



# LUGARA

## HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN

### ABOUT THE BULLETIN

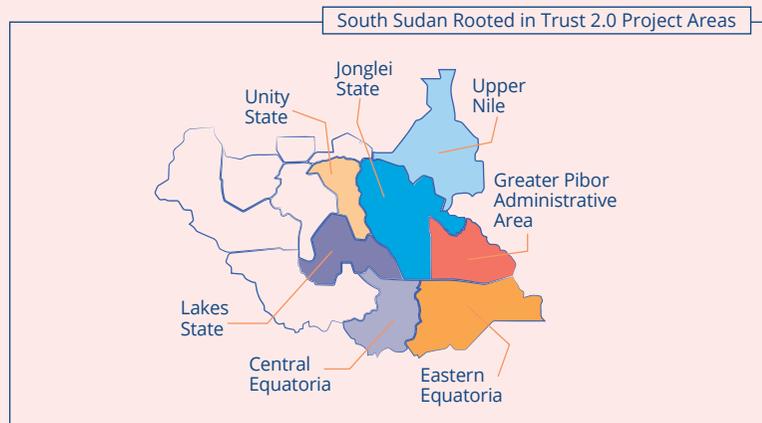
This bulletin is produced by Internews in South Sudan to provide an analysis of community feedback, rumours trends and inform humanitarian and health organisations with practical recommendations on how they can better respond to the community rumours and concerns around COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines, and other health and non-health community concerns across the country. This bulletin not only explores community feedback and concerns but also sets out to facilitate effective two-way humanitarian communication and close the feedback loop on humanitarian and health programming.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECTS

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 to counter the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumours and misinformation on COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines, and other health-related topics. The project aims to provide timely and accurate information and address COVID-19 misinformation by collecting and analysing concerns of communities to help humanitarian actors and health organisations across the country respond to the most pressing concerns of communities with fact-checked information. Analysis of rumour trends in the past year shows many rumors and misinformation were addressed and gone away while few others have persisted. In addition, we provided fact-checked information responding to community concerns, questions and complaints. The project plans to broaden its thematic areas in addition to health issues. The Lugara Humanitarian Bulletin is an output of such work. ("Lugara Humanitarian Bulletin#6 South Sudan")

Besides South Sudan, the RiT 2.0 project is being implemented in Lebanon, Mali, Colombia, Sudan, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Zimbabwe, Haiti, Madagascar, and Yemen. For more information, please visit: <https://rootedintrust.org/>

## HUMANITARIAN AND HEALTH OVERVIEW (JANUARY 2023)

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan continues to worsen and is fueled by climate crisis, food insecurity, conflict, and public health challenges. An estimated 6.31 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity across the country.

In December 2022, the South Sudan Health Ministry declared an outbreak of measles. As of January 2023, there were 3,581 suspected measles cases and 41 deaths reported. Of the reported cases, 55.2% have no history of immunisation, while across the country 71% of children under 5-years have not received any dose of the measles vaccine. In response, the Ministry of Health (MoH) with its partners reactivated a vaccination campaign aimed at closing immunity gaps to stop the transmission of the virus.

The MoH, the World Bank, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and World Health Organisation (WHO) launched a COVID-19 vaccine campaign on January 28, 2023, following the arrival of 3.9 million vaccine doses into the country. While the country-wide campaign aims to reach 70% of the population, vaccination coverage remains low in South Sudan. Unprecedented floods in the North of the country and escalating conflict have hampered COVID-19 vaccination and regular childhood vaccination efforts as well as challenged access to basic health services.

On January 31, 2023, there were a cumulative 18,425 confirmed positive COVID-19 cases, 18,115 recovered patients and a total of 138 COVID-19 reported deaths, according to the South Sudan MoH data.

## METHODOLOGY

For this bulletin, Internews in South Sudan analysed a total of 320 statements collected between January 2 - 31, 2023. These statements were received from five RiT 2.0 Feedback collectors working in five states in South Sudan namely: Upper Nile, Unity, Central Equatoria, Eastern equatorial and Jonglei states.

During the period, the methods utilised to collect community feedback and runout data include Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), face-to-face interactions, social media listening, and monitoring. In addition, State Risk Communication, and Community Engagement (RCCE) focal persons have started reporting through the unified rumour tracking tool.

