Multi-platform education

KEY CONCEPTS

INDIGENITY, STEM,
PRE-LITERACY SKILLS,
EDUCATION, CHILDREN,
EDUTAINMENT, CO-CREATION
ANIMATION

Despite being the region with the fastest-growing school-age population, sub-Saharan Africa registers the highest rates of education exclusion and lowest pre-primary enrollment in the world. Entering primary school with insufficient learning readiness, children lack pre-primary foundations, a deficit that spirals into poor educational, cognitive, behavioural, and social outcomes. Founded in 2013 and targeting young children and their parents, Ubongo is an 'edutainment' social enterprise providing millions of families across Africa with fun, localised, and multi-platform educational content that helps children aged 3-14 learn via ubiquitous and locally accessible technologies.

COUNTRIES
Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia

CLIMATE
Main climatic zones: arid and semi-arid, tropical, equatorial, and temperate

INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICITS
Poor education infrastructures

RISKS
Lack of education, poor cognitive development, limited future prospects

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion in the world, with approximately 500 million children failing to receive a quality education. Despite being the region with the fastest-growing school-age population, one-fifth of children between the ages of 6-11 and one-third of youth between the ages of 12-14 are not in school. The problem starts from the earliest years, with 44% of African children aged 3-4 experiencing low cognitive and social-emotional development. In a context of public school systems increasingly unable to meet the demand for education, and few informal learning resources for children, Ubongo provides a low-cost and massive-scale educational resource for children and their caregivers.

Approach

Established in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Ubongo's 'edutainment' offerings provide content that improves school readiness and learning outcomes, and promotes social and behavioral change for children, caregivers, and educators. The innovation of Ubongo Edutainment lies in leveraging locally accessible technologies that tens of millions of families across Africa already use. Delivering its fun, localised content across platforms including radio, TV, SMS, and smartphones, Ubongo content is freely available via a CC-NC-ND-BY license, with a number of free Android apps in English and Kiswahili available on Google Play.

Employing a human-centered approach based on user input, programmes are typically broadcast in local languages, and reflect indigenous cultures through catchy songs, beautiful animation, and relatable characters. Ubongo content builds pre-literacy skills and socio-emotional learning outcomes for younger viewers, and foundational STEM and analytical thinking skills for older learners. Available in 12 languages across 23 African countries, Ubongo's shows attract 11 million viewers a week across Africa, at a cost of just $0.13 per family per year. The innovative model has also resulted in the Ubongo Edutainment brands "Akili and Me" and "Ubongo Kids" being the most popular children's entertainment brands in East Africa.

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Institutions, Governance, and Finance

The Ubongo team consists of 74 personnel (ranging from the executive department, digital, pre-production, post-production, adaptation, studio, education, operations, finance, and business departments), eight board members and five advisors. The organisation is funded through its commercial revenue, as well as grants from the Human Development Innovation Fund (DFID-funded), Development Innovation Ventures (USAID), and the Fred Foundation. The organisation also works with numerous partners, including core-funders, contributors, leadership partners, co-production partners, mobile partners, education partners, and research partners (e.g., the Goodall Foundation and Spring Accelerator, who help develop life skills content like financial literacy).
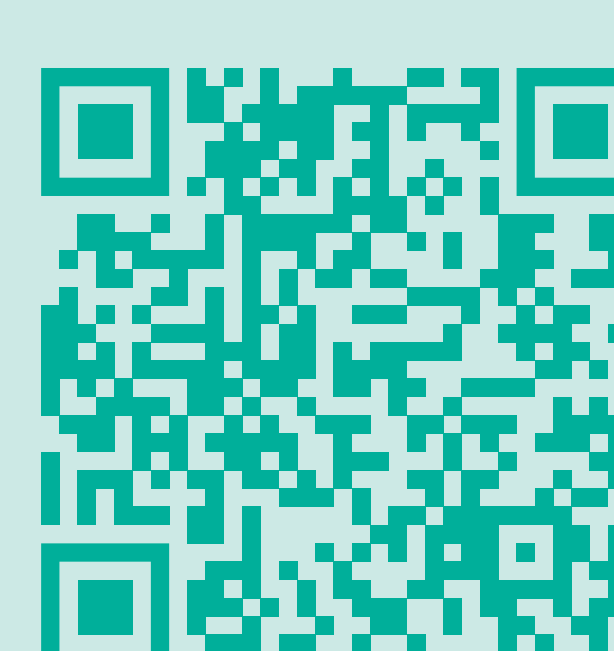
The Impact

IMPACT	SOCIAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	ECONOMIC
Provision of education services for children	✗		✗
Women's empowerment: 80% of senior management are women	✗		✗
Skills development of children	✗		
Low cost per student	✗		✗
No transport required to access learning		✗	✗

Looking Ahead

In addition to the 12 languages currently in use, Ubongo is piloting Kinyarwanda programming in Rwanda, and has plans to add four more African languages. It further intends to grow free-to-air television broadcast (which allows anyone with the appropriate receiving equipment to view content without a subscription) across the continent, seeking to reach 60 million families by 2025.

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