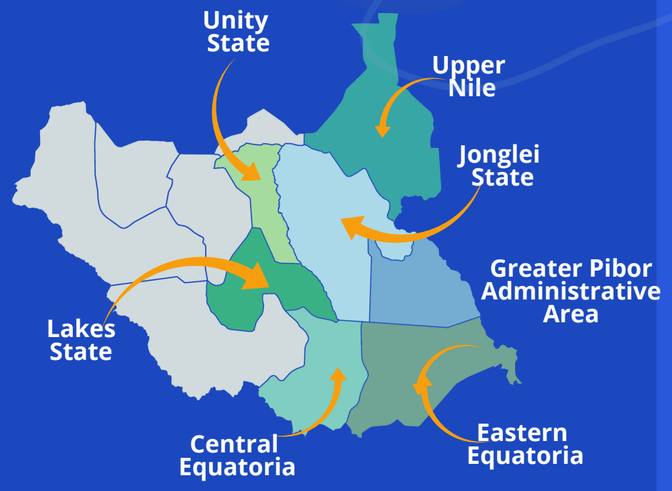
Rooted in Trust

LUGARA #6
HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN
August, 2022

South Sudan Rooted in Trust 2.0 project areas



Senior Humanitarian Project Manager
Dr. Michael Gubay
(mgubay@internews.org)

Humanitarian Project Advisor
Tusiime Wilfred Romeo (Akiiki)
(atusiime@internews.org)

This Humanitarian Bulletin has been reviewed by the South Sudan Ministry of Health

Rooted in Trust

Introduction to project

Rooted in Trust 2.0 (RiT 2.0) is a global pandemic information response program funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID-BHA) and implemented by Internews in 13 countries around the world, including South Sudan, to counter the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation on COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines, and other health related issues. Besides South Sudan, the RiT 2.0 project is being implemented in Lebanon, Mali, Colombia, Sudan, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti, Yemen, Madagascar and Zimbabwe. For more information, please visit https://rootedintrust.org/ .

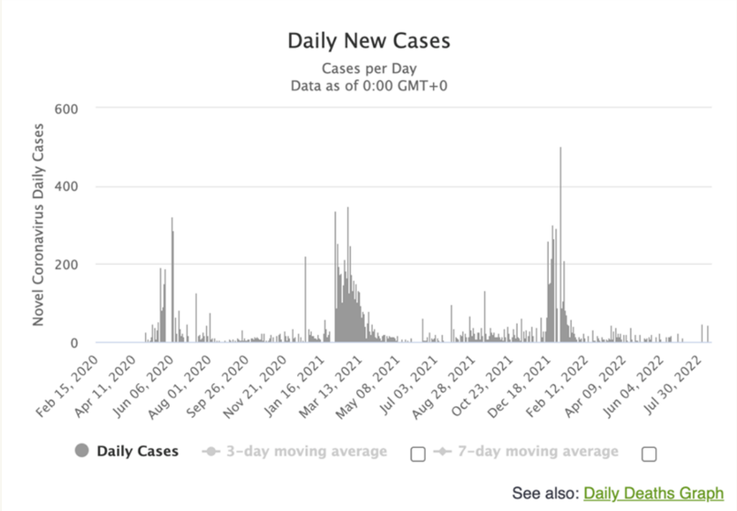
Rooted in Trust 2.0 in South Sudan addresses these related rumors and misinformation by collecting and analyzing concerns of communities to help humanitarian actors and health organizations across the country respond to the most pressing concerns of communities with fact-checked information. The Lugara Humanitarian Bulletin is an output of such work.

About this Lugara humanitarian bulletin

This bulletin is produced by Internews in South Sudan to provide an analysis and inform humanitarian and health organizations with practical recommendations on how they can better respond to the community rumors and concerns around COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines among other health-related issues across the country. This bulletin not only explores the rumors and community concerns but also sets out the potential impacts of these on communities' humanitarian and health programming.

COVID-19 situation overview

On August 23, 2022, there were 17,683 positive COVID-19 cases, 15,630 recovered patients and a total of 1381 deaths, according to data from the Ministry of Health (MoH). On August 15, 2022, 1,531,295 people were fully vaccinated in South Sudan.[1] This comes to around 11% of the population,[2] which is a lower rate than neighboring countries such as Sudan (15%), Kenya (23%) and Uganda (41%).[3]



Source: https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-sudan/.