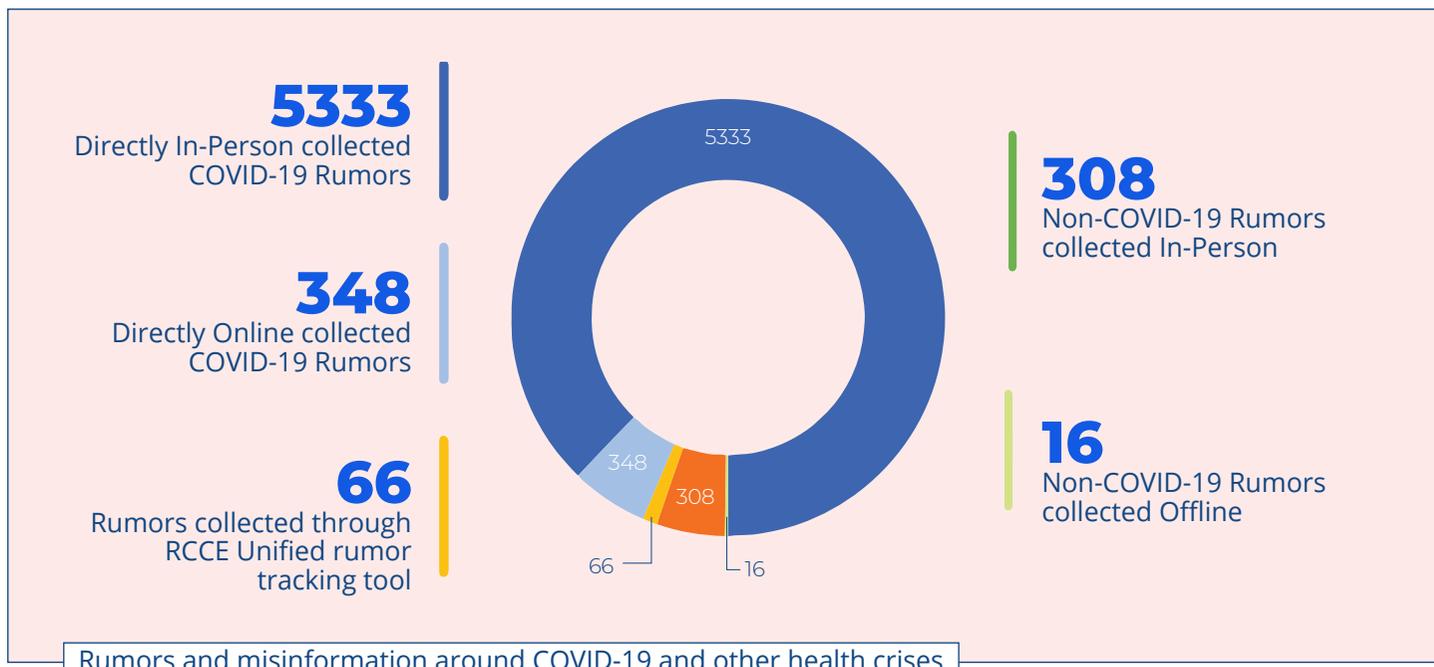
The analysis of the rumours was done by the Information Management Officer and the findings were discussed at an editorial meeting to select the frequent and high-risk rumours. The feedback data collected was coded thematically and those statements that were most often heard or were most concerning are presented in the following sections.

# Overview of concerns, rumours, and feedback data in 2022

## RUMOURS TREND ANALYSIS IN 2022

In 2022, the project collected and addressed a number of rumours with our partners. Through trusted networks of information many rumours were addressed. Although, while many rumours were addressed some around COVID-19 and the

COVID-19 vaccine persisted. The most persistent rumours were that "COVID-19 causes infertility in women", "COVID-19 is a hoax", and "Government or NGO business", and "the hotline 6666 is the devil's number".



The Internews team had consultations with partners and reviewed documents to establish the 'why behind the persistence of these rumours' some of which is explained below.

According to MoH reports, the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Sudan was negatively affected by lack of funding for most COVID-19 response interventions. Activities

like sample collection, community surveillance, mortality surveillance, and contact tracing were discontinued, affecting the country's ability to test and trace cases. The dwindling number of cases and deaths reported has significantly impacted the population's risk perception of COVID-19. In addition, recent efforts are mostly focused on vaccination, with many rumours circulating in the

community related to vaccines, rooted in the low-risk perception of COVID-19 among the population, due to the continuous low number of cases and deaths reported. **Source:** Strategic Preparedness, Readiness and Response Plan COVID-19 South Sudan, 1 June 2022-31 May 2023. Link: <https://bit.ly/3Y3JjVi>

Secondly, many religious leaders contributed to the persistence of the misinformation about COVID-19 vaccine and the claims on the call center number. The RCCE Working group convened urgent meetings in the past to address the rumours spread by the religious leaders. The RiT 2.0 project findings from the information sharing events conducted by and involving religious and community leaders support this evidence. The fact that these are prominent people and influentials trusted by the community contributed to the wide spread of rumours, making it difficult to address and debunk the rumours. The MoH and RCCE partners engaged the Council of Churches of South Sudan to address the rumours and vaccine hesitancy. Most of the rumours and misinformation are spread by religious leaders/pastors serving in churches that are not members under the South Sudan Council of Churches structure. Effective engagement with community leaders, religious leaders, women leaders, and others remains key to building trust among the population, for promotion of the vaccine.

