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Advanced Course on Verification and new narratives on fact checking for Namibian journalists

Windhoek, Namibia
7-9 June 2022

#PeriodismoÁfrica

ADVANCED COURSE ON
VERIFICATION AND
NEW NARRATIVES
ON FACT CHECKING
FOR NAMIBIAN JOURNALISTS

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STRATEGIES FOR FACT-CHECKING WHEN INFORMATION IS HARD TO FIND



What is **Africa** **Check?**



About Africa Check

- **Africa's first** independent fact-checking organisation
- Offices in Johannesburg, Nairobi, Dakar, and Lagos
- **Promotes accuracy** in the public domain and the media
- Enables the public to make **informed decisions**



Why fact-check?

- People need access to accurate information to make **well-informed decisions**
- “He said, she said reporting” **can be life-threatening**



Health misinformation in Nigeria

367 views · 31 Jan 2019

2 DISLIKE SHARE SAVE ...



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What to do when:

- 1. Your experts don't want to be quoted**
- 2. The available information is unreliable**
- 3. There is simply no reliable information**

Case 1:

**Your experts don't want to
be quoted**



Why quote experts?

- We can't be experts on all topics,
- Experts vet our work,
- Increases transparency and trust,
- N.B. Try to quote **multiple experts**.



**“I can’t speak
on-the-record...”**

The last thing you want to hear.



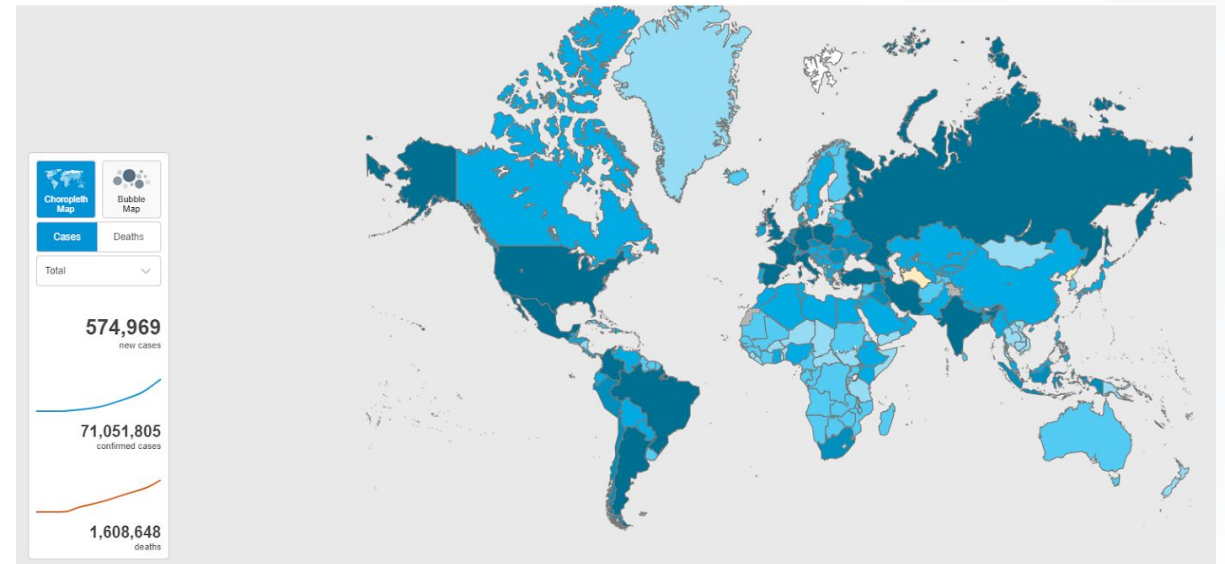
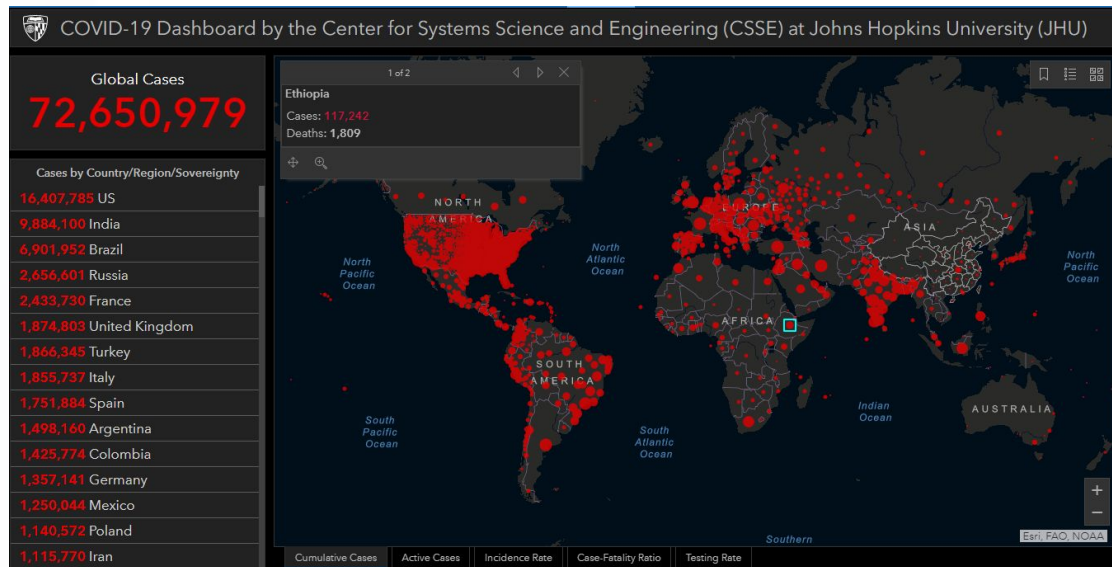
Possible sources of data

