

# 42 Uganda: Popow's radio response to COVID-19

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Type of intervention: non-governmental

Website: <https://www.popow-vision.org>

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## General description

Prince of Peace Orphans and Widows (POPOW) is a community-based non-profit organisation founded in 2009. Based in Kaberamaido, Uganda, its mission is to empower community youth, orphans and vulnerable children to realise their full potential and achieve sustainable livelihoods. POPOW works to uplift communities and to improve livelihoods in seven domains: 1) access to clean and safe drinking water, good hygiene, and sanitation; 2) household economic empowerment; 3) protecting children; 4) education; 5) life skills for youth; 6) mitigating domestic violence; and 7) psychosocial support.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent school closures, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports approved and sponsored educational radio broadcasts. None of them is in Kuman, the main language in Kaberamaido, a rural agricultural district in North-Central Uganda. While Kuman is the main language in the city of Kaberamaido and its neighbouring areas, it is not a widely spoken language in Uganda.

Most students in Kaberamaido lack access to television sets or smartphones to engage with educational materials, but over 80% can access radios. Limited government resources have prevented Kumam-speaking radio stations from receiving financial support to broadcast educational shows. For younger Kumam-speaking learners, the non-Kumam broadcasts hold a double challenge in learning material and deciphering a language they are not yet fluent in.

To fill in this gap, POPOW sponsored educational radio talk shows for teachers to broadcast their lessons in Kuman to reinforce learning. This intervention aims to provide additional radio broadcasts to keep Kumam-speaking students learning in academic and socio-emotional domains. Moreover, these radio broadcasts contain flexibility for teachers to calibrate lessons in Kumam to the needs of the community.

Beginning the week of 12 April 2020, POPOW sponsored teachers to broadcast weekly Monday through Friday for five hours a day in Kumam. For primary school students, the radio broadcast included maths, science, social studies and English lessons. Teachers also broadcast these subjects on a secondary school level, with science further broken down into chemistry, biology and physics, and other subjects including geography and religion. The content is not based on curricula designed by education district officers. So far, POPOW has sponsored 10 teacher broadcasts, resulting in 80 hours of radio time. Furthermore, these broadcasts include interactive components such as student panels, simultaneous self-study work (including facilitated notes or questions) and call-in questions. For socio-emotional development, POPOW hosted a talk show with a student panel on COVID-19 and the lockdown.

The intervention followed the following phases

- Phase 1: Initial radio talk shows

POPOW hosted two talk shows. For the first broadcast, POPOW and partner teachers created an interactive talk show featuring student perspectives on COVID-19 and the lockdown. POPOW featured four students aged 11-16 from across Kaberamaido. Teachers moderated the talk show while other students called in with questions. Students expressed concerns about their education while at home and the challenges of balancing schoolwork and household responsibilities. The inclusion of student voices was meant to engage learners across the district, created comradery among students at home, and exposed community members to students' opinions and challenges that they face in studying during the COVID-19 crisis.

The next talk shows brought in teachers to teach in various subjects. The next series of talk shows engaged school management committees, parent-teacher associations, community elders and teachers to discuss various stakeholder roles and responsibilities in the education sector during this time.

- Phase 2: Continued talk shows and distribution of learning materials

POPOW met with school management committees, head teachers and school inspectors to deliver learning materials to learners in primary Levels 3-7. They also worked to inform parents and communities about their roles in supporting students. Meanwhile, POPOW sponsored regular educational radio talk shows hosted by teachers aimed for primary Levels 1-3.

- Phase 3: Follow-up and monitoring

POPOW continues its radio lessons and the distribution of its learning materials while devising plans to assess the outcomes of radio learning.

## Main problems addressed

- On 20 March 2020, Uganda closed all schools in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The closure particularly affects poor and rural students who lack resources such as television and smartphones to engage in the Ministry of Education's new education framework for education continuity. The government of Uganda approved 38 radio stations to broadcast educational shows in addition to television and smartphone programming. With approval, stations receive funding and resources for educational broadcasts, widening access to educational information for students without televisions, computers or smartphones. Two of these stations are in neighbouring districts to Kaberamaido, Dokoto and Soroti, but broadcast in Lango and Ateso respectively. While listeners in Kaberamaido can listen in, many young students lack fluency in Lango or Ateso. While Kaberamaido's local radio station, Dwanwa F.M. Radio Station, did not receive funding or learning materials provided to the approved radio broadcasts, it was a good partner to broadcast lessons in Kumam.
- In Kaberamaido, in-person learning solutions the lack of learning materials outside the classroom (i.e. newspapers, books, televisions and smartphones) resulting from limited educational infrastructure, particularly in rural communities. POPOW's intervention expanded Kumam-speaking youth's access to understandable educational materials during the COVID-19 lockdown. This intervention is innovative through its focus on community needs, which assists in improving learning engagement throughout the lockdown. If students lose previous knowledge, they are at risk of falling behind and failing to meet benchmarks, which in turn could translate into being held back and/or dropping out. Through this continued learning engagement, the intervention aims to help students more seamlessly transition back to in-person schooling.
- Finally, the radio format allows students with visual impairments to participate in school since physical reading materials fail to accommodate their learning needs. Students with visual impairments can listen to the programmes, while students with auditory impairments are given reading materials.

## Mobilising and developing resources

- Over 80% of Ugandans have access to a radio. POPOW capitalised on this infrastructure to engage learners remotely and reinforce previous learning while at home. POPOW partnered with the local radio station, Dwanwa F.M. Radio Station, to broadcast shows.
- Another resource that could be mobilised were district officers: they designed some of the education content that POPOW broadcast. The radio lessons are based on the school year curriculum designed by district officers. The Ministry of Education and Sports employs officers in each district. The district education officers in Kaberamaido designed the curriculum after an educational exchange visit in another district with excellent academic performance on national standards. The officers chose the successful practices and learning materials from those schools and merged them with the practices and materials in Kaberamaido schools to form the curriculum in Kumam. This work exceeds the scope of the officer's position, but the Kaberamaido district officers acted to additionally benefit learners. POPOW is working closely with district officers to bring these materials to learners through the radio broadcast.
- POPOW also collected and co-ordinated the development of resources from schools and teachers that could be taught through radio.

