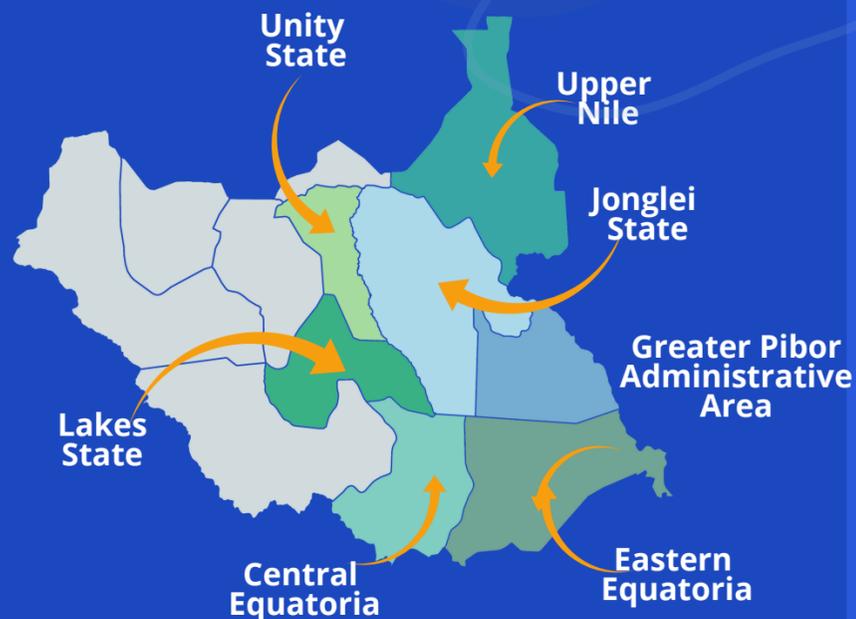




LUGARA #7 HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN

September, 2022

South Sudan Rooted in Trust 2.0 project areas



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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.



A letter from the project team

Dear readers of Lugara,

This is the last Humanitarian Bulletin that we at Internews will produce as part of the Rooted in Trust 2.0 project in South Sudan. I would like to thank you for being part of this journey with us.

A lot has changed in South Sudan since we started the project in March 2022. Initially, there was a severe shortage of COVID-19 vaccines in South Sudan. In April, vaccines were delivered to South Sudan and vaccination efforts started taking off. An uphill battle: many citizens remain distrustful of the lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines.

Many of the community concerns are frequently linked to negative historical experiences with aid agencies, distrust in government and elites, and stronger trust in traditional beliefs and practices. Many people, for example, say they distrust COVID-19 vaccines and the response due to previous negative experience with broken trust in interactions with Western aid workers. A common concern is that the COVID-19 vaccines can affect reproductive health. Having children and being sexually fertile is culturally important in many South Sudanese communities, particularly in rural areas and cattle camps.

During the last year, we have supported the integration of humanitarian and health needs into response plans strengthened risk communication. Integrating rumor surveillance with epidemic disease surveillance systems and health information systems prior to, or during outbreaks, is a major gap. A holistic approach is needed to help the government and humanitarians gather community feedback and rumors and respond to information needs during outbreaks. Communities should always be involved in shaping public health response activities.

It is important that we as humanitarian partners continue to work together in ensuring we provide adequate, fair, accurate, and transparent information on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines in a timely manner to the communities we are working with and in. It is also important to ensure that we keep our promises, understand historical wrong-doings and cultural traditions and practices to be able to design an appropriate response. We can do this by ensuring the integration of citizen feedback in humanitarian programming, by answering questions and by ensuring the active participation of communities in program design.

Together we can stop COVID-19!

