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# Exploring community perceptions on the feasibility and acceptability of seasonal malaria chemoprevention

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The commitment and trust of community health workers increase the feasibility and acceptability of seasonal malaria chemoprevention.

## Introduction

In 2022, South Sudan implemented seasonal malaria chemoprevention (SMC) in Aweil South County, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, targeting 18,000 children 3–59 months. SMC is not commonly utilised in South Sudan due to concerns about sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) resistance. However, it has been suggested that SMC remains effective, because SP retains its chemoprevention efficacy, even in areas where resistance is high. This study explores community perceptions about the feasibility and acceptability of SMC in South Sudan in order to guide future policy and programme decisions.

## Methods

- A qualitative study was conducted at the end of the second round of SMC in December 2022.
- Key informant interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires. Participants included seven Ministry of Health officials (three at the national level and four at the state level), two gender experts, four community leaders and four health facilities in-charges.
- Focus group discussions were held with 48 female caregivers of SMC-eligible children (six groups) and 32 local community health workers, known as *boma* health workers.
- Thematic analysis was conducted using an inductive approach.

## Results

- Perceived effectiveness of SMC and caregivers' trust in *boma* health workers, who have close ties with the communities with whom they work, were reported as key factors for increasing the acceptability of SMC over time.
- Initially, many caregivers had concerns regarding the potential side effects of SMC medicines, but participants noted that sensitisation about the benefits and eligibility criteria, as well as the door-to-door delivery strategy, improved SMC implementation.
- Participants expressed their desire for SMC to continue. Several other participants expressed concern about SMC being discontinued in the study area.

## Conclusion

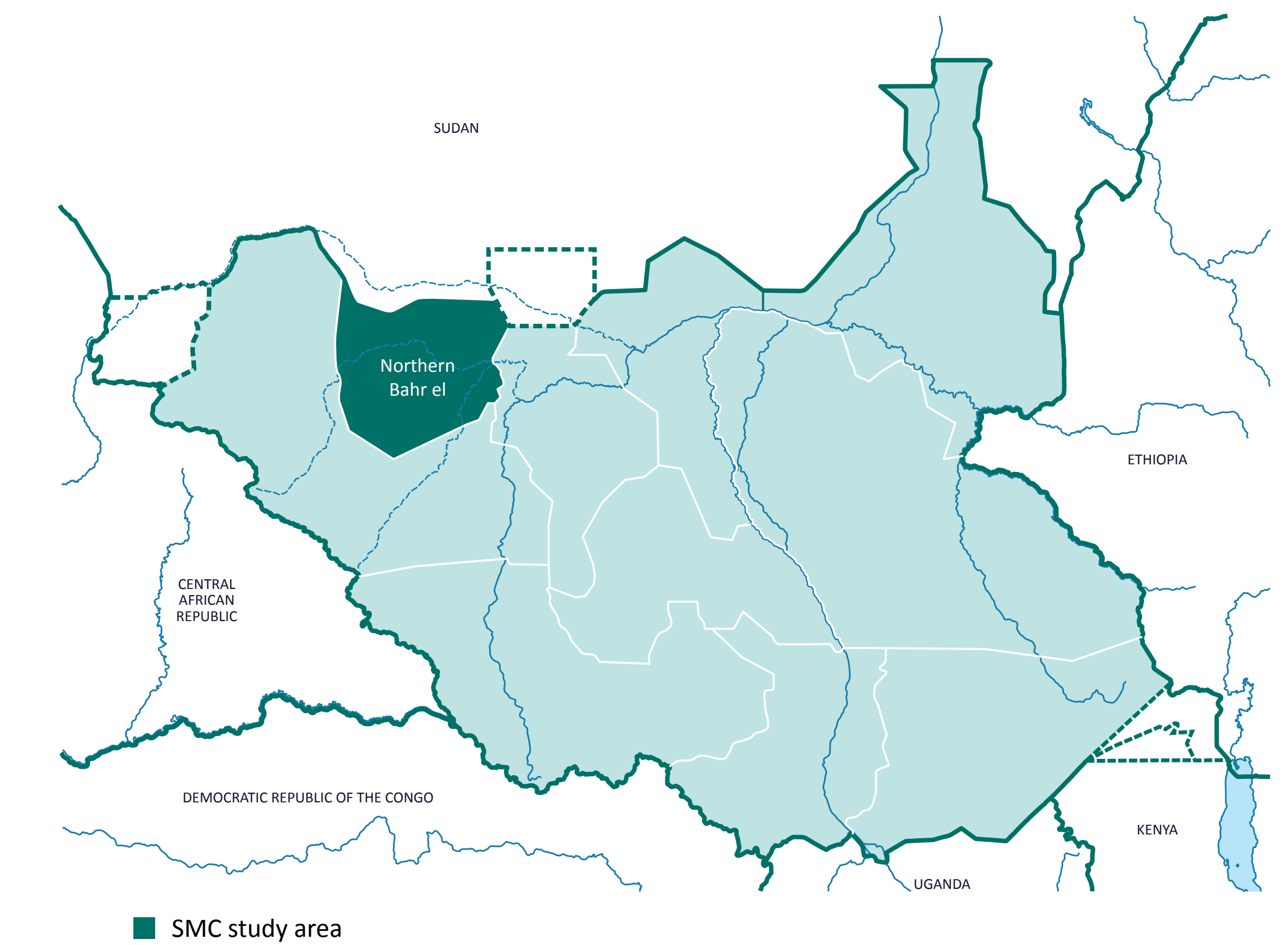
This study suggests that SMC is acceptable to the community and feasible to implement in Aweil South County, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan. Factors perceived to have contributed to the feasibility and acceptability of SMC were similar to those identified by previous research on similar health interventions, such as the role of committed and trusted community health workers who utilised a door-to-door delivery strategy.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Results

Table 1: Community perceptions on feasibility and acceptability of SMC in South Sudan

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
SMC is highly accepted by communities and acceptance increased over time	SMC perceived as reducing malaria cases among 3–59 months	<p>"Children used to frequent get malaria but since SMC began, my children were relieved." Female caregiver</p> <p>"I had a child who used to frequently and he was growing thin but when these drugs, he was okay, and he is now growing well, and I have a feeling it is these drugs." Female caregiver</p>
Communities want SMC to continue with wider reach	SMC seen as a priority and great prevention option	<p>"I'm now more encouraged to continue advocating for SMC in terms of maintaining". Ministry of Health official</p> <p>"It is a gift by Malaria Consortium to us in this county because Aweil South is worse in so many areas. Hunger and disease, we fight these two things. And then because of SMC this can help a lot reducing the case of malaria in children. So, I would recommend SMC to be implemented fully in the county." County health official</p>
SMC implementation is feasible by community distributors in South Sudan	Community distributors' commitment facilitated coverage of the households	<p>"The most important thing is the commitment of the providers, the community drug distributors, the <i>boma</i> health workers. They were very committed to reach the unreachable and this is indicated by the fact that most of the mothers, even the fathers, they were eager to see into their kids are given medication." Ministry of Health official</p>

Figure 1: Map of SMC study area in South Sudan



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## Reference

1) Kozuki N et al. The resilience of integrated community case management in acute emergency: a case study from Unity State, South Sudan. *Journal of Global Health*; 2018.