

# Data in Focus

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**U-Report, a Tool that Brings People Close to Decision-makers and Policymakers**

## Key Highlights

- U-Report is a powerful two-way communication tool. It allows messaging to pre-registered users, who can make their voices heard and answer pressing questions in real-time.
- In Lesotho, as of November 2022, there are 6,428 total pre-registered U-reporters, and numbers are growing.
- Lesotho has used U-Report for real-time programme monitoring, citizen engagement, and information-sharing and to promote social behaviour change in various settings.
- While the U-Report is currently hosted and managed by UNICEF Lesotho, in other countries, the tool is hosted and managed by the government and integrated into national programming Monitoring and Evaluation.



## Data in Focus

While the importance of reflecting on people's thoughts and ideas on policies and programmes has long been valued by development practitioners, it has not always been easy to capture those ideas promptly and effectively. U-Report is an innovative communication tool that precisely does that. The tool is an open-source application developed through UNICEF support that, since 2011, has become the agency's flagship digital platform and is currently active in 95 countries. The platform can send messages to pre-registered SMS or social media accounts and prompt recipients to respond to polls or short surveys, thereby serving as a two-way communication channel. This issue looks at how the U-Report brought the people of Lesotho and their opinions closer to the policymakers and influenced programme designs and decision-making processes.

UNICEF Lesotho launched the U-Report in 2019, and as of November 2022, there are a total of 6,428 people pre-registered, of which 56% are youth aged 24 years and younger, while 39% are older than 24. These users are called U-Reporters and receive messages and prompts to answer polls. Registration in the U-Report is voluntary, and all poll responses are confidential and anonymous. People's opinion expressed through polls is analysed in real-time and converted into user-friendly dashboards accessible to the

public (<https://les.ureport.in/>). Data can also be downloaded and analysed in-depth to inform policymakers on necessary adjustments that could be made to ensure policy and programme meet the needs and expectations of the public.

While a powerful tool for decision-makers and policymakers to directly hear the voices of the community, U-Report comes with challenges and limitations. For example, to be able to answer a poll and have their voice heard, U-Reporters need to have access to a working cellphone and at least a 2G network. They also need to be literate in at least the local language to be able to read the questions and answer the poll. These limitations and challenges must be carefully considered when interpreting the collective voices gathered through the U-Report.

