



Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) Digital Engagement Approaches to Empower Adolescents and Young People and Bridge the Digital Divide in Eastern and Southern Africa

UNICEF U-Report and Internet of Good Things (IoGT) Case Study

Background

Adolescents and young people in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) experience many challenges and deprivations in terms of fulfilling their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including vulnerability to HIV, sexually transmitted infections, unintended and unsafe pregnancy, violence and/or harmful practices such as child marriage of female genital mutilation. Young people are also struggling to achieve minimum learning outcomes and acquiring the necessary 21st century skills to earn an income.

On the positive side, mobile penetration in developing markets has been rapidly expanding since the mid-1990's. Today, there is the largest generation of youth in history, with over 90% of the 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24 living in developing countries⁷. These numbers are expected to grow in the coming decades. Adolescents and young people, caregivers and community members in ESAR are increasingly using digital platforms to stay informed, get their opinion heard and shape a safer, participatory, and empowering future for themselves and their peers.

Innovative platforms and tools are needed to help programmers to customize and target their approaches, be responsive to the different youth groups, and address the factors that make them vulnerable and exacerbate their risks. In recent years, the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) team has promoted two main platforms in the region, U-Report and Internet of Good Things (IoGT).

This case study aims to showcase the growth journey of U-Report and IoGT, bring out key insights for the outcomes so far, and provide learnings and recommendations that need to be considered for further improvement in and beyond ESAR.

Introduction of U-Report and Internet of Good Things (IoGT)

U-Report

[U-Report](#) is a messaging and engagement platform for adolescent, youth and community participation, designed to address any issue that affects children and young people – by collecting information from them to improve policy and programmes, and by directly providing life-saving information to the most vulnerable in a timely way. U-Report is run in collaboration with government partners, UNICEF programmes, and local NGOs or CSOs. UNICEF country offices and partners use it to share information, raise awareness, and collect quantifiable data on specific areas that impact the most vulnerable - including child protection, health, education and emergency response. Responses received are analysed in real-time, mapped and displayed on a public dashboard. It aims to engage adolescents/youth and provide a safe space for them to raise their voices and concerns.

To date, the U-Report platform has engaged over 29 million U-Reporters worldwide with over 3.7 million in 15 countries in ESAR- Angola, Botswana, Burundi, eSwatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Somalia



South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe- with an increase of more than 700,000 users in the last 12 months.

Internet of Good Things (IoGT)



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[Internet of Good Things \(IoGT\)](#) specifically targets users with lower literacy levels and limited experience with technology – particularly first-time Internet users. It can deliver content to adolescents and young people, parents and caregivers, frontline workers and service providers. The platform serves as a repository of guidance on topics such as parenting, education and healthy practices. Users can also be referred to access essential services when needed. IoGT is also a tool for two-way communication and engagement, offering a platform to build and maintain a dialogue with key populations and capture behavioural insights. IoGT aims to bridge the digital divide by providing localized and relevant content through a mobile-ready website designed to work seamlessly both on feature phones and smartphones and accessible for free in 65 countries thanks to Mobile Network Operator and Free Basics partnerships. By early 2023, IoGT has reached over 6 million users in ESAR,

with a tremendous increase registered from 2021, when we had 2.9 million users. In the ESA region, IoGT is active in 13 countries – Angola, Burundi, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Use of IoGT and U-Report among Adolescents and Young People in Eastern and Southern Africa

In 2022, UNICEF ESARO commissioned a participatory research to engage programme managers and users of both IoGT and U-Report platforms to better understand how these have been used to date, and identify challenges and lessons from successful use cases. The research was implemented between June and September 2022, with primary data collection with adolescents and young people in South Africa and Tanzania. As per the report, the following key findings emerged:

Attitudes and Behaviours Related to Technology

1. Adolescents tend to approach new digital platforms with curiosity and openness, whilst older young people approach them with more scepticism and hesitation.
2. Internet-enabled feature phones are more often used to access applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook) rather than for general browsing purposes.
3. Young people understand the value of having access to unlimited information via the internet while acknowledging that it has certain drawbacks to finding relevant and digestible information.



