

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

17-24 June 2024

Weekly brief #125

Top concerns

[Increase in mis/disinformation and anti-Western sentiment in the Sahel following Global forum on Vaccine](#)

Anti-vaxx account on X known for calling for the removal of French and Western influence across the Sahel region while encouraging more Kremlin influence, spreads disinformation about global health leaders, the supply of the malaria vaccine, the motive of the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator, recently launched in Paris.

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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 17-24 June 2024 in Africa.

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Increase in mis/disinformation and anti-Western sentiment in the Sahel following Global forum on Vaccine

Engagement: **circulation on WhatsApp channels in Mali, online engagement on X Likes: 3.5K, comments: 538, retweets 1.6K**

- On 20 June, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, co-hosted the Global Forum for Vaccine Sovereignty and Innovation alongside the African Union and the French Republic. During the Forum, the [African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator \(AVMA\)](#) was officially launched.
- Public and media interest surged on 20 June, as African online media agencies published a total of 103 articles focusing on the global vaccine forum's emphasis on strengthening vaccine production capacity in Africa. [[Burkina Faso](#), [Gabon](#), [Capo Verde](#)].
- Online users were critical of western motives regarding vaccination in Africa as well as suspicious about the intentions behind these efforts. The conspiracy theories shared by online users are entrenched in a social media echo chamber where similar viewpoints are reinforced and amplified. Infographics and edited photos also deepen the distrust and skepticism expressed in the comments.
- A Pan-African activist renowned for promoting Russia's interests across the African continent, and a [critical voice of French and Western influence across the Sahel](#) while promoting Russian influence shared a tweet in French on 21 June that received 300K views on X platform. A Malian journalist trained in infodemic management shared that an excerpt of the tweet about the "Paris vaccine forum" was widely circulated in WhatsApp channels in Mali. Below are tactics used by the anti-vaxx account:

Casting doubt on the "generous donation" of the RTS,S Malaria vaccine amplifies the role of unconscious biases associated with Western healthcare initiatives in Africa

- Despite not being a specialist in vaccinology or infectious diseases, the anti-vaxx account urges followers to systematically reject the RTS,S Malaria vaccine and casts doubt on the “generous donation” of the malaria vaccine by “western countries”.

In fact, according to [WHO](#), The RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine, also known as Mosquirix, is the result of 30 years of research and development by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) in collaboration with the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI), with support from a network of African research centers. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided catalytic funding for late-stage development of RTS,S between 2001 and 2015. The RTS,S malaria vaccine is the world’s first vaccine against a parasite and the result of the contribution of many scientists and researchers, including hundreds of African researchers.

Amplifying disinformation about the role of global healthcare philanthropists and African leaders being complicit in endangering the health of their populations.

- Another tactic used is the promotion of conspiracy theories which accuse global leaders of depopulating Africa. These narratives prey on existing distrust and skepticism among the public about the nature of Bill Gates’ philanthropist activities and have been debunked by fact checkers numerous times [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. Added to that are allegations which claim African leaders colluded with Gates to prioritize harmful vaccines, risking sovereignty and health systems for disguised foreign aid. **In fact**, according to [Gavi](#), the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA) is designed by Gavi in close collaboration with the African Union and Africa CDC. The summit was attended by leaders from Botswana, Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana, as well as visiting ministers, health groups and pharmaceutical firms. Collaborations are aimed at strengthening healthcare systems, improving vaccination coverage, and enhancing vaccine manufacturing capabilities in Africa. At present, **demand for vaccines in Africa is valued at over US\$ 1 billion annually**, with this figure projected to grow along with the continent’s population over the next several decades.
- The post also includes a statement: “In the USA and Europe, children are vaccinated with DTPa, a safer variant with far fewer side effects than DTP, which has continued to be sent to Africa.” **In fact**, according to [WHO](#) (pg. 455), “*protection against severe pertussis in infancy and early childhood can be obtained after a primary series of vaccination with either whole-cell vaccine (wP*

or the Diphtheria and tetanus toxoids and whole-cell pertussis (DTP) or acellular vaccine (Diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis vaccine also known as DTaP vaccine).

- Although local and systemic reactogenicity are more commonly associated with wP-containing vaccines, **both aP-containing and wP-containing vaccines have excellent safety records**. The reactogenicity of wP vaccines is significantly reduced when given in early short timeframe schedules”.

