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# The 8<sup>th</sup> African Vaccination Week Report

## Akobo County, South Sudan



**Vaccines  
Work.  
Do Your Part!**

Submitted by the CORE Group Polio Project, South Sudan

July 2018



## INTRODUCTION

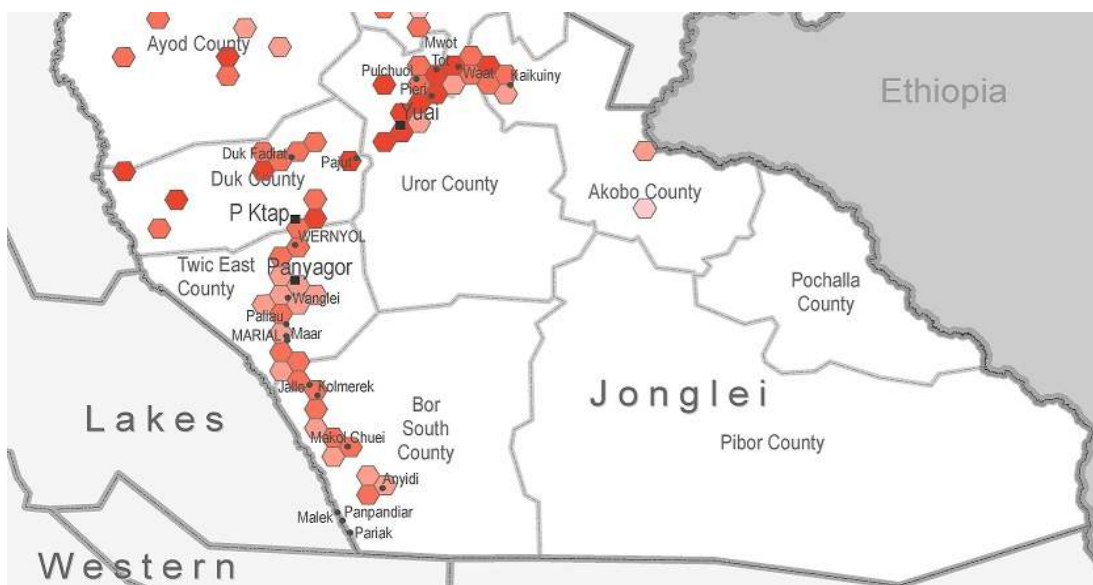
This report documents efforts of South Sudan's CORE Group Polio Project (CGPP) during the 8<sup>th</sup> African Vaccination Week (AVW) held in late April 2018. USAID provides funding for the CGPP's immunization activities in 11 select counties in South Sudan. The brief highlights the implementation of program activities during AVW for the underserved, marginalized and hard-to-reach populations in Akobo County.

From April 23 to April 29, CORE Group South Sudan collaborated with the Universal Network for Knowledge & Empowerment Agency (UNKEA), WHO, UNICEF, Nile Hope, International Medical Corps, and the Akobo County Health Department (CHD) that represents the Republic of South Sudan's Ministry of Health. The main goal of the annual initiative is to strengthen immunization programs in South Sudan and to draw attention to the right of every child and woman to be protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. The theme for this year's AVW was **"Vaccines work. Do your part!"**

During the 2018 AVW, CORE Group undertook a variety of activities aimed at raising awareness through advocacy and social mobilization activities to promote the valuable benefits of immunization. These efforts resulted in increased numbers of children and women vaccinated through routine immunization outreach activities in Akobo County.

## SELECTING AKOBO COUNTY FOR AVW

Akobo County is located in northeast South Sudan in Jonglei State and is situated near the international border of the Gambella Region of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the county has a total population of 193,470; 7,739 are children under one year and 48,368 are women of child-bearing age. The county is geographically sub-divided into Akobo East and Akobo West with each geographical subdivision further divided into administrative units. Akobo East hosts more than three quarters of the population and is the site of the County headquarters.



Akobo County faces multiple challenges that heightens its risk of polio re-importation or re-emergence: porous borders, inaccessibility to health care, and low immunization coverage.

