parties should do is to educate all 'people' about what WHO stands for, how it would affect the people. Unfortunately for most of them money talks and not their responsibilities.

WHO must be stopped, even if it is with force.



Good to hear sense from an African leader and not racist, even genocidal words from the likes of those in South Africa.

Africa may well be the saving grace in this dire epoch as western 'leaders' are traitors amongst their own citizens.

### What can we do?

- Collaboration with the media, influencers to better explain, in non-technical terms, the International Health Regulation (IHR), the pandemic agreement and how those regulations are negotiated and adopted by the WHO Member States.
- For specific disinformation arguments, debunks about the pandemic treaty can be shared on social media platforms. An extensive list of debunks can be found [here](#).
- Continue monitoring the disinformation discourse about the pandemic treaty and whether there is a spillover effect on other health narratives (e.g., vaccine acceptance).

## Persistent trends

### South African news media outlet reminds followers of the cholera outbreak in Hammanskraal a year later

Engagement: **9 posts, 951 likes, 133 comments**

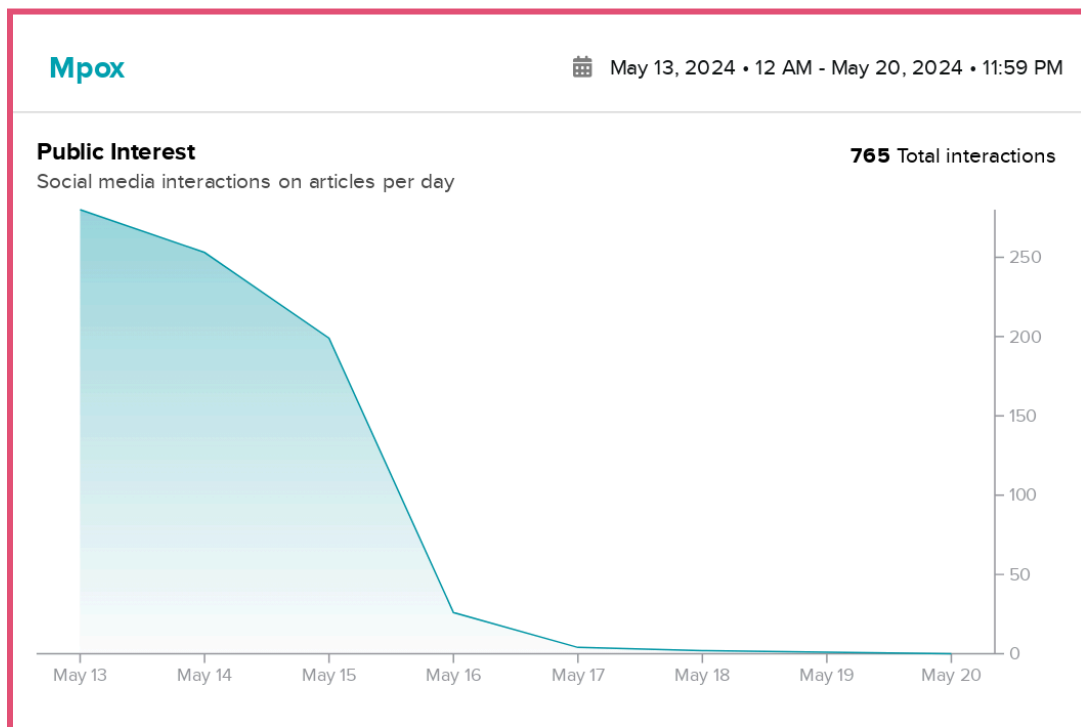
- Sowetan LIVE, the digital extension of the Sowetan newspaper based in Johannesburg, published eight Facebook posts featuring human interest stories about those affected by the cholera outbreak in Hammanskraal in May 2023 [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)].

- The majority of online users blamed local authorities for the [inconsistent supply and the lack of access to safe water](#) resulting in the spread of cholera in Hammanskraal.
- The South African general elections are scheduled for 29 May 2024 and according to [AP](#) “Hammanskraal’s problems are a snapshot of the issues affecting millions and driving a mood of discontent in South Africa that might force its biggest political change in 30 years in next week’s national election.”

