Welcome to Internews South Sudan’s first bulletin on rumors and misconceptions around COVID-19.

Internews captures rumors and perceptions on the ground in order to close information gaps between humanitarian agencies and local communities. This report aims to create a better understanding of community information needs and debunk rumors before they cause harm. This bulletin was developed based on data collected in Bentiu and Malakal PoCs as well as Jamjang and Maban refugee operations.

While South Sudan has so far seen no confirmed cases of COVID-19 within its borders, the fact remains: humanitarian actors must prepare to combat the spread of the disease and be ready to treat the infected. Internews used listening groups to track misconceptions and rumors about COVID-19, as well as what various communities regard as the best next steps for humanitarian actors.

**WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING**

**MISCONCEPTIONS**

As has been observed in multiple countries, COVID-19 is met, by governments and communities alike, with an unwillingness to heed the advice of health experts and moves to minimize the extent of the threat the virus poses. South Sudan is no exception. Youth, in particular, remain indifferent about COVID-19.

The community in Bentiu expressed concerns that youth continue to play soccer in crowded fields, potentially spreading the virus. For the youth who are concerned, misconceptions abound. Indeed, they are spreading “rumors that COVID-19 is treatable with onion, salt and smoke from dry cow dung”, explained one adult in the Malakal PoC.

**MYTHS & RUMORS**

Rumors can be developed to answer questions to which there are not yet answers. Indeed, rumors are typically bred out of hopes, fears or existing hostilities, and while rumors may not be inherently bad, it is important to address them in order to ensure that communities are equipped with the facts they need to stay healthy.

“The deadly virus comes from superpower countries wanting to depopulate and kill people from poor economy countries.”

-Adult Woman, Bentiu PoC

“Coronavirus is treatable with chloroquine. We also heard that Israeli scientists have discovered a vaccine for treating the illness, so we’re not afraid anymore.”

-Adult Male, Bentiu PoC
**LOOKING FORWARD**
Suggestions from the Most Impacted

### HEALTH

Communities are requesting expert advice from health providers about symptoms of the disease, its reach and how to minimize spread.

“We are asking organizations to carry out large campaigns on Corona disease.”
- Adult Male, Maban Gendrassa

“The Corona virus is very dangerous: we need to know the symptoms of it.”
- Adult Male, Malakal Town

### WASH

Equally important to information is the real ability of people to take action. Communities appeal to WASH partners for more resources to stay healthy.

“We heard about Coronavirus, but we have nothing to protect ourselves from it. We need water tanks for washing hands, soaps, and enough water in water stations.”
- Adult Male, Malalak PoC

### FSL

Avoiding groups is one of the foremost means of slowing the spread of COVID-19, so concerns have been raised over crowds at food distribution sites.

“Food agencies should stop thumb print authentication until the end of coronavirus fears.”
- Adult woman, Bentiu PoC

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**PUT FEEDBACK INTO ACTION**

Internews has spent years developing a rumor tracking framework that goes beyond “debunking rumors,” to recognizing rumors as a tool for people to express their concerns in a world where they feel increasingly unheard. In this way, our fact tracking acts as a means of agenda setting for community leaders, governments and humanitarian actors. We recommend that all relevant parties:

- **Listen to and track rumors:** Internews trains and deploys Community Correspondents who engage with the public, collect rumors and tracks them to their source. We know that a high prevalence of misconceptions has, in past outbreaks, led to the rejection of interventions while localized communication interventions has effectively changed behavior.

- **Analyze rumors:** determine if the rumor has the potential to cause or exacerbate fear, danger or insecurity. Internews stores rumors in a data base and analyses them on the basis of sector and other data points. We do this to determine the actual questions, misconceptions or concerns behind the rumor.

- **Verify rumors:** fact-checking and liaising with experts is critical to combat rumors. Working with relevant actors in the sector, Internews is able answer the lingering questions that prompted the rumor in the first place. We use this information to develop or modify messaging ultimately shared with the community.

- **Share verified information:** provide correct information through trusted sources. In a health crisis, it is important that health workers are at the forefront of communication, as they are well-positioned to combat fear with facts through supportive messaging and promoting social connection during a time wherein physical distancing is needed.

- **Continuous monitoring and response:** After initial knowledge gathering on COVID-19, it is important to give people the chance to ask questions about the virus and response mechanisms, before and during the outbreak. As new questions or concerns arise, messaging and IEC materials should be enhanced to address the population's ever-changing information needs.