The internet is a city and, like any great city, it has monumental libraries and theatres, museums and places that make you complete. But there are also slums, red light districts and there are really sleazy areas where you wouldn't want your children wandering alone. And I think people must understand that about the internet - it is a new city, it's a virtual city and there will be parts of it of course that they dislike, but you don't pull down London because it's got a red light district. (Fry, 2009)

Today the life of most young people is defined by internet and social media for communication such as Facebook, twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube among others. I guess you have heard your friends say 'I will Whatsapp you'; 'I will holler you on Facebook'; 'I will twit you in a bit'. Social media has made conversations cheap and instant. According to the International Telecom Union, Uganda has over 8.5 million Internet users with the biggest percentage being young people. With all the benefits that come with social media, there are also possible risks. Since the beginning of 2015, STF has been asking you to share the good and bad experiences with the Internet and social media. We received many letters from you. Read on!

Good:
"Internet is a hassle-free way to get in touch with the world. It can be used to provide young people with health information and current affairs," Hafubu Julius, 17, S3, Busia Trust SS.

I met an American ‘boy’ on Facebook...

Cathy, Ebenezer Progressive says: I met Charlie, an American boy online. He said he was my age mate. We shared love messages, exchanged photos and gifts. He said he was 18 years old, but surprisingly he kept changing his age. This didn't discourage me as I continued chatting with him.

One day he invited me to visit him. He bought me an air ticket and I travelled to the USA. When I arrived I was shocked to see that Charlie was my dad’s age mate. He took me to a restaurant. Thereafter, we went to a guesthouse where he had a bed made up like a heart and many gifts for me, including knickers that he asked me to wear. He began touching my breasts and private parts but I resisted and screamed for help. Luckily, a cleaner passing by heard and rescued me. Charlie was arrested, I was returned to Uganda. The internet is good but we should be careful with the friends we meet and chat with online.
**Research**

Nakimuli Joan, 19, Form 6, Bright Way Hill School, Bukesa says: “My friends and I do research on the internet for new things which are of educational benefit.”

Bryan 16, Busia Trust Secondary School, says: “Social media sites like facebook, Whatsapp among others have helped friends and families to connect with each other.”

**Modern Communication**

“It transforms one from local means of communication to modern ones.”

Namutebi Faith Diana, 12, Bright Way Hill School, Bukesa

The internet is a short cut to events all over the world. Young people can access health information online without being stigmatized. Straight Talkers shared their about the internet.

Daniel Kamar, S6, Yale HS Kayunga says: It’s fun chatting with friends online. However, the pirates have made social media like facebook a weapon of destruction and youth have fallen prey to pornography leading to immorality. Students also waste a lot of valuable time on the internet leading to poor performance.”

Many children provide too much personal information online and give access to bad people, which may lead them to fall victim to sexual predators. The Internet is both a beautiful and ugly creature, but the best part is that the users mold its face, so we choose what we want the Web to be.”

Okello Elvis Nume, Comprehensive College Kiteikika, Wakiso

“Many children provide too much personal information online and give access to bad people, which may lead them to fall victim to sexual predators. The Internet is both a beautiful and ugly creature, but the best part is that the users mold its face, so we choose what we want the Web to be.”

Simon Kutesa the head of media crimes at Uganda Police says, “report online crimes to any police station.”

“Social media networks about their age, where they live among other things. Facebook requires that you are 13 at the time you open a facebook page. Many below this age open accounts claiming they are older.”

**Rules for Online Safety**

- Visit sites suitable for my age
- Be polite, show respect online.
- The Internet is not a problem but the values we take with us online may be the problem.
- Keep your personal information secret
- Report unpleasant messages to security departments of platforms such as Facebook and Google.
- The internet is not a problem but the values we take with us online may be the problem.
- When you decide to meet people you connect with online, meet them in a public place. Do not be obvious. If you told them you will be in red, wear a different colour. This will give you chance to assess the person before meeting them.
- Go with a friend just in case the person is harmful.

**Take Interest in What Our Children Are Doing Online**

Child online protection is important to both leaders and parents and is a matter of urgency. Times have changed, pornography has become so easily accessible. It is evident that the internet has positively influenced us in education, facilitated online transactions and has made available expert medical services through telemedicine, it has also had a negative impact on the innocence of our children who are being exposed to online content that is detrimental to their young minds and we must regulate it and curtail its harmful effects.

Janet Museveni, ACOP Conference 2014

**Pornography**

“The Internet leads to immorality through exposure of pornographic content for example pictures and movies.”

Tumusiime Derrick, S3, Red, Busia Trust Secondary School.

**Online Bullying**

“Social media networks like Facebook have a lot of disadvantages. You could be bullied or harassed by an adult or a fellow young person.”

Sanyu Kevin, S6, Namboole HS, Kampala

**Addictive**

“The Internet is very addictive and it has become a driver for time wasting which inturn leads to limited time for revising books.”

Lizzie Kashy, S4, Princess Diana HS, Kampala
Gone are the days when someone raped or defiled you and you had no where to report. Many times, young people suffer the pain of abuse in silence because they do not know where to report such cases. Even those who know where to go give up because of the hectic procedures of following up a case and the costs that come with it. Today life has been simplified. Uganda Communications Commission in partnership with Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development has introduced the short code 116 as an emergency child response help line called Sauti. It is free of charge. The National call Centre is found in Kampala but receives cases from all around the country. Qualified staff and counselors are available 24 hours, seven days a week to attend to you. They speak English and different Ugandan languages. When you call from the country side, your case will be handled at a satellite or action centers in different districts. The Probation and Social Welfare offices at district levels act as satellite action centers. If you are calling from a nearby place, the Sauti team will reach you within a short time. Reported cases are followed up until they are solved in confidence. Currently, majority of people who call Sauti are from central Uganda and Apac district. In a day about 650 cases are received at the Sauti call centre.

