

U-Report for Risk Communication and Community Engagement – COVID-19 Vaccine chat bots, polls and awareness campaigns in Uganda

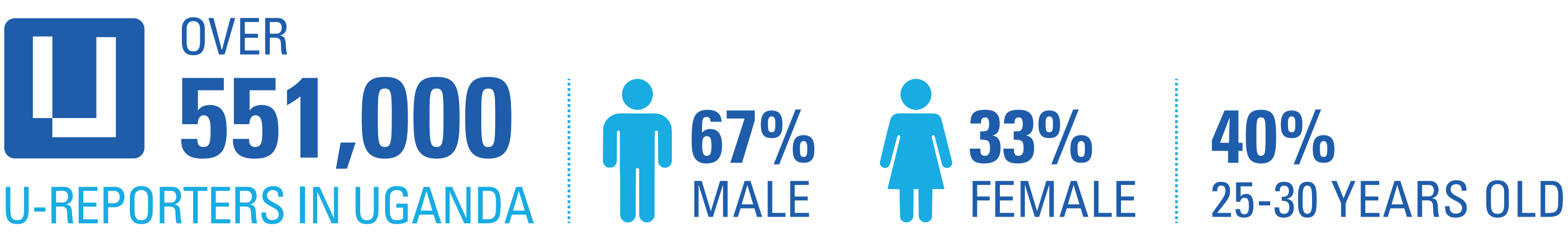
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Summary

UNICEF together with the Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH) and other partners adopted U-Report as a risk communication tool to help combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. U-Report, through polls, alerts, and the COVID-19 vaccine chatbot was used to reinforce key messages on COVID-19 preventive measures, vaccine awareness campaigns, and assessments on vaccine compliance and acceptance.

Background/Objectives

U-Report is a messaging tool that can drive social accountability through community participation. **Polls and alerts are sent out to U-Reporters, real-time response information is collected, and results are shared.**



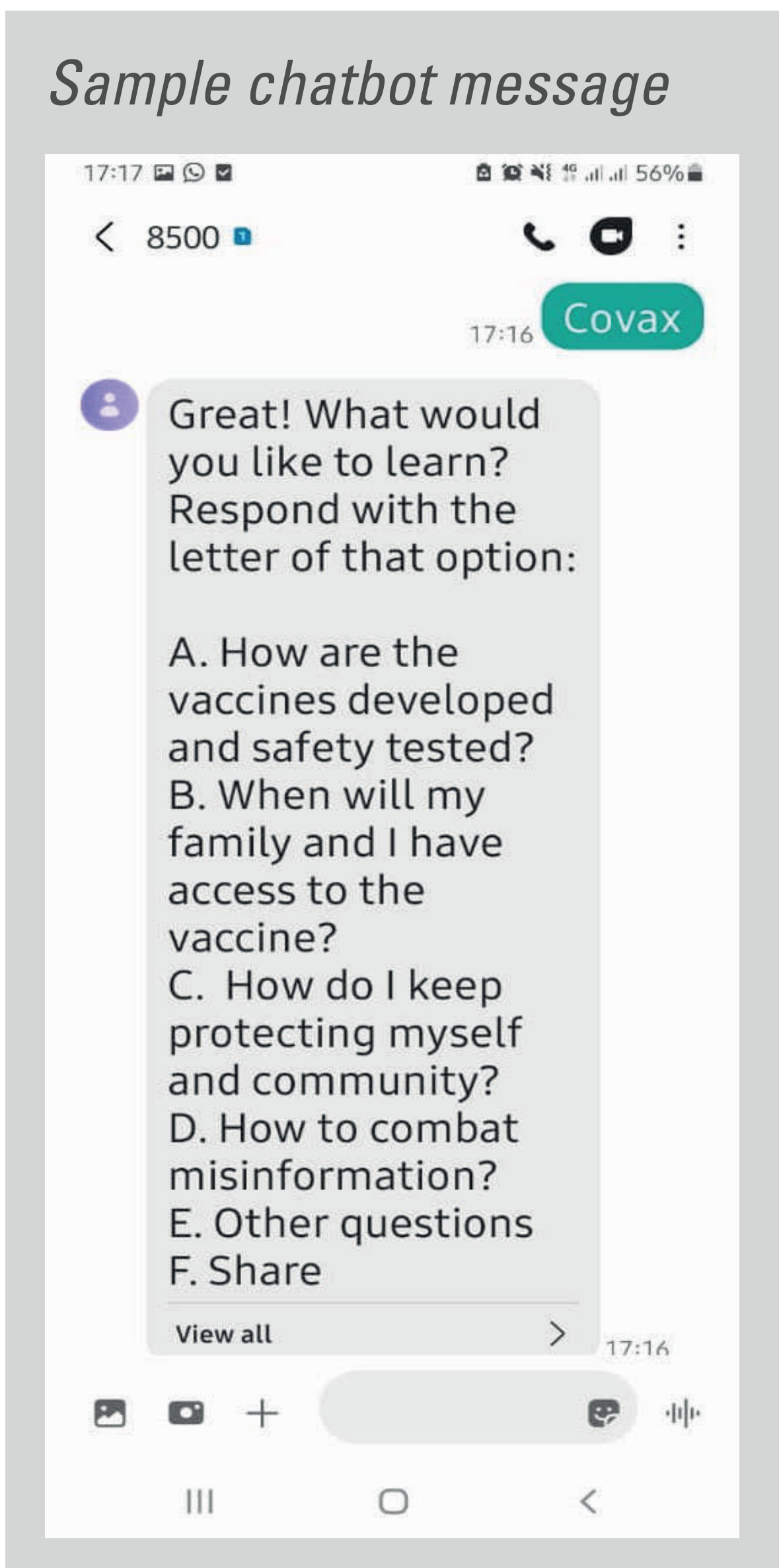
- Following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda, UNICEF together with the Ministry of health and other partners, undertook several interventions while using U-Report as a risk communication tool to help combat the spread of the disease. This was done through polls, alerts/informational messages and the vaccine chatbot messages accessed by the general population.
- These initiatives were undertaken with the key objectives of strengthening the government’s ability to reach young people and communities with information about the vaccine, boosting confidence and reducing vaccine hesitancy, and identifying rumours and misinformation in order to help young people.