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[To read the full report, please click here.](#)

Content Design & Delivery

1. Adolescents and young people want to feel validated, reassured, respected, and affirmed as they develop their identities.
2. Adolescents and young people want content that is relevant, simple, punchy, entertaining, and discrete.
3. The different mental models that adolescents and young people of different ages, genders and cultural backgrounds use to understand thematic content result in varying degrees of perceived relevance and importance.
4. The urgency with which information is sought out determines the effectiveness and appeal of the content format used for young people.

Attitudes to Thematic Areas

1. Adolescents and young people are somewhat exposed to information on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) through various channels; however, new gaps arise in their understanding of more nuanced themes within these topics.
2. Perceptions of mental health range on a spectrum from being viewed as a culturally irrelevant topic to an important societal challenge.
3. Learning to earning topics are considered a top priority across all demographics of young people that are out of school or engaged in higher education/learning.
4. Climate change is generally acknowledged as an important topic yet de-prioritised by young people due to other more compelling needs that are perceived as more immediate.
5. Caregivers would like to see content for adolescents and young people centred around safety and protection from exposure to risky and harmful behaviours.
6. There is some mismatch between what UNICEF COs have prioritized for adolescents and young people and what adolescents and young people are interested in.

Reach, Scale and Engagement

U-Report

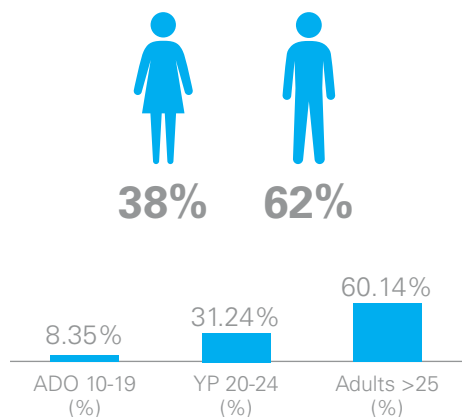
Adolescents and young people in ESA are increasingly using this platform to get their opinion heard, stay informed and shape a more safe, participatory, and empowering future for themselves and their peers. U-Report plays an important role in promoting two-way communication and engagement with adolescents and young people. Personalization, such as responses to individual questions, is a strong motivator for continued engagement. UNICEF identifies issues that affect adolescents and young people by collecting their insights to improve policy and programmes, and by directly providing life-saving information to the most vulnerable in a timely way.

UNICEF ESAR has 15 countries using the platform and has registered 3.7 million U-Reporters by May 2023. When a trend analysis was conducted in February 2023, the platform registered a tremendous annual growth of 31.66 %.

U-Report Ambassadors are young people who provide feedback to the local U-Report focal points and share ideas on how to improve the platform while maintaining a youth-centred approach. Evidence from ESAR human interest story confirms that impact has been felt by the young people. Mabel, 27, a facilitator at the Love Life Youth Center (Non-profit youth organization providing educational, recreational and sexual health services in resource-poor communities in South Africa) and a long-time resident of Orange Farm (Township of Johannesburg municipality) believes that U-Report and IoGT platforms can provide a safe space for girls to take care of their changing bodies. Emmanuel, 20yrs from Tanzania, first heard about U-Report on radio Kati FM, he has been on U-Report for one and a half years and has been diligently responding to polls whenever he can. Emmanuel finds value in responding to the bi-monthly polls, and in the general concept of U-Report. "I have like four U-Report t-shirts," Emmanuel says with a smile.

32% ▲ U-Reporters

In February 2023 there were slightly more than **3 million** U-Reporters in the region, compared to 2.3 million in the same month of 2022



The president of the children's parliament of Cabo Delgado province Marcelo, presenting the results of the U-Report survey, at the Red Hand event.

Mozambique is one of the countries in ESAR with top users currently at [796,042 U-reporters](#) as of April 2023. The SMS BIZ/U-Report team recently launched an invitation system to promote free and personalized counselling services on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention for adolescents and young people. Through this youth-centred competition, an already registered U-reporter had the possibility to further invite a friend or family member to complete the registration on the platform. The campaign was truly successful and has led to a faster scale of usability and reliability of the platform. This has also seen a reduction in market costs, helps to build, and strengthen existing youth networks and allows opportunities to leverage existing messaging channels in a strategic and innovative manner.

Using the reward system Mozambique has demonstrated the different levels at which change happens aligning with the social ecological model where at each level attitudes beliefs groups, systems and institutions mechanisms and policies influence change both positively and negatively in this case a positive change.

