

This bi-weekly bulletin is designed for and by media partners, journalists and other interested stakeholders in South Sudan reporting and working on COVID-19, and other related health and development challenges. It shares citizen concerns on COVID-19 and the humanitarian response, provides verified information about health measures of the Ministry of Health and partners and profiles trustworthy (re)sources.

September 04, 2020

## SITUATION UPDATE

### Reopening & COVID-19 “denial”

On 28 August, the Secretary-General of Islamic Council has announced the resumption of Friday prayers in mosques across the country after months of suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Islamic Council, the reopening of the mosques and prayers comes following consultations with the National COVID-19 Taskforce (Source: [Eye Media](#)). In Malakal, Internews partners report that religious leaders reported being concerned about “the lack of face masks amongst church visitors”, which they fear would increase disease risk inside churches.

The World Health Organization reports that religious gatherings that don't follow COVID-19 guidelines have the potential to spread the virus amongst the population (Source: [WHO](#)). Infection can be prevented, reports WHO, by ensuring that hand washing stations and temperature checks are in place at religious sites, by regulating entry, and by ensuring the right level of physical distance between people. Additionally, religious leaders should explore alternative ways of safe religious observance” (Source: [WHO](#)).

Additionally, in Juba, Bentiu and Malakal Internews media partners reported that citizens are unsure about the existence of COVID-19 in the country, or report to: “be tired of COVID-19”. For example, a 30-year-old woman in Bentiu PoC reported to an IOM staff member: “So many people are not so sure of the presence of COVID-19 because there is no machine for testing to prove it.” (Source: IOM, CCEWG). In Juba, it was reported that radio stations increasingly receive calls from people stating that the whole population is “immune” to COVID-19. For example, as a journalist reported “they say the whole of Juba is now immune already for months”, and “that the humanitarians are just making up COVID-19 to make money”.

Misinformation and rumors around COVID-19 and the response remain common, report journalists during a media training organized by Internews. The persistent concerns include that “black people can't get COVID-19”, that alcohol and herbal tea can prevent people from getting ill, and that “rain and flooding washed away COVID-19”. The World Health Organization has developed some useful visual myth-busters which can be used to challenge some of these persistent concerns related to the COVID-19 virus and response mechanisms in South Sudan (see: [here](#)).

## Case count & stats



South Sudan

Cumulative cases:  
**2,536**

New cases: +99 | Deaths: 47 | Recovered: 1296

Source: [Ministry of Health](#), 04 September 2020.



Africa

Cumulative cases:  
**1,275,815**

New cases: +301,605 | Deaths: 30,596 | Recovered: 1,015,865

Source: [Africa Centre for Disease Control](#), 04 September 2020.



Global

Cumulative cases:  
**26,121,999**

New cases: +7,557,351 | Deaths: 864,618 | Recovered: 18,685,865

Source: [WHO](#), [Worldometer](#), 04 September 2020.

The harmful use of alcohol  
increases your risk of health  
problems.



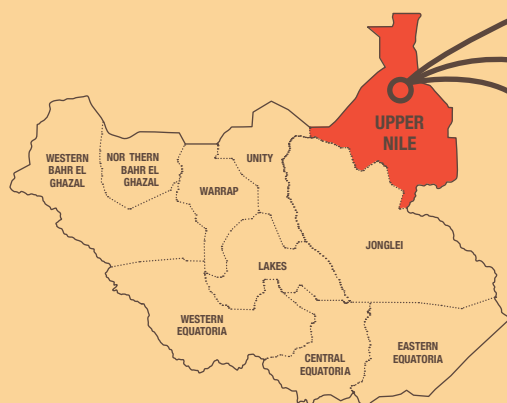
FACT:  
Drinking alcohol does not  
protect you against COVID-19  
and can be dangerous.

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## IN FOCUS

### What are we hearing in Upper Nile?



*"The rain has washed away the COVID-19 virus".*

residents in Bunj, Maban.

*"There are some people who lost their smell and taste and we are worried this could be due to the corona virus. Can health partners help them test those people so that they cannot transmit the virus to others if confirmed is a corona virus"*

residents in Batil refugee camp.

*"Can you distribute face masks to owners of clubs where people watch football because these are the places where they gather in big numbers"*

41-year-old man in Malakal.

## Rain and COVID-19:

Although it is recommended by the World Health Organization that washing hands with water and soap can prevent people from getting ill with the COVID-19 virus, it has never been proven by medical doctors that rainfall can wash away the virus (Source: [WHO](#)).

