

By Dallen Namugga

Vision Group has launched a nationwide multimedia campaign to safeguard children against the growing risks they face in the digital space.

The campaign, titled "Keep Children Safe Online: Addressing Online Safety for Children", will run throughout the school holiday season across Vision Group's print, broadcast and digital platforms.

DIGITAL STREETS

Vision Group's editor-in-chief, Barbara Kaija, said today's children "live in the digital streets, they are digital citizens", whether adults want to acknowledge it or not. She said restricting device access does not eliminate exposure.

"Even when you have hidden all the phones, the remote controls, their good uncle or best auntie, will walk in and give them the phone, and they will end up online," she said.

Kaija expressed deep concern about what children encounter online, which often

VISION GROUP UNVEILS NATIONAL ONLINE CHILD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

surpasses their emotional and psychological capacity to process. She added that even in homes where phones are confiscated, access still exists through smart televisions and other devices.

CURBING PHONE ADDICTIONS

Kaija said some children, "as early as three", show signs of screen addiction, shaped largely by adult behaviour in the home.

"We model what the children do with the phone. If an adult is addicted, most likely the children around them will behave like the adult," she said.

Drawing from a family analogy, Kaija noted that Uganda has long had a

strong culture of communal child protection, which must now be extended to digital environments.

"When you find a child in danger on the road, you protect them. That is a natural instinct," she said.

"What we are doing as Vision Group is saying: 'Look, the children are not just in the physical world, they are also in this online world.'

Kaija said the campaign will run content in *New Vision* and *Bukedde* newspapers, broadcast on *Bukedde* TV channels, *TV West*, *Wan Luo*, *ETOP*, *Radio West*, *XFM*, *Arua One FM*, *Kabalega FM* and *Radio Rupiny*, as well as circulate digital safety information across all Vision

BETWEEN THE LINES

○ The campaign will promote awareness about cyberbullying and responsible online behaviour, alongside forging partnerships with experts.

Group online platforms.

She also appealed for partnerships and sponsorships, noting that sustaining a broad public-awareness initiative requires significant resources.

AN UPSIDE AND A RISK

Esther Arinaitwe, Vision Group's media-in-education manager, described the Internet as "a tremendous

opportunity" for learning and development, but one that comes with "very unfortunate risks".

She highlighted the dangers of online predators, cyberbullying and incidents of trauma linked to harmful digital interactions.

"We've heard of some cases of suicide because of online bullying," she said.

Arinaitwe also raised concerns about growing gadget dependency.

Many parents, she added, lack digital literacy and are unable to supervise children effectively or recognise threats.

WHY NOW?

Vision Group special projects manager Sidney Miria said

launching the campaign during the school holidays was strategic. "Children break off for holidays; there are very many gadgets that are out there," he said.

The campaign, Miria said, will guide parents on supervised access, usage time, content filtering and broader digital safety practices. It will also promote awareness about cyberbullying and responsible online behaviour, alongside forging partnerships with experts.

WHY IT MATTERS

Findings from a 2022 study titled *Disrupting Harm in Uganda*, conducted by Unicef, ECPAT International and INTERPOL, show that nearly 40% of Ugandan children aged 12 to 17 are active internet users, and a significant number face online harm.

The study revealed that 10% of children had been offered money or gifts in exchange for explicit photos or videos, while 9% reported that sexual images of them had been shared without their consent.