Internet of Good Things (IoGT)

“It is a great website. My favourite part is [that] it has information for adolescents and young people, for caregivers. I think it’s really good and I’ll be using it.” These are the words of the young Wilson from Zambia when he discovers the new Internet of Good Things (IoGT) site. By connecting to one of the 13 IoGT sites in the region, adolescents and young people like Wilson, their parents or caregivers, as well as key frontline workers, gain access to localized, up-to-date, quality content directly on their mobile phones at any time for free.

In 2022, with support from the Office of Innovation, UNICEF ESARO and HQ SBC teams enabled country offices to make an even stronger use of IoGT, by releasing and

promoting the IoGT v2.0. Alongside a fully renovated design, new v2.0 features were built to support a diverse set of programme needs including a powerful set of customization tools to match the platform to individual programmes, new monitoring and evaluation features, and the ability to download IoGT content for offline browsing.

The results followed soon after the launch of the updated platforms – there is an increasing trend in the number of users that turn to IoGT for information and guidance. Some country offices have also decided to focus their sites more closely around the needs and interests of adolescents and young people, which are now estimated to be 59% of all site visitors.

In the meantime, the different IoGT teams have started receiving testimonials and feedback about the information they access on the sites. User experience surveys from Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia show that most users (61%) strongly agree that they enjoy using the site, with about half of the visitors indicating that that the information is easy to find and useful.

Young people in particular point out entrepreneurship and skills-building as a top priority and look at IoGT as one credible source of information and guidance. Mental health appears to be no different – although there are plentiful mental health resources available on the internet, young people would like to know how they can access local mental health and counselling services in their town and believe that IoGT could be a great platform for that. The caregivers and professionals are also growing supporters of IoGT as a tool they can use in their work, engaging adolescents and young people with relevant and interactive content on sensitive topics such as sexual and reproductive health. (More insights can be found in the human-interest stories, part of the human-centred design research conducted in 2022).

32% ▲ Pageviews

When the Set aside project started in 2021, IoGT had **7.1 million** hits. After the launch of v2.0 this number has reached to **9.4 million**.

166% ▲ Users

The numbers of unique users grew from **2.2 million** in 2021 to the current **6.1 million**. 59% of our users are estimated to be adolescents and young people. The female users grew from 30% in 2021 to the current 36%.



Eastern and Southern Africa

Angola, Burundi, eSwatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Asia

Pakistan, South Asia regional site

Lessons learned

- Young people are motivated to speak up, and there is a need to empower young people to share opinions on issues that matter to them.
- Ensure U-Reporters get value from their participation.
- Provide valuable information to community members and the government.
- Amplify voices for advocacy at local, national, and global levels.
- Reduce the distance between government and constituents.
- Use citizen data to improve accountability and strengthen programs.
- Influence positive social and behaviour change.
- Ensure U-Reporters are given feedback on how data is used.
- Use the tools available to provide virtual health, education and protection services.
- Some youth lack interest in topics that they don't deem interesting leading to low responses to polls.
- The majority of adolescents and young people do not have phones and depend on caregivers to respond to the polls.
- Electricity is a challenge in remote areas hence this does not allow full engagement.
- Poor mobile networks and low literacy levels make it difficult to reach people living in remote areas.
- Knowledge and lessons learned sharing within the region are still low.
- Young people value having their own digital space to learn about sensitive topics – like SRHR – away from their parents.
- Adolescents browse thematic content, but also are sometimes seeking specific information.

Recommendations and Way Forward:

- Periodically reviewing, sorting and updating the U-Report database to gather accurate insights based on active U-reporters which will help inform cost optimization measures e.g. Uganda/Mozambique.
- Separate Dormant Users and employ different strategies to stimulate their engagement in response to their unique needs.
- Facilitate feedback sessions with U-Report teams at COs to identify opportunities to adapt to the existing knowledge-sharing sessions.
- Periodically develop human interest stories of successful use cases of U-Report and use them for marketing to wider audiences at both user and partner levels.
- Prioritize structured periodic (annual or semi-annual) in-person engagements with young people for IoGT and U-Report focal points to gather feedback on both user and content experience.
- In more digitally mature contexts, consider designing IoGT platforms that are specifically for young people and aren't shared with other audiences.
- Make it easier to find answers to popular/specific questions alongside broader thematic content.