### Porous borders

Akobo County is located along a key porous international border with unrestricted movement between South Sudan and Ethiopia, raising concerns of cross-border transmission of polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

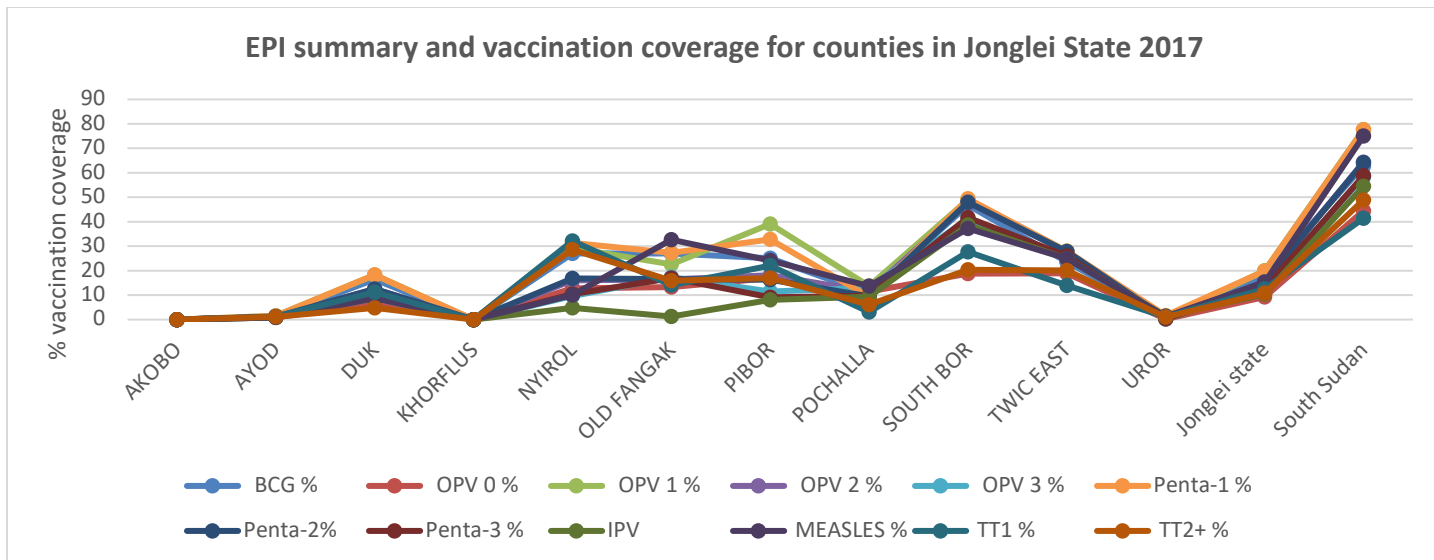
### Inaccessibility to basic health care

Akobo County is among the most conflict-affected counties in Jonglei State because of the continuing civil war. Conflict and insecurity has led to the destruction of health centers and immunization facilities and the displacement of health staff. The rainy season turns roads into rivers, further hampering the ability to reach children and mothers with vaccines. Akobo West has been inaccessible since the start of the conflict in 2013 and little is known about its four payams.

### Low immunization coverage

According to the National Routine Immunization Taskforce for South Sudan, Akobo County is among the six counties in the country with 0.0% Routine Immunization coverage from January to December 2017. The Taskforce classified the county as a top priority, requiring a push for additional support to significantly boost the routine immunization coverage.

The graph below shows the routine immunization administrative data for counties in Jonglei State from January-December 2017



Source: South Sudan MoH EPI Administrative data, 2017.

Given these challenges and due to the significant numbers of children not reached through supplementary immunization campaigns, any important gains in the drive to eradicate polio may not be sustainable in Akobo County without additional attention and intensive measures. Bringing focus to Akobo County during the 8<sup>th</sup> AVW was a significant step to spotlight the county's health needs.

