

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

20-27 May 2024

Weekly brief #121

Top concerns

[Increase in social media posts highlighting the impact of heavy rains, flooding on health in several African countries](#)

Heavy rains and flash floods continue to wreak havoc across the African region. Discussions about these hazardous events impacting communities have peaked in May 2024, surpassing levels seen earlier this year and in 2023.

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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 20–27 May 2024 in Africa.

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Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, South Sudan, Chad

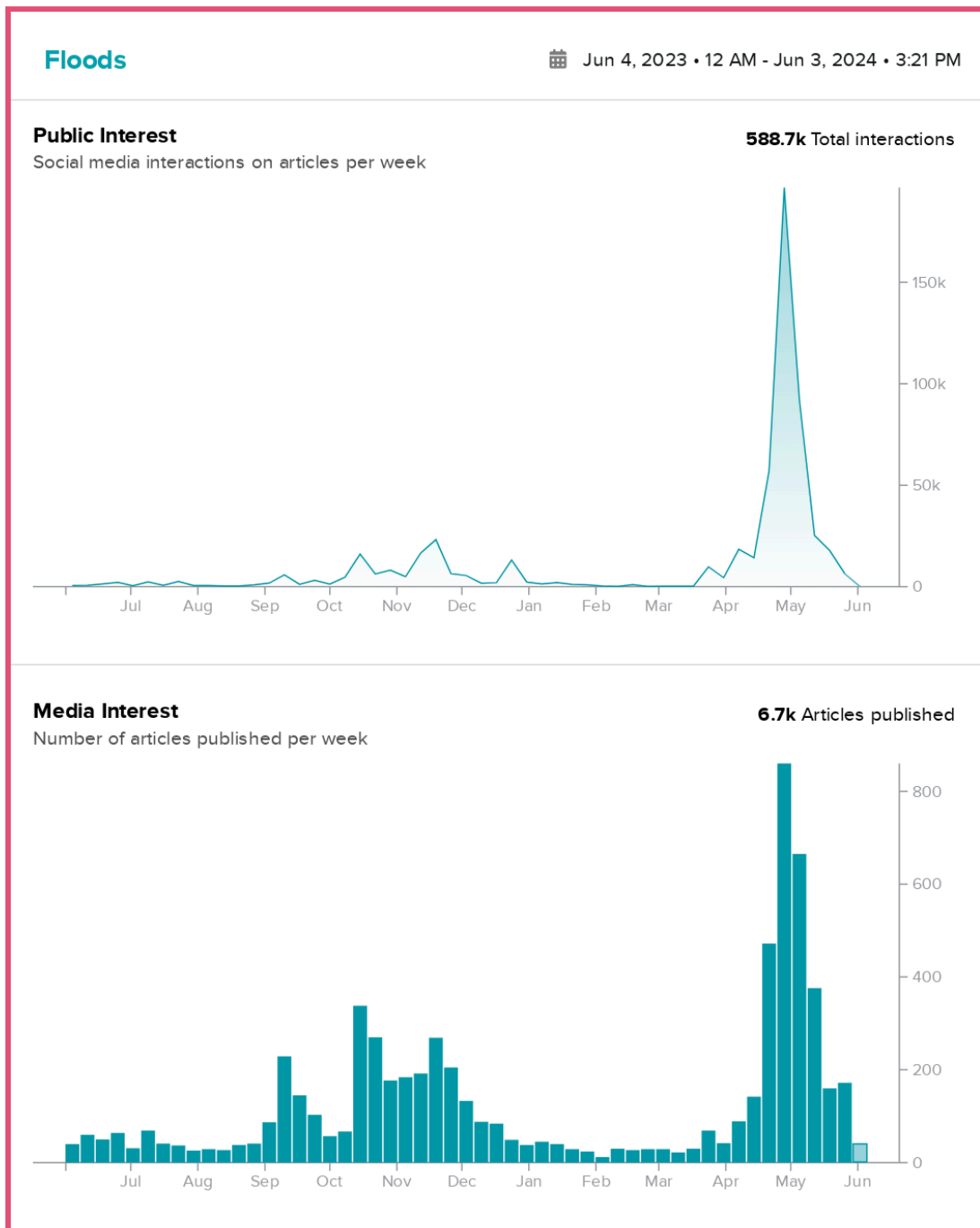
Increase in social media posts highlighting impact of heavy rains, flooding on health in several African countries