Methodology

For this issue, Internews in South Sudan analyzed a total of 994 statements collected between August 1-24, 2022. These statements were received from five Rooted in Trust 2.0 media partners in South Sudan namely: Singaita 88.3 FM located in Eastern Equatoria; Mingkaman 100 FM in Lakes State; TRC Hub-Juba in Central Equatoria; Advance

[1] COVID-19 Epi surveillance 15th TWG - update from the Ministry of Health and Health Partners in South Sudan.
[2] NSC 11082022, update from the Ministry of Health and Health Partners in South Sudan.
[3] https://africacdc.org/covid-19-vaccination/

Youth Radio in Central Equatoria and Voice of Reconciliation 98.4 FM in Jonglei State. Additional analysis of rumors collected on social media was done by our Information Management Officer Annabelle Thompson Loholong in Juba, South Sudan.

The feedback data collected was coded thematically and those statements that were most frequently heard or were most concerning are presented in the following sections. Two rumors are pulled out below and detailed information is provided on the potential impact of the concern, and a fact-check.

Theme 1: Monkeypox – signs and symptoms

"We are worried about the monkeypox disease. How does it spread and how can one prevent himself from getting it?", male, 26-35, Bor town, Bor county, Jonglei state.

What is behind this concern?

The first monkeypox case was detected in Khartoum, Sudan, on 1 August 2022.[4] There are still no confirmed monkeypox cases in South Sudan, but several suspected cases were tested for monkeypox by the national public health laboratory in Juba.[5] Due to frequent interactions with traders, family and visitors from Khartoum, citizens want to know how to protect themselves from getting infected with new disease and how to recognize the symptoms and signs of monkeypox.

Fact check:

The symptoms of monkeypox include fever, intense headache, swelling of the lymph nodes, back pain, muscle ache and lack of energy. There could be skin rashes that begin on the face and spread to other parts of the body and evolve to pustules and crusts, says the Africa Center for Disease Control.[6] Monkeypox is transmitted to humans through close contact with an infected person or animal, or with material contaminated with the virus, says the World Health Organization (WHO). The virus is often transmitted from one person to another by close contact with lesions, body fluids, respiratory droplets, and contaminated materials such as bedding.[7] Prolonged contact, especially with a person's skin lesions, is emerging as the top transmission route.[8]

4 https://sudantribune.com/article262136/
5 https://jubaecho.com/south-sudan-establishes-facilities-to-test-monkey-pox%EF%BF%BC/
6 https://africacdc.org/disease/monkeypox/
7 https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/monkeypox
8 https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-02178-w

Why is this important?

When people don't know common prevention pathways, and signs and symptoms, they can't effectively protect themselves from getting ill with monkeypox.

This is also important as the current symptoms and patterns of spread don't look like what researchers had observed in previous outbreaks in other settings in West and Central Africa. In these parts of Africa, including in South Sudan, the virus has caused isolated outbreaks for decades.[9] This means citizens of South Sudan may have heard about monkeypox in humans before, but transmission pathways and signs and symptoms of the virus may present themselves differently.

Recommendations for humanitarian and health partners

Humanitarian and health partners should talk about monkeypox in their routine and COVID-19 focused health outreach and communication activities. Staff could be supported with the OpenWHO course: "Monkeypox: Introductory course for African outbreak contexts". This video from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine also explains monkeypox in a simple and effective manner:

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBi8Zn7Z63o

9 https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-02178-w;https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/monkeypox

Humanitarian partners could also support preparedness and response efforts by reporting rumors related to monkeypox in the communities they are working in, especially ones that could lead to harm. These rumors should be shared with the Ministry of Health, so health actors can take rapid action.

Theme 2: Side-Effects of COVID-19 vaccines

"I was vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines; I felt pains in my body after the injection. The trending misinformation makes people fear to receive the jab," man, 36-45, Juongkang Boma, Leer County, Unity State.

"COVID-19 vaccines are increasing the problems within the community (red: related to vaccine hesitancy) because of side effects," man, over 60 years Juongkang Boma, Leer County, Unity State.

