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## Processes, experiences, and impact: A summary report on community-led Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (HVACS) results dissemination in Uganda

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# Processes, Experiences, and Impact:

## A Summary Report on Community-Led Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (HVACS) Results Dissemination in Uganda

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The Population Council leads the Baobab Research Program Consortium in close partnership with the Population Council Kenya and the African Population and Health Research Center. Situated in the East and Horn of Africa, this Africa-based and African-led consortium is filling critical evidence gaps to reduce inequities in sexual reproductive health and rights among vulnerable populations in humanitarian settings.

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## Introduction

The Uganda Humanitarian Violence Against Children Survey (HVACS), completed in 2022 in refugee settlements in Uganda, was the first of the Baobab Research Programme Consortium's (RPC's) series of studies to be implemented. As a landmark study in its own right, and the first-ever HVACS, it provided critical insights into the state of Violence Against Children (VAC) in refugee settlements in Uganda. The key findings from the HVACS include the following:

1. There is a high prevalence of violence against children in refugee contexts in Uganda.
2. Physical violence is the most common type of violence experienced by children.
3. Girls experience twice the rate of sexual violence as boys over time.
4. Intimate partners and peers are the most common perpetrators of children's first incident of sexual violence.
5. The first incident of sexual violence in childhood largely occurs outdoors, as opposed to within homes.
6. Boys experience high rates of injury as a result of physical violence.
7. Certain sub-groups of children are particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence compared to others, including children who witnessed violence in the home, those living with disabilities, and those who were married or cohabiting.
8. Children in refugee settings in Uganda have relatively high knowledge of where to seek help for violence but are unlikely to disclose and to obtain help or care.
9. Survivors of childhood violence experience devastating consequences, including a greater likelihood to perpetrate violence, experience mental health problems, and engage in risk-taking behaviours compared to their peers who had not experienced violence.
10. There are high levels of endorsement of retrogressive traditional norms among children and young people in Uganda's refugee settings.

The radio dissemination activity was designed to take place during the *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)* commemorated between 25 November and 10 December 2023, aligning with the global theme "*Invest to prevent violence against women and girls*". The 16 Days of Activism provided a platform to design and disseminate key messages by the Baobab RPC in partnership with the Government of Uganda (Office of the Prime Minister, Department of Refugees) and other stakeholders.

## The radio dissemination activity in Uganda

Community radio has been shown to be a wide-reach and high-impact tool in humanitarian settings, with both prevention and response capacity in health and other priority areas<sup>1,2</sup>. The use of radio to communicate to communities offers multiple benefits which include raising awareness, contributing to positive behavioural shifts, strengthening community cohesion, and catalyzing desired change<sup>3</sup>. Radio enables the sharing of rapid, relevant, and reliable information. The evidence also shows that involving affected communities in radio programme production and delivery increases their awareness and commitment to act on the recommendations. Furthermore, the use of well-known personalities in broadcasts increases message retention amongst listeners<sup>4</sup>.

Against this backdrop and following stakeholder consultations, Baobab conducted a collaborative and extensive radio dissemination activity in Uganda targeting all refugee settlements where the HVACS was implemented. We sought to optimize radio's proven effectiveness by directly involving both refugee and host community leaders and representatives in the framing and dissemination of HVACS findings through interactive broadcasts.

- **Timelines:** The radio dissemination activity was conducted between 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023, with follow-on stakeholder engagement activities right up to December 16<sup>th</sup> 2023. This dissemination activity was designed to align with the 16 Days of Activism against GBV in order to ride the wave of interest and maximise listenership.
- **Radio Stations:** Uganda's refugee settlements are spread out in the Western, Northern and West Nile regions. By engaging premier radio stations, the programming was able to reach all refugee settlements and host communities, while allowing for participants from the refugee settlements to physically join as panellists, disseminating and engaging communities on key findings from the HVACS data. The selected radio stations were Britop FM radio station in Western Uganda, Arua One FM radio station in West Nile, Kibanda FM radio in Western and Mighty Fire FM radio in the Northern region.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown W & Arvind S (1999) Entertainment-education media strategies for social change: promises and problems. In *Mass Media Social Control and Social Change*, edited by David Demers, and K. Viswanath, 263–280. Iowa: Iowa Statue University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Jack B (2018) The humanitarian duty to communicate: an analysis of rumour. *Migrants, Refugees, and the Media New Reality of Open Societies*. <https://www.routledge.com/Migrants-Refugees-and-the-Media-The-New-Reality-of-Open-Societies/Krishna-Hensel/p/book/9780815377177>

