



New Grant Launched to Drive Progress Against HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria and Strengthen Health Systems

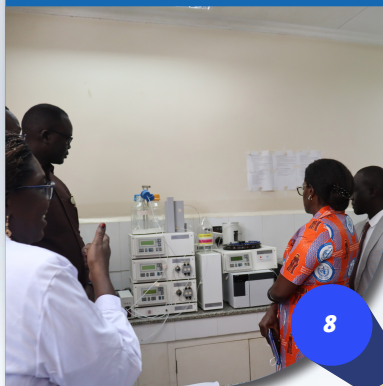
The Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol launches the GC7 grant. Looking on is the Minister of Health Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng and other Government dignitaries and partners.

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About Us

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustices of poverty, inequality and climate change. Working with a broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet Earth.

UNDP is a Principal Recipient of the Global Fund in South Sudan, supporting the government through the Ministry of Health to end HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis (TB), and to build resilient and sustainable systems for health. Other efforts are, strengthening preparedness and response to pandemics and public health emergencies, as well as improving leadership and coordination at the Ministry of Health and the South Sudan AIDS Commission to enhance the delivery of health services.

Through the procurement, storage and distribution of health supplies and laboratory reagents for HIV and TB, UNDP ensures access to comprehensive HIV and TB services in over 200 hospitals and health facilities across the country.

The Connecting the Dots: Towards a More Equitable, Healthier, and Sustainable Future: UNDP HIV and Health Strategy 2022–2025 elaborates our work on HIV and health, and is guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNDP Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and related regional programmes. It is informed by and complements the strategies and plans of key partners such as WHO, UNAIDS, the Global Fund, UNICEF and UN Women.

Working with the Ministry of Health and partners, UNDP is currently implementing Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) funded by the Global Fund over the period 2024–2026. Valued at US\$167 million, the grant supports the country's vision of ending HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria as public health threats by 2030 and seeks to build resilient and sustainable health systems and strengthen preparedness and response to pandemics and other public health threats.

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New Grant Launched to Drive Progress Against HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria and Strengthen Health Systems

Valued at US\$167 million, the Grant Cycle 7 will be implemented over the period 2024–2026.



The Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol, the Minister of Health Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng, other Government dignitaries and partners during the launch of the GC7 grant.

The Government of South Sudan, with funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), launched the Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) to consolidate gains and to strengthen the national response to HIV, TB and malaria in South Sudan from 2024 to 2026. The new grant was launched by the Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol on 14 February 2024.

Valued at US\$167 million, the grant comprises \$50.2 million for HIV, \$17 million for TB, \$23.5 million for Resilient and Sustainable Systems for Health (RSSH), \$53.3 for malaria, and \$23 million for pandemic preparedness and additional RSSH. This is the largest Global Fund contribution to the people of South Sudan since its independence in 2011. This grant supports the country’s vision of ending HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria as public health threats by 2030 and seeks to build resilient and sustainable health systems, and strengthen pandemic preparedness and response.

As the Principal Recipient for the HIV, TB, RSSH and C19RM components, UNDP, on behalf of the Government and its partners, will manage a total of \$116.3 million, which is also the highest amount under UNDP’s stewardship in recent periods. UNICEF will manage the component for malaria valued at \$53.3million.

These components of the grant build on the achievements made through previous periods of Global Fund support. These include strengthening health systems, as well as the procurement, storage and distribution of HIV, TB, COVID-19 medicines, laboratory reagents and health supplies, which has ensured access to vital medicines and therapeutics in over 200 hospitals and health facilities across the country. The new grant seeks to reach and impact 91,500 people living with HIV with life-saving medication, and to treat and cure as many as 26,000 people affected by TB per year. It will also equip over 28 hospitals and health facilities with solar power installations, as well as providing a secure and reliable supply of medical oxygen countrywide.

The GC7 grant also seeks to reduce new HIV infections by 25% by 2026, reduce AIDS-related deaths by 25% by 2026, maintain above 70% coverage of combination HIV prevention interventions for key and vulnerable populations, reach 85% of HIV-positive pregnant women by 2026, reach 3,000 of HIV-exposed infants (HEI) with early infant diagnosis (EID) by 2026 and reduce HIV-related discrimination and other inequalities towards people living with HIV and AIDS.



The Hon. Minister of Health and Dr. Jane Alphonse, the CCM Chairperson.



Ms. Alice Okuo, Civil Society Representative, CCM South Sudan

Dr. Jane Alphonse, the CCM Chairperson, said the launch signals the formal handover of the grant to the country, particularly the Ministry of Health and partners for immediate implementation. "As the CCM, we are going to revert to our oversight role," she said, urging the government to execute the co-financing requirement for the effective implementation of the grant.

