## COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This report seeks to communicate **operational recommendations** based on social media monitoring from June 7-13, 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
	+ Concerns emerging around **myocarditis incidences**
* Questions about the vaccine’s purpose and efficacy

**OBSERVED TREND**

* Frustration with slow vaccine rollout and vaccine inequity

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

**Where have we observed this trend?**

News of higher than usual **myocarditis incidences (heart inflammation)** due to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, particularly in young men, has spread across the region

* In South Africa [here](https://www.facebook.com/171668502853983/posts/4219075054779954) (Facebook)
	+ Claim that Israel has halted child vaccinations because of “alarming myocarditis incidences” [here](https://twitter.com/NickHudsonCT/status/1402690822403985409) (Twitter)
	+ Post stating myocarditis incidences are another reason the military should not be required to take the vaccine [here](https://twitter.com/erika_pirzl/status/1402493067081420800) (Twitter)
	+ Comment about vaccine not having been adequately tested and being linked to myocarditis reports [here](https://twitter.com/LibertarianZA/status/1403970405212299266) (Twitter)
* In Nigeria [here](https://www.facebook.com/1041138195916349/posts/4687167187980080) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/294392970705525/posts/2494425524035581) (Facebook)
* In Kenya [here](https://www.facebook.com/547732545335759/posts/3814853765290271) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/261061365404/posts/10165678864750405) (Facebook and News)

This is compounded by news of **another rare blood clot condition** emerging in association with the AstraZeneca vaccine

* In Kenya [here](https://www.facebook.com/261061365404/posts/10165683735385405) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/1114543308738640/posts/1670385476487751) (Facebook)
* In South Africa [here](https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/another-rare-blood-condition-identified-as-potential-side-effect-of-astrazeneca-vaccine/) (News)

Other content

* South Africa
	+ According to this week’s WHO EARS report, the claim that women in the U.S. have had **miscarriages** due to the vaccine continues to circulate, and lead to skepticism around encouraging pregnant women to take the vaccine
	+ Comment about ongoing lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies due to vaccine deaths and side effects [here](https://twitter.com/DJDFoxy/status/1401946080275742723) (Twitter, flagged in South Africa social listening weekly updates)
* DRC
	+ President Felix Tshisekedi says he will get vaccinated but admits having had doubts about the AZ vaccine [here](https://www.facebook.com/528455063970713/posts/1998843063598565), [here](https://www.facebook.com/555705631271769/posts/1939321539576831), [and here](https://www.facebook.com/1210880555639014/posts/4363343113726060). He states he will set the example when other vaccines arrive [here](https://www.facebook.com/102930858351551/posts/204780208166615), and announced their arrival [here](https://www.facebook.com/109598264498099/posts/172754464849145) (Facebook)

Outside of target countries

* Uganda
	+ Concerns over the vaccine’s **impact on women’s menstrual cycles** continue to circulate in the region, and were identified [here](https://twitter.com/SabrinaKitaka/status/1403978655655727105?s=08) this week (Twitter)
	+ Question about whether one should take aspirin to avoid Astrazeneca blood clots [here](https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/healthy-living/should-i-take-aspirin-to-avoid-astrazeneca-jab-clots--3428440) (News)
* Namibia
	+ The family of man who is reported to have passed away hours after taking the AZ vaccine plans to sue [here](https://www.observer24.com.na/family-to-sue-for-death-after-covid-19-vaccine/) (News)

**Why is it concerning?**

* Concerns over safety and side effects drive vaccine hesitancy & refusal in the region
* Reports of serious adverse side effects are now been associated with several vaccines
* Comments on these and other posts in the region illustrate increasingly prevalent links between news on side effects and vaccine hesitancy & refusal
* Vaccine acceptant people also appear to be changing their minds about vaccination in response to the content listed above
* 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?**

* 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
* 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

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

* + Include answers that address this misinformation in FAQ documents, call centers scripts, and help chat-bots made available to the public
* **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
* 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

**Questions about the vaccine’s purpose and efficacy**

**Where have we observed this trend?**

* Nigeria
	+ Vaccinated people have died, what’s the point of getting the vaccine? [here](https://twitter.com/superiorkivan07/status/1402665831230849032) (Twitter)
	+ A fully vaccinated man dies in Seychelles, though there is no information on when he obtained the vaccine [here](https://www.biznews.com/briefs/2021/06/11/seychelles-covid-19-astrazeneca) (News)
* South Africa
	+ You can still get COVID despite having had the vaccine, and risk dying of side effects such as clots [here](https://twitter.com/mzilanontobeko/status/1403741105083064324) (Twitter)
	+ Comment drawn from this week’s WHO EARS report