What is behind this concern?

People say misinformation and fears around side-effects of injection with COVID-19 vaccines were observed in various communities (particularly those recently visited by vaccination teams for the first time). Some people say that common side-effects, for them, confirm that there *"is something seriously wrong"* with the vaccines, and that rumors were true. People who don't understand that side-effects are common, can spread fear and misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Fact check:

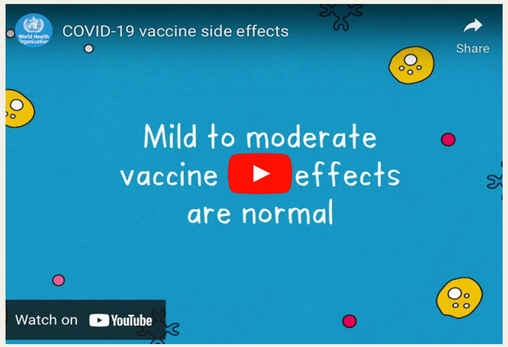
Reported side effects of COVID-19 vaccines have mostly been mild to moderate and have lasted no longer than a few days. Typical side effects include pain at the injection site, fever, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, and diarrhea.[10] Mild-to-moderate side effects are normal and not a cause for alarm: they are signs that the body's immune system is responding to the vaccine, specifically the antigen (a substance that triggers an immune response) and is gearing up to fight the virus. These side effects usually go away on their own after a few days, says the Health Ministry and WHO.

Why is this important?

When people who receive the vaccine, or communities, don't understand why they are experiencing side effects after being vaccinated, they may misunderstand the severity of the side-effects, or spread misinformation out of fear. Humanitarian and health partners should be wary of the potential for rumors to spread as these could ultimately negatively affect vaccine uptake in South Sudan.

Recommendations for humanitarian and health partners

Vaccination teams in South Sudan should always explain that it is common to experience some mild-to-moderate side effects when receiving vaccinations. They should explain side effects are there because a person's immune system is instructing their body to react in certain ways: it increases blood flow so more immune cells can circulate and raises the body temperature to kill the virus. This video from the WHO could be used to explain why side effects are common.