The Project Coordination Advisor for the UNDP-Global Fund Programme Mr. Russell Armstrong thanked the Global Fund, the Government and partners for the renewed confidence in UNDP as a partner of choice

for the stewardship of precious Global Fund resources on behalf of the people of South Sudan. He pledged UNDP's commitment to deliver on the aspirations of the GC7 and C19RM investments.

Hamida Lasseko, UNICEF Representative, welcomed the grant and credited the Government and partners for their commitment to the health of children in the country, emphasizing how malaria continued to be a leading cause of sickness and death for large numbers of young children in the country.

The oversight of the grant will be undertaken by the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), a multisectoral body that coordinated the development of the funding request that was submitted to the Global Fund expressing the country's priorities.



The Minister of Health Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng

OTHER GC7 GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

CO-FINANCING	CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR TRANSITION	OVERSIGHT OF THE GRANT	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRANT
<p>The grant comes with a co-financing obligation which requires the Government of South Sudan to progressively increase the national budgetary allocation to health. The Government is also required to maintain or increase domestic funding of Global Fund-supported programmes and absorb the key costs of national disease plans, failure of which the Global Fund may reduce grant funds during the current or any subsequent implementation periods. The government needs to increase domestic investment in health by \$9 million or risk losing \$21 million of the approved grants.</p>	<p>The new grant includes important investments for the Ministry of Health to strengthen its core systems for Global Fund grants management as a sub-recipient (SR). Wherever UNDP functions as a principal recipient (PR), it maintains a commitment to capacity development for transition so that a national institution may assume the PR role at a mutually agreed-upon future date.</p> <p>During the GC7, UNDP will continue to support the Ministry of Health (MOH) to build and strengthen core systems in financial management, monitoring and evaluation, programme planning and management, and procurement and supply management. Important milestones have been set so that, by the end of 2026, the MOH will have strong and resilient systems and processes for Global Fund grants management as an SR.</p>	<p>The Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) oversees the implementation of the Global Fund investments in the country. Comprising both state and non-state actors, the CCM represents the interests of country-level stakeholders in the fight against HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria. All funding requests to the Global Fund, material budget revisions and other major adjustments to the Global Fund grants are endorsed by the CCM before submission to the Global Fund for approval.</p>	<p>To deliver on the grant, the Government and UNDP will work with six sub-recipients and other partners. These include the Ministry of Health, the South Sudan AIDS Commission, the Arkangelo Ali Association, Cordaid, AMREF and the United Nations Population Fund. Other implementation partners include the South Sudan Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (SSNeP+), the National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU) and the Network of HIV/AIDS Service Organisations for South Sudan (NASOSS).</p>



Global Fund Engages Gov't, Partners to Revise HIV/AIDS and TB Targets Upwards

During the mission, the Global Fund country team also visited Al Sabbah Children's Hospital and Kator PHCC to witness the transformative solar projects being implemented.

The Global Fund Country Team has engaged the Ministry of Health, the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), UNDP and partners on the issue of raising the HIV and AIDS, and tuberculosis (TB) targets in the Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) being implemented over the period 2024 – 2026.

This arose from the need to match the GC7 targets to results attained by December 2023. It followed a record of improved performance on Global Fund indicators over the last three reporting periods between July 2022 and December 2023 where some targets set at the time of grant writing were achieved even before the start of the GC7 grant.

"We have seen in the recent reports to the Global Fund that the number of people on ART or people included in the ART cohort increased dramatically from one semester to the next to the point where you have already surpassed the targets that you set for the first year of the grant. This is a huge success that we don't often see in other countries," Ms. Lyne Soucy, the Global Fund Regional Manager, said during the grant revision workshop held on 13 March 2024.

Ms. Lyne Soucy commended the Government and people of South Sudan, and partners for the successful grant writing and negotiations leading to the award of US\$167 million GC7 grant, saying,

"We hope that you will use the funding for maximum results."



During the grant revision workshop convened by the CCM, the Ministry of Health presented proposals on antiretroviral therapy (ART) targets and TB notification targets linked to results attained by the end of December 2023. In the new targets, the Ministry of Health seeks to have at least 91,500 enrolled on ART annually by 2026 and about 26,000 diagnosed and treated of TB annually.

Background

During their mission, the Global Fund Country Team also visited Al Sabbah Children's Hospital and Kator Primary Health Care Centre where solar energy solutions are transforming health delivery, saving lives and enabling critical hospital operations in face of acute power shortages.

"We learnt a lot especially about the practicality of the installation and how solar is helping the country and of course harrowing stories of the loss of children in the past before the solar was installed. When we hear of such, it gives impetus to the value of investing in systems broadly as opposed to being disease-specific," Boniface Njenga, the Senior Fund Portfolio Manager at the Global Fund, said. Under this support, solar installations are going on in 28 hospitals and other health facilities across the country.



