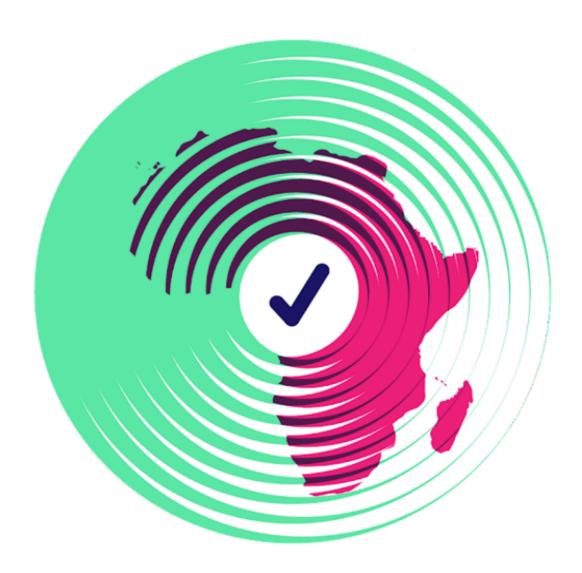# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

## A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



## AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

### 29 July - 5 August 2024

### Weekly brief #130

# Top concern

**Confirmation of mpox cases in Uganda, Kenya and Central African Republic spurs concerns about public health and social measures in Kenya, sentiment of distrust in Ugandan local authorities and worries about disease transmission in Central African Republic**

Mpox regional conversations are diverse from one country to another. Most notably, Kenyan online users are concerned about prospective public health and social measures (PHSM) that may be implemented in response to mpox. Ugandan online users exhibit distrust in local health authorities in response to Mpox confirmation. South Sudanese online users are anxious about Mpox cross border spread.

# Reference Guide

**Uganda, Kenya, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Tanzania, Ivory Coast**

**Confirmation of mpox cases in Uganda, Kenya and Central African Republic spurs concerns about public health and social measures in Kenya, sentiment of distrust in Ugandan local authorities and worries about disease transmission in Central African Republic**

### Kenya
**Engagement: 20 posts, 8854 likes, 2929 comments**

- ☐ The ministry of health in Kenya confirmed an outbreak of Mpox in Kenya at the Taita Taveta one stop border point, very close to Tanzania. [LINK]
- ☐ Across 20 monitored social media posts on X and Facebook, the main themes identified in online conversations relate to concerns around prospective public health and social measures (PHSM) that may be implemented in response to mpox.
- ☐ Online users have suggested that scenarios similar to those following the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic might occur, including the possibility of a lockdown or the introduction of an Mpox vaccine.
- ☐ Distrust in local authorities is evident through skepticism about the outbreak's existence. There is a heightened focus on recent anti-government protests in Kenya with attributions of the disease to financial corruption or as a sole distraction of the anti-government protest scheduled on 8 August.
- ☐ Few questions about Mpox were monitored including questions about its symptoms, lethality and whether monkeys in Kenya can transmit the disease.

### South Sudan, Tanzania
**Engagement: 6 posts, 2333 likes, 270 comments**

- ☐ Online users geolocated in South Sudan who commented on Facebook posts by Eye Radio [LINK, LINK], a South Sudanese news media outlet, expressed intense concern about the cross-border transmission of Mpox from neighboring countries, including the Central African Republic and Uganda. They urged the Ministry of Health of South Sudan to implement preventive measures and activate preparedness measures for a possible outbreak.

- ☐ Across four monitored posts from Tanzanian online news agencies, there was no dominant trend in the online conversations. Online users discussed a variety of topics, including the socio-political situation in Kenya, warnings about interactions with monkeys, and concerns over the consumption of monkey meat. [LINK,LINK,LINK,LINK]

## Uganda
**Engagement: 8 posts, 227 likes, 51 comments**

- ☐ The Minister of Health in Uganda Jane Ruth Aceng confirmed in an interview two cases of Mpox imported from the Democratic Republic of Congo. [LINK]
- ☐ Across five monitored posts from Uganda news media agencies, online users exhibit a sentiment of distrust in local authorities as has been the case in previous declarations of disease outbreaks (ebola in 2022) and vaccination campaigns in Uganda (yellow fever vaccination in 2023). Online users mention alleged financial corruption, expressed disappointment at reoccurring health outbreaks after declaration of Mpox outbreak by the minister of health [LINK]