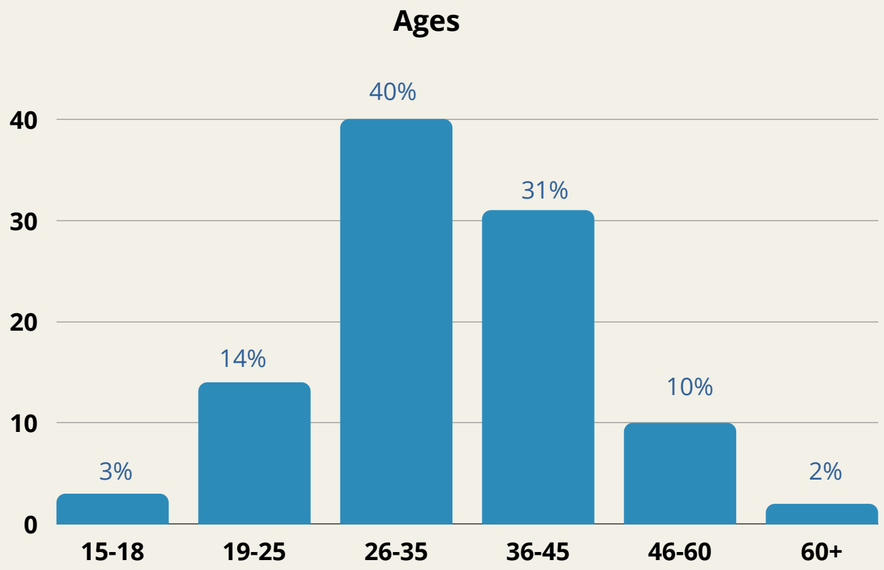
https://youtu.be/xn0pRq84j_M

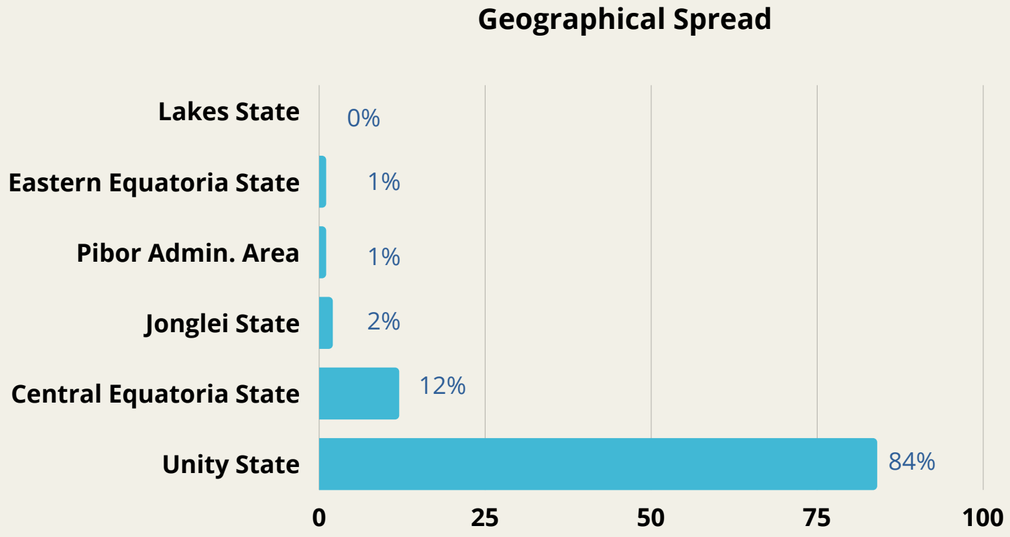
[10] https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/side-effects-of-covid-19-vaccines

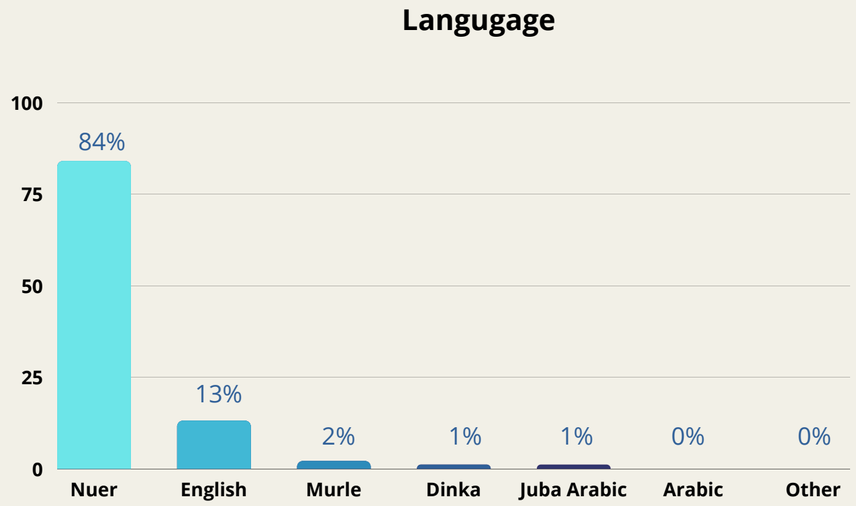
Overview of other concerns, rumors, and feedback data (August 1 –24, 2022)

Most statements collected (431 out of 794) were focused on COVID-19, with others (243 out of 794) focusing on COVID-19 vaccines (see an overview in graph 2). Most concerns came from Unity State (see graph 1); were predominantly from men (499 out of 794 statements); mainly from people between 26-45 years old (523 out of 794 statements); were shared in Nuer (648 out of 794) (see graph 1).

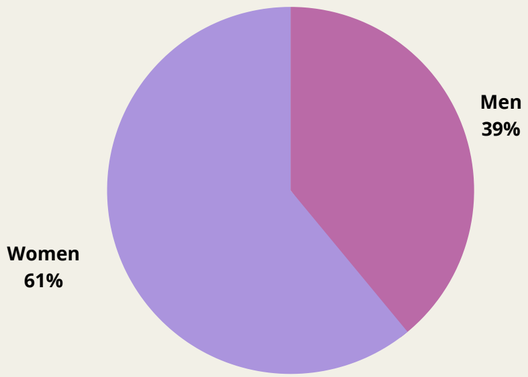
Graph 1: a profile of the people that contributed rumors, concerns, and statements to this bulletin – data collected between August 1-24, 2022 (total statements = 794).