Officials from the Global Fund Country Team, Ministry of Health, UNDP and partners during the recent Global Fund mission to South Sudan



Technology Accelerates TB Detection in South Sudan

Thanks to Global Fund and its funders, in South Sudan, we are beginning to use artificial intelligence to detect TB cases.



Dominic Sam
UNDP Resident Representative

Every 24 March, countries around the globe observe World Tuberculosis (TB) Day to raise awareness and recognize achievements in TB prevention and control, and to renew their commitment to ending this devastating, yet preventable disease by 2030.

The theme for this year's commemoration – **Yes! We can end TB!** – expresses hope that we can turn the tide against this infectious disease.

In 2022, TB was ranked as the second leading infectious disease killer worldwide, after COVID-19. It was also the leading cause of death for people living with HIV. According to the 2023 Global Tuberculosis report, 10.6 million people fell ill with TB in 2022 while 1.3 million people died of TB-related causes, including 167,000 deaths among people living with HIV. Drug-resistant TB also remains a major public health concern with an estimated 410,000 people developing multi-drug-resistant forms of TB in 2022 alone! Fortunately, globally, 75 million lives have been saved since 2000 due to our collective efforts to combat TB.

For the record, anyone can get TB including the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the educated, the uneducated, and the rural and urban dwellers alike. People with TB can also be found everywhere – where we work, live, learn and spend time with family and friends. This is because TB is spread through the air, and we all breathe air.

Stigma and discrimination

Yet stigma and misunderstandings about TB remain the Achilles heel barring people from being screened or diagnosed, seeking and adhering to treatment, and that fuels further spread and the needless loss of lives. People are scared to go to the clinic to receive treatment because someone might recognize them and thereafter judge and ostracize them or get scared of them. Because of stigma, people are afraid of sharing their fears that they may be sick and asking for help!

In South Sudan, an estimated 25,000 people are diagnosed and treated with TB annually. UNDP has been a valuable partner and a principal recipient of the Global Fund grant in the fight against TB and HIV since 2003, working with the MOH and partners to provide TB services in over 200 locations across the country.

Inclusive technologies helping end TB

We must continue to work together to fight this epidemic on multiple fronts through provision of new diagnostics and treatment regimens with digital technologies and innovations at the helm. The innovation cycle for South Sudan began with the use of GeneXpert machines. We are now entering a new phase of innovation with artificial intelligence (AI) assisted digital X-ray machines to scale up case identification.

In this regard, the Ministry of Health, in partnership with UNDP, and with support from the Global Fund, installed two portable digital X-ray machines at Torit and Rumbek state hospitals in December 2023. An additional four machines will be installed soon. These portable X-ray machines have multiple benefits including increasing the accuracy of diagnosis, leading to improved treatment outcomes.

These new battery-powered X-ray machines are small, light and easy to transport by hand. One can charge a battery and use it multiple times on a single charge. Given the disruptions in power supply, this enables the provision of services during power blackouts.

Given their portability, they can be used in community outreaches to conduct X-rays, which reduces the cost of travelling to health centers for rural patients, who may otherwise delay TB testing until their condition deteriorates. AI-assisted X-ray machines can also detect other health conditions and complement other interventions such as the use of the multi-disease-testing GeneXpert machines.

With funding from the Global Fund, UNDP provided over 55 GeneXpert machines to reinforce the country's capacity in diagnosing HIV/AIDS, TB, COVID-19 and other public health threats. A total of 246,677 TB laboratory tests have been conducted from January 2018 to June 2023 while 95,202 people were enrolled on treatment and 63,046 deaths were averted over this period. Yet a lot more needs to be done to find and treat active TB cases as a step in the prevention and elimination of TB.

AI-aided X-ray Machines are Saving Lives and Changing Health Care in Torit

Innovation is helping to accelerate progress in the fight against diseases while preparing the world for future pandemics. In South Sudan, we are beginning to use artificial intelligence-aided digital X-ray machines to scale up TB screening and treatment.



The digital X-ray machines are enabling health care at Torit State Hospital

Ofere Ohide works as a radiologist at Torit State Hospital where one of the two X-ray machines in the country was installed in December 2023.

He says that before the installation of the machine, people had to go to the capital Juba, about 136 kilometres away, to get screened for TB, and many people would choose death, owing to the distance and costs associated with the travel.

"Our people here are quite poor; if you tell them to go to Juba, someone will choose

death over going to Juba because they know that they are going to spend a lot of money and probably they wouldn't come back. So, they usually just live with it. They will not even bother going for an X-ray," Ofere said of the journey that takes between eight and 10 hours to drive by road from Torit to Juba.

"This is the smallest X-ray. It's more portable. If for some reason someone cannot come to the ward, you can pick it, pack it and go and take the picture from the ward and come back," he added.