## Ivory Coast
**Engagement: 8 posts, 5287 likes, 821 comments**

- ☐ The Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene issued a press release on 31 July confirming two cases of Mpox [LINK]. However, on 3 August, the ministry reassured the public that there is no mpox epidemic to date. Six sporadic and isolated cases have been reported, with no evidence of human-to-human transmission [LINK].
- ☐ Edith Brou, a prominent Ivorian digital strategist, blogger, and social media influencer, shared two Facebook posts about Mpox on August 2 and 4, which gained significant attention from online users. [LINK, LINK] Users propagated conspiracy theories, suggesting that Mpox is another attempt to reduce the African population and that all major problems seem to occur in Africa. The comments also reflected widespread mistrust and skepticism about the outbreak, with references to anti-COVID-19 narratives.

## Central African Republic
**Engagement: 5 posts, 117 likes, 15 comments**

- ☐ The Minister of Health and Population in the Central African Republic confirmed an mpox epidemic in the Bangui 2 health district on 27 July [LINK]

☐ Although online engagement is low, commenters on the Facebook posts of Radio Ndeke Luka, operated by Fondation Hirondelle—a prominent radio station in the Central African Republic—have expressed their concern about the spread of the epidemic and how it entered the country in the first place [LINK].

**Why is it concerning?**
☐ The detection of Mpox at the Tanzania-Kenya border poses several significant challenges including cross border transmission, surge of misinformation and panic, travel restrictions and decreased cross-border trade, impacting the economies of both countries, limited access to healthcare and information. All of which can exacerbate the current socio political landscape in Kenya.
☐ Protests and gatherings can significantly exacerbate the spread of Mpox, particularly in a context where contact tracing is still underway (reduced compliance with public health measures and increased physical contact.)
☐ In light of the situation and the potential for further international spread within and outside Africa, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus convened an Emergency Committee to advise on whether the outbreak constitutes a public health emergency of international concern.[LINK, LINK]
☐ Increasing sentiments of distrust towards local authorities are concerning because they undermine public confidence in health interventions, leading to lower compliance with preventive measures and later on vaccination if introduced, which can exacerbate the spread of diseases and hinder efforts to control the Mpox outbreak.
☐ This indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on public perception, leading to heightened anxiety and expectation of stringent public health measures whenever a new outbreak is announced.

**What can we do?**
☐ Develop and enhance cross-border risk communication and community engagement strategies to identify and respond to fast-evolving concerns on travel guidance and modes of transmission coupled with the evolution of the outbreak in neighboring countries.
☐ Monitor regional outbreaks to assess the evolution of outbreaks in neighboring countries and regional transmission of Mpox.

☐ Provide community health promoters with a detailed Mpox taxonomy to effectively communicate and categorize concerns into high, medium, and low priority.

☐ Recommend that the technical team, rather than local authorities, take the lead in communicating about Mpox to ensure accurate, trustworthy and credible information. Ensure timely and transparent communication about the evolution of the outbreak, since they can be trusted sources of information about the outbreak.

## Trend to watch

**Chad to introduce malaria vaccine in October**

**Engagement: 4 posts, 242 likes, 26 comments**

☐ According to tchadinfos.com, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Public Health, Dabsou Guidaoussou, has announced the introduction of new vaccines to the immunization program, including a vaccine against malaria. The rollout is scheduled to begin on 25 October, starting with 25 priority districts and gradually extending to other provinces.[LINK]

☐ Online users asked questions about the origins of the vaccine as well as its effectiveness.

## Key resources

**Mpox**

☐ WHO, Strategic framework for enhancing prevention and control of mpox

☐ WHO, Mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo

☐ VFA, Mpox social media kit

☐ WHO, Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for mpox outbreaks: Interim guidance, 24 June 2022

☐ Africa CDC, Mpox situation in Africa

☐ WHO, Public health taxonomy for social listening on monkeypox conversations

# 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 and monitoring conducted by only one person for the entire African region, to a combined one based on 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 (siloed 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.

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.