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Combating Fake News & Malinformation in the time of Covid-19 & beyond. Africa's digital campaign to win against Covid-19

The internet belongs to all of humanity. It is a multi-stakeholder platform and no one controls it. It is for this reason that all good citizens of the world are working hard to protect it. To that effect the Internet Engineering Task Force says that “Closing the digital divide is critical and community networks offer a solution. These are “do it yourself” networks built by people for people.” (internet-society.org, 2020)

This principle is what has inspired us to form a continent wide, bottom up multi-stakeholder, civil society digital and social initiative to combat fake news and malinformation in Africa. Additionally, The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) which is a platform for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on prevailing and emerging issues on Internet governance ecosystem says it “aims to be a platform for an inclusive multilateral, multi-stakeholder and multilingual discussion on issues pertinent to the Internet in Africa in general and Internet Governance issues in particular.” (AfiGF, 2019)

This is exactly what has inspired our multi-stakeholder bottom up, civil society approach to setting up Covid Facts Africa. This is done to address the fact that we do not have a comprehensive digital communications framework that governs the flow of information in and out of the continent, inter and intra country, as well as between entities and citizens in Africa. Furthermore, the cyber warfare has peaked in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Which has resulted in an overwhelming flow of malinformation in the form of fake news and deep fake. This calls for a united, coordinated, multi-stakeholder civil society pan African initiative to combat the scourge of malinformation in the African continent. Hence, the

forming of Covid Facts Africa. The operating model of which is illustrated below. It follows a poly-centric model starting from the core which is the technical platform that proactively combats fake news. Then there is an advocacy platform which formed by a creative community to advocate against fake news as well as educate the public through an omni-channel model that includes all social media platforms. Both these sit behind an interactive social platform that informs, educates, entertain and enlighten the citizens of every country in Africa.

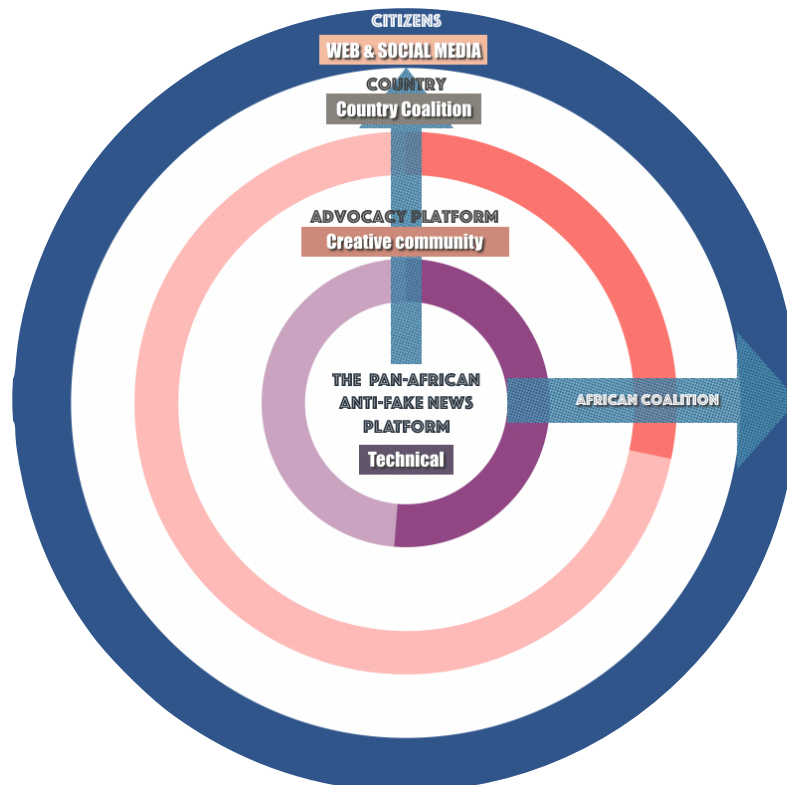


Figure 1: The Covid Facts Africa Operating Model

We have drawn from organisations such as ICANN which is a community that aims to make people understand internet governance. And, similarly within the continent AfNOG which is a forum for cooperation and the exchange of technical information between operators of Internet-connected networks in Africa. Much the same as AfNOG, we aim to build ‘a community of digital volunteers and engineers helping each other operate a fake news free internet in Africa.’ (afnog.org, 2020)

In our daily practices we would also like to align with the practices of organisations such as ZADNA which is to “comply with international best practice in [administration](#) and management of the domain namespace in compliance with international best practice.” (zadna.org.za, 2020)

As we have seen recently with the rise of online fraudulent activities such as the increase in the registrations of fake domain names. David E. Weslow and Ari Meltzer of Wiley Law warn that Covid-19 internet scams are on the rise. Explaining that there are three types of internet scams currently doing the rounds. The first being a scam that involves the use of well known and respected brands to sell unregulated remedies. In the second scam, the perpetrators send phishing emails to people looking for information about the virus. These emails claim legitimacy by saying that they are affiliated with Centre for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The third type of scam involves websites claiming to offer discount coupons for online purchases but in fact download viruses and malware when clicked.