Why is it concerning?

- The recycling of old disinformation after a global health event is not new (such as the dissemination of a viral video of a known African anti-vaxxer spreading disinformation about the pandemic agreement, malaria, tetanus and HPV vaccines after the closure of the World Health Assembly in May 2024) ; it consistently serves as a catalyst for disinformation accounts to advance their agendas. This amplifies public uncertainty and fear that can in turn disrupt effective health interventions, and undermine trust in authoritative sources.
- Disinformation accounts employ diverse tactics to persuade their audiences, such as evoking emotions like fear, anger, and distrust, capitalizing on existing concerns individuals may have about the malaria vaccine (or vaccines in general), western global health leaders like Bill Gates, or exploiting sentiments of pan-African identity taken over by a western one for example: claiming that Western countries dream of an Africa without Africans. Replying to comments by online users also solidifies the presence of the disinformation account.

What can we do?

- Develop information materials for prebunking persistent false narratives especially ahead of public health events that may trigger false or misleading information.
- Coordinate with fact-checkers and journalists to develop and share information materials/messages across the relevant messaging platforms.
- Share facts and evidence about the paris vaccine forum, malaria vaccine, routine immunization vaccines and resources about global health leaders (such as debunks about Bill Gates) with journalists who detect misinformation and disinformation in private WhatsApp channels and answer questions community members might have to prevent people from potentially falling prey to disinformation narratives.

- ❑ Share a compiled list of identified disinformation accounts with journalists and fact-checkers in Mali to strengthen efforts in debunking health false information and amplifying correct information.
- ❑ Advocate with health authorities to implement policies aimed at curbing the spread of disinformation on social media platforms, thereby safeguarding public health information integrity.

Persistent trends

Nigeria, Zambia

Contaminated water and poor sanitation as the main barriers to stop the spread of cholera in Nigeria, Zambia

Engagement: **24 posts, 2914 likes, 220 comments**

Nigeria

- ❑ The Lagos State Government published on its Facebook page two posts warning residents against drinking [contaminated water and poor sanitation](#), the primary [cause of the cholera outbreak](#) according to the Lagos State Ministry of Health.
- ❑ Instablog 9ja, a popular Nigerian online news platform known for its coverage of news, celebrity gossip, and social issues in Nigeria shared [on its instagram account](#) that people who consumed from an unregistered tiger nut drink in Eti-Osa, Lagos were affected with cholera. The post was further amplified by a social media influencer on [X](#). Below are some of the online users' reactions:

That's why I don't buy these things from the unregulated sellers. Especially because I'm not sure of the water they used in producing them. I'm very particular of the water I consume in this Lagos.

When will we talk about those guys who sell sliced fruits by the roadside?

Respectfully, i think they are just passing blames. So if they were registered, does that make any difference? Secondly, how do you even determine the specific cause? People have been selling Tiger nut and Zobo with used plastic before we were born.

The entire Lagos street food scene is a crime scene for cholera , from suya made Infront of open gutter to fruit salads being sold open air

Zambia

- According to a video report by Diamond TV Zambia on 16 June, the cholera outbreak that originally started in Eastern Zambia's Chipata has [now spread to four more districts](#). During the video, the minister of health Sylvia Masebo says that the cause is related to "meals eaten and the consumption of unsafe water at the Saturday market in Chipata".
- The [Zambia cholera situation report](#) highlights that the ongoing drought in the country is leading to additional water-stressed situations; hence a greater proportion of the population is at an increased risk for cholera.

Trends to watch

Heightened attention to COVID-19 surveillance in Mali after confirmation of positive cases among Senegalese travelers after Islamic pilgrimage