Description of Intervention

- A set of monthly **polls and awareness messages** were developed and sent out to U-Reporters nationally to understand the community’s perceptions and views about the new COVID-19 vaccine,



- Through the **COVID-19 vaccine chatbot** – An automated response platform enabled U-Reporters to interact and access key lifesaving information about the COVID-19 vaccine at any time they wish by simply texting the word “COVAX” to U-Report.



- Through a rapid assessment on vaccine compliance and acceptance conducted amongst U-Reporters of 18 years and above,

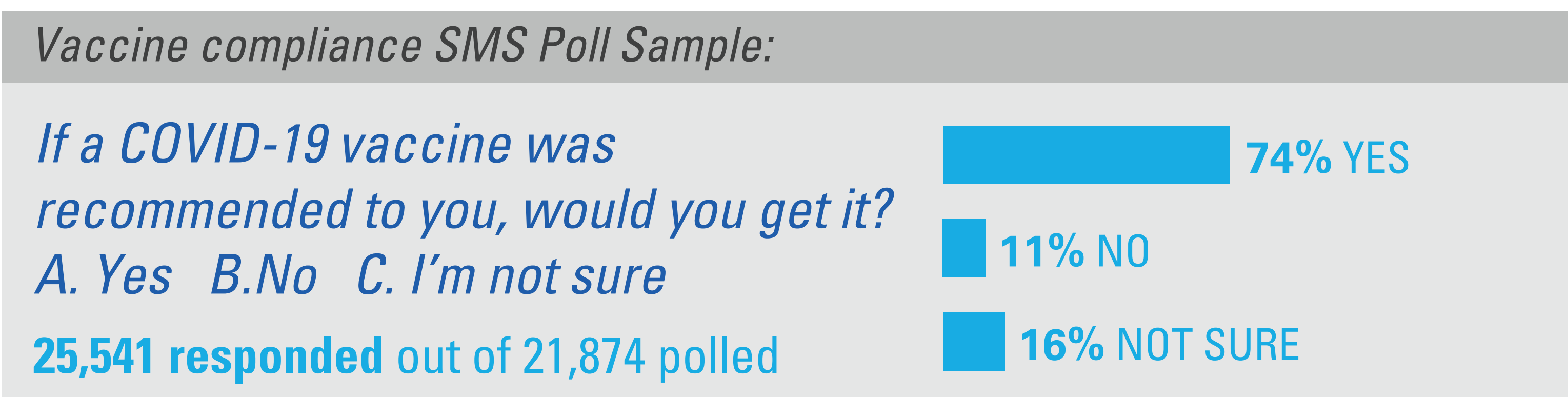


- The feedback received from this assessment played a key role in enabling the UNICEF Uganda and MOH communication teams to address concerns and safeguard against anti-vaccination rumors and misinformation which could have had a considerable impact on the acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine.
- The data was further utilized to identify districts with higher levels of hesitancy and the Ministry of Health (MOH) adopted a regional approach, starting with the most hesitant and worst-performing districts in vaccine uptake.

Results/Lessons Learned

A one-on-one anonymous conversation with U-Reporters adds more value to their participation. The MoH call center is now equipped with a team of trained counselors dedicated to responding to not only COVID-19 related concerns but also other general health-related issues arising from U-Report. Vaccine compliance and acceptance has greatly improved.

For more information, call the Ministry of Health toll free line on: **0800 100066, 0800 203033** or send a **free SMS** to U-Report on **8500**



OVER 135,885 U-Reporters benefited from the RCCE initiatives including the COVID-19 vaccine chatbot information, polls, alerts and awareness messages sent out in response to the COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.

Discussions, Implications and Conclusion

With over half a million U-Reporters nationwide, the U-Report platform is best positioned to flag out serious and emerging issues within the communities across the country. The platform is fast, cost-effective, reaches many people at once, and provides opportunities for direct communication with affected people. Moving forward, UNICEF and partners have an opportunity to strengthen this tool for inclusiveness and a fair representation of the young people at different levels.

