

Sudan COVID-19 Community Feedback



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Introduction

The **Sudan Rooted in Trust** project was launched in October 2020, in response to increasing misinformation around COVID-19, and as part of a global pandemic information response project. Internews and its partners in Sudan, Andariya, Adeela, Khatim Adlan Enlightenment Center and Y-Peer Sudan have been working together to address COVID-19 rumors and misperceptions.

This booklet is a snapshot of community feedback highlighting a variety of COVID-19 **rumors** and shared **perceptions** across six states. Between 24 January and 18 February 2021, Y-Peer Sudan, Internews' primary partner for **face-to-face** discussions with community members and on-the-ground rumor tracking, collected 1,350 rumors and perceptions from **Khartoum, Kassala, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, West Darfur and South Darfur**. To better understand information gaps and misconceptions about COVID-19, 30 Y-Peer volunteers conducted 160 listening groups, where 1,844 men, women, children, youth, older people, and people with disabilities, including refugees and internally displaced people, participated in these interactive face-to-face discussions.



Relying on the Accountability to **Affected Populations (AAP)** framework, we aim to share community insights and concerns with humanitarian partners and public health responders in the country, in hopes that they will address communities' humanitarian and health information needs and readapt their programs to remain relevant and community centered. People affected by armed conflict living in camps, as well as in urban and rural areas were key participants in listening activities. Vulnerable communities living in under-resourced areas were also active participants in these interactive group discussions.

