

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **The *Kony 2012* video – why did it attract so many views?**

It received more than 110 million hits and was the twelfth video the American charity Invisible Children had released but none of the others attracted this amount of attention. Accessible, simple, with a compelling narrative, it targeted an existing network of supporters and its message was finely-tuned. It had an enjoyable and simple call to action – to share it.

- **Reaction in the media** The video attracted widespread media coverage and led to a backlash against Invisible Children which responded by releasing further videos. The criticisms centred on Invisible Children's advocacy of a military solution to the Lord's Resistance Army and what was perceived as the video's neo-imperialist approach. The next step of the campaign, for supporters to gather to Cover the Night on April 20th, didn't succeed in mobilising as many people as expected.

- **Response in Uganda** Internet usage in Uganda is limited to urban areas. Radio is the most popular form of media and this was instrumental in spreading the word about the *Kony 2012* campaign. Ugandan online journalists wrote blogs about the campaign which were picked up by the international media. In turn, the Ugandan press, radio and television began to cover the story.

There was a negative response to video in Uganda because most Ugandans didn't believe the military solution would work. Other criticisms included the impression given by the video that members of the Lord's Resistance Army were still in Uganda when they left 6 years ago, its neo-imperialist approach and the lack of local voices.

- **The longer term implications** It is too early to assess the overall impact of the *Kony 2012* campaign beyond its raising awareness of Invisible Children and the LRA. However, we have now seen the potential for the internet to stimulate a global debate about an issue in a developing country. The video has also provided campaigners with an opportunity to spotlight current needs in the country, such as nodding disease. One important result of the campaign is that some Ugandans have questioned the motives and financial accountability of Invisible Children and this has extended to a scepticism about NGOs in general.

- **Lessons** Having an established network is key in making any video go 'viral' as well as having content which is accessible to the audience you are targeting. There are no longer geographical boundaries so campaigners need to take into account audiences all over the world and be prepared for critical comment and, ultimately, a loss of control. Anticipating the speed with which social media can move is crucial so campaigners aren't overwhelmed as Invisible Children were when *Kony 2012* went viral. The greatest challenge, which *Kony 2012* failed to address, is how to make content engaging while allowing for nuance and complexity.

- **The future of online campaigning** In order to avoid a potential backlash to online campaigns, organisations need to be honest and transparent and involve local people from the start. Campaigns may need different elements to appeal to different audiences. There could be links to other content for those looking for more depth and context. Campaigners need to innovate and surprise and not overwhelm supporters with too much material.