Quality-Control Minilab Launched to Improve Drug and Food Safety



The quality-control minilab will also boost confidence in the country's health sector

A quality-control minilab has been launched to regulate food and medicinal standards through rapid drug quality verification and falsified medicines detection to ensure access to safe, effective, quality-assured foods and medicines in the country.

The establishment of the quality-control minilab is supported by the East African Community Regional Center of Excellence for Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management in collaboration with UNDP and pharmaceutical stakeholders in South Sudan.

"This lab will help combat substandard and falsified food and medical products from entering the country, which will in turn save the lives of people," said Dr. Mawien Atem Mawien, the Secretary General of the Drug and Food Control Authority, during the launch on 7 February 2024.

Dr. Ader Macar Aciek, the Undersecretary, Ministry of Health, called for strict adherence to the set quality standards and

urged law enforcement agencies "to ensure that all our regulations are complied with." Dr. Emmanuel Galla Lado, the Chairperson, Pharmaceutical Society of South Sudan, noted that presently, "drugs are not properly being tested, leading to increased numbers of illnesses, deaths and side effects."

With the minilab in place, he said, "We will provide the best care for our patients and the people of South Sudan." The lab will also reduce the cost of sending samples abroad for testing and increase turnaround time for results.



Dr. Mawien Atem Mawien, Secretary General, Drug and Food Control Authority

UNDP-Global Fund Programme support

The UNDP-Global Fund Programme supported the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for pharmaceutical vigilance and the review of supply chain and supervision tools in 2021. These SOPs were validated and guided the training of trainers (TOTs) from various agencies.

Under the GC7 grant from 2024-2026, US\$400,000 is earmarked to support the quality-control minilab. The DFCA will be supported to strengthen drug regulatory systems through the procurement of quality-control equipment. Pharmacists and lab technicians will also be trained on the use of quality-control equipment.

An official from the Ministry of Trade and Industry said the lab will boost confidence in the country's health sector, "The presence of substandard products and medicines on the market is a great threat to public health. It contributes to ineffective treatment and undermines the confidence of the public in our national health care system – that is why you see people leaving our country to get treatment in other countries."

Other speakers called for zero tolerance to corruption and favoritism in the regulation of food and medicinal products, "to avoid perpetuation of problems that the lab seeks to address in the first place."

WHO's Dr. Mutare Ssekwe thanked the Ministry of Health for the leadership and oversight in the establishment of the minilab. She urged DFCA to deliver its mandate diligently, "We have heard of stories of people who want things done their way, but I urge you to ensure that you carry out this function – without fear or favour."

PICTORIAL



A time for us to remember the many lives lost to HIV/AIDS. The Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol and partners light candles to mark the World AIDS Day.



Solar power installation in 28 hospitals and health facilities is transforming health delivery, saving lives and enabling critical hospital operations, given the power shortages.



Together we can do so much. The UNDP Resident Representative Dominic Sam with the Global Fund Country team during a recent Global Fund mission to South Sudan



We all have a role to play to combat HIV/AIDS. Security personnel actively participated in the World AIDS Day ceremonies.



The former UNDP Resident Representative in South Sudan Mr. Samuel Doe hands over a copy of the Health Bulletin to the Minister of Health Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng.

Health Bulletin Expands Storytelling Avenues for UNDP-Global Fund Programme

The Health Bulletin, a periodic publication initiated by the UNDP-Global Fund Programme, has expanded avenues for profiling and dissemination of information about the project’s contribution to Government efforts to end HIV and AIDS, and tuberculosis, and strengthen health systems working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners.

The publication offers new opportunities to capture and disseminate information about our transformational work, and serves as an instrument for delivering development support in a transparent and accountable manner. It is hoped that this will increase visibility and stakeholder appreciation of our work.

The first edition of the Health Bulletin was released in December 2023 with a plan to produce three editions annually; that is, every after four months – in April, August and December.

The first edition was widely distributed and warmly received by the partners and stakeholders in the HIV/ health implementation sector. These include the Minister of Health Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng who received a copy from the former Resident Representative Mr. Samuel Doe. The Health Bulletin has also been distributed at public ceremonies presided over by the Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol.

The UNDP Deputy Resident Representative – Operations Debab Asrat Ynessu (L) with the In-Charge of Kator Primary Health Care Center



VP Hussein Abdelbagi Rallies Nation to End HIV Stigma and Discrimination

Government and partners in the health services implementation in South Sudan have called for an end to stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV and tuberculosis so as to ensure good health and wellbeing for all. This was the highlight of the Zero Discrimination Day observed on 1 March 2024, to renew calls for every individual to live a life free from discrimination, with dignity and respect. In line with the day's theme, participants were reminded that by protecting everyone's rights, we can protect everyone's health.



The Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol

Speaking during the 2024 Zero Discrimination Day commemoration, the Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol called for equal treatment of all people. "Our government calls upon the entire nation to support and embrace HIV and AIDS patients as equal members of our society, deserving of respect, compassion and understanding. Together, we can make a difference and have a society that is inclusive and supportive of every individual," he said, adding, "As we observe zero discrimination, let's renew our commitment to end discrimination where all people are treated with dignity and respect regardless of their health status."

He called for intensified collaboration between government ministries and agencies to deliver quality health services, "On behalf of the President of the Republic of South Sudan H.E Salva Kiir Mayardit, I urge all stakeholders including the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Ministry of Finance and Planning, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development, and Ministry of General Education and Instruction to cooperate with the Ministry of Health to expedite the implementation of the HIV and AIDS framework."

The Vice President also underscored the need for uninterrupted access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) for people living with HIV to "ensure that they live healthy, long, productive and fulfilling lives."

On her part, Evelyn Letio Unzi Boki, Executive Director, National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU), called for justice for the victims of stigma and discrimination, and punitive action against perpetrators. "Now is the time for action. We need justice to be done. Stand up for equality to give everyone a future!"

Discrimination hinders the demand for and uptake of HIV prevention, testing, treatment and adherence services for fear of being labeled, ostracized, judged and for being rejected by family, friends and workplaces, which fuels further spread and the needless loss of lives.

UNDP Orients Partners on Implementation Arrangements for GC7 Grant

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has oriented partners on the implementation modalities of the Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) which runs across the period 2024 – 2026.



Partners in the implementation of the GC7 grant during the orientation workshop.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has oriented partners on the implementation modalities of the Grant Cycle 7 (GC7) which runs across the period 2024 – 2026.

During the orientation workshop held on 19 February 2024, the partners in the implementation of the grant were informed of the requirements of the grant as well as guidelines and policies of the Global Fund. They were also sensitized about the performance framework, targets and the finance and programmatic compliance management requirements or expectations for the smooth implementation of the grant. Participants were also sensitized about the roles and responsibilities which empowered them to deliver on their roles and mandate.

The workshop was attended by officials and participants from the Ministry of Health, the South Sudan HIV/AIDS Commission, Arkangelo Ali Association (AAA), Cordaid, AMREF, UNFPA, the South Sudan Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (SSNeP+) and the National Empowerment of Positive Women United (NEPWU).

Participants were also urged to sustain the gains made in the previous grant. These include continuing with successful programme delivery and effective utilization and absorption of resources, which could help the country to get additional resources under the portfolio optimization conditioned on exceptional programme delivery.

Besides having resources and its activities to implement, the Ministry of Health has a much more central role in the implementation of the grant, including a big stake in many of the activities being executed by other sub-recipients.



Speaking during the launch of the workshop, Dr. Kediende Chong, the Director General, Policy Planning, Budget Research and Monitoring and Evaluation at the MOH, said the GC7 "is another opportunity to make an impact on our health system."

On her part, Dr. Acol Ayom Korium, the Deputy Chairperson, SSAC, called for dedication and hard work from all the partners, "Let's all work hard; implement what you set out to do and deliver for the benefit of all South Sudanese."

Russell Armstrong, the UNDP–Global Fund Programme Project Coordination Advisor, reiterated UNDP's readiness to support all the sub-recipients and sub-sub-recipients in the effective implementation of the grant and called for continuous engagement from all the partners.

He urged all partners to adhere to the principles and procedures and play their rightful roles. "It only takes one implementer to fall, and it draws us all in. If we have financial integrity issues with one partner, it affects all of us," he said, calling for strict compliance with reporting and accountability requirements.

Partners Ponder on Ways to Strengthen South Sudan's Lab Network

A strong and effective lab system is key to having a robust health system. Laboratory stakeholders and practitioners from across the country held a national laboratory network workshop during which they reflected on successes, challenges and opportunities to strengthen the country's laboratory system for improved diagnosis, care and treatment outcomes. They also developed an operational plan based on the recommendations of the diagnostic network assessment conducted in 2023.

Automatic blood components extractors installed at the South Sudan Blood Transfusion Services

The three-day workshop took place on 11–13 March 2024, and was attended by officials from the Ministry of Health, State Director Generals, laboratory personnel and HIV/ TB coordinators. Other partners involved were WHO, USAID, CDC, PEPFAR partners, Cordaid, and AAA, among others.

In October 2023, the Ministry of Health, with the support from the Global Fund, conducted a diagnostic network optimisation assessment for South Sudan that revealed challenges hindering the delivery of quality laboratory services. These include inadequate policies, guidelines and SOPs, capacity gaps, limited understanding

of waste management, lack of an integrated laboratory management information system (LMIS) and fragmented sample referral and logistics systems. During the workshop, stakeholders discussed challenges identified through the assessment, and developed a work plan and strategies to address them and to ensure that the laboratory services and laboratory network are optimized throughout the country.