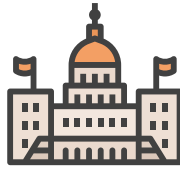


Quick Statistics



Number of Y-Peer volunteers who led listening groups

30



Number of targeted States

6



Total number of sessions

160



Total number of participants in listening groups

1,844



Total number of participants living in IDP/refugee camps

717

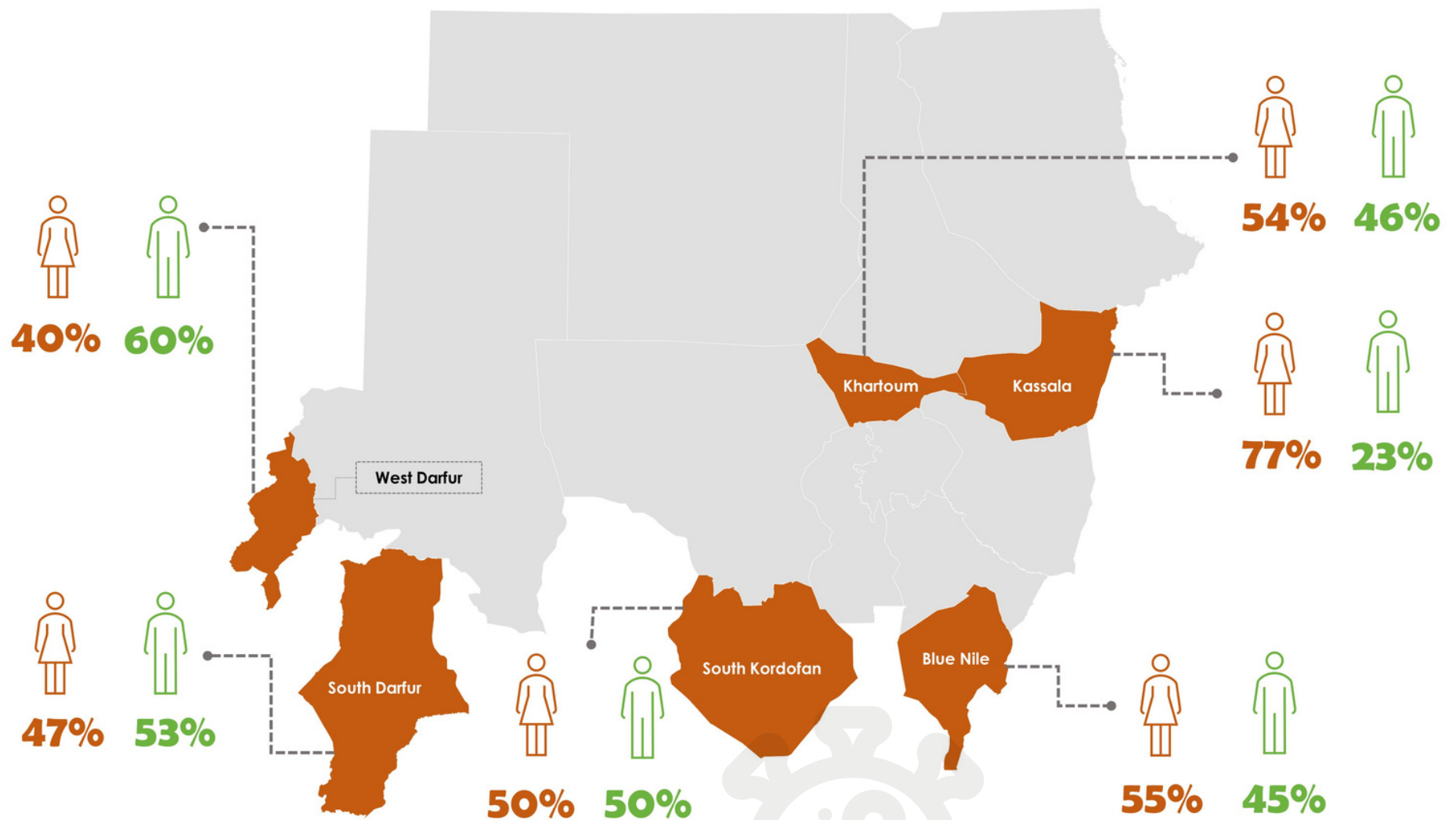


Total number of sessions in IDP/refugee camps

55



Individual Participation by Gender Across States in Listening Groups

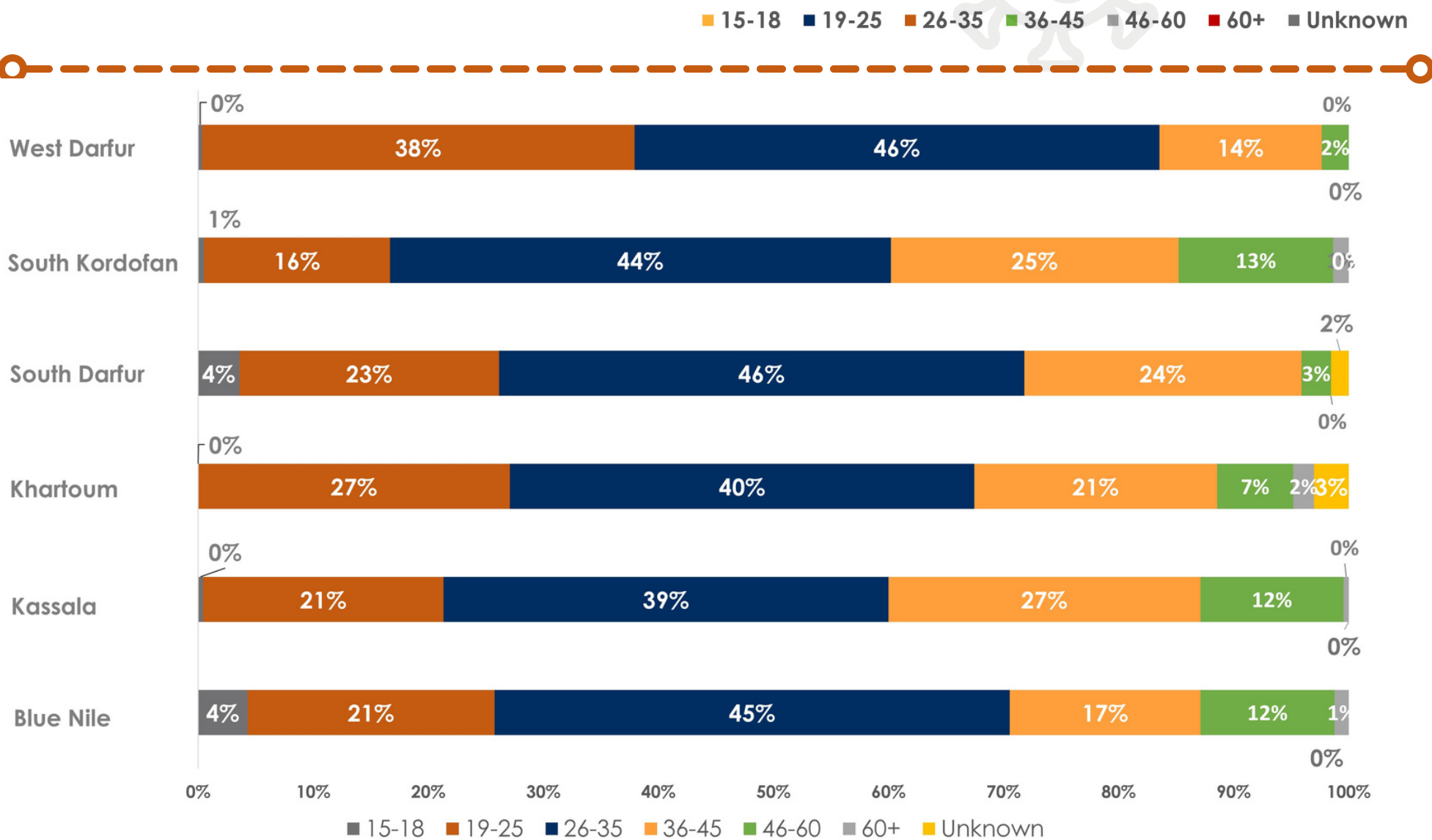
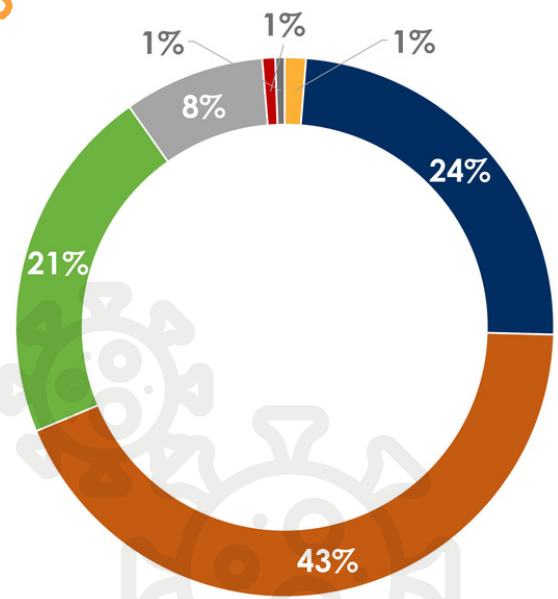


Males represent 49% of the total participants in listening groups, while females represent 51%.