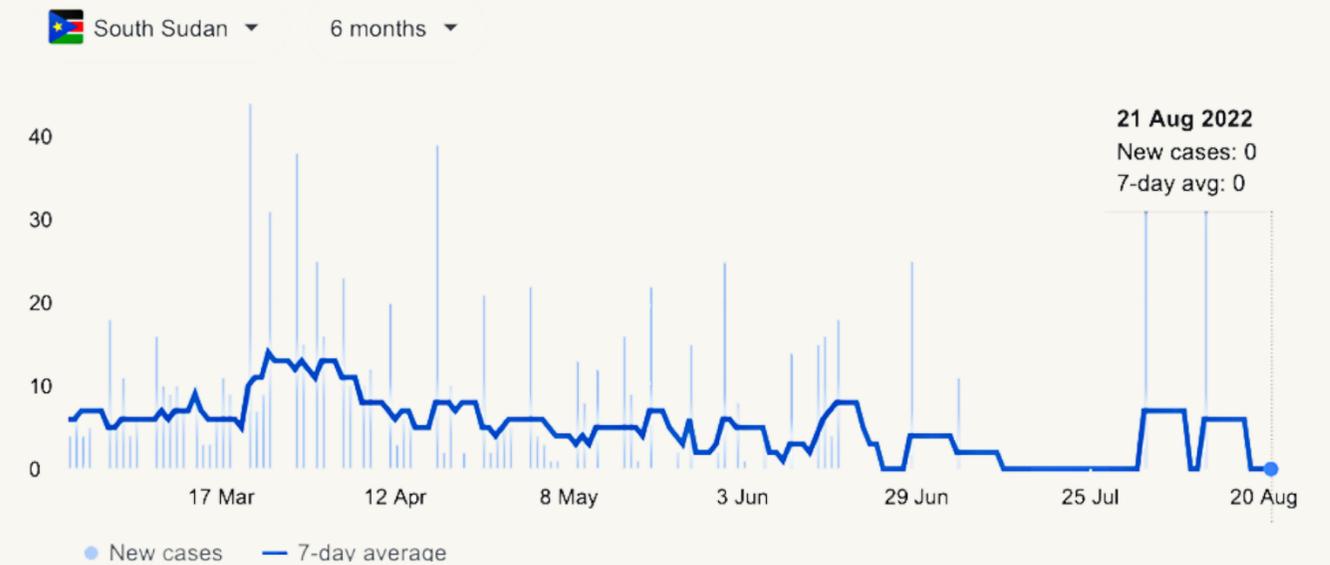
Dr. Mike Gubay & Tusiime W. Romeo (Akiiki)



COVID-19 overview (March 2022 – August 2022)

In the last six months, COVID-19 cases have fluctuated but currently remain low and stable:

From JHU CSSE COVID-19 Data · Last updated: 9 hours ago



Source: <https://github.com/CSSEGISandData/COVID-19>

Besides COVID-19, health officials reported many other infectious disease outbreaks in South Sudan in the reporting period. There is a current measles outbreak in Juba, Munuki, Na Bari and Rajaf Payams (mainly amongst young people between 1-4 years old); a continued hepatitis E virus outbreak in Bentiu refugee camp (since 2019 this infectious virus affected up to 3,003 patients and 23 deaths). There were several suspected anthrax cases in Gogrial West, suspected meningitis cases in Bahr el Ghazal, and cholera in Bentiu IDP camp, Unity State.¹ It is important that partners work together to stop all outbreaks.

¹ EP&R Meeting IDSR Presentation, 3 August 2022. Ministry of Health, South Sudan.

The next timeline shows critical response milestones related to COVID-19 in the last six months:

March:

- Increased COVID-19 vaccination effects in 596 health facilities in 80 counties.²
- There is a shortage of vaccines: the Ministry of Health (MoH) is awaiting 144,000 doses of the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) vaccine donated by New Zealand and 806,400 by Portugal.³
- No deaths attributed to infection with the COVID-19 virus were reported since 31 December 2021.
- There have been no admissions to the Infectious Disease Unit in Juba since February 2022.⁴

April:

- In April the MoH received the expected vaccine doses from Portugal and New Zealand, which were all received in frozen state with an expiry date in 2023. In April, MoH and partners have enough vaccines and there were no doses at risk of expiring.⁵
- COVID-19 numbers remain stable, with no new deaths.

May:

- Stable-to-low confirmed COVID-19 cases. Still no deaths nor admissions to the Infectious Disease Unit. Dominant strains are Omicron BA.1 and BA.2 sub lineages.⁶

June:

- By June 23, 70,087 people are vaccinated in South Sudan. Northern Bahr El Ghazal State is the state with the highest coverage of the total population fully vaccinated (16%), followed by Unity (13%) and Western Bahr El Ghazal (11%) States.⁷
- Stable-to-low confirmed COVID-19 cases. Still no deaths and admissions to the Infectious Disease Unit.⁸

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-31-march-2022>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-31-march-2022>

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-26-may-2022>

⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-7-april-2022>

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-26-may-2022>

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-23-june-2022>

⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-23-june-2022>

July:

- Stable-to-low confirmed COVID-19 cases.⁹
- Updated COVID-19 travel guidance in line with the East Africa Community (EAC): in-bound travelers can now enter South Sudan when fully vaccinated or with a negative PCR test certificate. Most new cases detected through pre-travel screening among asymptomatic travelers in the capital city of Juba.¹⁰
- Intensified vaccination efforts. 346,500 doses of J&J expected in August.¹¹

August:

- Vaccine demand generation activities are starting. By now, 11% of the population was vaccinated, with the highest number of people fully vaccinated in Unity (19%), Northern Bahr El Ghazal (17%) and the lowest in Jonglei (8%) and Eastern Equatoria (7%) States.
- In total 345,600 doses of J&J vaccines were received in early August and 579,000 are coming in the second half of August.¹²



⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-28-july-2022>

¹⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-28-july-2022>

¹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/covid-19-update-south-sudan-28-july-2022>

¹² NSC 11082022, from the Ministry of Health.