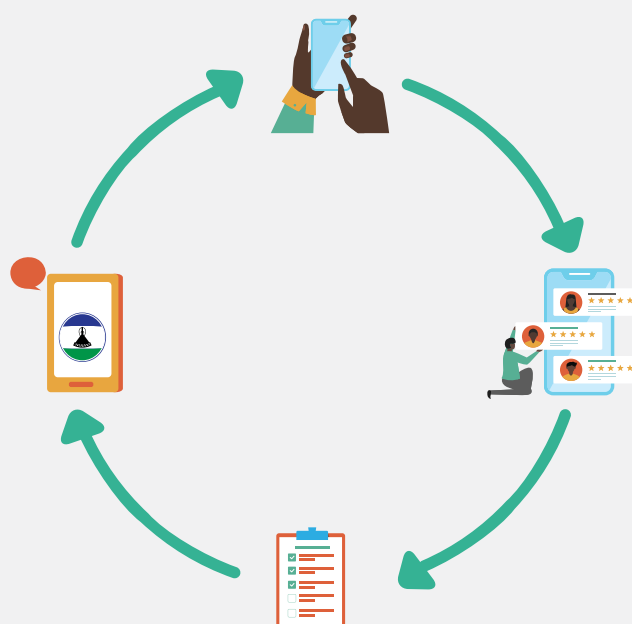


### Step 1:

To report on what matters to you.  
SMS 'JOIN' to 8500

### Step 4:

Decision makers take action and results are shared back with U-Reporters



### Step 2:

Your SMSs are combined with other U-Reporters into one strong voice

### Step 3:

The common voice of U-Reporters is shared with decision makers

# What are We Doing About It:

## CASE 1: in the case of real-time programme monitoring of COVID19- social assistance expansion (2021)

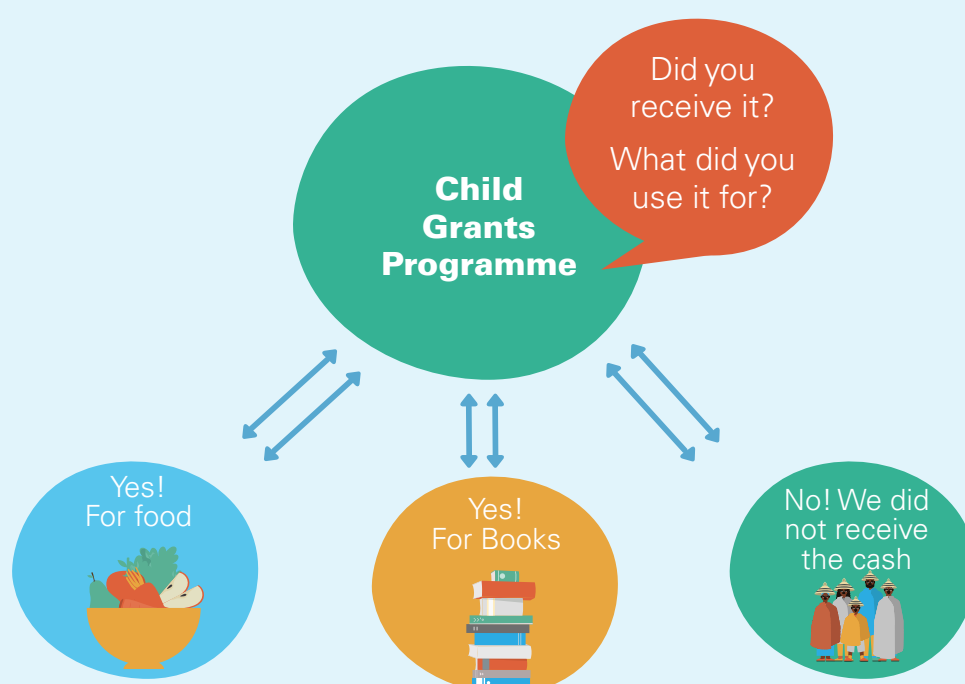
The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), with technical support from UNICEF, and financial support from the European Union (EU), implemented the vertical and horizontal temporary expansion of the Child Grants Programme (CGP) to respond to the adverse impact of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis on poor households in 2021. U-Report was used to monitor how the existing beneficiaries (vertical expansion) used the COVID-19 top-ups, how it differed from the regular child grants, and how new beneficiaries (horizontal expansion) used the COVID-19 grant.

Prior to the poll administration, payment events were used to sensitise beneficiaries and encourage them to register on the U-Report platform. Following the disbursement of the cash grant, two polls were run—one among the beneficiaries of horizontal expansion and another among the beneficiaries of vertical expansion. There was a total of 970 responses. The polls found that more female-headed households considered the cash grant insufficient, possibly indicating the harsher financial situation of this specific population segment. On the other hand, households who benefited from the vertical expansion indicated that they spent the top-up money mainly on school fees and health services and made some investments in agriculture. Both vertical and

horizontal expansion beneficiaries thought the regular Child Grants Programme transfer amount or the COVID-19 transfer was not enough to fulfil their basic needs. The most common channel of communication and information gathering for both types of beneficiaries were local councillors and village chiefs, followed by public gatherings. Many beneficiaries did not know how to file complaints in case they had not received the cash grant.

The information gathered has been used to inform MoSD about changes in the programme's design. For example, the data was used by the MoSD to raise awareness among beneficiaries about the feedback and complaints mechanism, especially in districts with a high number of beneficiaries reporting being unaware of the complaint channels.

This case shows the potential use of U-Report for real-time programme monitoring. While some investments are needed to enrol beneficiaries at the beginning, the running cost of the programme is low, and the real-time information gathered can translate into a constant dialogue between communities and policymakers, making policies and programmes more suited to all people of Lesotho.



## CASE 2: In the case of youth engagement and getting a sense of youth sentiments on the SDGs (2022)

In 2022, the U-Report was used to get a sense of youth sentiments toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the SDG country self-assessment process, the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. A seven-week campaign was held whereby a poll on a specific issue or goal was launched each week targeting youth. The poll questions were developed jointly by the Government of Lesotho, UN agencies, and youth representatives. This consultative process ensured that the polls were relevant to the youth and the VNR process. Nine hundred ninety-one responses from youth aged 24 years and younger were gathered over seven weeks.