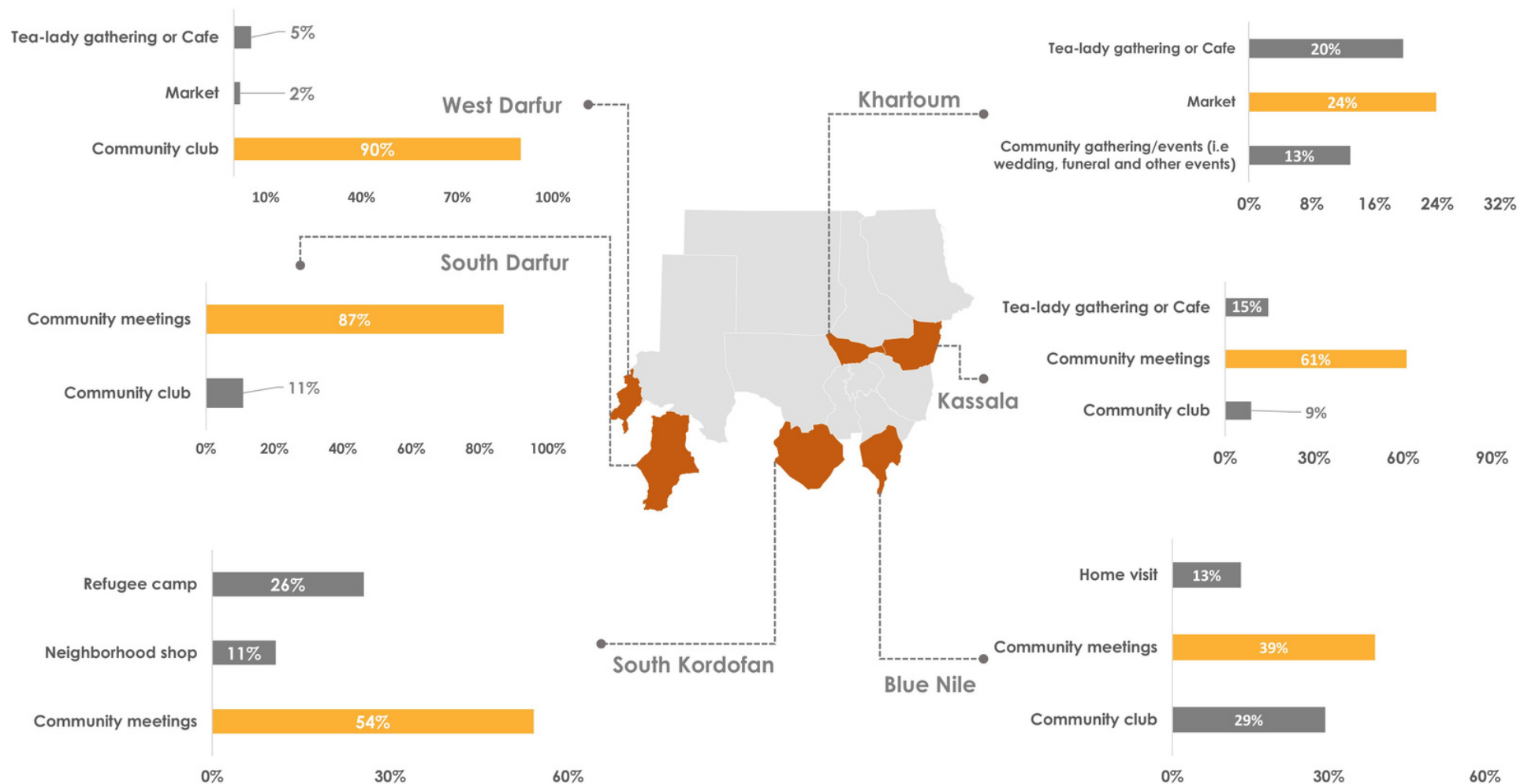


Age Distribution across States – Interactions Data

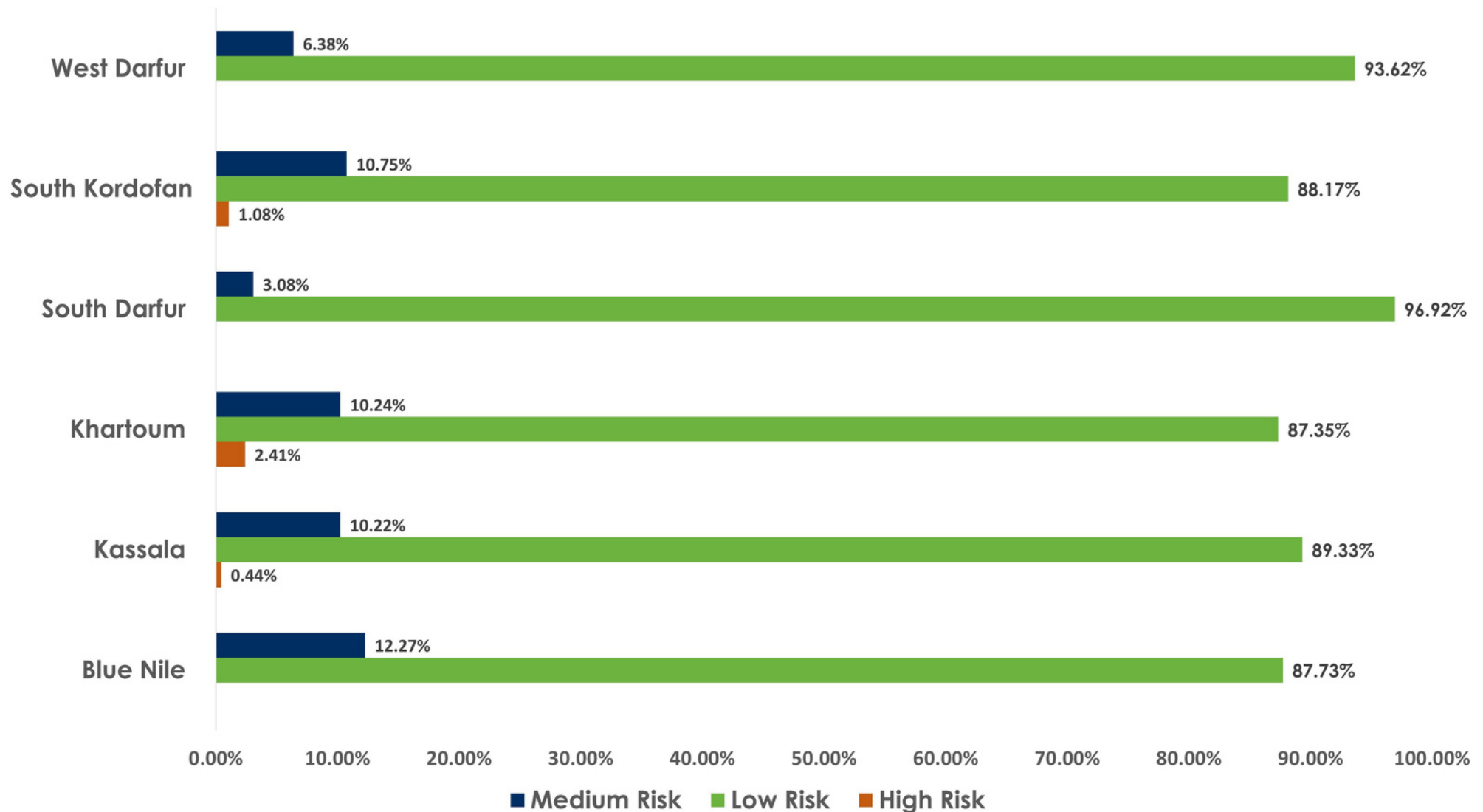
People between ages 26 and 35 represent the largest age group across all states.