## Implementation challenges

The main implementation challenges relate to budget:

- The largest cost is to secure radio airtime. The reach of the project depends on those budget constraints. Airtime for radio talk shows charge per hour, which is unaffordable for many schools and teachers without government or outside support. Dwanwa F.M. Radio Station has alleviated some financial burden by offering 2 hours free for every 3 hours of airtime purchased.
- A second challenge related to fundraising. Since education is a domain of the organisation's mission, POPOW leveraged existing networks to raise funds for the broadcasts. However, fundraising proves more challenging than usual given the economic crisis linked to the COVID-19 health crisis. POPOW has also advocated to include Dwanwa F.M. Radio Station as an approved educational broadcast station, but has so far failed to gain approval due to limited government resources.
- POPOW, therefore, funded airtime using organisational funds. Sustainability remains one of its challenges. The district follows the quarter system to break up the school year, and so far, POPOW has sponsored shows for the second civil quarter. Given the changing landscape, POPOW will assess funding and needs for coming quarters.

## Fostering effective use and learning

This initiative engages students and teachers in a number of ways.

First, teachers and students are engaged in panels in which they can speak about their experiences and share multiple perspectives and approaches while creating a sense of community among listeners. These panels cover a variety of issues and further help establish a community approach to learning. These panels focus on students' socio-emotional development through the opportunity to publicly share their opinions and relate to peers and teachers through challenges. These facets of the initiative aim to engage family members and the larger community in their responsibilities to students during remote schooling and increase community exposure to education challenges during this time.

Second, the intervention allows teachers to continue interacting and building relationships with their students remotely and allows students to engage with their peers through call-ins and synchronous work. Unfortunately, it does not involve direct student-teacher interactions due to limited mobility.

Third, these radio shows are designed to be simultaneously educational and accessible to a range of listeners, particularly young Kumam-speakers who lack fluency in other languages. The shows teach previous content in the district curriculum to reinforce learning.

## Monitoring success

- While monitoring has been minimal, POPOW collected listener demographics for the student panel on COVID-19 reactions based on those who called in. Ninety-seven per cent of respondents attended school and are currently home due to the lockdown. The majority of student callers were in primary Grades 6 or 7. Girls were the main contributors, making up approximately 70% of callers. While these data reveal pertinent demographic information, they only cover those who called in, not the overall listeners.
- Teachers do not currently follow up with students listening to the broadcast. Limited mobility due to rural infrastructure and transit restrictions relating to the COVID-19 lockdown prevent teachers

from collecting homework. Teachers plan to follow up with students upon returning to school and will review homework from the broadcasts.

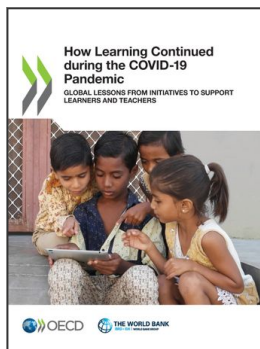
- Informally, parents have reached out to POPOW requesting more broadcasts and many teachers have asked to partner future broadcasts.
- While the message has reached students across the district, difficulty remains in determining the number of students listening and to pinpoint the intervention's overall benefit. However, POPOW plans to work directly with the head teachers (principals) and school management committees to follow up to find out how many learners are benefiting from the radio talk shows.

## Adaptability to new contexts

- Educational radio broadcasts hold promise for communities without access to other infrastructure (such as computers, televisions and smartphones) to distribute educational information given the widespread availability of radios relative to TVs and smartphones. This solution should be considered in other rural areas in which a sizable portion of the population has access to a radio.
- Moreover, this solution resonates in rural regions with high linguistic diversity. Uganda, for example, has 44 official languages.
- The scaling of this solution depends on the affordability of radio airtime, and communication and partnership with schools, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.
- Community organisations hold a unique position to address community-specific problems. Educational radio broadcasts led by community organisations such as POPOW allow more specificity than broad government interventions and allow all students to learn in their most comfortable language.
- While POPOW designed this intervention to address learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, this initiative is workable after the crisis to engage students outside of the classroom and reinforce classroom content, and to reach students not enrolled in formal schooling.
- Going forward, POPOW's strategy is to continue radio talk shows for children in primary Levels 1-3 who learn best in Kumam and continue working with stakeholders and community members for feedback and monitoring.
- POPOW plans to scale up this intervention by increasing the frequency of current radio programming and expanding its reach to the Kalaki district, the Kaberamaido district's eastern neighbour.
- When it is safe to return to in-person schooling, POPOW will shift attention to supporting schools in instituting proper social distancing measures and sanitary practices. POPOW is also considering developing new content should schools continue to be remote in the coming semesters.

**Box 42.1. Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation**

1. Successful responses to remote learning can repurpose existing infrastructure, such as radios, to avoid wasted energy on establishing new distribution channels.
2. Educational radio talk shows can incorporate the specific learning needs of the community that is listening, such as rural Kumam-speaking students in Kaberamaido.
3. Community organisations offer insight to specific community needs that larger government bodies may not be equipped to address, for example accounting for linguistic diversity.
4. Successful education radio talk shows depend on budgeting for radio airtime, planning lessons that lend to broadcasts, and teacher and school communication.
5. Even though students and teachers are separated, educational radio talk shows can include interactive components (i.e. student guests or call-in questions).



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