The polls revealed that the female youth seemed more engaged and interested in the SDGs than their male counterparts. Answers suggested that the polling process enhanced the awareness of the SDGs among youths and increased the appetite for similar consultations, as almost all the respondents expressed a desire to participate in the VNR in the future. Overall, more than half of the youths acknowledged the government's efforts in achieving the SDGs, but around 40% felt that these efforts were still far from enough. All goals were identified as a national priority by U-Reporters. However, goal 1, "No Poverty," stood out as the country's biggest priority among the five goals examined, with many comments

pointing to the linkages between SDG 1 and other goals, including SDG 2 on zero hunger, SDG 3 on good health and well-being, SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Among the vulnerable groups, people living in rural areas, people with disabilities and people living in poverty emerged as being perceived as most vulnerable to poverty, which is a recurrent feature in Goals 1, 4, 5 and 15. Other vulnerable groups perceived as 'left behind' include youth, elderly and children for "no poverty" and LGBTQI + people for "Gender Equality".

The uniqueness of this U-Report use case is that the youth engagement process was intertwined with the youth perception data collection process. For example, the polls were developed in close collaboration with the youth. Aside from the polls, the campaigns also featured youth-to-youth messages on the SDGs almost daily. The youths were also invited to speak about the results of the polls in stakeholder meetings held by the Ministry of Development Planning, which was leading the VNR process, and in the Media. This case represents the potential that U-Report has in engaging citizens at large, especially youth, by allowing them to speak up and be heard and, at the same time, educating them and creating opportunities for participation in public debate.



### CASE 3: In the case of social, behavioural change for COVID19- vaccination uptake (2021)

The U-Report was also used in Lesotho to promote vaccine uptake among healthcare workers and citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. After registering the healthcare providers on the U-Report, a poll was run asking about the situation of vaccination, reasons for not being vaccinated, and source and platform for trusted information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 415 healthcare workers across ten districts responded to the poll. A communication and social behaviour change campaign on vaccination was then designed based on the poll results that ran for six weeks. Messages focused on debunking misconceptions, addressing fears and lack of information about vaccines. The messages also targeted low-vaccine uptake areas and were conveyed through a trusted platform for information sharing. During this time, UNICEF observed an increase in vaccine uptake among healthcare workers.

Another poll, U-Report Lesotho ([ureport.in](http://ureport.in)), also targeted adolescents and young people. It received responses from 71 girls and 29 boys that were critical to understanding their perceptions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and informing the development of a communication and social behaviour campaign.

While the U-Report is currently hosted and managed by UNICEF Lesotho, there are cases in other countries where the government hosts and manages the platform independently with UNICEF support. In these cases, the tool can be systematically integrated into the national Monitoring & Evaluation system, allowing different national entities to solicit feedback and comments, engage and promote citizen participation and promote positive behaviours as an integral part of national programmes.

#### Development Partner Collaboration

**The COVID-19 top-up and the monitoring of the programme using U-report is supported by the European Union (EU).** The EU, the Government of Lesotho, and UNICEF entered into a partnership agreement in 2007 for the implementation of a national-level initiative to address the growing challenge of children orphaned or made vulnerable as a result of HIV pandemic in Lesotho. Since then, the EU has supported the strengthening and expansion of the social protection system in Lesotho.

**The use of the U-report to support the VNR process was funded by the UNICEF Core Funding.** The UNICEF core funding is the unearmarked contribution from various donors that UNICEF distributed to country offices based on the needs. Many of the contributors are national committees who represent the generous donation of the general public in that country. For more information on the UNICEF Core Funding, visit <https://www.unicef.org/partnerships/funding/core-resources-for-results>

**The use of the U-Reports to support the COVID-19 vaccination uptake were supported by GAVI, the Government of Japan, USAID, the EU and ECHO.**

## Contact Details:

For more information on the brief, please get in touch with [ytokuchi@unicef.org](mailto:ytokuchi@unicef.org) at UNICEF.

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This Data in Focus brief series is produced by UNICEF Lesotho using recent information and integrating data from multiple sources. The aim of the series is to encourage deeper discussion and understanding on issues important to children.