## **PRE-IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF AVW ACTIVITIES**

### **Micro-planning meeting in Akobo**

On March 27, 2018, a team of CGPP Secretariat Project Coordinators and its partner UNKEA (the partner implementing the USAID polio grant in Akobo County) in close collaboration with the Akobo CHD, Nile Hope, IMC, UNICEF and the WHO field team organized a meeting to plan AVW activities. This planning meeting assessed the security situation of the county; reviewed immunization performance; weighed advocacy and social mobilization activities; mapped cold chain facilities; calculated human resource requirements in the county. Additionally, the team reviewed available stocks of vaccines, HMIS tools, IEC material requirements, logistics, vaccination sites mapping and budget development. After considering these multiple factors, the partners concluded that the four payams in Akobo East should be the focus of the AVW campaign.

### **Obtaining approval from the Ministry of Health**

On March 29, 2018, the CORE Group Polio Project Secretariat submitted an official request to Dr. Anthony Laku, the Immunization Director of the Ministry of Health's Expanded Program on Immunization. Dr. Laku approved the request on April 4, 2018 to allow the implementation of AVW activities in Akobo County.

### **Preparatory meeting with implementing partner at the CGPP Secretariat in Juba**

The CGPP Secretariat and the implementing partner UNKEA met to review the micro plans developed in Akobo County on March 27, 2018 with the support of the CHD, Nile Hope, IMC, WHO, CORE Group and UNKEA and following approval of the AVW campaign by the Ministry of Health.

### **EPI Technical Working Group debriefing**

CGPP South Sudan is a member of the EPI Technical Working Group for South Sudan. Other members include the Ministry of Health, WHO, UNICEF and JSI. On April 6, 2018, the CORE Group Project Coordinator debriefed the EPI Technical Working Group members and requested endorsement of the plans for the AVW campaign in Akobo County. The debriefing focused on the requirements such as vaccines, HMIS tools, training guidelines, including AEFI guidelines for South Sudan and AEFI kits to consider adverse events during the campaign. Following the debriefing, the Working Group recommended formation of AVW steering committee to review the processes, plans and budgets.

### **Formation of AVW steering committee**

On April 9 in Juba, representatives from the Ministry of Health, JSI, UNICEF, WHO and the CORE Group composed a steering committee. The role of the AVW steering committee was to scrutinize micro plans for the AVW, adjust vaccine inventory, review IEC materials, assign responsibilities to partners, develop activity plans and endorsed micro plans for the AVW for Juba and Akobo.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE AVW

The AVW campaign targeted four payams: Alali, Bikey, Nyandit, and Dengjok in Akobo East, with a total population of 117,555 (the entire population of Akobo County is 194,340, according to the 2018 population projection by the South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics. The AVW targeted 4,702 children below the age of one year and 29,389 women of child-bearing age (15-49 years) within the four payams with social mobilization messaging and provision of vaccines.

### Akobo County 2018 Population

| Payam        | Male          | Female        | Total          | < 1yr       | IMR        | SIR         | Pregnant women | WCBA         | < 5yrs       | < 15yrs      |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Alali        | 3,144         | 2,860         | 6,004          | 240         | 24         | 216         | 240            | 1501         | 1261         | 2822         |
| Bilkey       | 26,672        | 24,262        | 50,934         | 2037        | 208        | 1830        | 2037           | 12734        | 10696        | 23939        |
| Nyandit      | 18,965        | 17,251        | 36,216         | 1449        | 148        | 1301        | 1449           | 9054         | 7605         | 17022        |
| Dengjok      | 12,778        | 11,623        | 24,401         | 976         | 100        | 876         | 976            | 6100         | 5124         | 11468        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>61,559</b> | <b>55,996</b> | <b>117,555</b> | <b>4702</b> | <b>480</b> | <b>4223</b> | <b>4702</b>    | <b>29389</b> | <b>24687</b> | <b>55251</b> |

Source: South Sudan National Bureau of Statistics 2017

### 1. Training of social mobilizers

The CORE Group Polio Project in collaboration with the CHD, Nile Hope and UNKEA conducted a one-day refresher training to 25 Social Mobilizers and 4 Social Mobilization Supervisors at the Youth Center Hall in Akobo on April 16, 2018.

