



## U-Reporters in Situation and Programmatic Monitoring: Cote d'Ivoire's experience in COVID-19

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U-Reporters raised awareness about COVID-19, in the community of Cocody, a suburb of Abidjan, in the South of Côte d'Ivoire. U-Reporters distributed masks and made people aware people about the importance of hand washing and social distancing.  
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### Abstract

RapidPro software, U-Report applications and youth engagement enabled UNICEF and the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to monitor and adapt programming in the context of COVID-19. U-Reporters and young bloggers were proactively engaged to identify and address false information around COVID-19 using the U-Report platform. Polls collected critical information while face-to-face data collection such as surveys and facility assessments were not possible due to movement restrictions. U-Reporters, already skilled in digital platforms, were engaged in an innovative pilot as third-party monitors (TPM) during Child Health Day campaigns. U-Reporters were based in their communities, equipped with knowledge of their communities and did not need to travel in contrast to traditional TPM. U-Reporters as a TPM modality were found to be a cost-efficient option to explore further. The flexibility of RapidPro software, ability to adapt U-Report information sharing and data collection, and engagement of U-Reporters contributed to an adaptive response over time.



### Lessons learned for consideration

**Build from what you have with initiative and imagination.** UNICEF identified the importance of addressing misinformation with trusted sources. Youth were already active in contributing to their community through the U-Report platform. UNICEF built from that platform by engaging young bloggers to strengthen awareness raising, and created opportunities for U-Reporters to act as locally-based third party monitors of national Child Health Days.

**Learn by doing.** Polls were an important means of generating data when face-to-face data collection was not possible. It was important to understand limitations of the data- such as gender breakdown or low response rate- to address the limitations in the next poll and in order to interpret the data correctly. In some cases, contact information was a limitation and other means, such as going

through field staff and local health staff by phone, was a viable alternative.

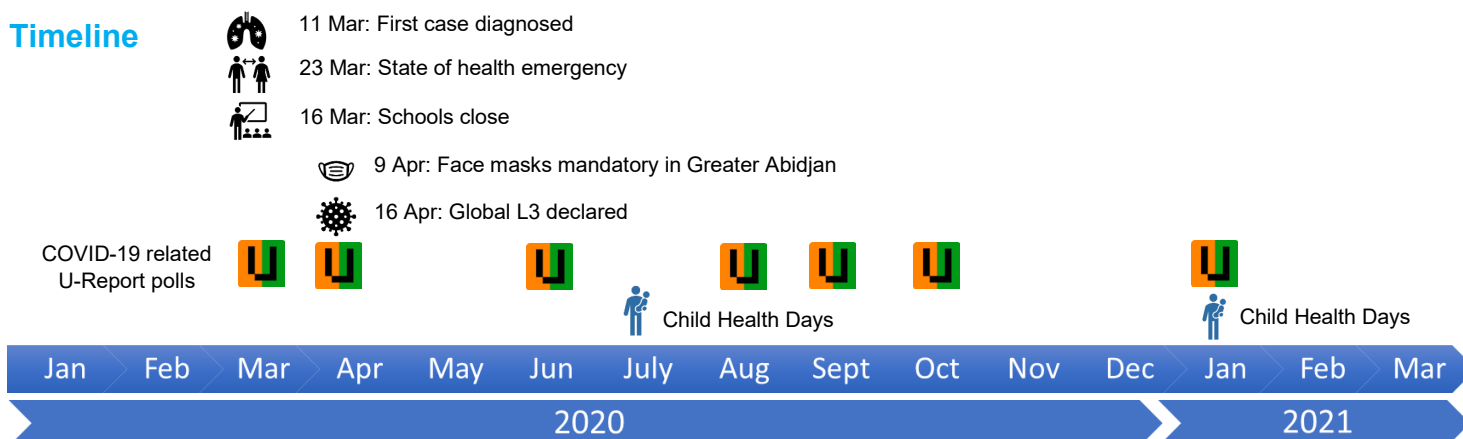
It is possible to create a **sustainable and adaptable system for information sharing, accountability to affected populations, and civic engagement through the U-Report platform**. Significant results were achieved as a result of youth engagement and flexible use of RapidPro and the U-Report platform.