<sup>3</sup> Heywood E & Yaméogo L (2022) Radio and Social Media as A Two-Way Communication Tool in Conflict- and Pandemic-Affected Communities in Burkina Faso, *African Journalism Studies*, 43:4, 44-61, DOI: [10.1080/23743670.2023.2204447](https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2023.2204447)

<sup>4</sup> Heywood E & Ivey B (2022) Radio as an empowering environment: how does radio broadcasting in Mali represent women's "web of relations"?, *Feminist Media Studies*, 22:5, 1050-1066, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2021.1877768](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1877768)

- Listenership for the selected radio stations is detailed in the Table below:

Region	Radio Station	Coverage in Refugee Settlement
West Nile	Arua One FM	Adjumani Bidibidi Imvepi Lobule Palorinya Rhino
South Western	Britop FM	Kyangwali Kyaka II Nakivale Orunchinga Rwamwanja
West Central	Kibanda FM	Kiryandongo
Northern	Mighty Fire	Palabek

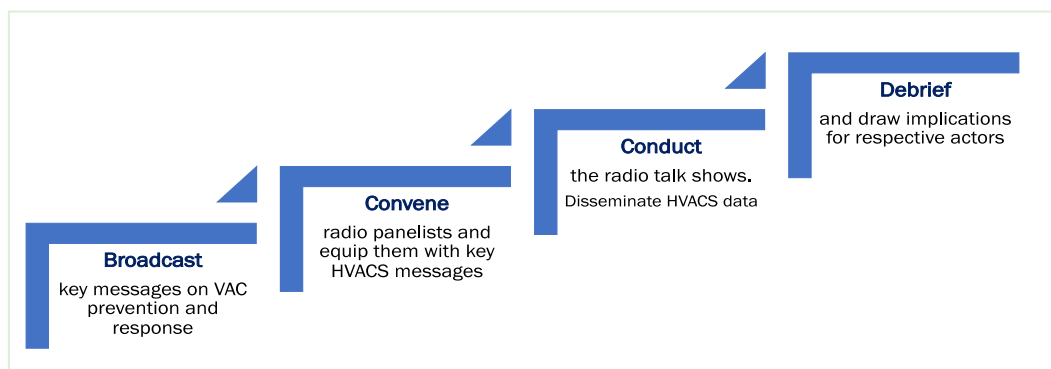
- **Panellists:** The HVACS radio dissemination programme intentionally engaged several and multi-level stakeholders with jurisdiction and implementing responsibilities in both refugee settlements and host communities. Stakeholder categories included government officials at national, sub-national and settlement levels. They also included implementing partners, politicians and media personalities disseminating alongside the Baobab team. Table 2 below provides a breakdown of radio panellists for this activity:

Constituency	Stakeholder	Comment
Uganda Government	Office of the President Minister Resident District Commissioners	Representatives of the President, oversees security, protection and welfare issues in the district
Central Government	Office of the Prime Minister	Settlement Commandants or their assistants
Government of Uganda	CDOs, ADCDOs, Probation and Welfare Officers Child Affairs Leads Youth Leads Women Leads	Technical leads in the local government
District Local Government	Political leaders District LCV Chairperson	Elected head of the district's political wing
	Law enforcement: District Police Commanders	Part of the district security committee (police) with linkage to community on child protection
	Law enforcement: Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU)	
Refugee Community Leadership	Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs)	Elected representatives of refugee communities
Media	Radio presenters Radio production teams Print media journalists	Journalists able to extract key messages for continued dissemination e.g., on news bulletins
Baobab RPC	Research Fellow Research Uptake Manager	Well-versed with the Ugandan context and study findings, they provided technical support and coordinated the activity
Public	Refugee and Host Communities	As listeners and callers into the radio station to discuss broadcast content



## The dissemination approach

The dissemination took a stepwise approach starting with: (1) broadcasting of key messages during the *16 Days of Activism* (25 November – 10 December 2023); followed by (2) the convening of panelists to brief them about the HVACS data, equip them with key messages and plan the sequencing and content of the radio talk show; (3) conducting the actual radio talkshows; and then finally (4) regrouping for debriefs and next steps. The key dissemination messages were shared with panelists (during the convening stage) before the radio talkshow for each radio station engagement. This process is illustrated in Figure 1 and explained further below:



- i. **Broadcasting of short VAC messages:** Short messages on key HVACS findings, as well as their related implications and recommendations, were crafted jointly with the community stakeholders and media personalities and broadcast across the entire *16 Days of Activism* period. This set the stage for radio panels which would follow, and it was clear that the community was already beginning to understand and make sense of HVACS data.
- ii. **Convening and preparing the panel:** Before each of the radio talkshow engagement, the Baobab's team members convened stakeholder engagement sessions where panellists were provided with key findings from the HVACS data in form of radio talking points and simple study materials. Participatory and empowering, these briefings provided panellists with the confidence and capacity to discuss, while drawing on their respective areas of expertise and official responsibilities. During the convening stage, we also discussed on the flow of the talkshow of the panel – supported by the radio talk show hosts/ media. Panelists would then review, refine and get ready for the talk show, with each voicing out their respective angles for example children protection from the law enforcement, service delivery, political or community angle.
- iii. **Conducting the radio talk show:** All panelists were given an opportunity to speak about the HVACS findings and resulting implications, as well as any ensuing commitments related to their respective official duties. Typically, the talk show began with the moderator introducing the team before handing over to the Baobab RPC to introduce the research and key findings, followed by other panelists. Following a session of dissemination and discussion of action points for VAC prevention and response, the radio listeners would be given opportunity to dial into

the radio station with comments and questions. This interactive session would go on until the end of the radio talk show. On average the talk shows took two (2) hours.

- iv. **Debrief:** Following completion of the radio talk show, panelists would convene to reflect on the deliberations, and map out next steps, specifically, on how to incorporate key messages and community reactions or questions into their routine prevention and response work.

## Key issues and questions emerging from the community radio talkshows

The radio programme was an invaluable platform which drew together refugee and host communities, their leaders, duty bearers, service providers, and other stakeholders, to discuss the pertinent issue of child protection. Community members calling in during the radio talkshow both validated the HVACS findings and key messages around what should be done better to protect children.

The systematic approach taken in delivery of this activity, which was iterative and heavy on stakeholder engagement, contributed to different forms of impacts<sup>5</sup> outlined below and further illustrated in the subsequent sections:

- Conceptual (changes to stakeholder knowledge, attitudes, and understanding)
- Capacity (changes in the ability of researchers to conduct similar work, or of stakeholders to use and apply research)
- Instrumental (changes to policy or practice)
- Ensuring connectivity (changes to the existence or strength of networks, relationships of stakeholders who can use or apply research)

Several emerging issues came up during the radio talkshow discussions, with some highlights listed below, including community voices:

1. **The prevalence and level of violence against children (VAC) is high and not acceptable.**  
This applies to all children.

*“The things which are being talked about here [VAC, on radio show] are very true ... the children are suffering and need help.” – Caller from the Refugee Settlement*

*“Even here in the host communities... things are not any different, many things are causing violence, and it has to stop.” – Caller from the Host Community*

*“It does not matter whether the child is a refugee or not. All children are children and should not be facing violence in any form, wherever they are or whatever their nationality is. They must be protected.” – Panelist from the Local Government*

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<sup>5</sup> Tilley H, Ball L and Cassidy C (2018) Research Excellence Framework Toolkit. <https://odi.org/en/publications/research-excellence-framework-ref-impact-toolkit/>

The sentiments above confirm the need for stronger and more cohesive child protection mechanisms at all levels, starting right from the community grassroots and all the way up to national (and even global) level. The excerpts also shed light on the reality of implementing Uganda's refugee policy which promotes refugee-host integration, with key lessons on/ implications for programming in child protection.

2. **The need remains for continued sensitization of communities about childhood violence.** In particular, emphasizing the negative impacts of adverse childhood events like violence and how this usually repeats later in adulthood, creating a vicious and generational cycle of abuse.

*"Some parents do not know the effect of things like punishment and what it does to their children. So for us, we continue to educate them on this and maybe one day they will stop." – Panelist from the Local Government*

*"Families here are stressed... so the adults just act violently towards children which is bad." – Caller from the Refugee Settlement*

3. **There is a need for the government to better intervene and crack down on some normalized and retrogressive practices which constitute VAC.** For example, child labour and corporal punishment in schools as well as punishment at home under the pretext of 'disciplining' children.

The protective role of education was emphasised, with community members calling upon government, and police in particular, to patrol villages and task parents to send children to school.

*"We need that 'Afande' [police officer] who was speaking [on radio] to come here with his team and sweep our entire village to see how many children are not in school but busy selling small merchandise... they should force the parents to take them to school." – Caller from the Refugee Settlement*

Relatedly, schools must be supported to become the safe spaces they are meant to be, where children can report and access services. It is important that protective mechanisms for the girl child are promoted, as most girls are abused by people known to them.