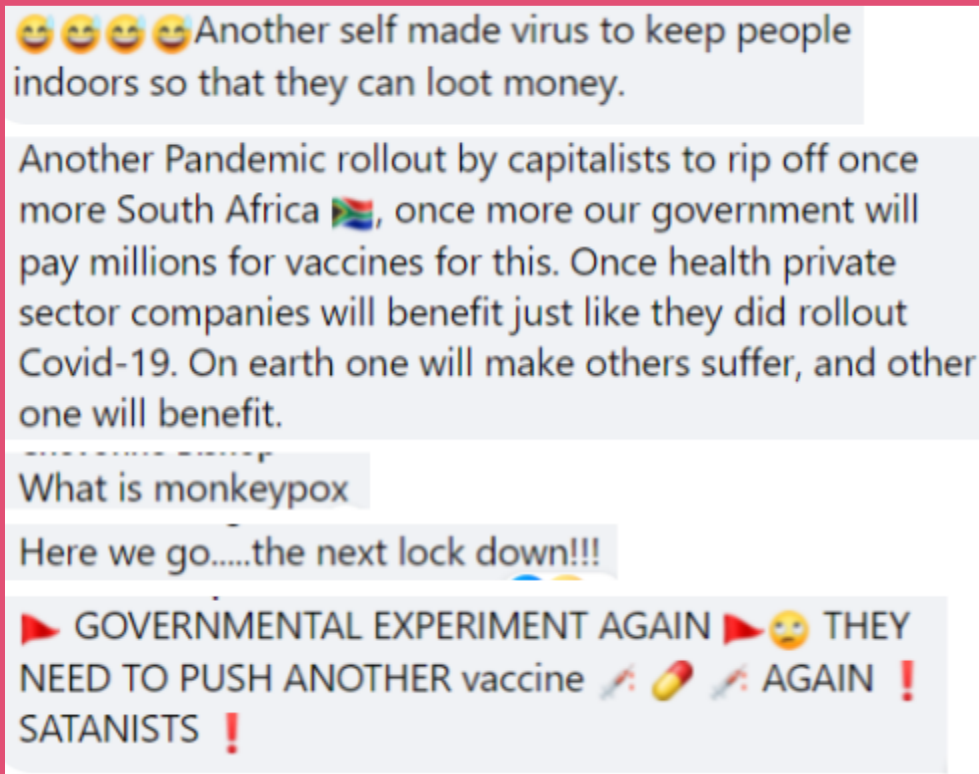
### Information gaps about Mpox reflected in comments by South African online users

**Engagement: 4 posts, 518 likes, 228 comments**

- Following the confirmation of an Mpox case in Gauteng province on 9 May, the public interest has gradually decreased during this week’s monitoring according to NewsWhip.



- The majority of online users commenting on four posts by online media agencies shared conspiracy theories, claiming a new virus is being used to justify lockdowns and exploit South Africa for financial gain. [\[LINK\]](#), [\[LINK\]](#), [\[LINK\]](#), [\[LINK\]](#) Some users also inquired about the nature of the disease. Below are some examples:

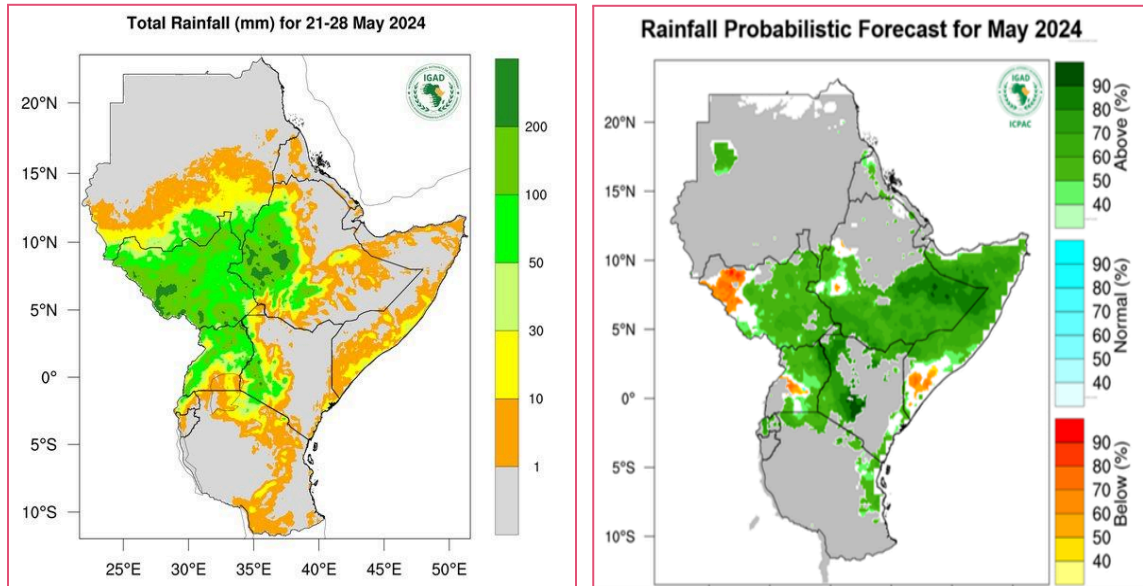


## Trends to watch

### South Sudanese local authorities call for preparations against flooding in the northern and central parts of the country

- The Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Hon. Pal Mai Deng, has called for [preparations against imminent flooding in the northern and central parts of the country](#) following the increase of the level of water in Lake Victoria to a record level. This announcement was made during a flood early warning briefing on 16 May 2024.
- The minister warned of potential population displacement and the submergence of roads and infrastructure, urging local authorities to take immediate action and issue warnings.





