



# Audiences Vulnerable to COVID-19 Disinformation in Sudan:

## Targeting Rural and Less Educated Populations<sup>1</sup>

Survey data demonstrate that although Sudan is the most informed and concerned about the coronavirus pandemic compared to its neighbors in the broader Sahel region, it is also the most vulnerable to COVID-19 disinformation.

Paradoxically, the World Health Organization (WHO), scientists, and health workers are trusted by almost 8 out of 10 Sudanese people, but only a minority of the population<sup>2</sup> use them as a source of information about COVID-19.

Despite the Sudanese being more informed and concerned about COVID-19, this is not reflected in changes in behavior to prevent the spread of the disease.

Finally, disease control measures are particularly difficult to implement in Sudan due to social, economic, and structural challenges – such as cultural background, absence of a safety net, poor adherence to mask wearing, limited access to water, and crowded living conditions.



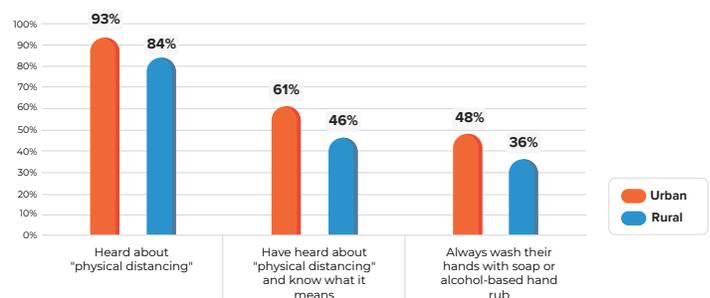
- Red** Audience groups who are the most vulnerable.
- Yellow** Audience groups that diverge from the official scientific guidelines and narratives.
- Green** Audience groups that are most in lockstep with the scientific consensus and WHO guidelines.



## Education as a determining factor of vulnerability

As is the case across the Sahel, the most significant differences in knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to COVID-19 in Sudan are correlated with inequities in education levels. Across most survey questions focusing on factual knowledge about COVID-19, a higher education level correlates with more accurate knowledge about the disease. For example, 55% of respondents with less than primary education are aware that individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate. As the education level of the respondent increases, so does this percentage. The trend in knowledge correlating to education levels also applies to perceptions about COVID-19 and the use of preventive measures such as physical distancing (also known as “social distancing”) or wearing a mask.

Knowledge of good practices regarding COVID-19 depending on the area (Sudan, n=828)



The same pattern can be observed across most of the survey questions. People with secondary and primary education, and especially those with less than primary education, comprise a particularly vulnerable audience to disinformation, which may result in increased risk of infection. Thus, this audience segment should be considered the main target for COVID-19 communication campaigns and counter-disinformation programs.

1. This paper is part of a 9-month program “The Truth About COVID-19” that aims to tackle disinformation around COVID-19 in eight countries across the broader Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Northern Cameroon, Senegal, and Sudan). The program is led by Sayara International in partnership with the Timbuktu Institute. This paper leverages data from a regional survey (n=4,899), including 828 respondents in Sudan, as well as 47 Key Informant Interviews, including 7 in Sudan. Fieldwork was conducted in December 2020.

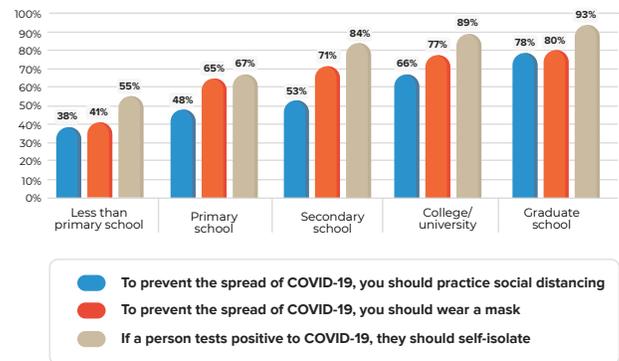
2. To the question “In the past week I have received news or information about COVID-19 from the following: (read options, check all that apply)”, 26% selected WHO and 39% of respondents mentioned scientists, doctors, and health workers.



## Rural audiences are less informed than urban audiences

Regarding preventive measures, fewer people from rural areas (36%) always wash their hands with soap or alcohol-based hand rub than people from urban areas (48%). Findings from other survey questions (including “What are the symptoms of COVID-19?” and “How does a person contract COVID-19?”) highlight that respondents in urban areas are generally better informed about preventive measures. Therefore, COVID-19 communication campaigns should focus more (although not exclusively) on rural areas.

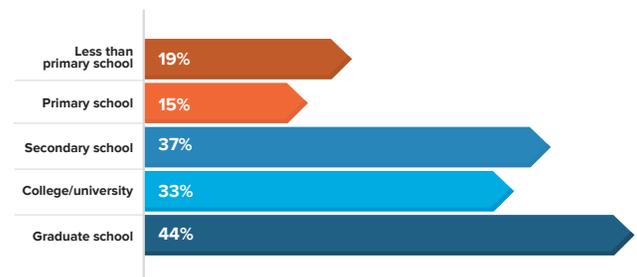
Known preventive measures by level of education in Sudan (n=828)



## Reaching the most vulnerable audiences

Communication strategies that aim to reduce COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation should include the most vulnerable audiences – people with less than primary education living in rural areas – even though these segments are harder to reach due to lower usage and trust in media than other groups.

Trust in journalists by level of education



### Less educated audiences:

- Mainly trust and use radio and TV in rural areas.
- Use and trust religious and community leaders as a source of information most in rural areas.
- **22%** turn to religious and community leaders for information about COVID-19, and **59%** trust them.

### Religious and community leaders:

- In rural areas, **51%** of respondents trust religious and community leaders regardless of their level of education, whereas that figure is **43%** in urban areas.
- Religious and community leaders are also trusted by respondents with primary (**69%**) and secondary education (**52%**).

### Key recommendations

Any communication strategy which aims to spread the right messages (based on accurate information) about COVID-19 in Sudan should:

- ✓ Communicate through radio and TV first.
- ✓ Ensure that it reaches populations with the lowest education level and those in rural areas.
- ✓ Rely on trusted voices (health workers, doctors, or scientists, as well as religious and community leaders) and amplify WHO messaging.
- ✓ Build upon people's existing knowledge and focus on wearing masks and handwashing.
- ✓ Not emphasize physical distancing, which could have a counter-effect and antagonize the audience – this measure is nearly impossible to implement in Sudanese society and is incompatible with the culture.