Engagement: **10 posts, 2181 likes, 460 comments**

- In Zac Mao, **Senegal**, recent floods have prompted neighbourhood councils to voice their [concerns about the recurring challenges they face after heavy rains](#). A major issue highlighted is the inadequate treatment of sewage, which exacerbates flooding and creates significant health and sanitation problems for residents.
- Three online media agencies from **Ghana** have reported on the floods in Accra, emphasizing the dangers posed by the rising water levels. The coverage highlights the displacement of waste, including plastic and debris, into the floodwaters, which clogs streets and exacerbates the flooding. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)].
- Addis Standard, a prominent **Ethiopian** online news outlet, reported on the displacement of residents due to heavy rains and flooding, as well as malaria outbreaks in several districts across the country. Ethiopian meteorologists have warned that the heavy rainfall will significantly impact health and agriculture. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- Chad's** national meteorological agency has [shared preventive measures to address flood risks and potential disease outbreaks](#), along with precipitation forecasts for the coming months. From June to August, the Sudano-Sahelian zone is expected to experience excessive rainfall, with a 45% probability of above-average precipitation and a 15% chance of deficits.
- The heavy rain in Juba, **South Sudan**, caused [severe flooding, impacting many residential areas and resulting in significant damage](#), according to an article by Hot in Juba, an online news media agency with 470K Facebook followers. Online users were invited to ask questions following a roundtable discussion on flood preparedness organized by Radio Miraya. Online users asked what [precautions they should take to prepare for the flooding, including whether it was necessary to stop cultivating their crops](#).
- In the **Union of Comoros**, currently grappling with a cholera outbreak, Comores News highlighted the country's struggle with multiple crises, including [flooding, cholera, and disruptions to electricity and water supplies](#).

Why is it concerning?

- The topic of flooding gained significant traction in the African region, reaching a peak in May 2024, compared to the same period last year. This surge is attributed to the perceived increased incidence and severity of climate events across the region, and a heightened public interest in climate change-related issues.



Source: NewsWhip, May 2023–May 2024, keywords: floods, inondations, geographical scope: Africa

- During the monitored week, the number of articles published by news media agencies from countries affected by floods was high (1186 articles as per Crowdtangle data). The increase in the number of articles during May 2024 (1.8k articles), compared with the previous month (1.1k articles), reflected significant interest in the impact of flooding on African communities. This surge in publications may also be attributed to the upcoming observance of Global Heat Day (2 June) and Global Environment Day (5 June). However, engagement from online users on monitored pages was low or non-existent. This indicates that flood-related conversations may be taking place primarily within local communities. The online discourse centered primarily around blaming local authorities for inadequate infrastructure to manage floods.
- According to the strategic roundtable “[Climate change and health: a global vision for joint action](#)” at the 77th World Health Assembly, “climate change is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable communities in every country in the world, threatening to reverse progress in health and sustainable development”.

What can we do?

- Disseminating information about preparedness measures to adopt ahead of flooding events (including [risk assessment reports](#), and actionable steps for individuals and communities to take in anticipation of flooding) can empower authorities and communities to take proactive steps to mitigate the impacts of flooding, enhancing overall resilience.
- Continue monitoring the discourse on climate and health in the African region, and continue sharing the available evidence on the relationship between climate change and health.
- Community feedback mechanisms can provide more insight into community needs in order to prepare and better respond to flooding and heavy rains.

Persistent trends

Disinformation groups who campaigned against the Pandemic Agreement laud its “failure” on X.