Location Distribution Across States



Rumor Risk Levels across States



Risk Level Definitions

High Risk

A rumor that is very likely to be believed among the larger community with potentially severe impacts resulting in serious harm.

Medium Risk

A rumor that has the potential to be believed among the larger community which poses moderate negative impacts to a community or an individual's health, well-being, or safety.

Low Risk

A rumor that is either unlikely to be believed among the community or which would cause minimal negative impacts to a community or individual's health, well-being, or safety.

What themes do we use to analyze community feedback?

Testing: Information about testing kits, test results, testing procedures, etc.

Cause: The suspected origins of COVID-19.

Treatment/cure: Treatment methods, potential or so-far unproven cures.

Preventative: Information on substances or at-home remedies used to prevent contraction or transmission of the virus.

Vaccine: Discussion of vaccines or vaccine trials.

Reinfection: Information regarding reinfection, reemergence, or relapse in people or animals.

Symptoms: Information describing confirmed or so-far unconfirmed symptoms of COVID-19.

Hygiene: Advice on proven or so-far unproven hygiene measures which control spread.

Travel: Travel bans, restrictions, road closures, or shutdowns.

Prejudice: Expressions of xenophobic, racist, or prejudiced content linked to transmission or contraction of the virus.

Healthcare: Health care options or services.

Government: State-mandated regulations or shutdowns related to the virus.

Transmission: Information--proven or non--regarding how COVID-19 spreads.

