## COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This report seeks to communicate **operational recommendations** based on social media monitoring from August 2-8, as well as relevant information on current mis/disinformation.

Target countries include Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa (ENG), Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Niger (FR). We have outlined what we mean by “engagements” and how we gather information in the methodology section at the end of this report.

**CONCERNING TRENDS**

* Ongoing concerns around vaccine safety and side effects
* Conversations about vaccine effectiveness

**OBSERVED TREND**

* Conversations about forced vaccinations

**Ongoing concerns around vaccine safety and side effects**

**Where have we observed this trend?**

* South Africa
  + According to this week’s South Africa social listening report, concerns about vaccines causing deaths are on the rise and persist from last week; examples [here](https://twitter.com/Praiseg29611602/status/1422520142869803013), [here](https://twitter.com/ntsikimazwai/status/1421703163069992961), [here](https://twitter.com/SeatiMoloi/status/1420343958639726596?s=20), [here](https://twitter.com/MohBil2/status/1422489775685181447), and [here](https://twitter.com/harley_dione/status/1422237094718676998) (Twitter)
  + We continue to note similar concerns as well; example [here](https://twitter.com/fcuckCabal/status/1424402609918652418) (Twitter)
  + Concern about severe side effects and question about which vaccine has the most side effects [here](https://twitter.com/kwena/status/1422493739390492672) (Twitter)
  + Nick Hudson (regularly posts mis/disinformation) posts an article alleging that rising child morbidity in Israel can be linked to vaccination [here](https://twitter.com/NickHudsonCT/status/1424378429449846792) (Twitter)
* DRC
  + In a post about AstraZeneca vaccine donations from the UK, multiple comments point to the fact that the president did not trust the vaccine and refused to receive it [here](https://www.facebook.com/528455063970713/posts/2041612505988287) (Facebook)
* Mali
  + In a post about the U.S. donating Johnson and Johnson vaccines to Mali, many voice concerns and claim that the vaccine was rejected/ considered unsafe in the U.S. [here](https://www.facebook.com/918943048259427/posts/2077373129083074) (Facebook)
  + This week’s Mali Social Listening Report also notes concerns about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine’s safety after its suspension in the U.S., as well

as doubts over AstraZeneca’s safety after the former president refused to take the vaccine [here](https://www.facebook.com/CapMaliPlus/videos/1003606280397180/) (Facebook)

* Ivory Coast
  + False speculations over Jacob Desvarieux’s death being related to the vaccine (he passed away last week despite having received three vaccine doses; the guitarist in fact suffered from immune health issues) [here](https://www.facebook.com/100059776530953/posts/224035546265662) (Facebook)
* Senegal
  + Call to stop Johnson and Johnson vaccinations and claim that they are “ravaging the country” [here](https://www.facebook.com/830727107105482/posts/1932923390219176) (Facebook) and post about J&J not being used in the U.S. due to serious adverse side effects [here](https://www.facebook.com/502577967269894/posts/770162140511474) (Facebook)
  + Dr. Babacar Niang spreads the false claim stating that anyone who gets vaccinated against COVID is part of a clinical trial [here](https://limametti.com/video-kepp-kou-vaccine-tu-es-en-essai-therapeutique-aissatou-diop-fall-tacle-dr-babacar-niang/?fbclid=IwAR3WtJFAXUwJ8q6jAC0uY0qbXm833khvQqPnMG5Y8crLEWiNTK0MP9rUNwA) (News)
  + Woman claim that her friends stopped getting their periods due to the COVID vaccine [here](https://www.facebook.com/627315047445511/posts/1981794621997540) (Facebook)

Outside of target countries

* Cameroon
  + A man claims his sister died due to Sinopharm side effects [here](https://www.facebook.com/1895228900700553/posts/3040370179519747) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/983726972014746/posts/1734215556965880) (Facebook)
* Uganda
  + Claim that Norway rejected the AstraZeneca vaccine due to serious adverse side effects before donating it to Uganda [here](https://www.ntv.co.ug/ug/news/national/norway-rejected-astrazeneca-months-before-donating-to-uganda-3496052) (News)

**Why is it concerning?**

* Concerns over safety and side effects drive vaccine hesitancy & refusal in the region
* In some countries (Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa) some data suggests populations are less likely to get the vaccine now (Mar-April) than they were in November 2020; respondents cite uncertainty about vaccine effectiveness as the top hesitancy driver, followed by **AEFIs and lack of knowledge/awareness on vaccine access, safety and efficacy** (UNICEF Data 4 Action June Report)
* Reports of serious adverse side effects are now associated with several vaccines (e.g. AstraZeneca and blood clots)
* Comments on these and other posts in the region illustrate increasingly prevalent links between news on side effects and vaccine hesitancy & refusal
* Reports of blood clots and side effects are particularly associated with AZ and J&J; AZ is the most widely used vaccine in Africa