*"COVID-19 was the opportunity to expand the potential of the U-Report platform. By diversifying the content and using it as a proactive way of raising awareness on COVID-19, combatting fake news and undertaking polls to generate information for needs assessment purposes."*

Soukeynatou Fall

Chief of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, Cote d'Ivoire

## Timeline



## Context

UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire introduced the RapidPro open-source software in January 2017 to support U-Report and other programme applications like real-time monitoring and end-user monitoring (Box 1). UNICEF's work with U-Report communities of youth ("U-Reporters") empowered them to undertake action for the community ("U-Actions") and self-report these actions in RapidPro. Actions ranged from cleaning, donations, social and cultural activities, to emergency interventions and awareness raising. The 1,000,000 U-Reporters in Côte d'Ivoire at the beginning of 2020 made it the largest U-Report market after Nigeria.

U-Report provided four different operation modalities:

- **Feedback** through [polls](#) which collected information directly from U-Reporters.
- **Live Chats** to provide one-on-one advice and communication.
- **Self-skilling through "bots"** that allow individuals to learn more about a specific subject.
- Community action through **U-Actions**.

### For more information on U-Report in action:

Video: [U-Report in Côte d'Ivoire](#)

Video: [Profile of a U-Reporter](#)

Video: [U-Reporters and emergencies](#)

Video: [U-Report action in the news](#)

Newsletter: [U-Report in Côte d'Ivoire](#)

### Box 1: U-Report in Côte d'Ivoire

*"U-Report is a free and anonymous social platform, which aims to strengthen the participation of young people in public debate to find solutions to the problems they face and enable them to influence decision-making powers, for positive change. It is available by SMS and young people express themselves on issues that are important to them through short surveys. They can also get information and ask questions. But U-Report in Côte d'Ivoire is much more than that. It is a movement of young people who come together, launch initiatives and take action (U-Actions) for positive change in their community."*

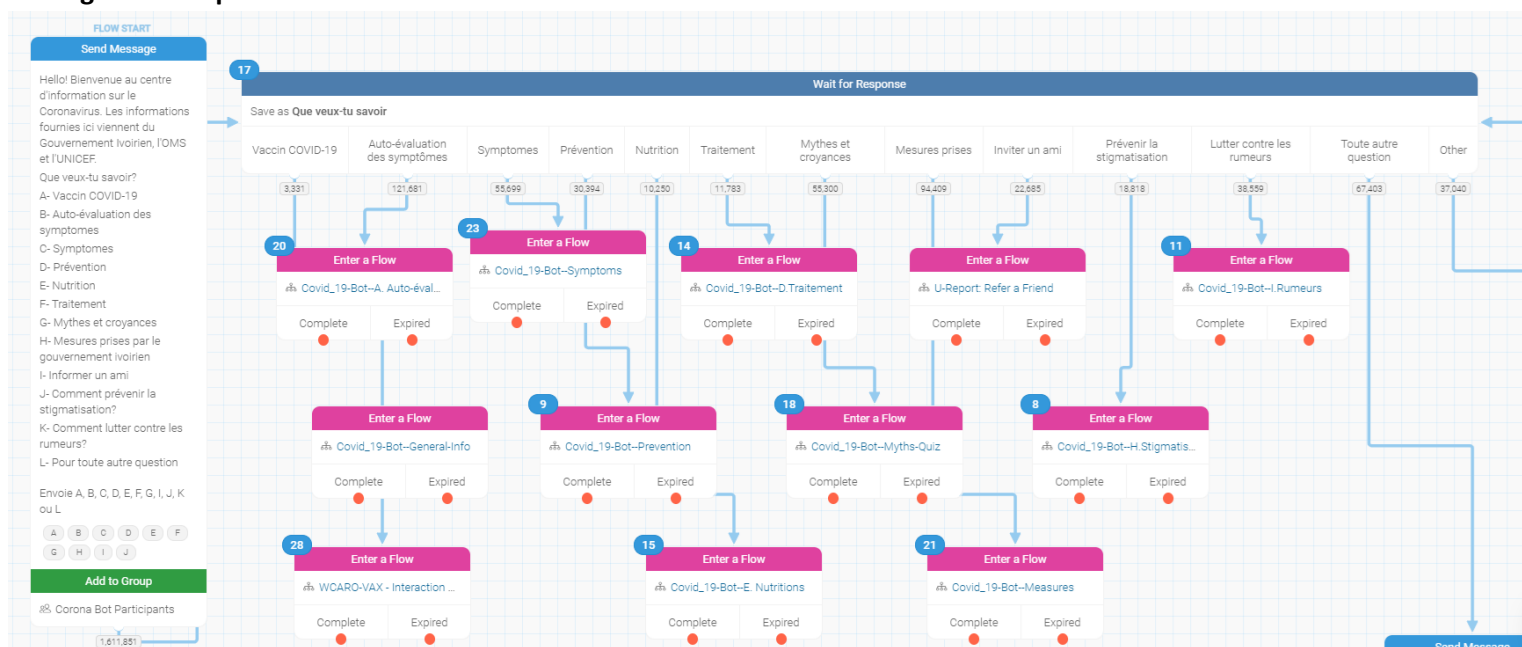
Source: UNICEF Youth Engagement Case Study Côte d'Ivoire