Key in the achievement is the strengthened capacity of the laboratory system which has reduced reliance on neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Kenya for most lab tests. "We are not sending any specimen outside the country. We are doing them here

and they are recognized," said Dr. Kediende Chong, the Director General for Policy Planning, Budget Research and Monitoring and Evaluation at the Ministry of Health.

He underscored the need for planning, saying, "We need to plan for ourselves and to plan for the laboratory services. Let's always be strategic in our engagement!"

Other speakers called for the integration of laboratory services in project designs and effective leadership at all levels. While strides have been made, it emerged during the workshop that there is still need to improve.



The happy hour sessions have been attended by the senior management team led by the Resident Representative and the two Deputy Resident Representatives

‘Happy Hours’ Deepen Awareness About HIV/AIDS and TB among UNDP Staff

Everyone has a role to play to combat HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis. Thus, creating awareness and empowering people to play their rightful roles is key to ending these diseases. In South Sudan, the UNDP–Global Fund Programme uses ‘happy hours’ to increase awareness about the two diseases. A ‘happy hour’ is dedicated space for fun, conversation, information sharing and discussion on key life issues in a relaxed setting over a soft drink, snack and music.

Two happy-hour sessions have so far been organized in partnership with the staff association as part of the World AIDS Day and World TB Day commemoration on 1 December 2023 and 24 March 2024 respectively.

The two previous happy hours have been well attended by staff members and senior management alike.

The 2023 World AIDS Day was held under the theme, “Let Communities Lead”, and the national celebration was held at Nyakuron Cultural Centre and was presided over by the Vice President and Chair of the Services Cluster H.E Hussein Abdelbagi Akol. The 2024 World TB Day was held under the theme, “Yes! We Can End TB!”, and the national commemoration was held at Upper Nile University.





The happy hour sessions have fostered discourse and increased awareness about HIV/AIDS and TB among staff.



However, not all staff members can attend the national celebrations. Thus, the happy hour sessions afford staff an opportunity to be part of the annual remembrances. During the happy hour, we share vital information about the disease burden, prevalence rates, risk factors and call to action. The theme of the commemoration is also explained, and key messages and a call to action made to staff. During World TB Day, three UN Clinic physicians made a presentation on TB; how it's transmitted, signs and symptoms and treatment options. They also responded to questions from staff members about the disease and treatment options.

"These sessions help staff members feel part of these international observances. They have also been very instrumental in sharing information and creating awareness about the UNDP-Global Fund Programme, which is doing a lot but was hardly visible or felt in the country office," a staff member said during the World TB Day happy hour.



Ministry of Health Undersecretary Urges Youths to Be TB Advocates

The Undersecretary Ministry of Health, Dr. Ader Macar Aciek, has urged the youth to become tuberculosis (TB) advocates in their communities and to support TB patients in the community with resources and advice.



Students were enthusiastic to learn about TB and its devastating impact.

Speaking to hundreds of students that attended the World Tuberculosis Day 2024 commemoration held at Upper Nile University, Dr. Aciek thanked the students for turning up in big numbers for the annual event, and for the enthusiasm to get knowledge about one of the world's deadliest infectious killers and its devastating impact.

"I urge you to listen very carefully, take each and every information and piece of advice that is given to you and be our ambassadors and share the information that you have acquired correctly with people in your communities," Dr. Aciek said whilst also thanking the university for hosting the event. Coincidentally, Dr. Aciek is an alumnus of the Upper Nile University having graduated from there in 2005.

He commended the national and state ministries of health, especially their TB and HIV programmes, as well as the organizing committee for a job well done, "Thank you so much for taking the decision to fight back on these diseases with support from our great partners. It is our ultimate goal to have zero discrimination and end TB."

He disclosed that the Ministry of Health is committed to observing all the health-related commemorations to raise awareness and renew action to end health threats and achieve good health and wellbeing for all. "Lets us come together, fight all the diseases that we are encountering in our country with concerted effort and one voice. So, let us all commit and say: 'Yes! We can end TB in South Sudan!'"



There were animated discussions about TB during the annual event



World TB Day commemoration at Upper Nile University

During the commemoration, key resource persons including TB physicians and lecturers made presentations about TB and had animated and engaging discussions with students about TB, its causes, signs and symptoms and treatment options. There was also infotainment and playing of advocacy songs on ending TB.

The commemoration was crowned with the signing of the Correx board by officials from the Ministry of Health, UNDP, WHO, AMREF and partners to signal their commitment to ending TB.