**What can we do?**

* Enhance factual information sharing by encouraging people to **pause before sharing** social media content

↪ UN [Pledge to Pause](https://pledgetopause.org/) campaign, Viral Facts example [here](https://assets.fathm.co/s/PdwFmEgEXH1kGvoj/fi)

* Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate often about what is known and unknown (from US-CDC J&J Rapid Report)
* Emphasize [**hopeful messages**](https://theconversation.com/covid-19-public-health-messages-have-been-all-over-the-place-but-researchers-know-how-to-do-better-150584) highlighting vaccines are crucial ending the pandemic
* Share solidarity messages around protective measure and safe behaviours, such as the ones circulated by the [UN’s Zwakala “I do it for you” campaign](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/wb35cr1df5oihtg/AABW2exDPExGngRxemaY66aca?dl=0)
* Expand content related to cases of myocarditis/ pericarditis after vaccination. Include information about the conditions, their seriousness, signs and symptoms, when to seek medical care, and what is known about who might be at increased risk (US-CDC SoVC Special Report Recommendation)
* Produce content explaining **why vaccines are considered safe and effective**

↪ Viral Facts example [here](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1380085301641682945)

* Consider emphasizing that **rollout pauses are precautionary measures**. The fact that health institutions are transparent and implement them show that they are thorough. This could help reinforce rather than undermine trust

↪ Viral Facts example [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1393079891533484033)

* Consider providing **country-specific vaccine safety information** based on the vaccine being disseminated nationally, particularly in relation to the AZ vaccine
* Produce video content **outlining ongoing monitoring and risk management processes** (*WHO EPI-WIN report recommendation)*

↪ Viral Facts example [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1393178071876911105)

* Clarify **indicators of potential side effects** for people to watch out for and **how to respond**(*WHO EPI-WIN report recommendation)*

↪ Viral facts example [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1369297394605654018)

* Produce content for journalists on Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) reporting and best practices, including using non-scientific language that is clear and understandable
* Communicate clearly around the relationship between vaccines and changes in the menstrual cycle - include answers that address this misinformation in FAQ documents, call center scripts, and help chat-bots made available to the public

↪ Viral Facts example [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1399266913142857731)

* **Continue to manage expectations around possible side effects**, underlining the safety profile of different vaccines and providing information on the systems public health practitioners use to investigate AEFIs (*UNICEF ESARO Feb recommendation)*
* Continue to advocate for trusted public figures and politicians to take the vaccine and provide correct information on vaccines safety, efficacy and rollouts
* Continue to encourage community engagement to address concerns as they arise, and continue to mobilize the healthcare worker community
* Ensure any of the above content is widely circulated and shared on **Facebook** and/or on any trusted communication channels. **Choose accepted and trusted organizations and messengers** to share the content, including **local** sources and unofficial channels

**Conversations about vaccine effectiveness**

South Africa

* Suggestion that vaccines aren’t working based on (likely false) death tolls in comparison with less vaccinated countries [here](https://twitter.com/Kenricward/status/1424370204486914055) (Twitter)
* Question about the vaccine’s purpose if it does not prevent people from catching COVID [here](https://twitter.com/Unathi_Kwaza/status/1424293839557246976) (Twitter)
* This week’s South Africa social listening report notes the claim that some people have fallen even more ill after receiving the vaccine [here](https://twitter.com/jozitube/status/1422488851008851968) and that it doesn’t make sense to take the vaccine given that you can still die from or contract COVID despite it [here](https://twitter.com/MveloZulu88/status/1422470826377555972?s=20), [here](https://twitter.com/SizweLo/status/1420984371029417984) and [here](https://twitter.com/Realthabanim/status/1422464747547643906?s=20) (Twitter)

Mali

* This week’s Mali Social Listening Report notes doubts about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine’s effectiveness [here](https://www.facebook.com/CapMaliPlus/videos/1003606280397180/) (Facebook)

Senegal

* Question about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine’s effectiveness [here](https://www.facebook.com/391042984987900/posts/1015873029171556) (Facebook)

Niger

* This week’s Niger Social Listening Report notes doubts about vaccine effectiveness in response to news about Senegal’s Justice Minister contracting COVID despite being vaccinated [here](https://www.facebook.com/556246494883439/posts/1186381271869955) (Facebook)

Outside of target countries

Cameroon

* Video asking why the West is sending African countries what it claims are expired vaccines (this video features multiple other false claims) [here](https://www.facebook.com/233655580000736/posts/868147390768774) (Facebook)

Ghana

* GhanaFact explains why it remains possible to contract COVID after vaccination [here](https://ghanafact.com/2021/08/3566/) (News)

