Nigeria is among the countries yet to procure Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. Reports indicate that the country is expecting 16 million doses of the vaccine through the global COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) arrangement. COVAX is a global initiative aimed at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines led by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the World Health Organization, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and others.

Since the announcement of its plan to procure vaccines for the people by the Nigerian Government, broadcast messages are spreading fast on WhatsApp and even conventional media organisations have joined the bandwagon disseminating misinformation on the vaccines, procurement, and administration. This has continued to promote skepticism and persuade the public to reject the shots, which can break the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Misinformation is doing great damage to Nigeria’s effort at halting the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. And both misinformation and disinformation can erode trust in both civil and corporate institutions. Such institutions include government health institutions and big non-government institutions like the World Health Organization.

In the past week, the Punch newspaper published a report that claimed the WHO had disqualified Nigeria from a global vaccine bid. They referred to a press from the WHO.
The reaction to this was instant. The report went viral. Other platforms were quick to publish the misinformation. The Punch Newspaper has since updated its report to the true position of the WHO. But the episode leaves not much to be desired about how Nigerians trust the present government to deliver safe and effective vaccines to the citizens.

**THE FACTS**

The WHO representative in Nigeria, Dr. W. Kazadi Mulombo said the “**WHO is part of Covax facility and can never disqualify a Member State from accessing an approved vaccine for their population.**”

He made this known via his Twitter handle @WMulombo. He went further to call on members of the press in Nigeria and globally to contribute to fighting misinformation around COVID-19.

In a press conference to address the issue, organized by the WHO in Nigeria and National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Dr. Kazadi said that “The World Health Organisation has not disqualified any country in Africa from accessing #COVID19 vaccines through the COVAX facility, but rather, is supporting all countries to access vaccines as quickly as possible.”

He went further to explain that in addition to the AstraZeneca doses, there is an initial limited volume of Pfizer vaccine available through COVAX.

“On the African continent, as if the 18th January, COVAX received 13 submissions and a multi-agency committee evaluated the proposals of which 9 were recommended as ready to deploy the Pfizer vaccine including Nigeria.” He said.

A review of the press briefing by Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, which the Punch Newspaper and others quoted shows the global health body did not disqualify Nigeria from any global vaccine bid.

“In much-awaited news, the COVAX facility has informed African countries of the first allocations of the COVID-19 vaccine. Nearly 90 million doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine could start arriving on the continent later this month. This is subject to WHO listing the vaccine for emergency use. The review is ongoing, and its outcome is expected soon.” She said.

The press statement also explained that proposals for the initial 320,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to be allocated to four African countries were evaluated based on current mortality rates, new cases, and trends, and capacities to store the vaccine at minus 70 degrees Celsius. The countries are Cape Verde, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia.

Fact-checkers at the CDD also went through the Gavi website to ascertain if Nigeria has been disqualified.
Gavi is co-leading COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. This involves coordinating the COVAX Facility, a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and equitable distribution of eventual COVID-19 vaccines.

The COVAX Interim Distribution Forecast shows Nigeria is in line to receive 16,000,000 doses of vaccines through the facility.

Read the report here

WHATSAPP MESSAGES

Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp handle 60 billion messages a day. Not all these messages are true. The majority of messages shared online are either scams, fake or misleading.

For instance, On Sunday 31st January 2021, our fact-checkers spotted a WhatsApp broadcast with the claim that the National Identification Management Commission (NIMC) is giving out five (5) Gigabytes worth of data to verified mobile phone numbers.

The message titled: “NIN verification” claimed that the NIMC would be rewarding customers who have been using their SIM cards for more than three months 5G worth of data.

It read in part: “NIN VERIFICATION Check if Your number have [sic] been chosen by NIN to receive 5GB. As Part of the Verification REWARD Program for who [sic] have been using the sim for more than three months. ALL NETWORK USERS Deadline: 30-01-2021 2021-2-29 Also attached to the message is a link that can be used by interested applicants for the verification process.

Investigations carried out by CDD fact-checkers revealed that the claim is false. Checks showed that the link provided is a bait normally used by internet fraudsters to defraud unsuspecting Nigerians.

Our fact-checkers found out that the link upon registration provides a three(3) way verification process where users are required to key in their numbers, share the same message on WhatsApp, and await their share of the said reward.

Further investigations by CDD revealed that the site promised applicants N10,000 in addition to the 5G data. It also provided a section for comments where previous beneficiaries give their “testimonies” – a method frequently used by fraudsters to defraud unsuspecting applicants of such scheme.

Read the report here
On February 2, 2021, fact-checkers at the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) spotted a report on OperaNews blog claiming that the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, had finally handed the NPF mantle of leadership to his successor.

The report also claimed that IGP Adamu having completed his mandatory 35-years of service with the Nigeria Police Force handed over to Sanusi Lemo, a Deputy Inspector General of Police in-charge of operations at the Force Headquarters.

Checks by CDD fact-checkers show that as of the time of writing this report, Wednesday, February 3, 2021, IGP Adamu is still the Inspector General of Police in Nigeria. IGP Adamu has not handed over to DIG Lemo or any other successor as claimed by the news blog.

Also, reacting to the report, the Force Public Relations Officer, Commissioner of Police Frank Mba, said the claim is false.

Mba, in an interview with the Nation Newspaper on Tuesday, February 2, 2021, said reports that the IGP has stepped aside and handed over activities at the Force Headquarters to DIG Lemo should be disregarded.

Also, the approval of a new IGP is usually announced by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, as at the time of writing this report, President Muhammadu Buhari is yet to make such an announcement approving the retirement and further replacement of the IGP. Read the report here

The Damage of a Single Story

False news travels faster online than facts but facts matter as the damage that can be caused by one single story cannot be undone by 10 sources of facts. This has been the struggle of fact-checking organisations like the CDD.

Some other fact-check published by CDD include:

**FACT-CHECK: Beware! There’s No NIN 5G Grant**

**FACT-CHECK: Is There Tension In Lagos Over COVID-19 Vaccine Administration?**

**FACT-CHECK: Is Newly Introduced WhatsApp Status A Bait?**

**FACT-CHECK: Is FG Disbursing N10,500 Weekly Grant?**
CDD is urging Nigerians to always verify the authenticity of stories before sharing them.

You can forward suspicious messages for verification via +2349062910568 or contact us on twitter @CDDWestAfrica

#StopFakeNews #StopDisinformation

Center for Democracy and Development West Africa| CDD West Africa