

## PIONEERING INTEGRATED COVID-19 AND ROUTINE IMMUNISATION MOBILE OUTREACHES IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan faces numerous challenges in providing healthcare services to its population. The country's healthcare system is marred by poor infrastructure, limited resources, and severe health worker shortages. This means that South Sudan has some of the world's worst health indicators, including low coverage of childhood immunisations and Covid-19 vaccinations.

Over 90% of the population resides in rural areas, with more than 56% living more than 5km from a health facility, making access to healthcare services and medications a challenging task, particularly given the limited road network and flooding during the rainy season.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues by highlighting the limitations of the healthcare system, such as limited human resources, time, and funding. As a result, there is a high burden of preventable diseases, and a significant number of deaths occur due to vaccine-preventable diseases and illnesses. The country has also experienced several outbreaks of measles in recent years, causing significant morbidity and mortality, particularly among children. These challenges highlight the importance of innovative solutions to improve access to healthcare services for hard-to-reach and underserved communities.

### Crown Agents' Integrated Mobile Vaccination Units

In November 2022, Crown Agents collaborated with the Ministry of Health (MOH) in South Sudan to pioneer a cost-effective approach for integrating Covid-19 vaccines with routine immunisation through mobile units in 22 counties across 7 states. The integrated mobile outreach lasted for three days, and it was staffed by two teams, with two vaccinators per team. This approach ensured that all 22 counties were covered, with a total of 44 teams and 88 vaccinators. During the planning and preparations for this pilot approach, Crown Agents considered the growing concern of a measles outbreak in South Sudan and prioritised counties with low coverage of measles vaccines to prevent and control the spread of measles outbreaks in these areas.

#### MOBILE UNITS FOR VACCINATION

Mobile vaccination units are a valuable strategy to increase access to vaccination services in underserved communities, high-risk groups, and rural areas. They are particularly helpful for people who face travel challenges, have limited access to health facilities, have disabilities or family duties. However, in places like South Sudan, implementing mobile outreach can be a costly and resource intensive endeavour.

### Reaching isolated communities in a cost-effective way

So far, the integrated mobile outreaches have been tremendously successful in South Sudan. One of the primary benefits of the integrated approach is its ability to reach underserved and hard-to-reach communities effectively. By providing healthcare services in convenient locations at appropriate times, the mobile units have made routine immunisations more accessible for working caregivers and individuals. Furthermore, the pooling of resources for routine immunisations and Covid-19 vaccinations has made these efforts more affordable, saving costs and time for both the healthcare system and the community. At every possible opportunity, we have leveraged existing systems and resources and ensured that integration has been implemented at various levels, including planning, training, demand generation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

In less than three months, Crown Agents through the [Health Pooled Fund 3](#) (HPF3) and its supporting partners, including Montrose, has reached a total of **35,153** children with routine immunisations. This includes **5,619 zero-dose children** and **13,795 children with the measles vaccine**. Additionally, our integrated approach has allowed the simultaneous delivery of COVID-19 vaccines, which has been essential in controlling the spread of the virus. Through this initiative, **51,736** people aged 18 and above were reached with the Covid-19 vaccine.

**Crown Agents' integrated mobile outreach programme** has also demonstrated the successful implementation of an innovative solution to strengthen the healthcare system in South Sudan. Through careful planning, training, and coordination at various levels, Crown Agents focused on maximising existing resources and strengthening capacity among health workers and Ministry of Health staff. Decentralising the mobile integration activity at the County Health Department (CHD) level and coordinating with community leaders was a crucial aspect of our approach. By involving local communities in the planning and implementation of the programme, we were able to increase ownership and sustainability as well as ensure that micro-plans and initiatives developed catered to the specific needs of each community.

The programme's monitoring and evaluation processes were led by the State MOH, with a focus on vaccine safety, data management, and the cold chain system. Through rigorous training of focal persons within each county on Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI), Crown Agents ensured that the programme was safe and effective. Throughout the pilot, there were no reported cases of AEFI post-vaccination.

**The integrated mobile outreach pilot has contributed to the strengthening of health systems in South Sudan. By working closely with the Ministry of Health and other partners, Crown Agents has been able to build capacity among health workers, enhance data collection and monitoring systems, and improve supply chain management. This has not only improved the delivery of healthcare services but has also contributed to the overall development of the health system in South Sudan.**

### Key learnings

1. Collaborative approaches are essential: Effective implementation of integrated mobile outreach interventions requires collaborative approaches that involve all relevant stakeholders, including health workers, government agencies, IPs, and donors. Successful collaboration ensures that resources are used effectively, and interventions are tailored to the specific needs of target populations.
2. Targeted interventions improve coverage: The integrated mobile outreach pilot showed that targeted interventions are effective in improving coverage in hard-to-reach populations and areas with low coverage. Future interventions should prioritize targeting populations with the greatest need to maximize the impact of interventions.
3. Health system strengthening is crucial: The pilot demonstrated that strengthening health systems is crucial for effective delivery of healthcare services. Future interventions should focus on building the capacity of health workers, enhancing M&E systems, and improving supply chain management to ensure the efficient delivery of healthcare services.
4. Flexibility and adaptability are key: The pilot showed the importance of both of these characteristics. Future interventions should be designed with a flexible approach to allow for course correction and adaptation to changing circumstances.
5. Technology can enhance access: Leveraging mobile technology can improve accessibility to healthcare services, especially for remote and underserved communities. Future interventions should consider the use of technology, including mobile health solutions, to enhance access to healthcare services and improve the efficiency of interventions.

### Conclusion

Crown Agents' integrated mobile vaccination initiative has demonstrated a remarkable success in increasing access to life-saving vaccines in underserved communities, high-risk groups, and rural areas. Despite facing some challenges such as temporary pauses due to national campaign efforts, the initiative has proven to be a cost-effective approach and provided valuable insights about the value of integration and leveraging existing systems. As we move forward, it is important to build on these successes and continue to improve access to healthcare services in South Sudan, ensuring no one is left behind. The integrated mobile vaccination initiative serves as a powerful reminder that with determination, collaboration, and innovative thinking, we can overcome even the most significant challenges in healthcare delivery.



#### Health Pooled Fund donors