An epidemiologist at the University of Delaware, USA, said that: *"she didn't think rainfall would have a significant cleansing effect or slow the virus"* (Source: [Forbes](#)). Other scientists state that they don't know enough but that they believe that rainwater may not be effective at destroying the virus (Source: [TIME](#)). Dr. Jared Evens, a senior scientist at the John Hopkins University of Applied Physics Laboratory, also says it is unclear if rain washes away all virus on a surface, and if it would mean that the surface is now safe to touch (Source: [TIME](#)).

WHO recommends that people wear masks, observe physical distance, even when it rains or there is flooding (Source: [WHO](#)).

## Cloth masks:

The Centre for Disease Control recommends that people wear masks in public settings when they are around people who don't live in their own household (Source: [CDC](#)). Masks with at least two layers of fabric are most likely to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Simple masks can be made at home using washable, breathable fabric and may help prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Source: [CDC](#)).

To make your own mask you would need the following:

- Washable, breathable fabric
- Rubber bands (or hair ties)
- Scissors (if you are cutting your own cloth)

Please find a visual tutorial on how to make your own face mask [here](#).

Make sure your mask:

- fits comfortably against the side of the face
- completely covers the nose and mouth
- is secured with ties or ear loops
- includes multiple layers of fabric
- can be washed with soap and water.

Please know that babies and children under two years old are not advised to wear a mask (Source: [CDC](#)), and that wearing a mask does not mean that you have COVID-19. Instead wearing a mask can protect yourself, your family and your community from contracting COVID-19.

## Media contacts:

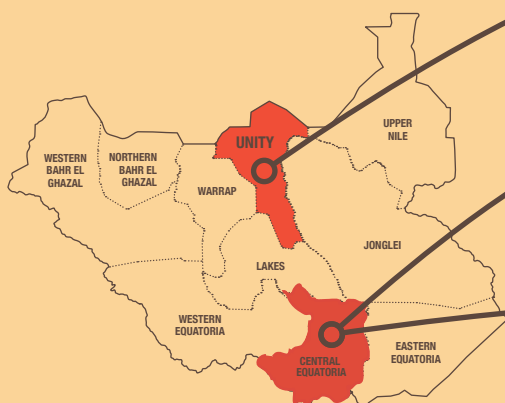
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**IN FOCUS**

## What are we hearing in Unity & Central Equatoria?



*"The increment on sorghum prices is reflecting badly on us, because the kind of business we do can't afford us to buy sorghum with such high prices".*

women in Yida, through Jamjang FM listening group.

*"Survivors don't want to talk on the radio, because they are afraid of the repercussions in their own community when they go on air".*

Radio broadcaster, Juba.

*"Could COVID-19 cause complication in pregnant women?".*

residents of UN House in Juba..

## Stigma:

Across the world, healthcare workers and patients who have survived COVID-19 are facing stigma and discrimination (Source: [Lancet](#)). For some these negative reactions from the community - often because of fear, and misinformation - lead to them losing their livelihoods, their house, or the support of their community, and even their mental wellbeing.

Journalists can help protect survivors by reporting responsibly to help avoid spreading panic (Source: [GIJN](#)). Journalists should provide the option for anonymity if desired and should always put humanity before story (Source: [GIJN](#)). It is important to remember to prioritize the victim's well-being first, the story second!

More tips can be found on the website of the [Global Investigative Journalism Network](#).

## Pregnancy:

We still do not know if a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can pass the virus to her or baby during pregnancy or delivery. However, UNICEF says there is no evidence to suggest an increased risk of miscarriage (Source: [UNICEF](#)).

Expert opinion is that the fetus is unlikely to be exposed during pregnancy. It is therefore considered unlikely that if you have the virus, it would cause abnormalities in your baby and none have been observed currently (Source: [UNICEF](#)).

Generally, pregnant women do not appear to be more severely unwell if they develop corona virus. However, if you develop more severe symptoms or if you feel your symptoms are worsening, call 6666 or your doctor (Source: [UNICEF](#)).

## Media contacts:

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## Frequently heard topics

### FOOD DISTRIBUTION

*"Please humanitarians, put a good plan for the General Food Distribution because the plan for this month has many crowded people and people can implement the social distance to prevent themselves against corona virus".*

residents in Yusuf Batil refugee camp.

### TESTING & MISTRUST

*"It is very essential to know the status of the residents and know the positive people".*

residents of Malakal..

*"MSF provides information that is not true, by saying that the deceased are dying from COVID-19 when it is not COVID-19"..*

residents in Malakal.