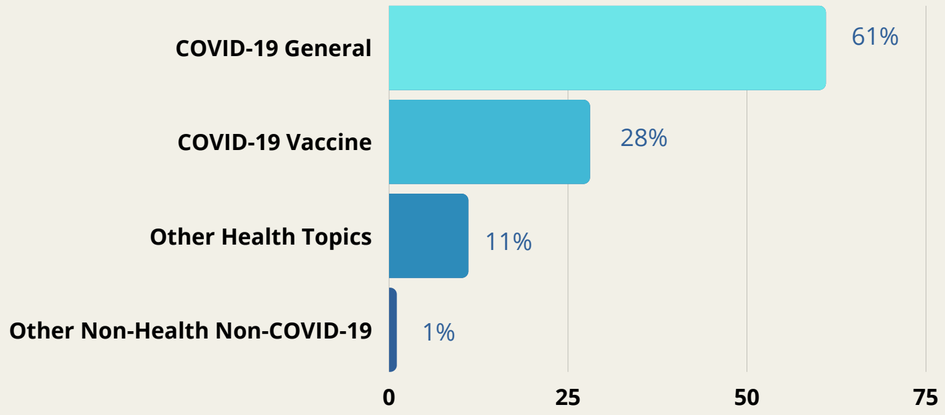


Gender

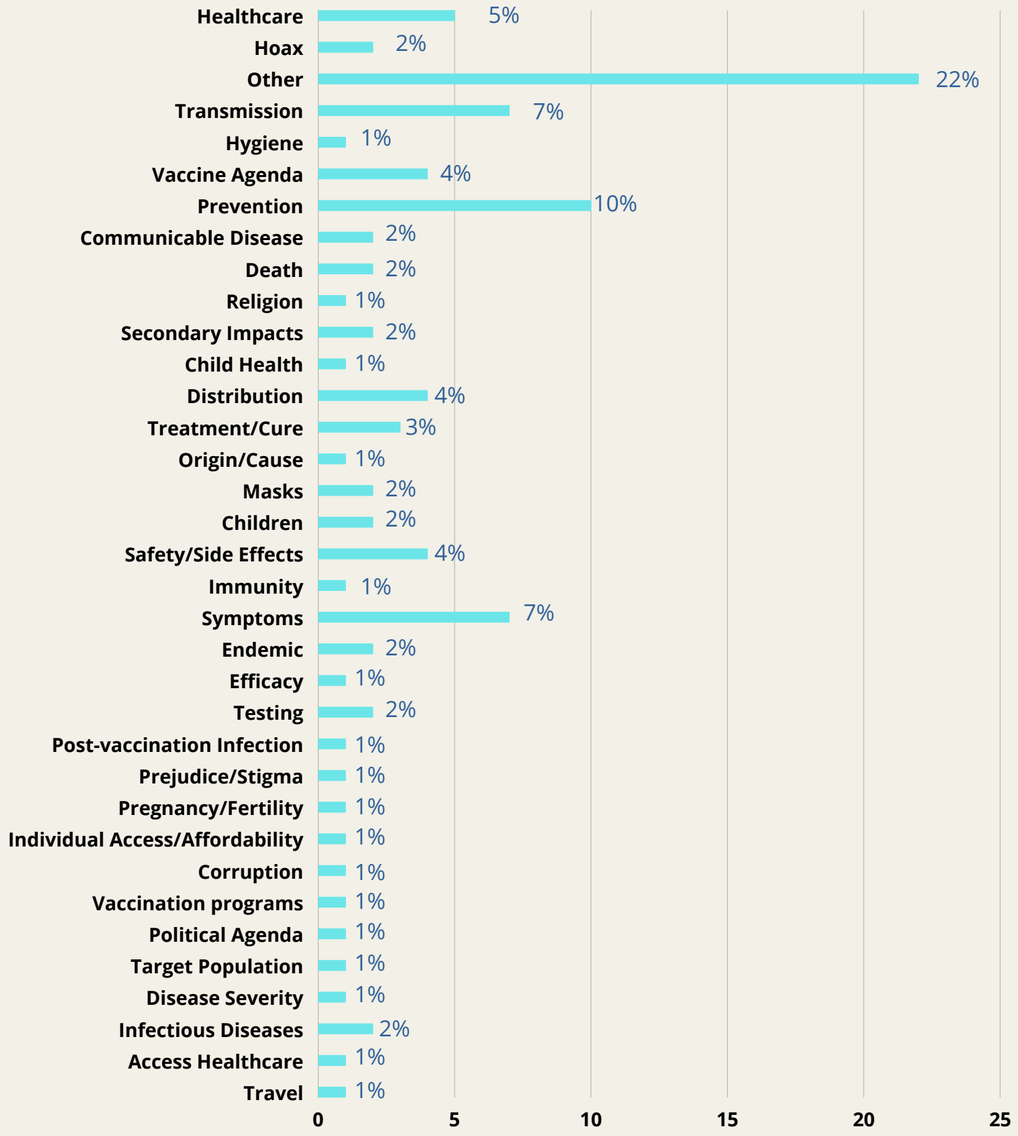


Graph 2: an analysis done by Internews of the statements received from our media partners between August 1- 24, 2022 and data collected on social media networks (total statements = 794)

Thematic areas



Topics of Statement



Other than the themes presented on the previous pages, people issued multiple statements around various other topics/themes (see an overview of the other themes above in Graph 2):

- Vaccine availability/coverage gaps: Many people who spoke to Internews partners in South Sudan reported that their communities were not reached by vaccine teams. As one man from Leer Country says: *"Many of the 16 Payams in Leer County are not reached with COVID-19 vaccines"*. Such concerns about vaccination shortages and information about coverage gaps should be directly communicated to the COVID-19 Rapid Response team at the MoH. Health partners should continue to help the MoH in providing COVID-19 vaccines to these communities. If vaccines are not available due to security dynamics, because of flooding or other stock/distribution challenges, partners should clearly, and with transparency, explain (the reason for) delays to affected communities.

- Misinformation continues to thrive. Misinformation about COVID-19 and more recently, about monkeypox, is continuing to spread both offline and on online platforms. *"Monkeypox virus is another tactic of illuminati," says a man, 19-25 years old, from Munuki Boma, Juba County, Central Equatoria State. Another added: "Monkeypox virus is the side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine"*. Continued and coordinated efforts of health and humanitarian partners to provide fact-checked and verified information speaking to these concerns is still urgently needed.