*“If true it will be far less surprising than if the vaccine actually worked, and we know it does not. If it cannot prevent or cure the virus there must be another reason for making it compulsory.”*

*“This vaccine is able to give you immunity for 6 months max. People who WERE vaccinated have also had it again. And how will the vaccine change my world. Can I go to the shop, mall, work, restaurant without a mask? No. So how is it going to change my life now??”*

*“Why must people be vaccinated that already had covid? Top scientists including Dr. Fauchi states from beginning that if u had covid u natural immunity enough. Thus u do not need the vaccine.”*

**Why is it concerning?**

* The perception that vaccines are not effective undermines vaccine acceptance
* It may also exacerbate COVID fatigue, and the perception that life will not regain a sense of normalcy in the foreseeable future

**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)
* Disseminate updated data about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Continue to provide updates about the effectiveness of current vaccines against common variants in Africa (adapted from US CDC Insights Report 9 recommendations)
* 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/ 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)

**Frustration with slow vaccine rollout and vaccine inequity**

**Where have we observed this trend?**

* South Africa
	+ Growing concerns over South Africa’s vaccine shortage [here](https://twitter.com/Newzroom405/status/1401784148273078274) (Twitter, flagged in South Africa social listening weekly updates)
	+ Request to speed up the vaccine rollout [here](https://twitter.com/GroundUp_News/status/1401880565041803267) (Twitter, flagged in South Africa social listening weekly updates) and [here](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-07-can-south-africas-covid-vaccine-rollout-be-sped-up-in-light-of-logistical-and-administrative-challenges/) (News)
	+ Questions about priority groups [here](https://twitter.com/stewartza/status/1402499833185906695) (Twitter)
	+ Frustration with lack of vaccine and insecurity [here](https://twitter.com/karlowitch/status/1402600988121387012) (Twitter)
	+ Frustration with lack of government engagement on vaccine inequity [here](https://twitter.com/_HassanF/status/1402882411235581953) (Twitter)
* Kenya
	+ Frustration with inequitable global vaccine distribution [here](https://twitter.com/ItsKipkorirBen/status/1403953744270827527) (Twitter)
	+ Post about Western nations donating vaccines within a few months of expiry after hoarding them [here](https://twitter.com/BillowYussuf8/status/1403107635185033221) (Twitter)
	+ Frustration with lack of budget allocations to COVID vaccines [here](https://twitter.com/abimwachi/status/1402982593507831810) and [here](https://twitter.com/Maskani254/status/1402544505476239361) (Twitter)
	+ This week’s WHO EARS report notes questions raised about the country’s slow vaccination rates
* Nigeria
	+ This week’s WHO EARS reports notes frustrations with vaccine shortages

**SPECIFIC CONTENT TO CONSIDER**

* **SOUTH AFRICA (ENG)**



In a [post](https://twitter.com/News24/status/1402494431006240768) about vaccines being available for babies this year, people express [questions about children’s capacity for transmission](https://twitter.com/News24/status/1402494431006240768), the [need to vaccinate low-risk groups](https://twitter.com/studdybear71/status/1402541219541102594), and express safety concerns [here](https://twitter.com/Nolan79675567/status/1402522539017052164), [here](https://twitter.com/mheidtman/status/1402616474259365890) and [here](https://twitter.com/Flashtrap5/status/1402528344437047299)



A U.S. pharmacist admits to tampering with COVID vaccines [here](https://twitter.com/News24/status/1402577487729672194), which may fuel distrust in vaccines



Claim that the government does not have the capacity to produce accurate daily COVID statistics [here](https://twitter.com/Gjing_superman/status/1402874850922876928) and comment about errors that are being posted in COVID statistic updates [here](https://twitter.com/rid1tweets/status/1402632919798194177)



Post about new clothing that allegedly kills 99% of all viruses, including COVID, given that it is dipped in an anti-viral solution [here](https://twitter.com/_ThebeMagugu_/status/1401911357109329923)

Post about person dying due to a COVID clot [here](https://twitter.com/rinmor/status/1402889306159648769)



