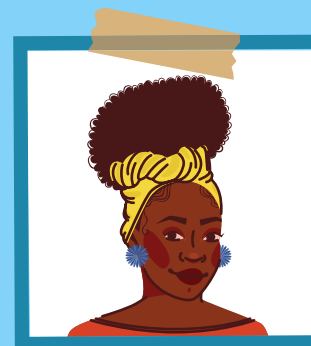




**U Report** VOICE MATTERS

# Internet of Good Things (IoGT) and U-Report Human Interest Stories from East and Southern Africa.

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**SOCIAL + BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**



**2gether 4SRHR**

**(IoGT)**  
**Internet of Good Things**



# Abbas

## Reflecting on how loGT can support the Learning to Earning agenda (Abbas 18 years old)

Abbas, 18, is an observant, talkative young man. He wears his school uniform neatly, his tie hanging straight and tight even despite the Zanzibari heat. He is almost done with secondary school, and while finishing brings its own freedoms, it also comes with its fair share of anxieties and worries, not least among them how to support himself and be self-sufficient.

Abbas is already making and selling *achari*\*, and is learning how to ride a motorcycle so that he can use it to transport goods and people. Abbas has a strong sense of duty to oneself, and this becomes clear when he speaks of the importance of starting to be responsible for one's life in youth. This shows in his reflections during the discussion.

***"When a young person gets destroyed in youth", Abbas has observed, "it's hard to recoup in old age."***

However, despite understanding and enjoying going to school, Abbas and his fellow students fear disillusionment from the lack of jobs after completing their studies. A group discussion with them gets heated as they talk about the frustration of mismatched realities inherent to their current education system.

***"You'll find someone with a degree, but the degree is all in their head!" his colleague says. "The VETA\* diploma students can do more."***

Abbas is not alone in his thoughts – Veronica, a recent university graduate from Dar-es-Salaam, spends her days searching for jobs on various websites ranging from groups on WhatsApp and Facebook, to LinkedIn and JamiiForum. She hasn't been successful, even if this is all she does, day in day out – searching for

jobs. This is the fear Abbas has – what can he fall back on if formal employment doesn't work out for him?

***"I think there should be more to share under the youth section," Abbas says of loGT. "I thought that 'mtandao wa mambo mazuri' would mean there are opportunities, the site should reflect that."***

loGT in Tanzania is well positioned to provide opportunities both for young people to learn alternative skills that would be useful in the job search in their localities, or that would prime them to start their own businesses. UNICEF Country Offices can also use loGT to share curated job postings that would help young people throughout their job searches.

***"I have three SIM cards," Abbas says. "One is only for internet."***

Abbas, like many around him, has found ways to maneuver around data costs to make full use of the opportunities the internet provides, not just for entertainment and communication, but for their studies as well. Abbas and his friends are already using the internet to reinforce their school learning – and alongside this, the same channels can be used to take that one step further into the next stage of life where how to earn a living takes priority.

***\*achari – a snack made of dried mango flesh covered in a spicy syrup coating.***

***\*VETA – Vocational Education and Training Authority***



# Sisonke & Thandi

## Leveraging IoT for Mental Health (Sisonke, 17 years old; Thandi, 22 years old)

When Sisonke, 17, speaks to her mother about how depressed she has been feeling, she feels angry that her mother is dismissive of her concerns. She is also afraid of reaching out to the counsellors in Soweto, South Africa where she lives, because she feels that they can't be trusted, after hearing them speak to multiple people about the problems of those who have confided in them. If her parents were to hear of this, she fears that they will react in a way that won't be helpful.

**"Spaces are judgmental," Sisonke says during the group discussion at the Jabulani Safehub in Soweto. "When you seek help for mental breakdowns, people say you are an attention seeker."**

Thandi, 22, feels the same way. When we meet at the Alex FM radio station headquarters in her township, Alexandra, it is clear to see the innate motivation and hope that many of the young people there have, but also, it is no doubt that many in the township struggle to make a living.

**"Resources are lacking here," Thandi mentions. "The sports and therapy centers are run down. Few people go there."**

As a first-born child, she feels an intense amount of pressure from her parents to set a good example for her siblings, and to get a stable income to support her family. But she hasn't been able to enroll in university three years after her matric. And she wants to be a radio presenter, which she does not know how to follow through on if she is constantly looking for money. As a result, she has experienced hopelessness, frustration, loss of interest in her hobbies, sleep disturbances, and deep sadness.