- National statistics institutes
- International organisations such as the United Nations
- Leading universities and research institutions
- Central banks, Government reports, Reports tabled in parliament
- Reputable peer-reviewed journals, International experts
- Fact-checking organisations like Africa Check, AFP Fact Check, PesaCheck, etc.

Quick tip



If you use a dashboard, consider the original sources of the data





Don't **underestimate** local sources

But vet all your sources thoroughly





Avoid “churnalism”

- “Copy-paste” journalism which repeats a press release
- Common in science-related articles
- Exaggeration in press release gets repeated
- Original article may not even be consulted

Ansa Heyl, Marina Joubert & Lars Guenther (2020) “Churnalism and Hype in Science Communication: Comparing University Press Releases and Journalistic Articles in South Africa”, *Communicatio*, 46:2, DOI: [10.1080/02500167.2020.1789184](https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2020.1789184)

Sumner P, Vivian-Griffiths S, Boivin J, Williams A, Venetis C A, Davies A et al. (2014) “The association between exaggeration in health related science news and academic press releases: retrospective observational study”, *BMJ*, 349, DOI:[10.1136/bmj.g7015](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g7015)

The worst case scenario

- Press release is misleading
- Media uncritically repeats press statement
- Details are not explained well to public
- Actual data doesn't speak to claim



volkswagen • fatal
polo crashes statistics

No, Volkswagen Polo drivers not 'the worst' – basic statistical error amplified by South African media

A widely reported press release misrepresented a study of fatal crashes in South Africa. We explain the details.

08 February 2022



Case 2:

**The available information
is unreliable**



How to judge the reliability of data

- **When was the data gathered?**
 - What timeframe are you looking at and what did the picture look like before and after?
 - An old research study may no longer be applicable
- **How was the data collected?**
 - Can you follow the methodology – where did the researcher get their data and how did they analyse it?



How to judge the reliability of data

- **Can the findings be generalised?**
 - What's the sample size?
 - Is the sample representative of the population? (Gender, age, etc.)
- **Is there a conflict of interest?**
 - Is the research funded and by who?
 - Could the researcher benefit from the results of the study?

You don't need perfect information



- Exact number of **illegal migrants** not known
- Around 3.9 million **total migrants** in 2020
- Enough evidence to show this claim is **incorrect**.



migrants

Still no evidence for
#15MillionIllegalMigrants in
South Africa

11 March 2021



**“But all the information I
have is terrible!”**

That's all we need to know...



Is Nairobi traffic world's second worst? 29 people say yes!

Published on 26 July 2018

- As Nairobi looks to ease its traffic, the media often claim it's the second most congested city in the world.
- The claim's main source is an online survey that polled only 29 people over three years - and only 10 in 2017.
- As the city looks for traffic solutions, accurate data will play a big role in making policy.



Vincent Ng'ethe

Share

To ease traffic snarl-ups in Kenya's capital Nairobi, the government is **reportedly** looking at having its employees work in shifts.

Other options **include** introducing car-free days and a rapid bus system.

Less time in traffic would appeal to despairing Nairobians, who **spend hours** on the road.

But is the city **of 4.7 million people** the second most congested in the world, as the media **regularly report**?

Claim

Nairobi is the second most congested city in the world.

Verdict



No data exists to support the claim.

Case 3:

**There is simply no reliable
information**

**“Unproven”
is an option**



Africa Check's verdicts



- Correct
- Mostly correct
- Unproven
- Misleading
- Exaggerated
- Understated
- Incorrect





Home > Fact-checks > Reports > A tale of twists and turns in ...