Of the rumours tracked in January 2023, three of the most pressing rumours have been pulled out below. Detailed information is provided on the potential impact of the concern, and a fact-check.

## ■ THE MOST PRESSING COMMUNITY CONCERNS

### #1. “Is the measles outbreak caused due to flooding?”

**Feedback collected from Internally Displaced people (IDP) community in Bentiu, Unity State, South Sudan**

#### **What is behind this concern?**

Flooding due to high levels of rainfall, climate change and erosion have internally displaced many people in South Sudan. This rumour was collected from the IDP community in Bentiu, Unity State; an area affected by flooding for the past consecutive years. This has compounded emergency health and humanitarian needs. People are attributing the floodwaters to spreading disease as they are faced with many threats to their health and livelihoods.

#### **Fact Check:**

Whilst it is the case that flooding is associated with some disease transmission like Cholera, it is not the case that measles is linked to flooding. Measles is an air-borne disease while Cholera and acute watery diarrhea are water-borne.

However, displacement due to flooding increases the risk of infectious disease transmission, including Measles, due to crowded living conditions where people are forced to live in to avoid the floods. Thus, the risk of transmission of Measles through coughing and sneezing in crowded spaces amongst groups of persons that have been displaced is increased. - **Dr Brendan Dineen, WHO COVAX Coordinator, South Sudan.**

### #2. “Can Hepatitis kill people more than the Coronavirus?”

**Feedback collected from Juba, Central Equatoria State**

#### **What is behind this concern?**

There has been growing attention to Hepatitis in South Sudan. Some people in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, claim that hepatitis can kill people more than COVID-19.

#### **Fact Check:**

There are 1.5 million new cases of Hepatitis B and an added 1.5 million persons diagnosed with Hepatitis C each year. These two types of Hepatitis are responsible for most deaths (96% as of 2019) due to Hepatitis. In the Africa Region, there are an estimated 990,000 new Hepatitis B cases, with approximately 80,000 deaths due to this disease. Similarly, 210,000 new Hepatitis C cases and 45,000 deaths occur annually in Africa. Dr Brendan Dineen, WHO COVAX Coordinator, South Sudan.

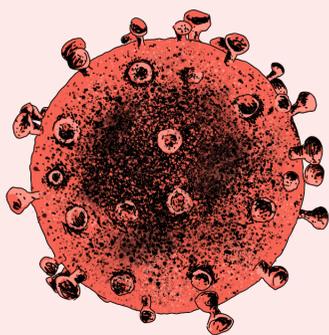
“Hepatitis is a serious life-threatening condition, especially Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Likewise COVID-19 – caused by the Coronavirus – has caused more than 6.8 million deaths since the start of the pandemic [in South Sudan] in 2020. Thus, both Hepatitis and COVID-19 are preventable conditions that contribute significantly to the global burden of disease and death, including in Africa,” said **Dr Brendan Dineen, WHO COVAX Coordinator, South Sudan.**

### #3. “COVID-19 ended a long time ago, why are we still disturbed about it?”

Questions/feedback heard from various communities in South Sudan.

#### What is behind these concerns?

The pandemic’s longevity has caused pandemic-fatigue, such that there is less concern or low risk perception. This coupled with intersecting humanitarian crisis have left people wondering why COVID-19 is still an issue/priority.



#### Fact Check:

The WHO on January 30, 2023, said COVID-19 remains a global health emergency. According to the WHO, approximately 10.5 million new cases and over 90 000 deaths were reported during a 28-day period, from January 9 to February 5, 2023. As the figures show, COVID-19 has not ended and thus continues to be a public health issue requiring attention and action, especially testing and vaccinations.

## RiT 2.0 South Sudan Project Partners’ Work & Impact

In 2022 RiT 2.0 worked closely with media partners to address the concerns of communities and share community feedback to the MoH, decision makers, and other stakeholders. Some of their work is highlighted below:



#### ADVANCE YOUTH RADIO (AYR)

Advance Youth Radio (AYR) is a youth-led radio station based in Juba City. They produce youthful programming delivered through live online streaming and in a state-of-the-art on-air studio. In 2022, AYR in partnership with RiT 2.0 produced radio talk shows and conducted live broadcasts events as part of community outreach programs on COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine.