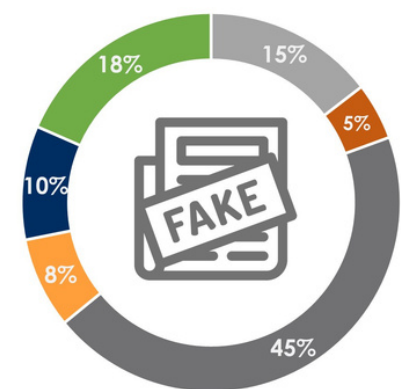
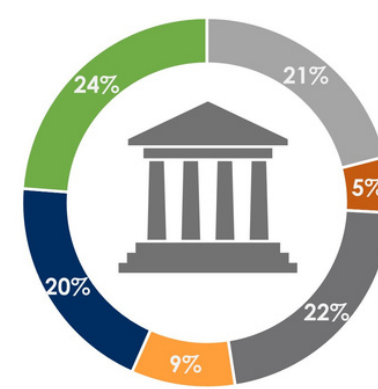
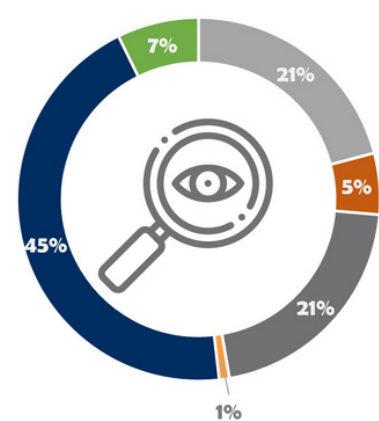
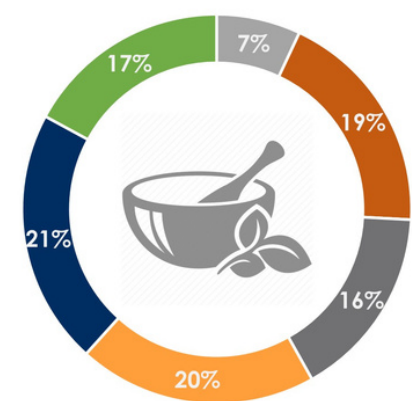
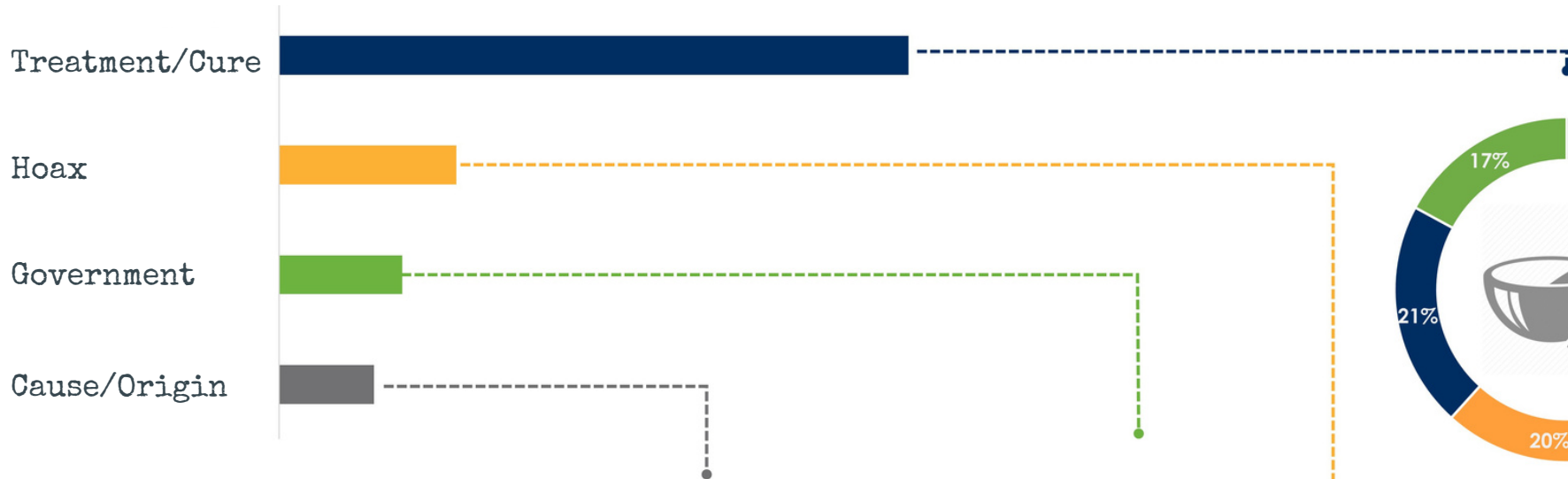
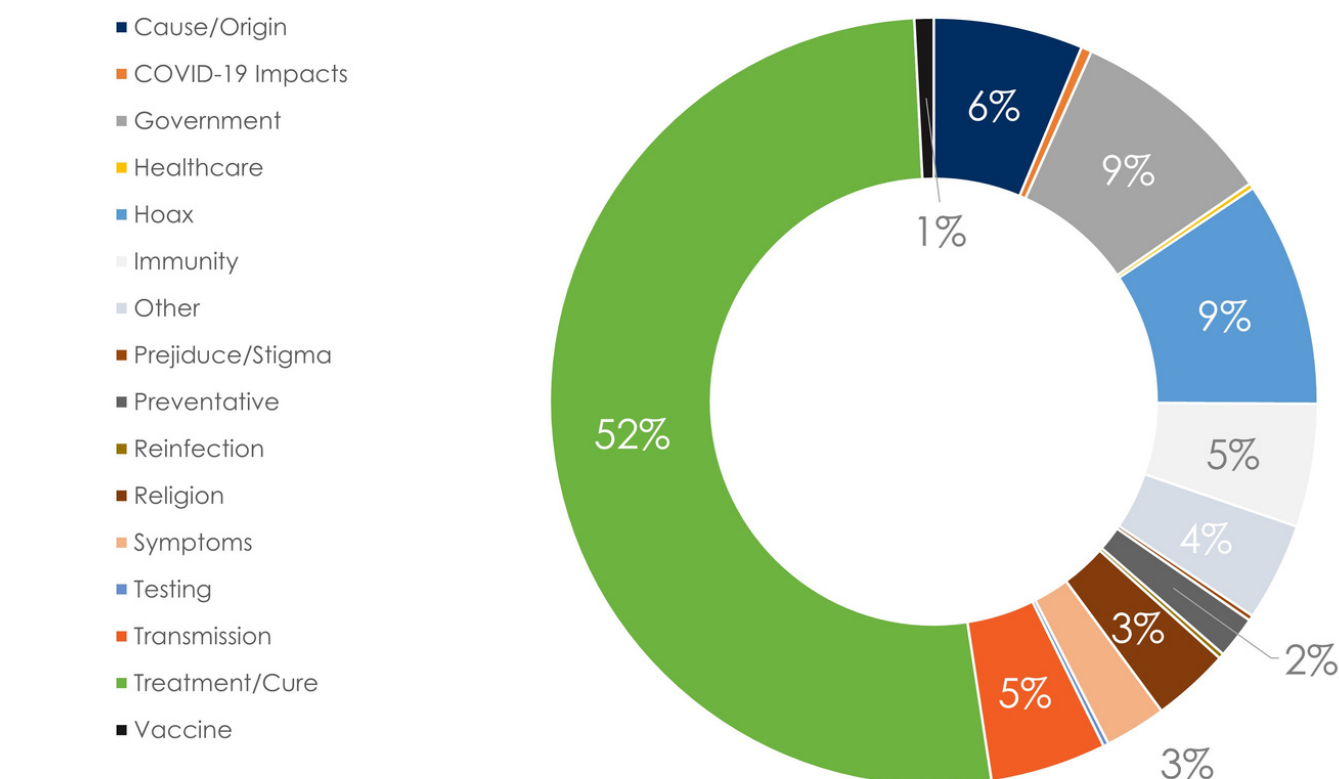
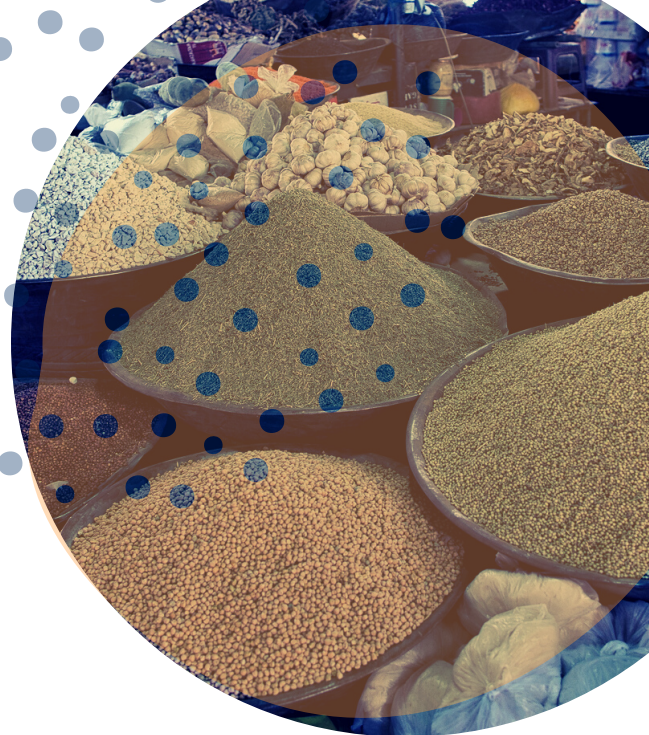
Immunity: Information regarding who can or cannot contract COVID-19 or who is at heightened risk of complications.

Impacts: Any content that claims disproportionate or uncorroborated impacts, either on an individual or the larger community.

Hoax: For any content that claims COVID-19 is no longer an issue or never was, or that the pandemic is a conspiracy.

Other: For any content that does not fall into the other thematic categories.

