

OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS AT THE AFRICA REGIONAL SCOUTS & UNICEF U-REPORT WORKSHOP HELD VIA ZOOM ON 18TH FEBRUARY 2021

EXPERIENCES: What are you currently doing with U-Report?

In communities across Africa, many challenges and attendant uncertainties continue to impact on the education, safety and health of children, adolescents and other community members. Communication with the public, including children and their parents is crucial in such uncertain times. In many instances, there are no functional mechanism for meaningful participation and engagement of children and young people in these countries, nor their families, in shaping response to crises which affect them, most recently COVID-19.

U-Report offers a solution. Here is how UNICEF Country Offices have been working with SCOUTS and other organizations to establish and deploy U-Report platform as a tool for social communication and change.

- Setting up National U-Report Steering Committee/Taskforce comprised of different partners
- Setting up internal U-Report Taskforce to manage U-Report roll out and support with the development of the polls.
- Recruitment of U-Reporters form among existing youth networks
- Promotion and visibility of the U-Report brand name
- Local integration of the U-Report and U-Partners platforms
- Partnering with National Scout Organizations as the base of U-Reporters and using Scouts and Scout activities as a media to capture new u-reporters
- Organizing RapidPro Hackathon with University Students, giving them the opportunity to develop SMS applications based on challenges we've shared
- Creation and dissemination of weekly polls, bots and live chats
- Advocacy campaigns in communities to report all sort of abuses that occur specifically in rural areas.
- Developed an integrated Terms of Reference for establishment and running of U-Report
- Using U-Report data to improve programme interventions

OPPORTUNITIES: What else can you achieve with U-Report?

Despite all the activities that have been taking place in different countries, UNICEF Country Offices and SCOUTS see the following as possible new opportunities for scaling U-Report and innovating its use.

- Scouts could be invited to join the U-Report National Steering Committee independently if no formal partnership between UNICEF and the NSO exists in the country. This will help bring different perspectives from different partners and youth organisations at the Steering Committee. UNICEF can play the role of catalyser.
- U-Report may open doors to for Big Data analytics which can be used to transform a vast quantity of digital trails into information and knowledge about the underlying communities generating those trails
- Develop online U-Report computer apps accessible from anywhere (e.g., internet cafe).
- Youth are really eager to participate in ways that go beyond providing just opinions. They wish to use this energy in having mobilized groups for change. Scouts can be one of this groups of mobilisers while learning new skills
- Partnering with Scouts to reach more adolescents and young people to grow the platform's reach.
- Sensitization on adapting to the new normal as the communities are reluctant to engage on the new COVID normal
- Connecting "offline" the youth organizations to discuss poll outcomes with the aim of using the findings to influence the youth public policy agenda. This can be through Focus Group Discussions, Radio and Television programmes, Virtual events etc.
- U-Report could support young people access digital learning platforms and help them continue learning during these difficult times through the new "Reimagine Education" initiative in UNICEF. Organizations like Scouts could be super useful in raising awareness on such learning opportunities within their large networks.

LIMITATIONS: What do you see as possible hindrances?

The following are seen as some of the limitations that affect ongoing activities and could hinder maximization of new opportunities:

- Increase the knowledge on the platform for trainers.
- Maximizing the use of Whatsapp considering its popularity in Africa.
- There are limitations on what can be sent via U-Report. It would be great if more dynamic content could be sent.
- Expand on the channels to have a web-based online login.
- It is necessary to keep the visibility of the project right in order to support mobilization. Momentum was higher during the launching period than it is today.
- The gender gap is growing and its difficult to enroll more girls and women onto the platform
- With COVID-19 and lockdowns, it is difficult to meet and operate through the U-Partner platform
- Lack of access to mobile phones and to mobile data is a challenge to many adolescents and young people. This makes it hard to join hence makes our community a little older.

SUPPORT: What needs do you have that require support?

UNICEF Country Offices and SCOUTS may require support in the following areas:

- Increase awareness through more advertisement of U-Report on online and offline media.
- Support from Regional Offices to document joint efforts and results.
- Recruitment of U-Report Advocates from people with strong visibility at global and regional level to help with patronage and promotion.
- Ideas on how to enrol U-Reporters without a lot of community engagement as a result of the pandemic.