**Know Your Body:**

**A normal Vaginal discharge does not itch or smell**

**Nassozzi Josephine, S1, 15, Galaxy SS, Wakiso asked:**

**What causes vaginal fluids?**

Dear Josephine, at puberty, the walls of the vagina produce a fluid or a discharge which is thicker than saliva. This is caused by the hormones in our bodies.

**Belinda Tumushabe, a Clinical Officer in Murchison Bay Hospital in Kampala says:**

Vaginal fluids keep the vagina clean and maintain the proper environment in which “good” bacteria that prevent infections can grow.

**Normal vaginal discharge**

This is clear and whitish in colour, non smelly, not itchy. Girls tend to get more vaginal fluids during certain times of the menstrual cycle. For example, discharge increases during ovulation or when sexually excited.

**Abnormal discharge:** It is smelly, itchy, has blood or pus, yellowish in colour or looks like spoilt milk. This could be due to infections/STDs. Go to hospital for treatment if you have an abnormal discharge.

**HIV Basics**

**Why is it that when some women with HIV/AIDS produce children, they have HIV too?**

**Namuddu Proscovia, 14, Standard SS, Bweyogerere**

**Dear Proscovia,**

HIV is transmitted from mother to child via three main ways. First, the child can get infected when it is still in the womb as the virus can cross the placenta and enter the baby, during labour and the child birth. The risk of infecting a baby with HIV is high especially when an HIV positive mother does not give birth from a health unit with qualified health workers who can help to prevent infection. **Dr Stephen Watiti, Watiti Foundation**

**Get it off your chest: Call Sauti**

Most of the cases reported since 2013 are rape, defilement, forced marriage, incest, child neglect, physical abuse including Female Genital Mutilation.

**Communications Commission in partnership with Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development has introduced the short code 116 as an emergency child response help line called Sauti. It is free of charge. The National call Centre is found in Kampala but receives cases from all around the country. Qualified staff and counselors are available 24 hours, seven days a week to attend to you. They speak English and different Ugandan languages. When you call from the country side, your case will be handled at a satellite or action centers in different districts. The Probation and Social Welfare offices at district levels act as satellite action centers. If you are calling from a nearby place, the Sauti team will reach you within a short time. Reported cases are followed up until they are solved in confidence. Currently, majority of people who call Sauti are from central Uganda and Apac district. In a day about 650 cases are received at the Sauti call centre.**

**Fun at the Red Card convention**

On 11th July, 2015 Straight Talk Foundation hosted 31 schools at Nsambya Sharing Hall for the Red Card to Underage alcohol debating and drama competition.

The day kicked off with debates, poetry, dance and drama at 8.30am as different schools tussled it out to be crowned the ultimate winners of the day. Students shared the negative effects of underage alcohol consumption through debate, poems, music and petitions. The day was graced by Mr. Mondo Kyateka, the Assistant Commissioner for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and Susan Ajok the Executive Director Straight Talk Foundation.

Winterland PS and Uphill College Mbuya that presented a poem and petition respectively were given awards in recognition of their outstanding effort.
Dear Sharon, being healthy is very important. I no longer feel pain.

If you are sexually active, abstain, be faithful or use condoms to prevent HIV and other STDs.

If someone is below 18 years, seek medical help from a counselor or a therapist from a nearby health center. She needs your help now more than ever.

My mother died two years back. I stay with my father who drinks alcohol. Whenever he is drunk and asks for sex from you, talk to your senior woman teacher or a close relative for immediate help. My mother had cancer that was not transmitted to me.

Is it true that circumcision prevents some types of cancers? Asaba Kenneth, Gulu Army, SS

Yes, cancer of the penis is very rare among people who practice infant circumcision and circumcised men are less likely to transmit Human Papilloma Virus that causes cancer of the cervix in women and girls.

I feel pain in my waist and vagina. What can I do?

Go for a medical checkup because you could have what is known as "pelvic inflammatory disease" (PID), which is infection within the fallopian tubes and/or uterus.

Dear Ketty, there are many different disorders of the urinary tract. They are not always easy to tell. Some are not serious, while others can be very serious. A dangerous illness may begin with only mild symptoms. It is often difficult to identify these disorders correctly. Special knowledge and tests may be needed. Seek advice from a health worker.

My mother died two years back. I stay with my father who drinks alcohol. Whenever he comes back, he asks for sex. What can I do? KE, Greenvalley HS, Kampala

Sorry for the loss of your mother. It is sad that the person who should take good care of you comes back when he is drunk and asks for sex from you. Talk to your senior woman teacher or a close relative for immediate help.

Is it true that circumcision prevents some types of cancers? Asaba Kenneth, Gulu Army, SS

Yes, cancer of the penis is very rare among people who practice infant circumcision and circumcised men are less likely to transmit Human Papilloma Virus that causes cancer of the cervix in women and girls.

Am in love with a girl who is mentally unstable. I want to dump her but I’m scared of her reaction. What should I do? Byoruganda Gilbert, S4, Galaxy SS Wakiso

If she is mentally unstable, help her seek medical help from a counselor or a therapist from a nearby health center. She needs your help now more than ever.

I feel pain in my waist and vagina. What can I do?

Girls, 18, Hopeful Future SS, Kayunga.

Go for a medical checkup because you could have what is known as "pelvic inflammatory disease" (PID), which is infection within the fallopian tubes and/or uterus.

Counselors:
Belinda Tumushabe, Murchison Bay Hospital, K’la and Dr Stephen Watiti, Watiti Foundation.

Papilloma Virus that causes cancer of the cervix in women and girls.