**"Parents have all these plans for your life," Thandi says. "Our parents don't really know what we are**

**going through."**

While young women appeared more likely to openly share their experiences of struggling with mental health than young men, these struggles are in no way relevant for girls only. Julius, 19, has been keen to make connections between drug use in their community and lack of access to mental and emotional support for deeply difficult moments in their lives.

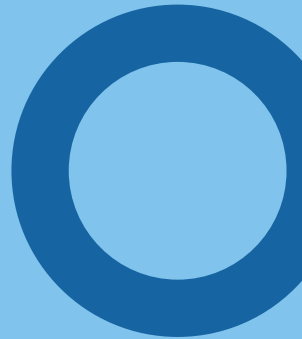
**"It's not the drugs that are the problem," Julius says, "It's the trauma. They might not do drugs, but they'll do something else."**

But both Sisonke and Thandi have been able to use the plentiful mental health resources available on the internet to manage their mental health. Even then, they still would like to know how they can access local mental health and counselling services in their town, and think that IoT could be a great platform for that.

**"I'd like to see more on the topic of mental health on IoT," Thandi suggests, "such as a breakdown of how symptoms of certain mental health conditions show up. And also specific topics relating to life in a township."**

Thandi and Sisonke are an example of the resilience of young people who have grown up in tough conditions, but who are still striving towards a better future. **"There has been a repetition of poverty, of failure," Sisonke reflects during the session. "I want to turn things around."** But like all young people, they also enjoy experiences that come with a light touch. Thandi says that to her, therapy is being around people, laughing with them.

**"Sometimes, there can be just life things on this site," Thandi says with a chuckle. "Things the youth like to talk about."**



# Mabel

## How loGT can provide a safe space for young girls to take care of their changing bodies (Mabel, 27 years old)



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), knows all too well what it means to live and struggle through the many disturbances that poverty creates in one's life, especially for girls and young women. She does not wish for girls in her community to go through the experiences she has witnessed, and because of this, was drawn to the kind of work that the Love Life Youth Center in Orange Farm does.

***"I identify vulnerable children and open a file with their history," Mabel says. "They come here for emotional support, and I even support them with homework sometimes."***

While Mabel knows that there are youth who require a lot of guidance, sometimes the amount of knowledge that is lacking amongst them is heartbreaking, especially as regards their changing bodies. This is the kind of situation that Mabel fears could lead to pregnancies in adolescents.

***"There was a young girl who wasn't comfortable telling her mother about getting her menstrual period," Mabel says, "But she told the watchman instead, who did not give her proper advice."***

Even while there are life skills sessions at the center dedicated to teaching young people about these and other matters, Mabel still faces a unique challenge. In helping these girls, because of some

of the stigma and myths related to menstruation combined with the mental and financial burdens of poverty, she has found that it is hard for the girls to open up.

***"loGT can be used as a tool in our sessions to share more information privately with these girls." Mabel says.***

Parents and caregivers in Orange Farm are no strangers to the dependence that their adolescents have on their mobile phones and the internet. ***"They don't ask us questions anymore,"*** one parent laments. Mabel wonders if they can use young people's affinity for the internet to provide relevant tips on menstrual care through loGT. Features could include period trackers, content on what period product options there are, and even content that targets their male friends to teach them more about periods and how they can be more sensitive to girls around them.

***"Most young people are not well educated about these things," Mabel says. "It's important that they learn how to manage their emotions, stress (that surround the experience of menstruation) and more, and figure out how to do it on their own."***





**U-Report**

# Emmanuel

## Engaging with peer counselors through U-Report Tanzania (Emmanuel, 20 years old)

The first time Emmanuel heard about U-Report was on the radio – Kati FM, specifically. He wasn't quite sure what it was about then, but now, he has been on U-Report for one and a half years and has been diligently responding to polls whenever he can. Needless to say, 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. However, of late, he has been struggling with responding to polls that he is not interested in, or that he feels he will not learn much from. Sometimes, the responses are slow, which makes him less motivated to follow through to completion."***

***"Another problem is my phone," he laments. "It needs to stay on the charger all the time. And it's a tochi [feature phone] so it is not easy to respond to all the polls."***

All this changed when he heard about Papo-kwa-Papo. Recently, U-Report Tanzania launched a new feature – for a week, they would have healthcare professionals on call to respond, in the space of a few minutes, to any questions asked via the platform.