This overview was made with help of frequent COVID-19 Updates from the Government of South Sudan and World Health Organization (WHO). Please find some useful resources for COVID-19 updates in South Sudan here:

- <http://moh.gov.ss//covid-19.php>
- http://moh.gov.ss//daily_updates.php
- <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/covid-19>
- <https://covid19partnersplatform.who.int>

Overview of rumors covered (March – August 2022):

Month	Topics Covered	Resource
February	Does vaccination cause infertility in child-bearing women? Can it stop one from having children Is Omicron just the nickname for the normal December flu?	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lugara_Community_Factsheet_Issue-1_ENG.pdf
March	COVID-19 is a disease of urban people which affects people living in towns and cities.	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lugara_Community_Factsheet_Issue-2_ENG.pdf
April	COVID-19 Vaccines and Safety/Fertility There is no COVID-19 in South Sudan	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lugara_Community_Factsheet_Issue-3_ENG.pdf
May	Is COVID-19 endemic? Vaccines and efficiency	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lugara_Community_Factsheet_Issue-4_ENG.pdf
June	COVID-19 vaccines and older people Why is there no HIV vaccine? Duration of vaccine protection	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Lugara-Community-Factsheet-Issue-5_ENG.pdf
July	Vaccines and pregnancy COVID-19 and variants	http://rootedintrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Lugara-Community-Factsheet-Issue_6_ENG.pdf

Feature from our partner in Jonglei:

This story was written by our partner Voice of Reconciliation in Jonglei. It shows how media organizations helped communities in cattle camps access accurate & timely information on COVID-19 vaccines. Cattle communities are highly mobile communities, living across South Sudan.

"Our problem was that we did not receive the information": addressing critical COVID-19 information gaps in cattle camps in Jonglei, South Sudan

By Manyang David Mayar, Voice of Reconciliation (VoR).

"This virus, I believed it came from Western doctors who prepared it in their workplace and spread it to Africans in order to increase the death of the African people. But when we here in South Sudan resisted the virus, they decided to send the same virus in the form of the vaccine to kill us," explained 35-year-old Maker Jool. Jool works as a cattle keeper in Jonglei State cattle camp, and he and his family long believed this rumor, he said.

Many people who live in the cattle camps in South Sudan feel that they are "lucky", Jool explained: "they believe they have plenty of milk that keeps them healthy and that helps their immune system to fight the viruses and therefore neither the COVID-19 virus nor the vaccine will manage to harm". The perception is making that many citizens living in the camps opt out of taking lifesaving vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine.

Many people in South Sudan live in cattle communities: migratory societies who often travel for weeks-on-end to find fresh parcels of grass and water wells for their hungry and thirsty animals. Cattle camp communities also travel through conflict affected areas in the country and are at times hit by violent cattle raids and intercommunal violence. It is often difficult for health partners to reach the pastoralist communities with COVID-19 information.

On August 4, 2022, Voice of Reconciliation (VoR), a partner of Internews' BHA Rooted in Trust 2.0 project in Jonglei State, visited the cattle camp and played some prerecorded messages from trusted religious leaders and doctors from the capital of Bor State, who are working on the COVID-19 vaccination program. They reported fact-checked information about the vaccines and stressed the importance of getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

It is not the first time that VoR visited the camp. The radio station has been organizing listening groups, with set activities where listeners of the radio are brought together to discuss radio items that were aired in the last week and to discuss common concerns, since March 2022. The radio station is also collecting rumors on COVID-19 vaccines and help humanitarian partners to debunk those rumors by providing fact-checked information on air.

The messages of the South Sudanese doctors, that VoR has recorded, focused on how COVID-19 has long been a global tragedy affecting millions of people and stressed that many people have died in the USA and in Europe since the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020. The messages also focused on how those deaths reduced after the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine in both continents, according to VoR.