Frustration with anti-vaccine publications [here](https://twitter.com/Magda_Wierzycka/status/1403960189636820998) and [here](https://twitter.com/Saxondk/status/1403956004665057283) generated questions

about immunity and transmissibility [here](https://twitter.com/ljlusse/status/1403967097886150658) and [here](https://twitter.com/forpetersake/status/1403962500144680974)



Claim that mRNA vaccines kill animals, which is why they were not tested on them [here](https://twitter.com/SizweLo/status/1403717478564438022)



Claim about the overlooked “absolute risk reduction” of vaccines [here](https://www.facebook.com/112123760487193/posts/324714422561458) (this page is known to spread mis/disinformation)

* Two batches of J&J vaccine doses were cleared by the FDA after suspected contamination, and are being shipped to South Africa [here](https://ewn.co.za/2021/06/12/300-000-j-and-j-vaccine-doses-cleared-to-be-shipped-to-sa-as-a-matter-of-urgency) and [here](https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/americas/2021-06-11-us-fda-clears-jj-covid-19-vaccine-doses-after-months-long-delay/) (News)

↪ The FDA asks that **millions of other doses which have not been cleared be discarded** [here](https://citizentv.co.ke/news/u-s-fda-asks-jj-to-discard-millions-of-covid-19-vaccine-doses-11887509/)

↪ Anticipated delays due to the J&J vaccine halt [here](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-06-07-jj-vaccine-drive-stalls-out-in-u-s-after-safety-pause/)

↪ Debunk of **claims that administered vaccines were contaminated** [here](https://twitter.com/LindaGailBekker/status/1403413363569446916)

* News article stating that employees cannot get fired for not wanting the vaccine, but must provide a valid reason [here](https://www.businessinsider.co.za/trending/employers-cant-dismiss-workers-for-refusing-the-covid-vaccine-2021-6) (News)
* Claims about vaccines having magnetic properties dismissed [here](https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/covid-19-vaccine-magnetic-fields-claims-dismissed) (News)
* Article stating that South Africa made the right decision to halt AZ given its ineffectiveness against variants [here](https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/government-made-the-right-decision-to-halt-astrazeneca-vaccine-rollout-expert/) (News)
* People share their vaccines experiences [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/live-vaccination-rollout-in-the-words-of-our-readers-20210527&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1623669702803000&usg=AFQjCNExEvxwTBIoIb_l3VJYSD-pNlo77w) (News)
* **KENYA (ENG)**



Last week, Cabinet Secretary Kagwe raised a red flag over clinics charging for COVID-19 jab, stating that they could be “vaccinating with water” [here](https://www.facebook.com/261061365404/posts/10165649334540405) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/100044484967564/posts/328998795259617)

↪ **this has continued to fuel concerns about being vaccinated with water** [here](https://twitter.com/cobbo3/status/1402282563733962752) and [here](https://www.vice.com/en/article/qj8j4b/hospitals-in-kenya-have-been-injecting-people-with-water-instead-of-the-vaccine)



False claims alleging information provided by virologist Stefen Lanka, including that viruses don't have infectious capacity, that COVID tests are a scam, and that COVID’s existence has not been proven [here](https://twitter.com/AlisonBlunt/status/1403758953838874626)

* **NIGERIA (ENG)**
* An article outlines the volume of false claims about the COVID vaccine made by ex-lawmaker Dino Melaye (some of which we have flagged in previous reports) and their impact [here](https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/466234-how-ex-lawmaker-spread-falsehood-on-covid-19-vaccine-misled-followers.html) (News)
* Fact-check: the claim that Nigeria’s life expectancy is responsible for low COVID mortality is misleading [here](https://allafrica.com/stories/202106080004.html) (News)
* **DRC (FR)**



Claim that **spitting blood** is a new COVID symptom [here](https://www.facebook.com/528455063970713/posts/1997685660380972)



President Felix Tshisekedi promotes Congolese products like Manacovid against coronavirus [here](https://www.facebook.com/528455063970713/posts/1998851900264348)



Statement about wanting a locally made vaccine (not a “white” vaccine), and claim that the Congolese found the first COVID cure [here](https://www.facebook.com/413659195643939/posts/1514866155523232)



In comments on two social media post about choosing between a lockdown and vaccines, a majority state they want neither, [here](https://www.facebook.com/525984031160147/posts/1163587064066504) and [here](https://www.facebook.com/535397463647338/posts/1162713644249047)