### 2. Training of vaccinators

On April 17, 2018, a team of 13 vaccinators and 13 recorders received a one-day training on immunization in practice and health information management system.

### 3. Launching of the 8<sup>th</sup> African Vaccination Week campaign

The Akobo County Executive Director, who served as the guest of honor, launched the event with remarks to inspire action. More than 70 community members and leaders, top county authorities and representatives of health partners from across the county attended the event. The Executive Director urged community partners and leaders to continue working together to continue building momentum to ensure the reduction of morbidity and mortality caused by vaccine-preventable diseases in the county and throughout all South Sudan.



**Left: Akobo County Executive Director administering oral polio vaccine during the launch of campaign.**

**Right: Dr. Wanto (IMC Akobo) emphasizing roles of community leaders in promoting vaccination.**

**4. De-Briefing meetings**

Debriefing meetings were held each evening at the CHD office to review and evaluate that day’s performance, to identify challenges and lessons learned and agree upon measures to improve future performance.



**Members of the county supervisory team in an evening debriefing meeting at the CHD office.**

**5. Human resource structure for the African Vaccination Week campaign**

The successful implementation of the 8<sup>th</sup> AVW was due to the coordinating human resources from the World Vision CGPP and UNKEA in Juba, the Akobo County Health Department, health implementing partners and the support of host communities and their leaders. The human resources were organized into teams and committees, tasked with specific roles and responsibilities:

- 1. Central supervisory team
- 2. County supervisory team
- 3. County AEFI Committee
- 4. County waste management committee
- 5. Payam team supervisors
- 6. Community vaccinators and recorders
- 7. Cold chain assistants
- 8. Social mobilizers

### **Deployment of the central supervisory team**

Two staff members from the CORE Group Polio Project Secretariat, a staff member from the CGPP implementing partner UNKEA, and a representative from the UNICEF State office in Bor were deployed to Akobo County to plan and coordinate the AVW implementation.

### **Formation of county supervisory team**

This five-member team consisted of staff from the Akobo CHD, CORE Group, UNKEA and Nile Hope. The team implemented AVW activities in each payam and served as advisors.

### **Formation of county AEFI Committee**

This committee included CORE Group, IMC, CHD, UNICEF, WHO and UNKEA, the implementing partner for the CORE Group Polio Project in Akobo County. The AEFI committee was led by International Medical Corps (IMC), represented by Dr. Wato. The AEFI committee was responsible for investigation, management and referral of identified AEFI cases to Akobo county hospital.

### **Formation of county waste management team**

This team included representatives from CHD, the central supervisory team and Nile Hope. The team established a waste management plan to collect and store daily waste from the campaign and incinerate it at the end of the campaign.

### **Recruitment and deployment of Payam Team Supervisors**

In all, eight payam team supervisors (two supervisors of social mobilizers and two supervisors for the vaccinators/recorders in each payam) directed activities of vaccinators, recorders and social mobilizers at bomas and villages. In addition, they held payam advocacy meetings with the payam authorities to promote uptake of EPI services.

### **Recruitment and deployment of social mobilizers**

CGPP in collaboration with the CHD recruited 26 social mobilizers to conduct social mobilization five days prior the 8<sup>th</sup> AVW campaign. Community mobilizers used house to house visits, community meetings, and public announcements using mega phones and church announcements to prepare the communities.

### **Cold chain assistants**

In addition to monitoring the cold chain system, this team provided the critical role of distributing vaccines and other supplies, keeping an up-dated inventory of supplies and providing replenishment.

### **Recruitment and deployment of community vaccinators and recorders**

A total of 13 vaccinators and 13 recorders were recruited, trained and deployed to the four payams during the AVW in Akobo. The administration of vaccines to all the eligible children and women of child-bearing age was conducted by the community vaccinators. All approved vaccine antigens used in South Sudan were administered during the campaign. The recorders made sure to capture the necessary information from vaccinated individuals in the appropriate EPI records and reporting tools.