- **Source:** The IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), [weekly forecast](#) for 21-28 May and [monthly forecast](#) for May

## Ahead of Nigeria's second phase of HPV vaccine rollout, online questions arise about the virus.

**Engagement: 4 posts, 267 likes, 31 comments**

- [Channels TV](#), a Nigerian a prominent news and media television channel in Nigeria, published an article stating that twenty one states will begin the second phase of the HPV vaccination exercise, starting on 27 of May.
- UNICEF Nigeria asked online users to share their thoughts about HPV. 15 online users responded, emphasising the [need for increased awareness](#). They highlighted the importance of regular screenings with appropriate tools for early detection and prevention of diseases, inquired about [where to get vaccinated](#) and [what HPV is](#).

## Substandard malaria drugs sold in Uganda

**Engagement: 2 posts**

- An [article](#) by the Daily Monitor in Uganda reported that researchers from Makerere University found that 19 percent of antimalarial drugs sampled from randomly selected pharmacies and drug shops in the country failed quality tests. This raises concerns about increased death risks among patients.
- Dr Moses Ocan, a lecturer at the department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics at Makerere University said: “We are assessing drivers of drug resistance and



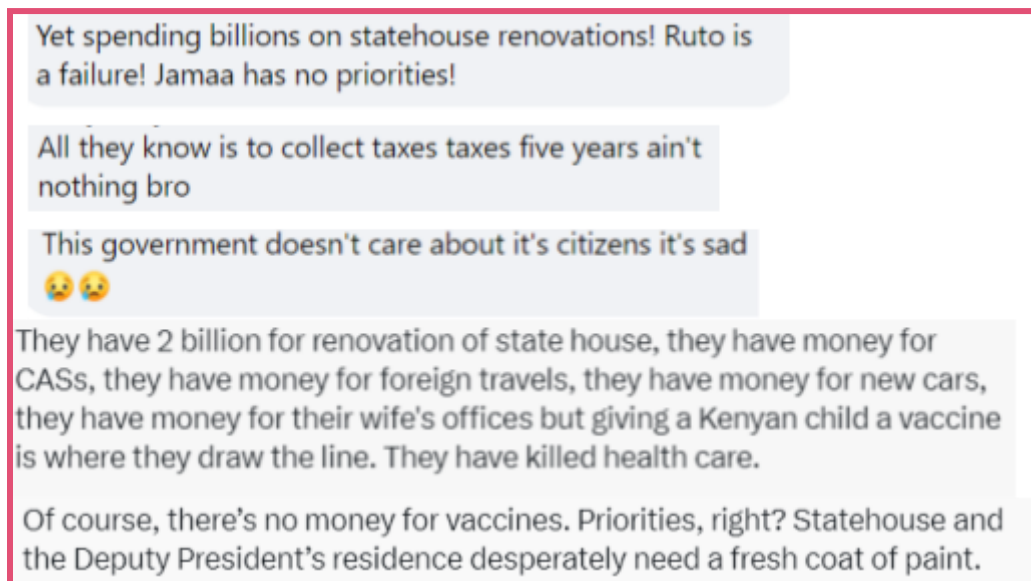
this could be one of the causes because parasites are being exposed to sub-optimal strength of the medication”.

## Kenyan media outlet reports vaccine shortage due to “inadequate financing delays and irregular release of money for vaccine procurement”

Engagement: **14 posts, 1112 likes, 247 comments, 293K views**

- The Nation media outlet reported on 19 May [vaccine shortages](#) for routine immunisation across health facilities in the country.
- “The shortage is attributed to inadequate financing and delays and irregular release of money for vaccine procurement.” stated the article.
- Private users on X [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] amplified the news to their followers who expressed concerns about the stability of the healthcare sector and the potential resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases if vaccine stocks are not secured.
- Online comments across Facebook and X posts by the Nation significantly highlight public dissatisfaction with local authorities' handling of the healthcare sector including the neglect of healthcare priorities. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

Below are a few comments:



- The Ministry of Health shared a press release on X, reassuring the public of their [commitment](#) to addressing any challenges in the national immunisation schedules.

## Key resources

### COVID-19

- [WHO](#), XBB.1.16 Updated Risk Assessment, 05 June 2023
- [WHO](#), Tracking SARS-CoV-2 variants
- [WHO](#), The Oxford/AstraZeneca (ChAdOx1-S [recombinant] vaccine) COVID-19 vaccine: what you need to know

### **World Health Assembly**

- [WHO](#), provisional agenda of the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly
- [WHO](#), WHO and WHA an explainer
- [WHO](#), WHA preliminary journal
- [WHO](#), WHO Member States agree to share outcomes of historic IHR, pandemic agreement processes to World Health Assembly
- [WHO](#), WHO launches its first Investment Round to sustainably finance its Health for All mandate
- [WHO](#), WHA 77 Calendar- side events & convenings

### **Mpox**

- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement readiness and response toolkit mpox
- [VFA](#), social media kit on mpox

### **HPV**

- [VFA](#), HPV social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), Cervical cancer fact sheet
- [PAHO](#), HPV Explainer

## **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 (siloe 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.