“I think our problem was that we could not get these messages where we live. We have been relying on our ordinary people in the camp here who go to the town and come back with the messages... They said that coronavirus is just a hoax, but now I heard the right information from people I trust. I believe this and I will not lie or convince people into doing something that harms us,” Jool concluded.

Follow VoR here: <https://twitter.com/radiovorbor> ; <https://www.facebook.com/RadioVORBOR>

“I am so grateful to Minkaman 100 FM for the tremendous work during COVID-19 vaccines campaigns. We had many challenges in the past. People could reject the vaccines due to disinformation. When we begin to talk on the Radio every week, people understood that the vaccine was important for them, and many accepted the vaccine. The number we vaccinated in the two months of June and July is nearly ten times higher than the last seven months of November to May. This shows that Radio is the reliable medium that people trust,” Daniel Achop, EPI Officer, Awerial County Lakes State.

“We have heard a lot about coronavirus from the radio and it has helped us a lot. For me, I have understood very well that Corona is a disease that is very bad, and it kills people. As the government has brought for us the vaccine for COVID-19, we first feared that it will kill us. And when we heard over the radio that it is a vaccine that saves people from dying of this corona disease, we rushed to take the vaccine,” Yusuf Mohamed, a resident of Palakal in Kapoeta Municipality.

Social media toolkit:

During the RiT 2.0 project period, Internews in South Sudan developed several social media cards, debunking COVID-19 and vaccine rumors. Partners are free to use them in their health programming. See an overview of developed resources below.

For specific requests, contact: ATUSIIME@internews.org.

Rooted in Trust COVID-19 & VACCINES
Your weekly snapshot of COVID-19 social media discussions in South Sudan

RUMOR

"Could getting vaccinated against COVID-19 disrupt my menstrual cycle?"



FACT CHECK:

There have been some reports of people experiencing disruption to their menstrual cycle after being vaccinated against COVID-19. There is not yet enough data available to know whether there is a connection between the vaccines and this disruption. Several large studies researching the impact of vaccines on menstrual cycles are ongoing. WHO will continue to monitor any new evidence regarding menstrual cycles. If you have concerns or questions about your periods, do not hesitate to speak with a health care provider.

The Rooted in Trust 2.0 project in Internews South Sudan, is funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). It aims to respond to rumors, misinformation, fake-news, and other concerns that shape negative public perceptions towards the COVID-19 response in the country.




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RUMOR

"Should I get vaccinated if I'm breastfeeding?"



FACT CHECK:

If you are breastfeeding, you should get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as it is your turn. None of the current COVID-19 vaccines have live virus in them. This means there is no risk of you transmitting COVID-19 to your baby through your breastmilk from the vaccine. In fact, the antibodies you get after vaccination may go through your breast milk and help to protect your baby.

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RUMOR

"COVID-19 vaccine reduces sexual performance"



FACT CHECK:

This is false rumor that was addressed by South Sudan Ministry of Health. "COVID-19 vaccine doesn't affect sexual desire or sexual performance. There is no record that COVID-19 vaccines affect sexual reproductive health or have caused infertility in women or men. Hence, there is no reason to think the vaccine would affect sexual performance," Mabior Kiir Kudior, Chief of Planning and Information at Public Health Emergency Operation Centre, Ministry of Health, Republic of South Sudan.

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Your weekly snapshot of COVID-19 social media discussions in South Sudan

RUMOR

"What is the difference between Covid-19 and Asthma? are they contagious diseases?"



FACT CHECK:

The World Health Organisation says that the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 is infectious. Older people and younger people can be infected by the COVID-19 virus. Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus. WHO advises people of all ages to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, for example by following good hand hygiene and good respiratory hygiene.

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Rooted in Trust COVID-19 & VACCINES
Your weekly snapshot of COVID-19 social media discussions in South Sudan

RUMOR

"Can you inquire from the doctor if the vaccine kills older people?"



FACT CHECK:

No vaccine or medical product is 100% safe, but the safety of vaccines is ensured via rigorous testing in clinical trials prior to authorization or approval, followed by continued safety monitoring once the vaccine is rolled out to the public to detect potential rare side effects. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration inspects vaccine production facilities and reviews manufacturing protocols to make sure vaccine doses are of high-quality and free of contaminants.

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Rooted in Trust COVID-19 & VACCINES
Your weekly snapshot of COVID-19 social media discussions in South Sudan

RUMOR

"Does Covid-19 come only in the rainy season?"



FACT CHECK:

World Health Organization says, "you can catch COVID-19, no matter how sunny or hot the weather is. Countries with hot weather have reported cases of COVID-19. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose."

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Thank you for reading our bulletins!

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:

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