

# Using Behavioral Change Communications Intervention to Create Demand and Enhance PrEP Uptake in South Sudan

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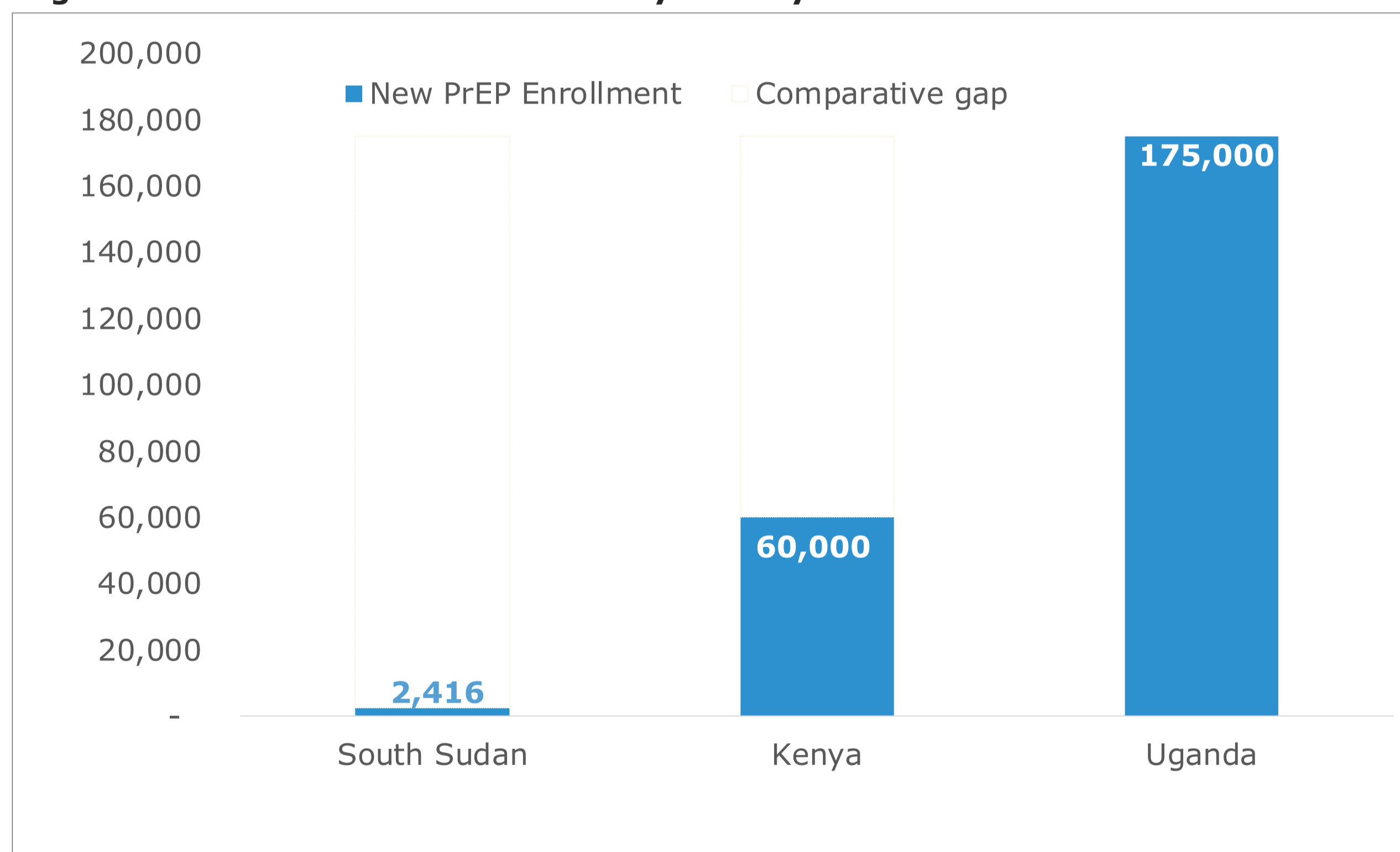


PrEP Officer, Wilson Mogga offering PrEP to a female sex worker during a community outreach activity in Gumbo Bridge hotspot in Juba, South Sudan. Photo by Gladys Achan for IntraHealth International, November 2022.

## Background

PrEP is the use of antiretroviral medications by people at HIV-risk to reduce infection possibilities. PrEP was first rolled out in South Sudan by the Ministry of Health, with PEPFAR support through USAID's Advancing HIV Epidemic Control Activity (AHEC), implemented by IntraHealth in partnership with local partners. South Sudan started PrEP implementation in September 2022, focusing primarily on key populations. However, South Sudan has so far, enrolled only 2,416 clients, (PEPFAR report, 2023), as compared to 60,000 and 175,000 in Kenya and Uganda respectively. This low uptake is attributed to the communities' lack of PrEP information, fear of medication burden, stigma and myths about PrEP being medication only for HIV-positive people.

Figure 1. Number of new PrEP users by country as of 2023



## Description

IntraHealth developed communication strategies focused on behavioral change and integrated the intervention within primary health care initiatives, and the communities. This included PrEP awareness using flyers, community sensitization, health education to improve clients' HIV knowledge, encouraging behavioral change using socially acceptable modalities. IntraHealth published PrEP vital stories, collaborated with Jhpiego's DREAMS program, and enrolled 268 eligible AGYW on PrEP by September 2023.

## Lessons Learned

Structured communication, delivered through multi-media like interpersonal or group-level, can facilitate development of PrEP awareness and demand creation for marginalized populations by influencing policy, community attitude changes and raising awareness on the impacts stigma, discrimination to break barriers to HIV service-access, increase service availability awareness, benefits, and relieves clients' fear and anxiety.



An ART clinician at Munuki Primary Health Care Center. Photo by Gladys Achan for IntraHealth International, 2023.

PrEP uptake in South Sudan has increased 3-folds in a year, from zero in December 2022, to 2416 in September 2023. Juba recorded the highest PrEP uptake, increasing from zero in December 2022, to 1450 in September 2023, comprising 60 percent of the national total. This behavioral change adoption resulted from the national commitment to scale-up HIV prevention interventions, and strategies designed for key populations.

## Conclusions/Next Steps

Structured communication helps increase awareness and demand for PrEP, influence eradication of security threats, stigma, and discrimination, increasing access to HIV services. IntraHealth will support the Ministry of Health to develop social behavioral change communication strategies to enhance clients' HIV knowledge, improve PrEP uptake, and reduce new HIV infections in South Sudan.

KEY WORDS: PrEP, Behavioral Change Communication, Awareness, Uptake.