Dr. Apal Toby Maduot, the Director, National Tuberculosis, Leprosy and Buruli Ulcer Programme, said equipping youth and university students is key in nurturing a cadre of medical professionals and in integrating TB care and treatment services

“Lets us come together, fight all the diseases that we are encountering in our country with concerted effort and one voice. So, let us all commit and say: ‘Yes! We can end TB in South Sudan!’”

in the health services package in hospitals and other health facilities across the country. The youth are also key in giving information to their families.

The World TB Day is observed annually every 24 March, to raise awareness and recognize achievements in TB prevention and control, and to renew the commitment to ending this devastating, yet preventable disease. The 2024 World TB Day was held under the theme, “Yes! We can end TB!”



The Undersecretary for the Ministry of Health, Dr. Ader Macar Aciek

Global Fund Ranks UNDP Performance as “Excellent” in South Sudan

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has earned the coveted topmost ranking by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria over its management and implementation of the HIV and AIDS, TB and health systems strengthening activities in South Sudan. This is in respect of UNDP’s role as a principal recipient and partner of choice for the stewardship of the precious Global Fund investments in the country.

According to the 27 November 2023 performance letter for the progress update covering the period 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023, the Global Fund gave UNDP A - Excellent performance, which is the highest a principal recipient can get.

“The reporting period showed good results compared to the June–Dec 2022 period. There was general improvement in the coverage indicators during this reporting period compared to the last one. Notably, among PLWHIV who know their HIV status (63,705) the percent on ART increased from 77% to 98%. The current PLWHIV on ART (62,629) is 12% beyond the target of 56,046 and represents an increase of 11%

compared to end Dec 2022 results. Of note is that there were no reported commodity stockouts during the period,” reads the letter signed by Boniface Njenga, the Senior Fund Portfolio Manager at the Global Fund.

The report puts UNDP’s average score at 104.7% (equivalent of excellent A score) which is an improvement compared to the 96% –B rating – for the period January to December 2022.

“We take this opportunity to thank United Nations Development Programme and implementing partners in the country for the progress made during the past reporting period,” the report reads, adding, “We hope

that this trajectory of improvement will continue in future reporting periods.”

The Global Fund assesses grant performance based on Principal Recipient reporting in the Progress Update every six months, using indicator results to confirm the programmatic rating and budget utilization, and in-country absorption to confirm the financial rating. The programmatic and financial ratings are combined to establish the overall grant performance.



The Minister of Health Minister Hon. Yolanda Awel Deng

South Sudan Exceeds Delivery Targets as it Closes the GC6 Grant

Partners in the implementation of the HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and health systems strengthening in South Sudan funded by the Global Fund successfully closed the Grant Cycle 6 (GC6) on a top notch by exceeding almost all the delivery targets.

These results build on the impressive performance achieved during the Jan-Jun 2023 period. They include a 97% delivery and financial absorption rate at the end of the GC6 grant in December 2023 following the absorption of US\$71,373,979 or 97% of the US\$73,469,797 approved for HIV, TB and RSSH for the 2021-2023 period. This is a significant achievement given the complex country context for grant implementation. The remaining funds were carried over to the new implementation period that started in January 2024. Other achievements include

an increase in HIV and AIDS testing coverage from 300,000 in 2021 to about 600,000 in 2023 and an increase in the ART retention rate from 60% in 2021 to 67% in 2023.