### **Social mobilization and sensitization activities**

Social mobilization was the main pillar of the 8<sup>th</sup> AVW campaign in Akobo. Communities were reached through county and payam level advocacy meetings, interpersonal communication, women group dialogue, awareness creation in the churches, markets and other communal places.

The social mobilization and sensitization activities in Akobo East started on April 16, 2018 with identification and training of social mobilizers. Two days later, a county advocacy meeting sensitized the local leaders, county authorities, community leaders and other partners operating in Akobo County on the AVW its importance to strengthening routine immunization. By April 20, social mobilization supervisors conducted payam sensitization meetings in each of the four payams of Alali, Bilkey, Dengjok and Nyandit.

On April 25, and with the full participation of the county authorities, community leaders and partners, social mobilization activities began. Five days prior to the start of the campaign, a team of 26 recruited and trained social mobilizers conducted house to house mobilization and community sensitization. During this period, the social mobilizers visited a total of 1,232 households and social mobilizers informed and educated 1,817 community members on the upcoming AVW and importance of vaccinating their children.



## VACCINATION ACTIVITIES

### Vaccination of children under the age of one

AVW partners targeted 3,560 children below the age of one for vaccination with various antigens. During the micro planning sessions, organizers mapped 29 outreach sites in the four payams of Alali, Bilkey, Nyandit and Dengjok. The campaign used 3,137 doses of different antigens to reach a total of 2,068 (1,124 males and 944 females) children below the age of one year, which was 58.1% of the monthly target.

The low vaccination coverage in Akobo, coupled with the large pool of under vaccinated children in the county, provided an opportunity to vaccinate children above the age of one who were never vaccinated or under vaccinated. A total of 245 children age 12-59 months were additionally vaccinated during the campaign period.

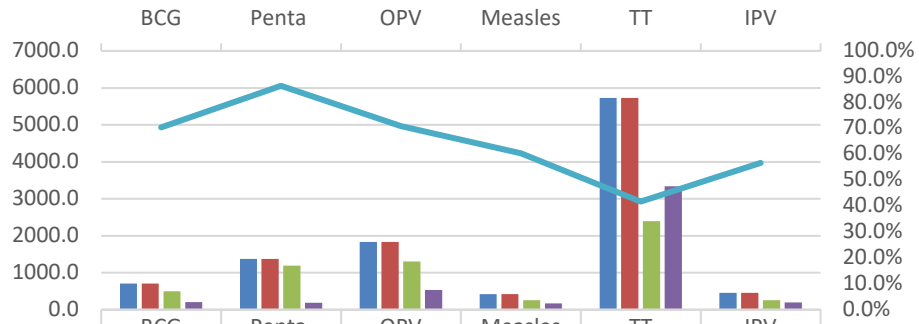
#### Children vaccinated with different vaccine antigens during the 8<sup>th</sup> AVW in Akobo East

| Vaccine Antigen                  | Infants 0-11 Months |            |             | Children 12-59 Months |            |            |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------|------------|
|                                  | Male                | Female     | Total       | Male                  | Female     | Total      |
| BCG                              | 268                 | 229        | 497         |                       |            |            |
| OPV0                             | 51                  | 59         | 110         |                       |            |            |
| OPV1                             | 346                 | 269        | 615         | 25                    | 21         | 46         |
| OPV2                             | 163                 | 135        | 298         | 22                    | 18         | 40         |
| OPV3                             | 90                  | 68         | 158         | 19                    | 14         | 33         |
| IPV                              | 124                 | 112        | 236         | 17                    | 7          | 24         |
| Penta1                           | 346                 | 269        | 615         | 25                    | 21         | 46         |
| Penta2                           | 163                 | 135        | 298         | 22                    | 18         | 40         |
| Penta3                           | 90                  | 68         | 158         | 19                    | 14         | 33         |
| Measles                          | 82                  | 72         | 154         | 58                    | 44         | 102        |
| <b>Total Children vaccinated</b> | <b>1124</b>         | <b>944</b> | <b>2068</b> | <b>141</b>            | <b>104</b> | <b>245</b> |



