

Zero-dose mobile vaccination South Sudan

Increasing the coverage of zero-dose and under-immunised children

Background

In South Sudan, limited access to functional health facilities is contributing to some of the worst health indicators globally. Life expectancy stands at just 58.6 years, with high levels of neonatal, infant and under-five mortality.^[1] Recent funding shortfalls have disrupted major vaccination programmes, leading to staff reductions and weakened immunisation operations. These, in turn, have compounded recurrent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

In 2023, less than three-quarters of children received their third dose of the pentavalent vaccine (which protects against five key childhood illnesses), and measles vaccine coverage was significantly below the 95 percent threshold required to prevent community transmission.^[2] Routine vaccination coverage figures have declined and a growing number of children are completely unvaccinated (zero-dose children).

Local health committees, community health workers (known as *boma* health workers) and community elders play a key role in tackling vaccine myths and improving uptake. They are also ideally placed to identify zero-dose and under-immunised children. However, linking these children with immunisation services remains a major challenge. Geographic and socioeconomic barriers, insecurity and the

Country

South Sudan

Funder

GiveWell

Length of project

August 2025 – February 2029

Partners

Ministry of Health South Sudan

UNICEF

WHO

threat of gender-based violence make it challenging for carers to reach their nearest health facility, many of which lack vaccine supplies or a vaccinator who can administer them.

Project outline and objectives

The Zero Dose Mobile Vaccination project aims to close persistent gaps in routine immunisation coverage to reduce the high burden of zero-dose and under-immunised children in areas of South Sudan that are affected by conflict, or where health services do not reach adequately. An estimated population of more than 705,300 children in Upper Nile, Jonglei, Warrap, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Northern Bahr el Ghazal states will be vaccinated over a four-year period.

In line with South Sudan's National Immunization Strategy 2023–2027^[3] and the World Health Organization's Immunization Agenda 2030,^[4] the project will focus on community-based mobile vaccination and strengthening health facility preparation to support this approach. Mobile vaccination teams equipped with motorbikes and vaccine carriers will reach underserved populations, reducing travel burden and addressing geographic and socioeconomic barriers.

Key objectives:

- Increased number of zero-dose and under-immunised children identified and vaccinated
- Improved engagement with communities to drive demand for vaccinations
- Effective vaccine management at health facilities.

Activities

Malaria Consortium is working with key stakeholders, including community and religious leaders, boma health committees and community members with and without vaccinated children, to address myths and misconceptions leading to vaccine hesitancy.

Through a proactive community mapping strategy, boma health workers and community-based mobile vaccination teams are screening all children aged 2–23 months. Household registration

undertaken by boma health workers is helping to ensure that county-level immunisation targets align with the latest population evidence. The project team is supporting refresher training for boma health workers on confirming children's vaccination status and mapping families with children under five.

Malaria Consortium is establishing five mobile vaccination teams in each county to identify, mobilise and vaccinate eligible children.

Outcomes and impact

Equitable access to immunisation services. The Zero Dose Mobile Vaccination project is expected to substantially improve equitable access to immunisation services in conflict-affected and underserved areas of the project sites. By linking boma health workers and community structures with mobile vaccination teams, the project will strengthen identification of zero-dose and under-immunised children, improve defaulter tracing, reduce missed opportunities for vaccination, and increase timely uptake of routine immunisation services.

Increased coverage of childhood vaccinations. By bringing vaccination services closer to communities, the project will reduce travel barriers, mitigate obstacles associated with insecurity and seasonal flooding, and address caregiver time constraints, particularly among mothers with significant household and livelihood responsibilities. These efforts are expected to increase demand for immunisation services and improve completion of age-appropriate vaccination schedules.

Stronger, more resilient health system. The project is strengthening health facility readiness for outreach through improved microplanning, cold chain management, vaccine stock monitoring and supportive supervision. Capacity strengthening initiatives for health workers will improve target population estimates and strengthen community ownership. Engagement with influential community members promotes acceptance of immunisation services.

The project will generate lessons and approaches that can inform the scale-up and sustainability of mobile vaccination strategies in underserved settings across South Sudan.

References

1. World Health Organization (WHO). South Sudan Health Profile. Available from: <https://data.who.int/countries/728>
2. WHO, UNICEF. Estimates of national immunisation coverage, South Sudan. 2023.
3. Ministry of Health, South Sudan. National Immunisation Strategy 2023–2027.
4. WHO. Immunisation Agenda 2030 (IA2030). WHO; 2020.

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Disclaimer: This project is funded by GiveWell and implemented in collaboration with government and community stakeholders. The views expressed in this brief are those of the project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of GiveWell or partner institutions.

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Cover image: Children and carers attend a mobile vaccination session, South Sudan.

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