

GMO misinformation in the Kenyan media - summary

In a study of GMO media articles published by Kenyan media published between October 2022 and January 2023 we found 151 out of a total of 376 articles contained unchallenged negative misinformation about GMOs. This equates to 40% of media coverage by volume in Kenya promoting negative misinformation about GMOs. Only 3% of articles contained pro-GMO misinformation.

Total Articles: 376

- Articles with no misinformation: 178 (47%)
- Articles with unchallenged misinformation: 151 (40%)
- Articles that challenged misinformation: 29 (8%)
- Fact-checking articles: 7 (2%)
- Articles containing misleading images: 16 (4%)

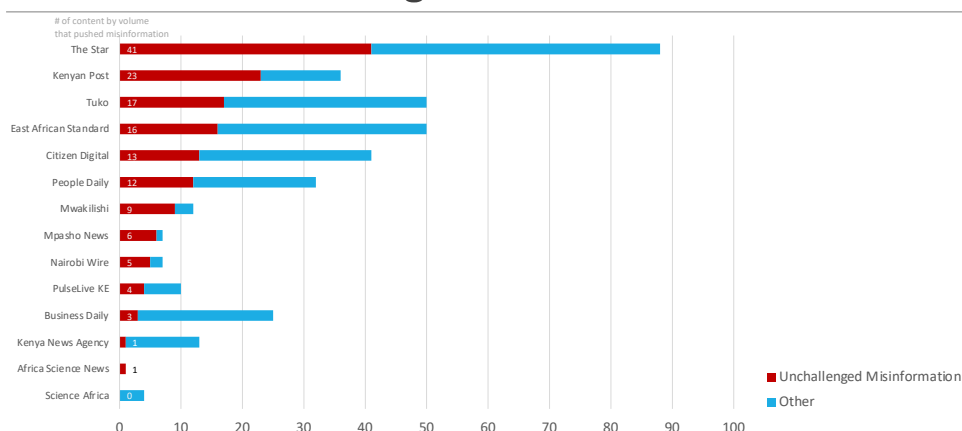
Misinformation breakdown of full conversation by pro/anti positioning:

- Anti-GMO: 151 (40%)
- Both: 7 (2%)
- Pro-GMO: 4 (1%)

Misinformation Volume by Topic

- Human Health: 168 (83%)
- Scientific Consensus: 20 (10%)
- Consumer Access: 9 (4%)
- Pesticides, Herbicides, and Soil Health: 5 (3%)

Misinformation by Volume for Outlets that Published Unchallenged Misinformation



Misinformation primarily originated in the form of quotes from prominent Kenyan politicians, in particular opposition leader Raila Odinga, trade cabinet secretary Moses Kuria and Roots party leader George Wajackoyah. Misinformation also originated from anti-GMO campaign groups like the Kenyan Peasants League. All these sources made scientifically unfounded claims about negative health effects of GMOs which were repeated unchallenged by media outlets.

Misinformation examples

"You don't feed people poison in the pretext of saving their lives," the politician said in a statement on Twitter Saturday.

'Resist GMOs, it's slow death – Ekuru Aukot' - The Star, 19 November 2022

"You are being told about GMOs. Mexico rejected the foods after research, about 500 men developed breasts and women grew beards"

'GMOs will make Kenyan men grow breasts and women grow beards – Prof WAJACKOYAH says' - Daily Post, 27 December 2022

Dr. Daniel Maingi of the Food Rights Alliance... stated that GMO technology contributes to cancer especially breast cancer thus insisted on non-GMO food.

'GMO Maize is harmful to your health, Kenyans warned!' - Africa Science News, 18 November 2022

These very high rates of misinformation are perhaps among the worst in the world, and will make it very difficult for Kenyan citizens and policymakers to make informed decisions about GMOs in the face of such a storm of misinformation. In order for the country to have a productive debate on the contribution GMOs can make to food and nutrition security, media will need to make a special effort not to repeat quotes, even from prominent people, which contain misinformation without rebuttal. Scientists will need to become better communicators, and media will need to devote space to authoritative scientific voices on this controversial topic.

What the science says

The position of the scientific community was summarised at a meeting 28 November 2022 of the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) in partnership with the Kenya National Academy of Sciences (KNAS) by KNAS Honorary Secretary Prof. Ratemo Michieka, who said:

"Scientific authorities around the world such as U.S National Academy of Sciences, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, World Health Organization, American Medical Association for the Advancement of Science, have analyzed thousands of scientific studies and concluded that GM food crops do not pose any risks to people, animals or the environment."

On behalf of NASAC President Prof. Norbert Hounkonnou said: "The Science Academies in Africa recommend adoption and commercialization of approved crops as one of the

sustainable options in addressing food insecurity and providing livelihoods of the population".

What the Alliance for Science says

"This is extremely concerning," commented Alliance for Science director Sheila Ochugboju, releasing the study to media and policymakers in Nairobi on 15 February 2023. "It will be very difficult for Kenyan citizens to make properly informed decisions about GMOs in the face of this storm of misinformation."

She added: "Let us be clear. Scientists around the world have assessed GMOs, and have reached a strong consensus that new techniques for breeding crops such as genetic modification are no more risky than older approaches. Thus any claims about negative health effects of GMOs are 100% false and must be reported as such in the media."

"It is no longer enough to simply report what someone said," Ochugboju added. "Journalists and media houses must do more than simply report the controversy. In doing so they risk unwittingly spreading misinformation. Just as with COVID and with vaccines, media outlets must accept responsibility for not misleading their readers. Therefore when prominent people make false statements, scientists must be contacted to give proper context and readers must be informed in the same article if statements are false."