A tale of twists and turns in Kenyatta's claims about improving Kenya's roads

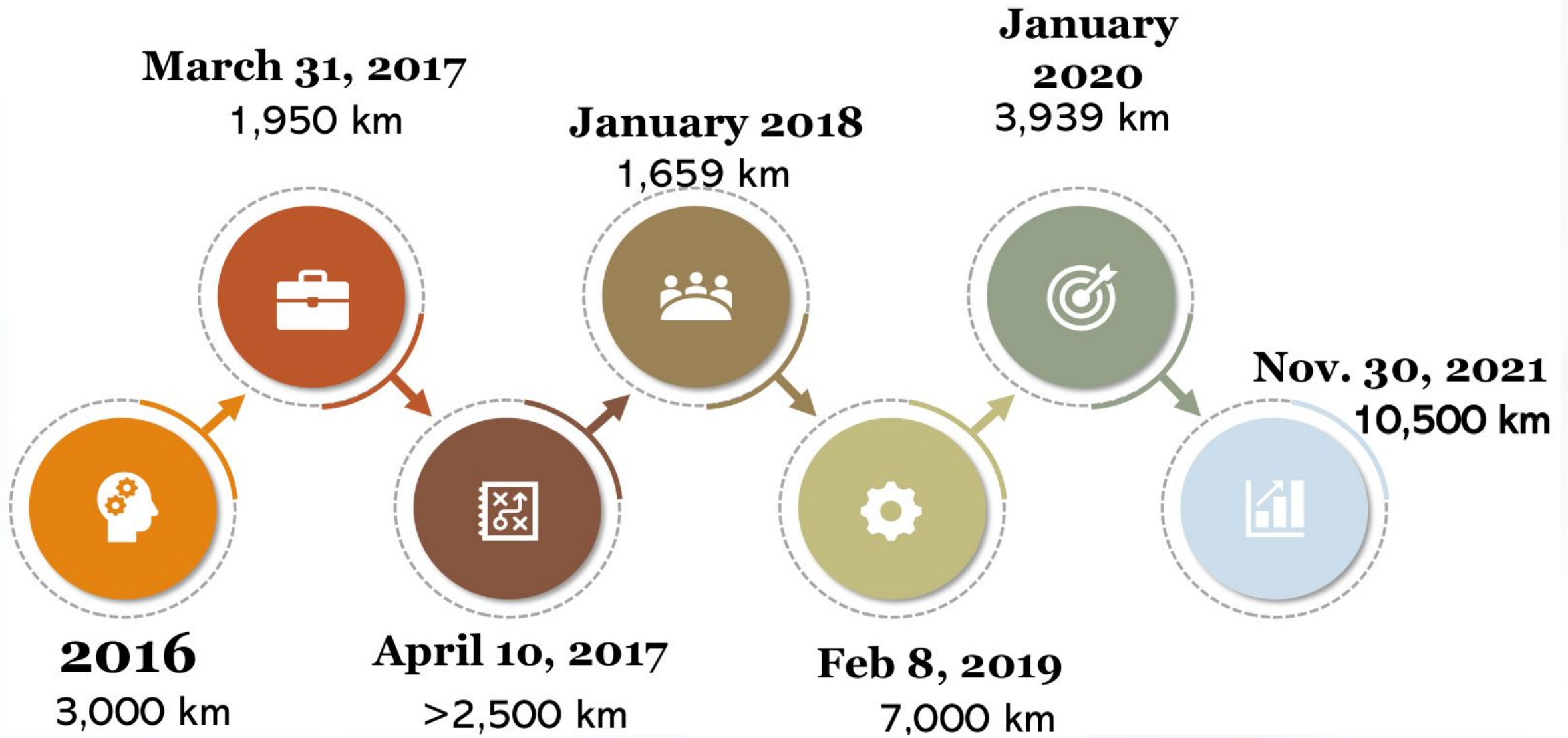
Published on 15 June 2020

- The president is accurate about the length of tarmacked road that the country had at independence.
- But his figures as to what his three predecessors built are inaccurate.
- Establishing how much new tarmacked roads his administration has built since he took office in 2013 is, however, an uphill task.



Alphonse Shiundu

Kenya editor





Focus on what is always true

- Don't know case numbers?
- Data is inconsistent?
- Experts disagree?
- Only 2nd-hand sources?
- Share symptoms/other useful info.
- Point out why claim is unreliable.
- Explain the implications for law/policy.
- When will more data become available?



Questions?

Africa's
History
Under
Review

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