- Information gaps in rural areas. People who spoke to our partners mentioned that communities in rural areas need lifesaving COVID-19 information. *"Most of the partners implementing COVID-19 projects end up in the towns"*, mentioned a Man, 36-45 years old from Kaigai Boma, Leer county, Unity state. *"NGOs should increase the rate of awareness about COVID-19 so that the information should reach the whole community,"* suggested another man, 46-60 years old from the same Boma in Unity. This is important as there are still many questions related to COVID-19 and vaccines that go unanswered: *"Some community members do not differentiate COVID-19 from other diseases"*; "Many people are not educated on COVID-19 vaccine topics". Partners should make sure that vaccination efforts are paired with communication activities where communities have plenty of options to ask questions about their (changing) concerns.

- Insecurity and other challenges. Some people in South Sudan continued to express dissatisfaction that COVID-19 and monkeypox are seen as more "critical" than other health risks and insecurity dynamics. *"COVID-19 is not the main cause of death in Jonglei, insecurity is the one that kills people and so we need a vaccine for insecurity,"* says a man from Jonglei. It is critical that humanitarian agencies acknowledge the other risks that people face in health communication activities and effort and continue peace-building and diplomatic efforts.

Health and humanitarian partners should be aware of these trends, as they can have an impact on their on-going programming.

Contact details

For more information about COVID-19 please call the toll-free number **6666**.
For more information, visit https://moh.gov.ss/.

If you want to contribute to or provide feedback on this Lugara Humanitarian Bulletin or have information to share, please contact: **Tusiime Wilfred Romeo (Akiiki)** (atusiime@internews.org) or **Dr. Michael Gubay** (mgubay@internews.org).

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Rooted in Trust

Internews Local voices. Global change.