**Why is it concerning?**

* Misconceptions around vaccine efficacy rates are likely to drive vaccine preferences, and may lead to the refusal of specific vaccines (e.g. AstraZeneca and J&J)
* Belief that vaccines don’t offer protection can decrease vaccine confidence
* They may also entrench already circulating frustrations around vaccine inequity, and the perception that Africans are receiving lower quality vaccines
* Many narratives are associated specifically with the AstraZeneca and J&J vaccines. AstraZeneca is by far the most widely used and available vaccine in Africa; plans to [manufacture J&J in Africa](https://www.devex.com/news/south-africa-s-aspen-to-boost-covid-19-vaccine-manufacturing-says-au-100554) will likely increase its availability in the region as well

**What can we do?**

* Emphasize **accurate information** around resistance to the COVID vaccines, with verified statistics on the risk of contracting COVID and having severe symptoms for vaccinated people
* **Provide context** for publications leading to the perception that the vaccines do not protect people against COVID (in Seychelles, for example, many people have

contracted COVID despite the advanced vaccination rollout; however, most of those who contracted COVID were not vaccinated)

* Amplify new evidence that vaccination likely results in **less severe illness for those who are vaccinated** and get infected with COVID-19 (adapted from US CDC Insights Report 9 recommendations)
* Emphasize proactive community engagement as well as engagement with authorities and address concerns around vaccine effectiveness as they arise
* Emphasize/ circulate personal stories of people affected by the disease

↪ Viral Facts example [here](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1400774549122191361), [here](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1401868352377786375), [here](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1401499109257879553) and [here](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1401868352377786375)

* Disseminate **updated data about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines** against common variants in Africa (adapted from US-CDC SoVC #9)
* Develop and disseminate messages about **how variant viruses evolve** and the **role that vaccination plays in slowing the spread** and emergence of new variants
* Provide guidance and talking points to healthcare professionals to discuss this topic with their patients to motivate them to get vaccinated (US-CDC SoVC #11 Report)

↪ WHO example on Delta variant [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTK7g_22hRg&ab_channel=WorldHealthOrganizationAfricanRegion)

**Conversations about forced vaccinations**

South Africa

* The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) examines complaints from unvaccinated workers threatened with dismissal [here](https://ewn.co.za/2021/08/02/sahrc-dealing-with-complaints-from-unvaccinated-workers-threatened-with-dismissal) and [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYD1BKsyTEU&ab_channel=NewzroomAfrika) (News)
* Report on French citizens protesting the government’s vaccine mandates [here](https://twitter.com/EricanSA/status/1424334923691958290) (Twitter)

DRC

* Conversations about mandatory vaccinations [here](https://www.facebook.com/283250271732978/posts/4312877362103562) (Facebook/ Radio)

Senegal

* Minister of Labour clarifies that vaccination should not be mandatory [here](https://www.facebook.com/93588388573/posts/10161245822698574) (Facebook)

Circulating in francophone target countries

* Post stating that rapper Rohff is against forced vaccination received high engagement in the region [here](https://www.facebook.com/688761651184934/posts/4332027043525025) (Facebook)

**SPECIFIC CONTENT TO CONSIDER**

* **SOUTH AFRICA (ENG)**
* Ongoing debates about the use of **ivermectin** in South Africa [here](https://www.biznews.com/global-citizen/2021/08/03/angry-sas-debate-ivermectin) (News)



Nick Hudson (regularly spreads mis/disinformation) claims that children have a near zero risk of contracting COVID [here](https://twitter.com/NickHudsonCT/status/1424324165302165511)

Claim that Novavax is the “best” COVID vaccine [here](https://twitter.com/edrybicki/status/1422484685909811204)

* **KENYA (ENG)**

Claim that Kenyans have resorted to bribes to receive vaccines [here](https://www.facebook.com/88201339429/posts/10159603746684430)



Reports of **low vaccine turnout among teachers** [here](https://twitter.com/ntvkenya/status/1424315526050951170) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/NTVKenya/photos/a.80240814057/10157552969664058/); according to country focal points, reports of fatal breakthrough infections and claims of deaths associated with adverse side effects fuel their hesitancy

↪ UNICEF ESAR July Report recommendation: share stories about teachers who decided to get the vaccine for their own protection and for the safety of students, highlighting the vaccine’s role in allowing for a safe school returns

Frustration with politicians’ disregard for safety measures [here](https://www.facebook.com/677857375669398/posts/3987684781353291) (Facebook) 

Frustration with lack of vaccines in Kenya [here](https://twitter.com/kamsamaki/status/1423292141707558913) (Twitter) 

Comment about COVID billionaires [here](https://twitter.com/waweru_pius/status/1422149462844190722) (Twitter)

