

Uganda | U-report spearheads the mobilization of youth

U-Report is a free SMS-based system that allows young Ugandans to speak out on what's happening in communities across the country, and work together with other community leaders for positive change. Developed by UNICEF Uganda and launched in May 2011, U-report is revolutionizing social mobilization, monitoring and response efforts. The initiative equips mobile phone users with the tools to establish and enforce new standards of transparency and accountability in development programming and services.

By sending the text message, "join", to a toll-free number and submitting a few personal details, anyone with a mobile phone can become a volunteer 'U-reporter', sharing their observations and ideas on a wide range of development issues. In less than a year, the population of U-reporters had grown to over 89,000, with 400 to 500 joining the network daily. Early October 2013, the number of members reached 238,702.

Engaging and empowering youth

Collaborating on the effort, UNICEF's U-report team and a group of nine partner organizations meet regularly to determine which issues to discuss with Uganda's youth, who make up the majority of U-reporters. Topics have included female genital mutilation (FGM), outbreaks of disease, safe water, early marriage, education, health and inflation.

Once a topic is decided, UNICEF sends a question via SMS text to U-reporters, who can respond either with a simple menu-based reply or with personal messages. The UNICEF team analyses and interprets the responses, sharing the results and often following up with additional questions or suggestions.

U-report has gained popularity because it has given Ugandans the ability to inform other Ugandans and to take action. UNICEF can ask questions about issues throughout the country and get answers right away – by district, by gender, by age. This helps the organization to know where to concentrate its resources and how best to advise government and aid partners.

UNICEF Representative in Uganda, Sharad Sapra: "U-report enables us to harness community information so we can judge the effectiveness of our programmes in meeting identified needs. It also engages our aid beneficiaries in monitoring programme progress."

Achieving equity for the hardest-to-reach

U-report was instrumental in addressing the recent outbreak of a mysterious epilepsy-related illness known as 'nodding disease', which mainly affects children under age 15. Over 3,000 cases have been reported to date. UNICEF noted an increase in messages about the disease from U-reporters in northern districts, and the U-report team was able to inform affected communities about symptoms and available treatment.

The programme offers a promising way to monitor education and child protection efforts as well. And U-report may also be a catalyst for more responsible and responsive governance. The initiative is garnering interest from Uganda's government and media, resulting in increased engagement by members of Parliament.

UNICEF is now working to increase access to the technology by creating versions of the app in Luo, a language spoken in northern Uganda, and in Karimojong, which is spoken in the north-eastern region. The initiative is also working with telecommunication companies to equip telephone booths with U-report service for those without access to a mobile phone.



"U-report offers a cost-effective, easy-to-implement means of assuring accountability by tapping community knowledge to learn the local and personal impact of policy and development schemes, health interventions and outbreaks," Mr Sapra said. "It is a 'killer app' for communication toward achieving equitable outcomes for children and their families."

✳ **For more information:**
www.ureport.ug

U-report is made up of:

- Weekly SMS messages and polls to and from a growing community of U-reporters
- Regular radio programmes that will broadcast stories gathered by U-report
- Newspaper articles that will publish stories from the U-report community.

U-report's mission

- Inspire action within our communities to unite and share the responsibility of creating a better environment for everyone.
- Inspire action from our leaders: let them know what's going on and what action your community wants.
- Share info that U-report gathers through different media (radio, TV, community dialogue, website, and youth events).

U-report Burundi – Coming Soon!

During a test phase in July/August 2013, U-report Burundi registered more than 500 U-reporters, and recorded a 70% response rate to the first live poll. More than 300 volunteers from key partner organizations – including the Burundi Red Cross, Scouts and Guides – have been certified as U-report trainer-of-trainers and are expected to drive user mobilization and registration efforts throughout the country. Live registration is scheduled to resume in mid-October 2013 – via the short-code "156" – with a public launch planned for early 2014.