Top Rumor Themes



- South Kordofan
- West Darfur
- Blue Nile
- Kassala
- Khartoum
- South Darfur

Treatment/Cure Rumors

More than half of the collected community feedback centered around treatments and cures for the virus. This was the **highest** rumor thematic category across the six states. As there is no cure for COVID-19, people are relying on a variety of herbal remedies and readily available home remedies to treat a COVID-19 infection, along with a few medical drugs. The 696 rumors mostly fall into five sub-thematic categories, including **plant**, **animal**, **pharmaceutical**, **faith**, and **climate-based** treatments or remedies. People have relied on their environment, agricultural produce, and livestock in an attempt to treat a COVID-19 infection. Unanimously, the use of **acacia** as an incense or food is one of the most trusted treatments across the six states. Nearly **200** rumors endorsed acacia as a cure for the virus. Cow urine was used in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, while **malaria medicines** were perceived as an effective treatment for COVID-19 across the six states.

Top Treatment/Cure Rumors



Animal-based remedies Faith-based remedies

Plant-based
remedies

Climate-based remedies

Other

Pharmaceutical-based
remedies

Alcohol-based remedies



Treatment/Cure Rumors

Herbal remedies and other readily available treatments in the six states are considered the best alternatives for treating **COVID-19** or other medical conditions, since availability of healthcare facilities are limited or unavailable in **conflict-affected** and rural areas. Community feedback has also revealed that even when access to healthcare is not a challenge, some communities continue to rely on treating the virus and other diseases at home and seeking medical care only when their loved one's health condition becomes critical. In **Khartoum**, community feedback displayed that some people were unaware of the health options available to them, while others complained that healthcare facilities within their vicinities were under-resourced or scarce.

To learn more about the use of herbal remedies and other home remedies in treating a **COVID-19** infection in Sudan, please refer to [Internews COVID-19 Community Rumor Bulletins](#), and [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin #6](#).

Top Treatments/Cures



Cumin

Cinnamon

Malaria Treatment

Ginger Acacia

Tea Panadol Hibiscus Chili

Lemon Neem Millet

Onion Honey



What people Say about Treatment/Cure



Drink gallbladder so you don't get Corona.
Male – Kadugli, South Kordofan

Corona medicine is basically Flagyl.
Male – Kadugli, South Kordofan

We drank bitter plant roots because we didn't find malaria medicine. They said it kills Corona, I drink a full bottle daily.

Female – Damazine, Blue Nile

Corona treatment is Mihaya (sheikhs write parts of the Quran and the Prophet's sayings on a board, and the board is then washed, and that water is provided for drinking).

Male – El Geneina, West Darfur

If someone has Corona, there is a worm known as Kandaku which you boil with Balanites aegyptiaca fruit oil, and it is given to the sick person.

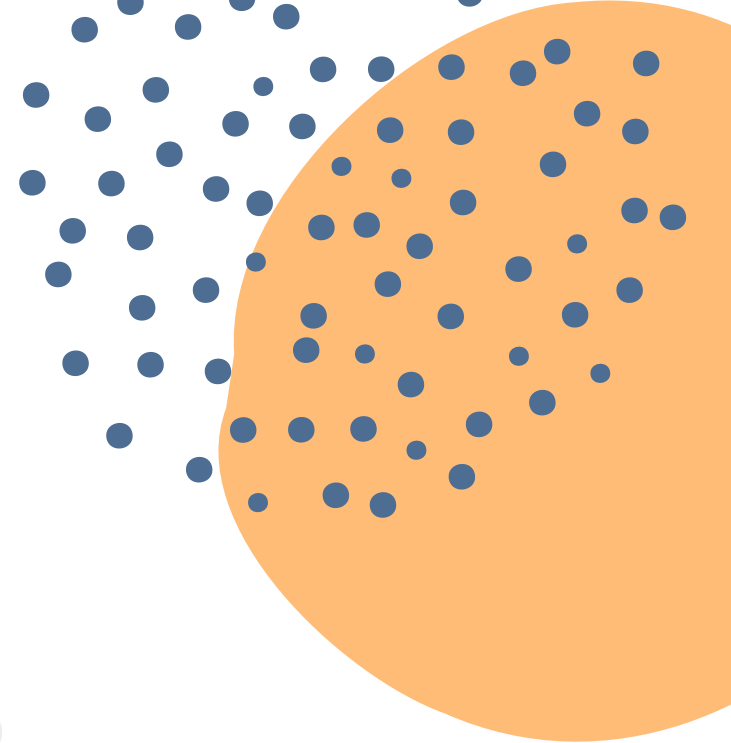
Female – El Geneina, West Darfur

We use Nile mud to treat Corona in Sudan.

Male – Kassala, Kassala

To treat Corona consume lamb stew with lemon, mint and cinnamon.

Male – Reifi Kassala, Kassala



What People say about Treatment/Cure



Rumor says: Kawal stew, nabag fruit and hibiscus.
Female – Nyala - South Darfur

They said eat goat meat with pepper.
Male – Kaas, South Darfur

Haboba (Grandma) said Corona is like a severe cough and its cure is donkey milk.
Female – Kaas, South Darfur

We have an uncle who ate meat for a week and was cured.
Male – Alinqaz, Khartoum



Vaccine Rumors

Notably, there are fewer rumors in this category, including the COVID-19 vaccine is fatal, vaccines do not exist, and outright vaccine refusal. This is an alarming indicator, with the current rollout of vaccines in Sudan as of **March 2021**. Our rumor data suggests that people may have limited information about the COVID-19 vaccines in the six states, which may explain some of the **anti-vaccine** sentiments and hints of vaccine **hesitancy** expressed in community feedback. The low percentage of COVID-19 vaccine rumors collected in the four states, along with no community feedback on vaccines from **South Darfur** and **West Darfur**, potentially indicates a harrow vacuum in vaccine information amongst communities in Sudan.

For more on responding to **COVID-19 vaccine** rumors in Sudan, please refer to our special editions on vaccines, including the [Humanitarian Vaccine Rumor Bulletin](#) and the [Community Vaccine Rumor Bulletin](#).