### WATER TANKS

*"People in Juba want humanitarians to provide water tanks inside the church's premises, for believers to wash their hands with clean water and soap"*

42-year-old man, Juba

### HAND WASHING

*"We heard about the outbreak of corona virus in Maban and we do not have hand washing facilities. Can you help us with hand washing containers and soaps".*

refugees in Gendrassa

## The COVID-19 Beat: Updates from the Media

This section sets out reports that Internews partners are receiving about COVID-19 and other relevant developments in the country. This week's section has been provided by **Paul Chan Amol**, The Radio Community (TRC), **Alex Modi Luka** at Top FM, and draws on conversations with **Awule Ezio**, Advance Youth Radio, **David Mayer**, Voice of Reconciliation, and **Lasubu Memo**, SAMA FM.

**Awule Ezio**, Advance Youth Radio, has recently interviewed South Sudan's COVID-19 incident manager, Dr Richard Laku. The live-broadcasts can be viewed [here](#). The Radio station has also contacted survivors of COVID-19 and broadcasted their live testimonies and shared information about contact tracing, correct use of face masks on the air in the past weeks.

The Voice of Reconciliation team, reported **David Mayer**, received a rumor from Bor that God will protect people from COVID-19. The statement led the team to interview a bishop from Bor. He explained that: *"There is nothing like saying God will protect you while you are there seated"*, he explained: *"The idea of putting on masks has equally come from God so we need to protect ourselves by putting on masks"*.

SAMA FM broadcasted a talk show element with Dr. Olum Dario, a medical doctor from Morobo Clinic in Yei River State. The doctor explained to SAMA FM how hand-washing is critical to stop infection with the COVID-19 virus. Dr. Dario also reported that COVID-19 can survive in hot climates, debunking a common mis perception in South Sudan. "Wash as much as possible", says Dr. Solomon, "Take charge of your life and that of your family, as to prevent from getting ill with COVID-19".

**Paul Chan Amol** reports that the National COVID-19 Taskforce urged the public to strictly observe rule of social distancing and health measures declared by the President. The global pandemic has caused huge harm on South Sudan's economy and has affected the livelihood of local people. The COVID-19 National Taskforce also directed the Undersecretary at the Ministry of Health to encourage doctors to return to work through better pay, states Amol. This came about after some health workers at the Dr. John Garang Infectious Disease Unit reported that they were forced to resign by their family members as they fear that response workers could bring the virus home.

**Alex Modi Luka** from Top FM reports writes about increased cases of rape in South Sudan during the pandemic. The journalist reports that a femicide is on-going in the country as community activists have witnessed increased rape and murder of teenage girls. The National Police, according to Modi's reporting, call for increased reporting. Modi also reports that women leaders call for equal implementation of the promised 35% participation in the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity. She spoke with members of the South Sudan Women Coalition, and representatives of the Women's Block about what they envision should happen during the peace process.



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## Pandemic Post

This section features a story written by Internews media partners about the COVID-19 outbreak and other important developments in the country.

### Feature: It's not all about COVID-19!

**As South Sudan crumbles with the impact of COVID-19, and many daily activities such as schools and prayers have come to a grinding halt to curb the spread of COVID-19, women and girls suffer from increased gender-based violence.**

#### Kei Emmanuel Duku

It is a busy evening in Gudele block 9, Juba. Street children, elderly community-members and youth are seated under trees, passing time by playing card games ("Rakuba") without observing COVID-19 rules of the Ministry of Health.

Keji Anna, a 39-year-old mother of five who makes money selling tea, says that the pandemic is hard for her and her family. "Mama Shisha", as Anna is nicknamed because of her business, explains that since the introduction of the curfew by the government, her sales have decreased, as she is forced to close latest by 8 PM at night, whilst customers prefer to drink tea until midnight.

"My husband is a soldier, but I don't see his salary. How can I feed my family?", asked Anna emotionally. She continues to state that the impact of COVID-19 is not felt only in the economic sector, but also in the social life of young people in South Sudan, most of whom are now unable to go to school as a result of the pandemic.

"It's more than 3 months that schools, churches, and mosques have been closed. Youth have involved themselves in various forms of drug abuse, they chew miargia (chat), smoke shisha, drink alcohol". For some the situation has meant that they

became involved in crime, stressed Anna: "issues of rape, theft, and robbery are high at night now because they are idle".

#### Rise in gender-based violence during COVID-19

Jenario Laku, the Deputy Chairperson of Gudele block 9 Quarter Council, counters Anna's statement and says that most criminal activities in residential areas in Juba reduced when the government introduced the curfew. However, he adds, after the lifting of the curfew, the situation changed for the worst and gender-based violence (GBV) has sharply increased. "The current challenge we are facing in block 9 is the issue of criminals who move at night, rape women and girls and break into houses".