↪ One person asks for the government not to implement any lockdowns, and instead require proof of vaccination for people circulating outside [here](https://www.facebook.com/413659195643939/posts/1514387718904409)



Post about COVID awareness not being good in the DRC

↪ comments include claims that COVID does not exist, is just a seasonal flu

Post stating that the country’s political leaders have not been vaccinated [here](https://www.facebook.com/550747101997694/posts/1110430506029348)



Claim that Africans don’t care about coronavirus, the only disease they care about is “sexual weakness” [here](https://www.facebook.com/248874822725144/posts/833715104241110)

* **SENEGAL (FR)** 

Vaccines rejected by people risk being thrown away [here](https://www.facebook.com/1830372406990229/posts/4695605057133602)

* **CIRCULATING IN FRANCOPHONE TARGET COUNTRIES**



Post stating that actor Jean Claude Van Damme refuses both the mask and vaccine, and is not scared of COVID [here](https://www.facebook.com/101056977192166/posts/822706045027252)

OUTSIDE OF TARGET COUNTRIES

* **GHANA (ENG)**



Claim that the president has taken the **Malaria vaccine (and not the COVID vaccine)** on live television, and that he would never accept a vaccine provided by the the West [here](https://www.facebook.com/yencomgh/posts/2777603469196878)

* **UGANDA (ENG)** 

Post about a person having had COVID three times [here](https://twitter.com/realsalehUG/status/1402980703407509507)

**PERSISTING ONLINE TRENDS**

\* any trends in blue are newly included this week

\*\* 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**

* South Korea’s vaccination drive picks up speed with [little sign of reduced infections](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-vaccination-drive-picks-up-speed-little-slow-down-new-infections-2021-06-08/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1623683747705000&usg=AOvVaw3AfgPkWm4ir-ceqQwb2gaS)
	+ This kind of publication could lead to doubts over the vaccine’s effectiveness, as it did when infections persisted in Seychelles despite the advanced vaccine rollout (though most infected people were not vaccinated)
* Moderna seeks US FDA approval to [administer vaccines to adolescents](https://www.iol.co.za/news/world/moderna-seeks-us-fda-approval-for-covid-jabs-in-adolescents-e84e18f1-1c5e-520a-a0ec-763a4135ba8c)
	+ Article on the importance of vaccinating teens to reduce transmission [here](https://www.facebook.com/EyewitnessNews/posts/4415420648502438)
* A new [COVID vaccine that could protect against variants](https://www.news24.com/citypress/News/tracking-progress-trial-of-potentially-variant-proof-covid-19-vaccine-in-khayelitsha-20210608-2) is in Phase I trials and recent research shows that [J&J should offer strong protection against variants](https://www.news24.com/health24/medical/infectious-diseases/coronavirus/jj-covid-19-vaccine-offers-strong-protection-against-variants-latest-research-shows-20210611)
* Questions about the safety and efficacy of [vaccine mixing](https://www.facebook.com/bbcnewsafrique/posts/5997886066888977) persist; [WHO claims it is safe to mix AZ and Pfizer vaccines](https://africa.cgtn.com/2021/06/14/safe-to-mix-and-match-astrazeneca-and-pfizer-covid-19-vaccines-say-who-experts/)
* Experts differ on [vaccinating people with past COVID infection](https://nation.africa/kenya/news/experts-differ-vaccinate-people-past-covid-19-infection-3432812)
* Dr. Ayoade Alakija, co-chair of the African Union Vaccine Delivery Alliance, claims [“COVAX is failing”](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09l6zmk) and that African nations were not adequately consulted
* New studies suggest mothers can [pass antibodies on to children](https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/covid-19-tranmission-moms-children/5925848.html)
* Russia tests [vaccines as a nasal spray for children](https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/world/2021-06-12-russia-tests-covid-19-vaccine-as-nasal-spray-for-children-agencies/)
* 10 people were arrested in Kampala for [stealing COVID vaccines](https://www.ntv.co.ug/ug/news/national/-10-arrested-over-theft-of-covid-19-vaccines--3436250) and [fake COVID vaccines](https://www.wsj.com/articles/fake-covid-19-vaccines-pose-new-threat-in-africa-11622971955) pose a threat in Africa and globally

*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.

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.