Emmanuel tests it out – first asking questions about HIV/AIDS, and is delighted that the responses are in Kiswahili, which clarifies for him some of the confusing English vocabulary which he didn't understand before. He wishes that more people would know about Papo: even if they do not have phones, they can arrange to borrow someone else's by Papo days (A specific time, spanning a week, during which U-Report users can ask questions related to SRH topics via SMS and receive direct, personalised responses from a trained professional).

***"There are people who don't have phones but would need the information from these things," Emmanuel says. "We also need not just doctors, but lawyers, police, on Papo. The youth want to learn about so much more, and Papo could be the place for that."***



# Aziza & Rehema

## Partnering with motivated and influential youth to improve U-Report platforms (Aziza, 20 years old; Rehema, 24 years old)



When Aziza, 20, walks into the lobby at the Bridge for Change offices in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, her confidence fills the room. When she starts to speak, it is clear that she has hit a perfect stride in the progress she is making in working towards her goals. She not only ran for Vice President of the Student Council, where she studies at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, but she has also recently joined a UNESCO initiative that raises awareness on gender-based violence. She is also the youth representative of a local chapter of a national party. At the core of all her choices lies Aziza's passion in uplifting those around her through volunteering, especially the youth. While she is not a U-Report ambassador, she has all the qualities of one.

***"We have to make a wonderful foundation for youth," Aziza explains, "because it's us who are being relied on."***

Rehema, however, didn't have the same experience in her university days. The soft-spoken 24-year-old university graduate went through a long, confusing period in watching her mother battling a serious mental illness, having to take care of her and witness the terrifying symptoms. In a way, Rehema thinks that the experience has given her purpose in life – realizing that there are so many invisible struggles that women go through, she wants to offer a shoulder for them to lean on through sharing the lessons she learnt. She is also incredibly committed to initiatives that promote women's self-reliance and has started a merry-go-round for young women who would like to start their own businesses. Rehema herself earns money through being a

make-up artist.

***"My father has 15 children," Rehema says, "So I like to rely on myself. I bought myself my first phone, a Nokia. Then a Samsung. Now I have an iPhone!"***

Rehema is a U-Report ambassador, because like Aziza, she is determined, and deeply invested in the well-being of her community and sees U-Report as a tool through which the youth can participate in conversations that affect them.

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. There are diverse kinds of individuals, those like Rehema, and those like Aziza, who are an example of many motivated, energetic young people whose vibrancy, dedication and connection to their communities would make them excellent partners for U-Report.

***"I just want others to have a life like the one I have," Aziza says. "And not to lose hope."***





## Dineo & Xolani

### Supporting parents through the anxieties of raising adolescent children (Dineo, 43 years old; Xolani, 35 years old)

Dineo, 43, has been a nurse at an Orange Farm Health Center for over 15 years, and is a mother of two teenage daughters. She has witnessed several changes to the healthcare policy in South Africa. As a nurse, her main job is providing care to members of the community, regardless of who they are, and the choices they make, but she cannot help but fear that accommodations in laws surrounding access to sexual and reproductive health services might encourage young people – even her daughters – to engage in risky behaviour. Compounding the fears Dineo has is the fact that her daughters seem not to want to talk to her about anything, instead getting their advice from the internet. Their safety is her main concern, and she wishes to communicate with them about how to stay safe and healthy in a way that they will listen to her, especially on topics related to their sexual and reproductive health.

*"Our kids no longer talk to us," Dineo says. "They say, everything I know, I can get from Google."*

After the group discussion, as the participants are chatting and slowly leaving the room, Dineo requests for the U-Report WhatsApp sign up link. She learns that through WhatsApp, she can choose poll topics that can contain information about her fears, and that she can also respond to with her own thoughts. Dineo will also have access to poll results that can show her what young people like her daughters are thinking and can use that information to start conversations with them. In this way, U-Report is useful not only for young people, but for those who care for and work with them.

*"As parents," Dineo says, "we shouldn't shy away from these topics."*

Take for example Xolani, 35, who is a parent to two boys who are fast approaching adolescence, and is worried about how nyaope\* is being used even by teenagers in their township. What concerns him even more is how it seems to have become normal, expected even, for all young men to start using, and he is not sure who he can trust to give him verifiable information about the dangers of the drug and how to keep his sons safe.

U-Report could be one such platform – results from polls on drug use could help Xolani understand more about what risks his sons face, and what he can do to mitigate them.

**\*Nyaope – heroin**