Laku reported that through the help of development partners such as United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Community Empowerment Progress Organization (CEPO), the Ministry of Interior was able to renovate Gudele Block 9 Special Protection Unit (SPU) which was destroyed by the 2013 and 2016 conflicts. The centre is a crucial site for victims as it provides protection and medical care.

#### Buying evening bread

I was able to visit the SPU – located behind a big fence protected by police after Gudele taxi park next to Juba Electricity Distribution Company (JEDCO).

With tears in her eyes, a girl – who will stay anonymous to protect her identity – explains that she was raped on her way to buy evening bread. "I was coming back, when three boys hidden in the maize field jump and asked me to stop... I could not run away very fast because it was raining so they caught up me by my hands and pushed me into the water". It was only when the lights of an approaching car that her rapist fled the scene.

#### Report rape to stop abuse

Edmund Yakin, the Executive Director for Community Empowerment Progress Organization (CEPO), says rape cases are common across the country. He says: "We have seen over 15 cases of rape that have been handled in this center". A recently released report by the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) indicates that violence against women remain particularly high the Equatoria region in areas where armed fighting persists.

Yakin appeals for citizens and media partners to support the Special Protection Unit (SPU).

He calls on citizens to report cases GBV to the nearest police station or call the toll-free hot line (111) in case any help is needed. To stress that reporting helps victims, he refers to an incident: "a small daughter of ten years was raped in Gabat, Juba, and when we heard the story on Eye Radio, we reported the case to this center. They were able to arrest the perpetrator and he is under police custody now whilst the survivor is recovering in the hospital". He ends: "I call on all citizens to immediately report cases of GBV to the nearest police station or call the hot line".

#### Editorial:

A representative from UNHCR reacted to this story, and shared the following:

"GBV survivors across South Sudan can also call the national GBV helplines 623 and 662 to receive remote support and accurate information about the nearest GBV service providers. The national helplines have been established to assist GBV survivors by providing information and linking them to the nearest GBV service providers, including one-stop centers.

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## ⊕ Capacity building opportunities:

### **Alfred Friendly Press Partners Fellowship Opportunity**

Early-career professional journalists from developing countries with proficiency in English can apply for a six-month fellowship. Alfred Friendly provides fellows with basic and advanced hands-on instruction at the Missouri School of Journalism and places them in leading U.S. newsrooms. The successful candidate will be 25-35 years old and have at least three years of experience as a journalist at a print, online or broadcast media outlet ([here](#)).



### **Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting grants**

The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting grants partners with individual journalists and news organizations to support in-depth, high-impact reporting on topics of global importance, including investigations of systemic problems that are often overlooked by mainstream U.S. media. We accept applications to fund reporting projects from freelance and staff journalists as well as assignment editors at news outlets. For more information, see [here](#).



### **Definitions on COVID-19, from the International**

**Journalists' Network (IJN)** This alphabetical list provides simple, concise definitions of many terms associated with COVID-19 coverage. **"Key terms every journalist should know when covering COVID-19"** (The International Journalists' Network).



### **Webinar Series: Investigating the Pandemic**

GIJN's archive of corona virus-focused webinars covers a range of topics related to reporting on the pandemic, including mental health, financial, and remote reporting advice. Upcoming webinar dates and links are also posted here. See [here](#).



## ➔ Project update :

On August 27, 2020, Internews conducted a monthly review meeting with media partners part of the "Information Saves Lives BHA supported COVID-19 response project. During the meeting, in which media partners from **Voices of Reconciliation (VOR)**, **Catholic Radio Network (CRN)**, **Advance Youth Radio (AYR)**, and **SAMA FM** participated in the review meeting

The partners produced programs based on community feedback and addressed questions and concerns, and misinformation. Partners have been airing programming on COVID-19 in differ formats. The formats include personal testimonies of COVID-19 survivors, interviews with experts including the South Sudan COVID-19 incident manager, audience questions through call-in sessions and interviews with individuals to record the public perception on the pandemic. Internews is in the process of compiling broadcasts and will share them with the RCCE Technical Working Group as the productions come out.

Media partners also shared concerns and experiences on how keeping audiences informed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of creative messaging and focus on how to bring storytelling and dramas to attract the right audience was stressed. Colleagues from VOR, SAMA, CRN and AYR report that it is critical that radio dramas and personal testimonies aired address the levels of denial of the COVID-19 virus. Media partners also brainstormed about how to go about ethically reporting on survivors of COVID-19; on how to address issues and misinformation about the use of alcohol and traditional medicine against COVID-19; and on how to ensure that the information they broadcasts gets disseminated to their audiences in the most effective ways.

If you are looking for particular broadcasts, or information, please do contact: Dr. Michael Gubay via [mgubay@internews.org](mailto:mgubay@internews.org).