* **NIGERIA (ENG)** 

Claim that the pandemic was planned [here](https://www.facebook.com/100045834333237/posts/367586881445787)



Nigerian comedian Basketmouth invites doctor to help **clarify questions about the vaccine** [here](https://www.facebook.com/BasketmouthComedy/posts/369851704489400) 

Post on **COVAX** failures and vaccine inequity in Nigeria [here](https://www.facebook.com/405398802881268/posts/4191710930916684)

**PERSISTING ONLINE TRENDS**

\* bolded trends appear to circulate more this week

* Frustration with slowness or mismanagement of vaccine rollout
* **Vaccine deaths will be logged as COVID deaths**
* I would rather die of COVID than of the vaccine
* **Vaccines don’t prevent death or the virus’ spread / vaccines are not effective**
* COVID palliatives are being hidden/ denied to citizens
* **COVID/ the vaccine is intended to control/ reduce the African population**
  + According to the Africa CDC February Vaccine Perceptions report, almost 1 in 2 respondents believe that COVID 19 is a planned event by foreign actors
* Lockdowns are not an effective way of controlling COVID
* **Frustration with double standards around health and safety measures (e.g. politicians not wearing masks)**
* **Questions and concerns around forced vaccinations**
* Politicians have taken fake vaccines
* Clinical trials were rushed
* Africans are lab rats or being used to test vaccines (Viral Facts response [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1384779123302752257))
* New pandemic waves/ COVID are caused by vaccines
* Other issues and/or diseases are more important than vaccination
* **Vaccines won’t stop the need for protective measures, why bother (Viral Facts response** [**here**](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1377241510039683073)**)**
* COVID case numbers/ mortality rates are exaggerated
* Foreign companies or governments profit from the vaccine rollout in Africa
* **Fear of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects**
* COVID does not exist (Viral Facts response [here](https://www.facebook.com/WHOAFRO/videos/1059407544571240/))
* Effectiveness of herbal remedies (Viral Facts response [here](https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1389878262743060483))
* **Effectiveness of ivermectin and alternative remedies (particularly in South Africa) (Viral Facts response** [**here)**](https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1394643247272706051)
* Frustration with looting and mismanagement of COVID funds

**TRENDS TO WATCH**

* [Record weekly COVID deaths](https://www.afro.who.int/news/record-weekly-covid-19-deaths-africa) registered in Africa last week
* The [WHO calls for a temporary moratorium](https://www.statnews.com/2021/08/04/who-calls-for-a-temporary-moratorium-on-administering-booster-shots-of-covid-19-vaccines/?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=eff20b1312-MR_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-eff20b1312-153002534) on COVID booster shots
* Ongoing conversations about different vaccines’ effectiveness rates (in general and against variants - Johnson and Johnson [here](https://twitter.com/Newzroom405/status/1424313829052272643), [here](https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/south-african-study-shows-high-covid-protection-from-jj-shot/) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/EyewitnessNews/posts/4588541774523657))
* Report suggesting that [mixing vaccines](https://citizentv.co.ke/news/who-astrazeneca-vaccine-more-effective-when-used-alongside-pfizer-moderna-13093270/) is more effective
* South Africa aims [to reintroduce AstraZeneca](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-08-06-oxford-astrazeneca-vaccine-to-make-a-comeback-and-provide-boost-to-national-drive/) vaccines
* Lessons learned from [Angola’s vaccine rollout](https://www.standard.co.uk/optimist/vaccine-world/angola-covid-vaccine-rollout-africa-cases-who-b945579.html)
* According to a Business Insider Africa report, [Pfizer and Moderna hiked their COVID-19 vaccine prices in the EU](https://www.facebook.com/businessinsiderssa/posts/2857174067877884) after AstraZeneca lost popularity there
* An analysis of [Kenyans' access to the COVID vaccine in urban-informal settlements](https://peoplesvaccine.co.ke/publications/analysis-of-kenyans-access-to-the-covid-19-vaccine-in-urban-informal-settlements) highlight key steps for greater trust and vaccine uptake in Kenya
* Reports state that the protection vaccines provide is [likely to wane over time](https://citizentv.co.ke/news/covid-vaccine-protection-highly-likely-to-wane-over-time-uk-advisers-say-13066630/)
* The Daily Maverick re-posts The Conversation’s [response to six myths about COVID-19](https://theconversation.com/reluctant-to-be-vaccinated-for-covid-19-here-are-six-myths-you-can-put-to-rest-165027) ([here](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-08-03-reluctant-to-be-vaccinated-for-covid-19-here-are-six-myths-you-can-put-to-rest/))

*And on a lighter note…*



*Methodology*

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, 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, TweetDeck, Crowdtangle, UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards as well as 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.