What people Say

They said this vaccine is Corona, if it arrives, we won't get vaccinated.

Female – Dardag, Khartoum

They brought the vaccine to kill more people, this may or may not be true. I'm also supporting the spread of rumors.

Female – Reifi Aroma, Kassala

The vaccine in Arab countries is not like the one in Europe, and that is why we will not take it.

Female – Jebel Awaliya, Khartoum

The preventative dose they gave to children in schools in Khartoum poisoned them.

Female - Kadugli, South Kordofan



Community Feedback inspired by Faith

Many people rely on their faith for guidance and strength during times of hardship, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and Sudanese people are no different. Some community feedback highlighted **prayers** or **religious rituals** as a cure or treatment for a COVID-19 infection, the pandemic as a punishment for our sins, and COVID-19 **restrictions** on congregational prayers are against Islam.

For more on responding to COVID-19 misinformation drawn from people's faith or religious practices in Sudan, please refer to Internews' COVID-19 [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin #6](#).

What people Say



If someone is infected with Corona, you take him to church and he will become well.

Male – Baw Locality, Blue Nile

Water used for Wudua' (Muslim cleansing ritual) protects from Corona.

Male – El Geneina, West Darfur

The person who dies from the virus, dies a martyr.

Female – Kadugli, South Kordofan

Corona came in the form of anger from God, some people died a normal death, but people say it's Corona. But only foreigners have the virus.

Male – Omdurman, Khartoum



COVID-19 as Hoax

COVID-19 hoax rumors have a wide reach globally, and within Sudan. By looking closely at the rumor data, we have been able to capture some of the insights behind this sweeping misconception. Some noted that those that have not received an **education** are more likely to believe this rumor, while others cited that the lack of media coverage of COVID-19 impacts on local communities may have inspired the popularity of the hoax. Several community members denied the existence of the virus, branding it as a common **cold** or **flu**, while others relied on **conspiracy theories** to support their stance. Numerous community members shared that they believe that COVID-19 is a hoax because they do not know anyone that has had the virus.

For more information on responding to **COVID-19** hoax rumors, please refer to our first edition of the [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin](#) and second edition of the [Community Rumor Bulletin](#).

What people Say



It was created by nurses in America, because they take care of older people, they wanted to get rid of them.

Female – Ar Rusayris, Blue Nile

We are not convinced, and if the vaccine arrives we will not let them experiment on us.

Male – Omdurman, Khartoum

There is no Corona, this is just empty talk. My husband was quarantined for two weeks, and his test result showed he had Corona, and I'm always with him. If it did exist, why didn't I get it?

Female – El Geneina, West Darfur



COVID-19 Symptoms

As COVID-19 is a new virus, community insights revealed there is some confusion about the virus' symptoms. Some described COVID-19 as a cold or flu, while others found the symptoms to be closer to other common diseases, like **malaria** and **chikungunya**.

A few risky rumors professed that COVID-19 leads to infertility, while one community member elaborated that this type of misperception could lead to stigma, driving people to hide a COVID-19 infection from others. Hiding an infection is also likely to have an adverse impact on **health-seeking behaviors** and allow the virus to spread further. Apparently, COVID-19 **stigma** is so strong in **Nyala, South Darfur state**, that many choose not to get a **PCR-test** out of fear of being branded as having the virus. Some people shared they feared that testing positive for COVID-19 would lead to a lengthy confinement in an **isolation center**, and **social abandonment** within their own community.

For more on **COVID-19 stigma** in Sudan, please refer to our [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin #3](#) and [Community Rumor Bulletin #5](#).

What people Say



A person who gets Corona cannot have children, and becomes infertile.

Female – El Geneina, West Darfur

Corona crumples a person's face just like leprosy and chikungunya, I saw it.

Male – Kadugli, South Kordofan

After five months in the body, the disease becomes like malaria.

Female – Baw, Blue Nile



Immunity Rumors

Immunity rumors were grounded around **climate**, **food**, and **identity**. For instance, several community members cited that Sudan and Africa's warm climates granted them immunity from COVID-19. Some also noted that Khawajas (white people or foreigners) had weakened immune systems in comparison to Sudanese people. Others associated their presumed immunity due to their **black** skin or **Africanness**. While several people cited that those who eat sweet foods also have a weak immune system, while those who ate traditional Sudanese foods were stronger. COVID-19 immunity-related rumors may offer people with a false sense of security, which may result in the dismissal of the precautionary measures, hence allowing the virus to spread unchecked.

For more on verifying and responding to COVID-19 immunity-related rumors, please see Internews COVID-19 Community Rumor Bulletins [#2](#), [#4](#), and [#7](#).

What people Say



Sudanese bodies have immunity because they have taken Chlorchine.

Female - Riefi Kassala, Kassala

Corona does not come to people from rural areas.

Female - Baw, Blue Nile

Normal people like us do not get Corona, we don't have deficiencies and we are breastfed.