## Pivoting U-Report for COVID-19

In January 2020, UNICEF developed a bot ("Information Center") in U-Report to raise awareness on COVID-19 risks and prevention with those already connected with U-Report. The Information Center bot automatically provided verified information to users based on a pre-programmed set of information flows (Figure 1). The bot shared information based on the respondent's selected options.

The first case of COVID-19 in the Côte d'Ivoire was reported on 11 March 2020. Strict containment measures, such as curfew, school closures, and travel restrictions, were put in place within weeks. Almost

Figure 1: Snapshot of COVID-19 Information Center Coronavirus bot



seven million school children were impacted. Routine vaccination rates began to fall. Abidjan was the national epicenter of the pandemic, reporting more than 95% of COVID-19 cases.

As the COVID-19 continued to spread, it was clear that mass communication through television, radio, and newspapers was insufficient. Critical basic services that were available were not being used. UNICEF explored how the foundation of U-Reporters and the Information Center bot could be boosted as part of Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) efforts under the leadership of the Chief of Communication. Actions included:

- **Engagement of young bloggers to combat fake news related to COVID-19.** The Communication Section identified a network of 150 young bloggers to provide information on COVID-19 to the community through the “1366 information line” and live chats.
- **Positioning the U-Report platform for credible information.** The Government made the Information Center bot the official government communication tool. The Information Center bot was continuously available and updated daily through close feedback loops on population information needs and feedback.
- **Engagement of the private sector.** In-kind donation of services from Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) serving Cote d’Ivoire also enabled the CO to send bulk SMS

to subscribers with information on COVID-19 and internet bandwidth to young bloggers free of charge.

### Situation and programmatic monitoring via U-Report polls

Traditional face-to-face data collection such as surveys and facility assessments were not possible due to movement restrictions. The RapidPro platform was leveraged to collect data to guide programmatic actions. RapidPro polls were not meant to be statistically representative of the population but could generate indicative information that could be triangulated with other information for action. UNICEF conducted 18 national polls and five targeted polls. Polls were developed with technical staff and the Innovation Specialist who administered the RapidPro platform.

- **National polls with U-Report** generated information from the community on several topics, including readiness for vaccination, interests in distance learning (“Mon école a la maison”), and violence at home. Poll results were used to adjust programming and were shared widely across radio, print, the web (Abidjan.net), and television.
- **Targeted polls** generated information on several topics including which health centers did not have

handwashing stations and required equipment procurement. The use of targeted polls created an opportunity for learning and constant improvement of the system. (Box 2).

#### **Box 2: Low response rates and multiple SIM cards**

The CO identified that the low response rate for the targeted poll on handwashing stations in health centers was because many respondents had multiple SIM cards. The CO had contact information for health workers and community health workers who received “top up” incentives through mobile payments on the MTN network. The poll had been sent to those contact numbers. Some health workers and community health workers had dedicated SIM cards for receiving mobile payments and had different SIM cards for daily use. The CO took a different approach to address the low response rate. The zonal offices started sending the polls to the chief of the health districts (“Chef de région médicale”) and the response rate improved.

### **Innovative programmatic monitoring: U-Reporters as third-party monitors**

Child Health Days (CHDs) provide critical preventive health measures to the community through campaigns undertaken twice per year. If undertaken without appropriate measures, these campaigns could have contributed to the greater spread of COVID-19 across the country.