Community Vaccinators vaccinating children during AVW and woman receiving TT immunization

## Percentage vaccine usage by antigen

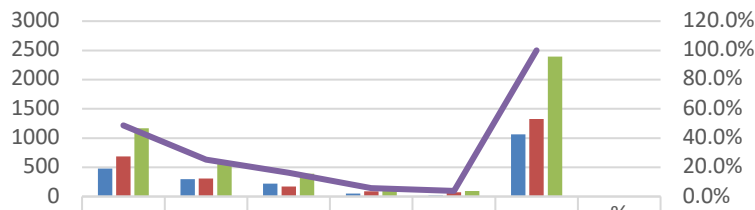


|                              | BCG   | Penta  | OPV    | Measles | TT     | IPV   |
|------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-------|
| Doses Required for the Month | 705.3 | 1375.4 | 1833.9 | 423.2   | 5730.4 | 458.5 |
| Doses supplied               | 705.3 | 1375.4 | 1833.9 | 423.2   | 5730.4 | 458.5 |
| Dosed Administered           | 497.0 | 1190.0 | 1300.0 | 256.0   | 2394.0 | 260.0 |
| Stock Balance                | 208.3 | 185.4  | 533.9  | 167.2   | 3336.4 | 198.5 |
| % Usage                      | 70.5% | 86.5%  | 70.9%  | 60.5%   | 41.8%  | 56.7% |

### Vaccination of women of child bearing age

A total of 2,394 women of child bearing age received various doses of Tetanus Toxoid (TT) antigens. This is 97.7% of the monthly TT target for the four payams in Akobo County. As shown in the table below, the majority of the women, 48.7%, received TT for the first time (TT1) and less than 4% received TT5. A nearly equal number of pregnant women (44.5%) and non-pregnant (55.5%) women receive TT overall during the AVW in Akobo East.

### Analysis of Tetanus Toxoid Vaccination for WCBA by pregnancy status



|                       | TT1   | TT2   | TT3   | TT4  | TT5  | Total  | %<br>percentage of<br>total |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|-----------------------------|
| Pregnant Women        | 479   | 299   | 220   | 49   | 19   | 1066   | 44.5%                       |
| Non pregnant Women    | 687   | 306   | 171   | 91   | 73   | 1328   | 55.5%                       |
| Total                 | 1166  | 605   | 391   | 140  | 92   | 2394   | 100.0%                      |
| % percentage of total | 48.7% | 25.3% | 16.3% | 5.8% | 3.8% | 100.0% |                             |

## IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED

### **Involvement of key stakeholders from the very beginning**

A bottom-up approach was used during the consultation with the county health department. The series of meetings conducted with the county authorities in Akobo including the commissioner, executive director, the county health director and the involvement of other partners on the ground such as IMA-World Health, Nile Hope, WHO, and UNICEF, all of whom contributed to the success of African Vaccination Week.

### **Community participation and ownership**

Throughout the process, CGPP provided technical and financial support. The Akobo CHD provided leadership throughout the actual AVW campaign implementation process, ensuring deep knowledge of the local context. County supervisors, payam supervisors, vaccinators, recorders and social mobilizers provided a keen sense of community ownership for the campaign.

### **Flexibility**

CORE Group South Sudan and partners showed flexibility to respond quickly to situations when confronted with challenges unique to the context of South Sudan. Just one day before the start of the AVW, a brief confrontation between the opposition and pro-government forces in Akobo presented the potential for disrupting the AVW. CORE Group quickly re-adjusted its plans and moved forward when calm returned.

### **Value of communication for development**

The AVW provided a unique opportunity to understand the value of communication for development to enhance awareness through community advocacy meetings, payam sensitization meetings and house to house community mobilization and sensitization.

**Women and children line up to receive vaccinations.**