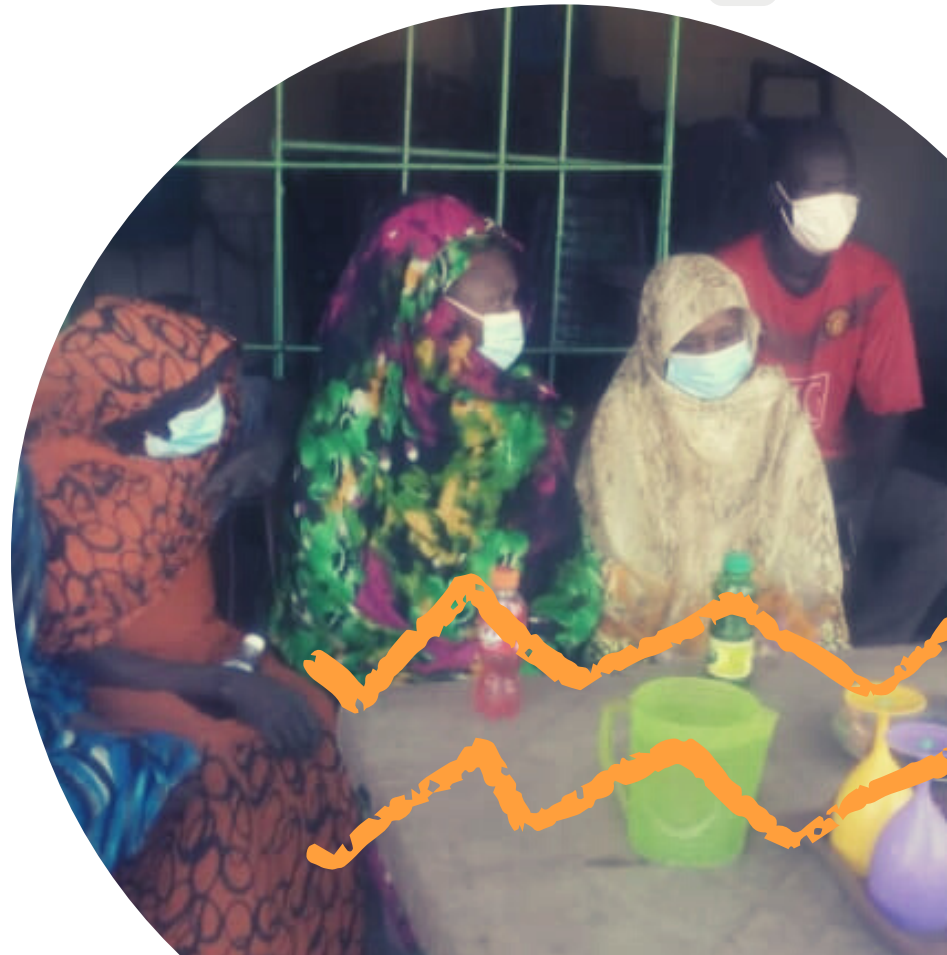
Male - Kadugli, South Kordofan

The local dishes we cook increase our strength, and we don't get any illnesses.

Female - Habila, South Kordofan

Khawajas don't drink their mothers' breast milk, and that's why they can't resist the disease.

Male - Alreef Alshargi, South Kordofan



COVID-19 Impacts

Community feedback on the impact of COVID-19 on people's daily lives was scarce but revealing. A couple of community members from Blue Nile shared that the lockdown resulted in an increase in **unemployment** and **idleness** amongst young people. Some community feedback noted that COVID-19 restrictions increased **financial difficulties** within families, resulting in a rise in **divorces** in **Blue Nile**, as becoming unemployed during the pandemic amplified **marital tensions**. Also, in **Blue Nile**, a couple of comments cited an increase in **violence** during the lockdown period.

For more information on the mental health impacts of **COVID-19**, please refer to our fourth edition of the [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin](#).

What people Say



The lockdown period brought family problems, and divorce increased.

Male – Damazine, Blue Nile

Because of Corona and financial pressures, youth are heading towards drugs, and this is all because of unemployment and not finding something to do.

Male – Damazine, Blue Nile

During the Corona days, there was a problem with violence and beatings, child marriage and even genital mutilation showed up again.

Female – Damazine, Blue Nile



Transmission Rumors

More than half of the rumors on the transmission of COVID-19 cited Sudan's hot climate as a protectant against the virus. While some community members shared COVID-19 infection rates are higher amongst men, and the risk of COVID-19 transmission depends on people's facial features. These types of misconceptions might be enough to convince some people that they are immune to a COVID-19 infection, and so they may become lax in practicing the recommended preventative measures.

For more on addressing COVID-19 transmission-related rumors, please refer to Internews Community Rumor Bulletins [#4](#) and [#5](#).

What people Say



Our area is desert-like and the weather is very hot, and the virus loves cold places and that's why it will not come to Sudan.

Female – El Geneina, West Darfur

Those that have long and small noses can get the virus, but those of us with wide noses the virus cannot enter.

Female – Dilling, South Kordofan

First world countries say the epidemic can come from the poor countries.

Male – Damazine, Blue Nile



Humanitarian Feedback



Kassala

Some of the refugees in Wad Sheriefi Camp in **Kassala** shared that they are not allowed to leave the camp unless they are being moved to another camp. They rely on others to buy **medicine** by using their own savings to cover the costs, and as a result, they have little left for **food** purchases, especially for those with special **dietary needs**.

In **Al Girba Camp** some refugees said they would like to have **access to healthcare**, but there are **no doctors** in the camp. They noted that this is the first time they are asked to speak about COVID-19, and they appreciated the opportunity to share their views.

Khartoum

Meanwhile in the outskirts of **Khartoum**, some people were uninformed on the availability of COVID-19 testing centers, and that there is free-of-charge **PCR-testing**. In **Alhaj Yousif**, the community was concerned for unaccompanied children, particularly since they are not being looked after by any specific body.

People in **Dar Alsalam**, **Alhaj Yousif**, **Alfatah**, and **Jenoub Alhezam** shared that they experience poor access to basic services like electricity, water, and cooking gas. They also noted that **healthcare** facilities and **schools** are scarce and **under-resourced**, and are suffering from weak infrastructure.



Humanitarian Feedback



South Kordofan

In **Dilling** it appears there is only one COVID-19 testing facility, and one **hospital** providing care for COVID-19 patients, however, community members shared it is under-resourced.

Blue Nile

In **Damazine** community members in **Alrahma** neighborhood complained of recurring **sewage** problems, especially during the rainy season and appealed for support. Also, community members expressed that difficult **economic** conditions have led both parents to work outside the home. They appealed for **assistance**, which would allow one parent to remain at home and care for the **children**.

West Darfur

Communities were less concerned by COVID-19, and more concerned with the **Chikungunya** virus. In fact, the only **isolation center** is in the capital **AlGeneina**, and is currently being used as **shelter** for the newly displaced following intercommunal fighting in West Darfur in **January 2021**.

Community members in **Krending Camp** and surrounding areas specified **food** and access to **healthcare** as essential needs. Displaced people in **El Geneina** and surrounding areas yearned for **security** to return so that they could go back to their former **homes**.



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