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Engaging youth voice in decision-making through U-Report

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Abstract

Background: UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Education & Training, and the Youth Development & Sports together with Youth Challenge Vanuatu have facilitated rolling out U-Report project in Vanuatu. It empowers young people to share opinions on the different critical issues, like Covid-19, stigma due to Covid-19 infection and other issues affecting the youth, which may be used by the policy makers as evidence to strategize the government policies to make it more youth friendly. Over 20 million young people are members of U-Report and growing worldwide. 91 countries are live, and more are in the pipeline.

Methods: The U-Report platform is pivoted on to two main platforms, which have a wider acceptance in Vanuatu. It includes SMS and Facebook messenger. Of the three polls conducted in Vanuatu, an assessment of the perceptions on COVID-19 vaccine for children/adolescents was the latest in series.

Results: The recent poll on child/adolescent COVID-19 vaccine indicates, women participating more actively compared to men and suggesting 70% of the respondents (out of 430) having taken two shots and a booster dose. 74% of the respondents being aware of the introduction of COVID-19 vaccine for 12-17 years and indicating radio (31%), health workers (30%) and social media (22%) as a key source of information to them.

Discussion: With the penetration of these platforms, using tools like U-Report makes it easier to seek a wider perspective from the community, in a short duration and to enable government to have better insights on various issues. Though a large percentage confirmed having taken the vaccine, they in fact mentioned, side effects, safety concerns and church as some reasons. It highlighted the need to re-strategize response to further improve upon the vaccine footprints. However, supplementing the tool with qualitative approaches will provide a more robust insight.