UNICEF’s Nutrition team explored the possibility of U-Reporters acting as third-party monitors. U-Reporters were based in their communities, equipped with knowledge of their communities and would not need to travel. U-Reporters were also already skilled in digital platforms. UNICEF consulted U-Report community leaders on their perspectives on the participation of youth in real-time monitoring and feedback was positive.

More than 250 U-Reporters were trained remotely on how to monitor the quality of the campaigns, including the level of compliance of health agents to COVID-19 protocols. Data was collected via RapidPro. Teams of 5-10 U-Reporters were constituted, with one person acting as a supervisor.

The supervisor would participate in local health district meetings. A Google form was developed to collect monitoring data and to monitor performance of U-Reporters.

In July, CHDs included vitamin A supplementation and deworming in 72 districts and screening for acute malnutrition in 24 districts. More than 7,700 households and 13,500 children were surveyed in the July campaign, and more than 8,600 households were monitored in the second campaign implemented in January 2021.

U-Reporters were found to be very committed and active. Their work contributed to a low level of refusals and assurance of COVID-19 prevention measure compliance.

### **Results**

Essential service delivery adapted as the pandemic progressed based on situation and programmatic monitoring data collected. Over 1.2 million people responded to U-Report polls, providing critical information to guide the response as the pandemic evolved. For example, a U-Report [poll](#) was shared after the remote learning “Mon école à la maison” programme was launched by the Government. The responses enabled UNICEF to advocate for longer broadcast time from 15min to 30min and to develop online learning materials for students and parents to assist their children at home.

U-Reporters as TPM was found to be a cost-efficient option to explore further. Monitoring data from the campaigns reported high safety compliance including appropriate use of face masks (95%), and other factors (hand sanitizing and social distancing) around 85%. In addition, coverage of vitamin A supplementation (86.0%), deworming (84.0%), and screening for acute malnutrition (86.7%) were similar between both rounds.

### **What it took to deliver**

#### **UNICEF Cote d’Ivoire staff**

- RapidPro expertise (Innovation Specialist Administrator)
- Communication and programme staff time



- Two Community and Youth Engagement Officers to coordinate U-Report and young bloggers

#### Partnerships

- With the Government, civil society networks for young bloggers, U-Reporters and MNOs

#### Technical assistance

- From UNICEF Nigeria and UNICEF's West and Central African Regional Office

#### Financial resources

- In-kind donation from MNOs

### Enablers

- **Collaboration in the UNICEF office** between sections (Communication, Programme, Planning, Innovation).
- **Support from senior management** in the expansion of U-Reporter roles and use of U-Report data for response.
- **Convergence of objectives with the Government.** UNICEF and the Government had a shared interest in addressing misinformation and improving the response over time which led the Government position the Information Center bot as a crucial national resource.
- **Partnerships.** U-Report was already connected for free with two of the three Mobile Network Operators (MNO). With the support of UNICEF's Public-Private Partnerships team, the third MNO agreed to connect the short-code in COVID-19, send SMS blasts to subscribers for free, provide data to young bloggers without charge, and run the U-Report platform without charge. This motivated the other two MNOs to send SMS blasts to their subscribers about COVID-19.

### Challenges

- **Digital solutions themselves cannot address the digital divide. Respondent breakdown needs to be part of data interpretation.** Overall, there are more male (60%) than female (40%) U-Reporters. Almost half of U-Reporters (51%) are below 25 years old, and less than one quarter (19%) are below 20 years old. The actual breakdown by age and gender in each national

U-Report poll varied, which needed to be considered in interpreting and using the results.

- **RapidPro software has some specifications that need to be understood when considering its use.** RapidPro has limitations of word count in questions, and depends on the literacy and language of the respondent. In the TPM of CHDs, the UNICEF team found they needed to simplify to no more than 10 questions.

### Next steps

Despite many areas of progress in 2020, addressing COVID-19 and its impact requires sustained efforts in 2021 and beyond. The U-Report platform is a powerful tool to leverage civic engagement in child rights and issues related to youth and adolescents. U-Reporters were shown to be powerful motivators of information, change, and accountability through sharing credible information, participating in third-party monitoring, and promoting peaceful elections. UNICEF plans to continue investments in U-Report and youth to optimize the efficiency and impact of programming.