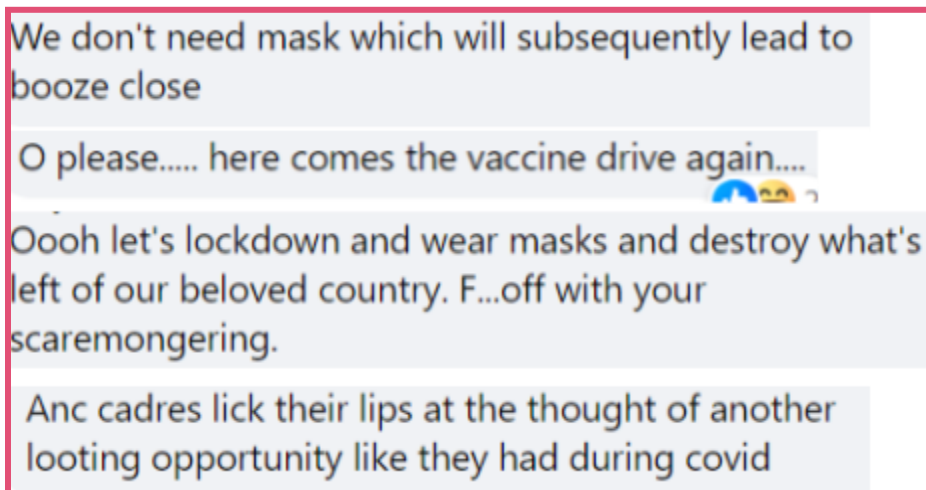
- During the World Health Assembly, the right-wing campaigning platform “Citizen GO”, which receives [funding from Russia](#), repeatedly urged its followers to [reject the UN's pandemic treaty, and “forced vaccines”](#).

- ❑ The platform shared an [online petition](#) falsely claiming that WHO has the power to legally compel all countries to vaccinate their populations.
- ❑ [WHO](#) debunked this myth, clarifying that under the International Health Regulations (2005), WHO is only mandated to advise and recommend, not to oblige countries to provide vaccinations or prophylaxis for specific diseases that may pose a risk of international spread.
- ❑ At the same time, international anti-vaxxer Peter Imanuelsen, known on X as Peter Sweden, “celebrated” WHO’s “failed” negotiation to finalize a pandemic treaty as a “massive victory for freedom”. His posts reached between 470k and 1million views[[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. Other known disinformation accounts and international anti-vaxxers shared the same sentiment [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. Known African disinformation figures were not focused on the pandemic agreement during this period. Instead, their efforts were directed towards spreading political disinformation in West Africa. Conversations on health sovereignty might arise, and spill over into the issue of vaccines, specifically the introduction of the malaria vaccine in the African region.
- ❑ According to [WHO](#), “WHO’s Member States decided to extend the mandate of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body, established in December 2021, to finish its work to negotiate a Pandemic Agreement within a year, by the World Health Assembly in 2025, or earlier if possible, at a special session of the Health Assembly in 2024”.

South African online users’ reaction to second Mpox case echoes negative sentiments expressed during COVID-19 response

Engagement: 4 posts, 103 likes, 43 comments

- ❑ Online users who commented on [IOL News’s Facebook post](#) about the confirmation of a second Mpox case shared remarks with striking similarities to those expressed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❑ South Africa recorded a second laboratory-confirmed case of Mpox disease. According to a [press statement from the government of the Republic of South Africa](#), “the new patient is a 39-year-old male who was admitted at Addington Hospital in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, without a travel history to countries and regions currently experiencing the disease outbreak”.
- ❑ Monitored comments frequently mentioned mask-wearing and expressed concerns about vaccine distribution efforts. Below are some examples:



Persistent vaccine-related rumours and myths challenge efforts to scale up HPV vaccination among adolescent girls in Uganda

- On 22 May, Capital FM Uganda shared a Facebook post highlighting persistent vaccine-related rumours and myths circulating on social media, citing these as a significant challenge to increasing [HPV vaccine uptake among adolescent girls in Uganda](#).

Key resources

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 with World Health Assembly
- [WHO](#), WHO launches its first Investment Round to sustainably finance its Health for All mandate
- [WHO](#), WHO Member States agree on the way forward to conclude the Pandemic Agreement
- [WHO](#), World Health Assembly reaches agreement on wide-ranging, decisive package of amendments to improve the International Health Regulations
- [VFA](#), Pandemic agreement debunk
- [Africa Check](#) debunk No, pandemic treaty still a rough draft, doesn't give World Health Organization "control over entire world"

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
- [Nigerian Health Watch](#), HPV infographics and videos

Climate and Health

- [ATACH, Alliance for transformative action on climate and health](#), Online training course: Climate Change and Health
- [WHO](#), Communicating on climate change and health, toolkit for health professionals
- [WHO](#), Technical webinar series on climate and health

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 (siloeed 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.