AYR identified and selected 20 volunteers whom they trained to carry out rumour-tracking and feedback gathering on COVID-19, the vaccines and other health related issues. The station also conducted community outreach programs through “Taking Radio Out of the Studio” where the radio presenters took a portable studio to the community and directly engaged with the listeners to enhance community engagement.



#### VOICE OF RECONCILIATION (VoR)

Another partner, Voice of Reconciliation (VoR), a Christian community-based radio in Bor Town, Jonglei State produced radio programs on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccine. These programs added on-air quizzes for listeners to find out if the community’s knowledge of COVID-19 was improving. The radio station’s broadcasts over 70 kilometres, reaching communities within IDP camps and host communities. VoR produced radio programs in a variety of formats such as radio quizzes, songs on COVID-19, and the COVID-19 vaccine. The radio content was translated and produced in six languages (Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Anyuak, Murle, and English), aired on VoR, and shared with other local radio partners.



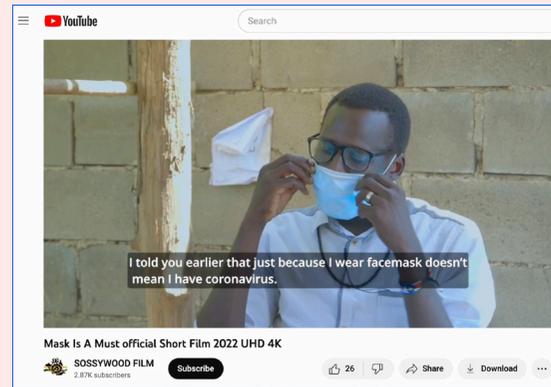
#### THE RADIO COMMUNITY (TRC)

The Radio Community (TRC) is an independent network of community radio stations in Northern Bahr El Ghazal State, Lakes State, Warrap State, and Eastern Equatoria State. RiT 2.0 collaborated with two of TRC’s radio stations namely Mingkaman FM in Lakes State and Singaita FM in Kapoeta. The Radio Community set up eight listening groups, four in Mingkaman and four in Kapoeta, produced and broadcast 160 episodes, and collected 376 pieces of feedback. Some of this feedback was directly recorded on the Kobo tool, a free open-source tool for mobile data collection. TRC also conducted health journalism training in Juba with five journalists from MingKaman FM and Singaita FM and one Juba-based radio station. Four project success stories came out of these activities, and a few are highlighted below.

# Story Grant Fellowship Partners

## Daniel Danis

Daniel Danis is a radio presenter, producer, and movie maker. In 2011, Danis directed the first feature film in South Sudan, Jamila (Bio in [Wikipedia](#)). He is one of the Small Story Subgrantees who worked on four short films on COVID-19 and the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). The short films are titled, "Mask is A Must", "Ruwa Takum Haginu", "Ebola Awareness" and "COVID-19 Vaccine Awareness". He worked with a team of young filmmakers to produce these short films.



## Emma Kwaje

Emma Kwaji is a student of journalism at the University of Juba. She is hardworking, enthusiastic, and has a passion for radio and other mass media.

Emma conducted 10 radio talk show programs weekly, which included the use of SMS, call-ins, and discussions on popular FM stations in Juba that helped engage the public on diverse topics. She also produced 10 Public Service Announcements (PSAs), skits, and promotional trails for airing during prime-time broadcasting. The recordings have been archived as evidence of the partnership. Emma collected 20 vox pops and testimonials from local communities and University students.



## Silver X

Silver X is a popular musician in South Sudan with many hit songs to his name. He won the Small Story fellowship and produced a song titled "Vibe" which he performed in several schools around Juba City. He also did several radio and television appearances to promote the song. The song is a blend of Afrobeat and Zouk with key messages on increasing public knowledge of COVID-19, the causes, prevention measures, and the COVID-19 vaccine. The three-minute song received positive reviews from prolific music analysts in Juba.

As part of the project, Silver X toured two schools, Angel Pride Academy a mixed-day school in Gurei, Juba, and Juba Proper Secondary School opposite Luri Payam Headquarters. Silver X was hosted at 89.0 Capital FM, City FM, Advance Youth Radio, and Eye Radio Silver X conducted radio talk shows on Eye Radio, South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation (SSBC), EBC, Radio One, and Classic FM.

Silver X recorded two vox pops which were shared with some media outlets like Capital FM, AYR, and City FM.



## CONTACT DETAILS

For more information about COVID-19, please  
call the toll-free number 2222  
or Visit <https://moh.gov.ss>

If you want to contribute to or provide feedback  
on this Lugara Humanitarian Bulletin or if have  
information to share, please contact:  
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