4. Some **tensions** remain – both overt and subtle - **between child rights discourse and culture** which continue to negatively impact on child protection work. For example, some sections of community fear that promoting "child rights" diminishes the active role of parenting and could erode cherished cultural norms and values such as training children to work hard and respect elders. Concerns are that the activists promoting child rights, including child protection are not emphasising child responsibilities, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

*"Children of these days have become untouchable... if you say anything to them, they run straight to report you for abusing them... they don't even want to do house chores or learn how to become responsible adults or even listen to elders... for sure this "child rights" thing is destroying our children and our culture. Yet culture is very important for us who are now living away from our countries." – Caller from the Refugee Settlement*

The excerpt above provides insights into community perceptions, attitudes, and practices. While panelists on the radio talkshow were able to respond to this concern – for example by emphasising the delicate balance between rights and responsibilities, it remains entrenched within the community and presents a major barrier to child protection efforts. A number of programming and policy lessons and actions can be drawn – including ongoing community sensitisation, dialogue, parental support, and embedding positive cultural sensitivity in child protection efforts.

5. There was a general feeling that the **current child protection system is not operating at optimal levels and needs strengthening**. For example:

- The Police’s Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) lacks the necessary tools and resources to swiftly and effectively respond to cases of violence, which was confirmed by police department representatives on the radio panel.
- Furthermore, members of the community mentioned that the reporting process is not usually well managed because when some people report cases, the police then share this information with the public, which breaks confidentiality and creates conflict in the community. It demoralizes people from reporting.

*“How can you expect parents or concerned people to report cases of violence when the police will either share this information or even accept bribes from some perpetrators? This is what has been happening, so most families end up not reporting or settling these cases at family level without involving the police.” – Caller from the Refugee Settlement*

In response to the above caller, the police officer on the radio talk show (and other panelists assured the public about their commitment and promised to improve on system functionality.

6. While the radio dissemination is a useful community engagement tool, it is also important for the **leaders and duty bearers to engage communities directly** through community dialogues and other in-person means. This will contribute to the messages on VAC being acted upon and will also unite community with their leaders and duty bearers.

*“It is really good to be connected and see that this [radio] programme has brought these important officials together to talk to us about this issue. We rarely get them together like this, infact some I have never met. But as you know, not everyone is listening to the radio right now, especially those who are continuing to commit these acts of violence... Some of these things need face-to-face discussions. I would like to request that you do something similar and come to the communities, educate our people like you are doing now and together we can stop this violence against children.” – Panellist, Leader from the Refugee Settlement*

## Lessons Learned

- For ownership and active participation, it is important to recognise and utilise existing leadership systems and structures. It was important that we first engage the leadership at the different levels to both promote and actively participate in such dissemination exercises. Several stakeholders only agreed to participate once they understood that their respective supervisors were aware that the activity was going ahead and supportive of it.
- Radio advertisements – a major component of radio sessions – often interrupt the flow of discussions. However, this provides an opportunity for a discussion panel to use the time to check in with each other and re-strategize.
- Engaging district leadership and particularly during peak hours increases your listenership and ownership with high-ranking district officials.
- It is important to consider the length of a programming slot and number of panellists that you invite into the radio station to allow for each adequate opportunity to speak in some level of detail about the topics under discussion.
- The radio show allowed the community to call in with their experiences, ask pertinent questions, and hold their leaders accountable. The debrief and reflection sessions which happened after the radio show further discussed matters such as responsibilities of government officials, with these officials committing to improve their supports. Some of the other panelists drew lessons for inclusion in their routine work, including content for community engagement sensitization.

## Challenges

- While we worked to ensure efficiency by selecting premier radio stations at regional level rather than more localised radio stations serving each of the settlements, the challenges of time during the programme, resource constraints, and clarity of frequency should not be underestimated.
- Relatedly, due to long travel distances to the radio stations and/or competing work commitments, direct engagement of some stakeholders as panellists - particularly during peak hours, can be costly if you are covering these expenses.

## Conclusion

The HVACS dissemination activity in Uganda was a huge success in terms of raising awareness on VAC, rallying critical stakeholders to act, and catalyze existing efforts in violence prevention and response. The moral and ethical imperative of returning to research communities with the findings was achieved, and stakeholder relationships well managed while building new ones. This set a solid foundation for additional work by the Baobab RPC - including upcoming interventions, in its bid to improve SRHR outcomes for vulnerable groups in humanitarian settings.



## Appendix: Dissemination gallery



**Above:** District Community Development Officer (DCDO) Kyegegwa District and Kyaka II Settlement Commandant from the Office of the Prime Minister attend a radio session at Britop FM.



**Above:** Briefing panelists before radio sessions in Kiryandongo and Arua Districts.



Above: Briefing panelists before radio sessions in Kitgum/Lamwo Districts.