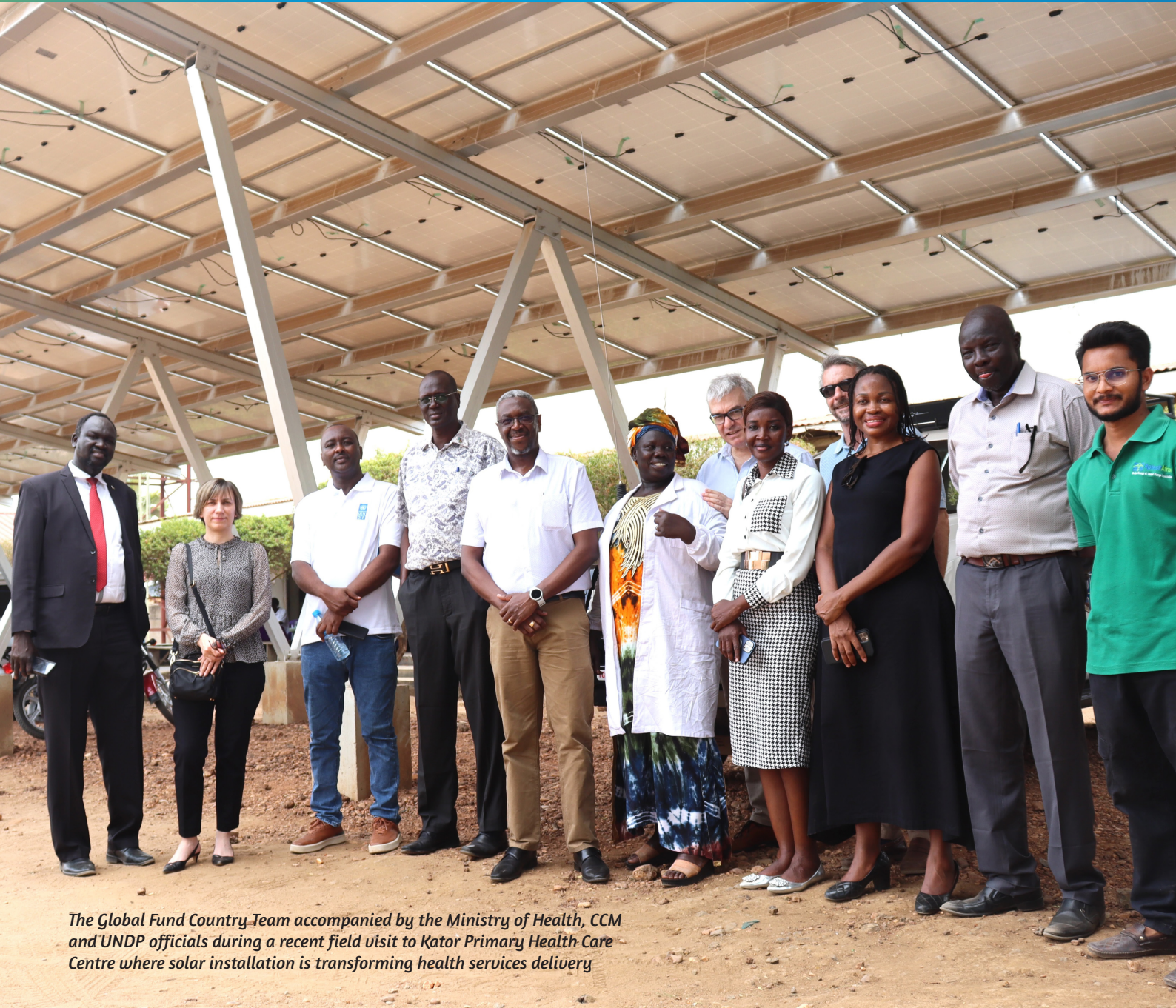
There was also improvement in the first 95 (people who are living with HIV knowing their HIV status) from 32% in 2021 to 40% in 2023 and an increase in the second 95 (people who know that they are living with HIV receiving ART) from 27% in 2021 to 47% in 2023. Others are improvement in the third 95 (people who are on treatment

being virally suppressed) from 86% in 2021 to 95% in 2023.

The TB notification also increased from 17,128 in 2021 to 23,877 in 2023 while the TB treatment success rate was maintained at 83% in 2021 and 82% in 2023, among other accomplishments that include the Resilient Systems for Sustainable Health (RSSH) investments including facility upgrades, laboratory expansions, installation of solar and oxygen plants in key hospitals and health facilities.

Summary of the GC6 overachieved targets by December 2023

S/N	Indicator	Score achieved
1	Percentage of sex workers reached with HIV prevention programmes	(158%)
2	Percentage of people on ART among all people living with HIV at the end of the reporting period	(158%)
3	Percentage of HIV-positive women who received ART during pregnancy and/or labour and delivery	(132%)
4	Percentage of sex workers that have received an HIV test during the reporting period and know their results	(133%)
5	Percentage of other vulnerable populations that have received an HIV test during the reporting period and know their results	(114%)
6	Percentage of HIV-positive new and relapse TB patients on ART during TB treatment	(109%)
7	Percentage of registered new and relapse TB patients with documented HIV status	(102%)
8	Treatment success rate of RR-TB and/or MDR-TB: Percentage of cases with RR-TB and/or MDR-TB successfully treated	(121%)
9	Number of TB cases with RR-TB and/or MDR-TB notified	(112%)
10	Number of cases with RR-TB and/or MDR-TB that began second-line treatment	(112%)
11	Number of notified cases of all forms of TB (i.e. bacteriologically confirmed + clinically diagnosed), new and relapse cases	(112%)
12	Completeness of facility reporting: Percentage of expected facility monthly reports (for the reporting period) that are actually received	(169%)
13	Of the US\$73,469,797 approved for HIV, TB and RSSH for the 2021-2023 period, UNDP and its partners absorbed US\$71,373,979 or 97%, a highly significant achievement given the complex country context for grant implementation. The remaining funds will be carried over to the new implementation period starting in 2024."	97%



The Global Fund Country Team accompanied by the Ministry of Health, CCM and UNDP officials during a recent field visit to Kator Primary Health Care Centre where solar installation is transforming health services delivery

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