Engagement: **36 posts, 23,709 likes, 8314 comments**

- Following the annual Islamic pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, Saudi Arabia (14-19 June), the [Senegalese Press Agency](#) confirmed via a Facebook post that tests have detected positive cases of coronavirus among Senegalese travelers returning from Saudi Arabia. The positivity rates range between 20% and 60% depending on the flight.
- After monitoring across various African online platforms after the Hajj pilgrimage, heightened attention to COVID-19 surveillance has been observed in Mali where its Ministry of Health and Social Development is intensifying [epidemiological surveillance](#) and urging Malian pilgrims that have returned from Hajj to undergo screening.
- Gabonese platform [Gabon Media Time](#) emphasized the importance of health preparedness despite no reported cases in Gabon. The news agency urged authorities to reactivate heightened health surveillance systems at borders, particularly at the international airport, to prepare for any potential developments.
- The majority of all African channels highlighted the death of pilgrims during the Hajj in Saudi Arabia due to the extreme heat that reached 51.8 degrees Celsius in the city of Mecca without any emphasis on positive COVID-19 cases in Senegal. [[Tanzania](#), [South africa](#), [Madagascar](#), [ivory Coast](#), [Chad](#)]
- Neighboring countries to Senegal did not outline any additional surveillance measures following the announcement of COVID-19 cases in the country [for example: [Guinea](#), [The Gambia](#), [The Gambia](#)].

Rift Valley fever outbreak confirmed in Mubende, Uganda, the previous epicenter of the ebola outbreak in 2022 - online users ask about its signs and symptoms

Engagement: **3 posts, 52 likes, 11 comments**

- According to an article from [The Nile Post](#), Mubende Regional Referral Hospital confirmed an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever (RVF) on 22 June.
- Two social media users commented on a Facebook post by Ugandan NBS Television, referencing the previous [Ebola outbreak](#) that affected Mubende in 2022.
- Searches on Google Trends for RVF in Uganda show a significant spike in interest, particularly in symptoms and signs of Rift Valley Fever.

Addis Standard confirms “four dead, eight hospitalized after eating anthrax-infected beef in Tigray” - online users mention spillover of security concerns in Tigray to healthcare sector

- According to an article by Addis Standard, an anthrax outbreak from contaminated beef has resulted in four deaths and eight hospitalizations in Hintalo district, South West Tigray.
- Mebrahtom Haftey of the Tigray Health Bureau attributed the incident to meat from unvaccinated cattle, slaughtered and distributed to approximately 500 people on 5 June.
- Online users commented that the conflict in Tigray [disrupted veterinary services](#), including [vaccination](#), leaving the population vulnerable to outbreaks.

Key resources

Cholera

- [WHO](#) : Cholera fact sheets (English)
- [WHO Infographics](#): Cholera (English)
- [WHO Infographics](#): Kits Cholera
- [VFA](#) : Preventive measures against cholera
- [Global Task Force on Cholera Control](#): About cholera
- [BBC](#) : Cholera epidemic in Zambia
- [WHO](#): Cholera epidemics, Q&A

Mpox

- [VFA](#), Mpox social media toolkit

- [WHO](#), Mpox fact sheet
- [WHO](#), Mpox Q&A
- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement readiness and response toolkit mpox

Malaria

- [WHO](#), Q&A on malaria vaccines (RTS,S and R21) (English and French)
- [WHO Infographic](#): the RTS,S Malaria Vaccine (English)
- [WHO Infographic](#): the RTS,S Malaria Vaccine (French)
- [UNICEF](#), Malaria Vaccines: Question and Answers on Supply, Price and Market Shaping by UNICEF's Supply Division
- [WHO](#), annual world malaria report 2023
- [VFA](#), malaria social media toolkit
- [Gavi](#), briefing on start of routine malaria vaccinations in Africa 19 January
- [WHO](#), Malaria: The malaria vaccine implementation programme (MVIP)
- [The United States President's Malaria Initiative, in partnership with Breakthrough ACTION](#), Malaria SBC toolkit for community and faith leaders
- [WHO](#), new vaccine introduction Checklist for planning communication and advocacy
- [WHO](#), a field guide to qualitative research for new vaccine introduction: step-by-step instructions to help immunization programmes understand their target audiences before communicating about the introduction of a new vaccine
- [UNICEF](#), Malaria vaccines: Questions and Answers on Supply, Price, and Market Shaping UNICEF Supply Division

Fact checking

- [Reuters Fact Check](#), List of claims about Bill Gates includes falsities
- [Africa check](#), No, Bill Gates is not practicing population control through vaccines – video combines two speeches out of context

Gavi - Forum for Vaccine Sovereignty and Innovation

- [Gavi](#), Investment opportunity (IO) launch, voices of support from country and private sector leaders
- Gavi, IO event press release in [English](#) and in [French](#)
- Gavi, African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA) [[ENG](#), [FR](#)]

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 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.