



GROUNDTRUTH

COVID-19

BAROMETER.

Assessing the impact
of the first month of
the coronavirus crisis
on the lives of young
people in Kenya.

**SHUJAAZ
INC.**

LETTER

FROM OUR

CEO.

‘This generation must be at the very centre of Kenya’s response to the crisis.’

After nearly a month of our COVID-19 Barometers, of SMS surveys, USSD polls and WhatsApp Focus Groups, we wanted to take a few more pages for this week’s brief, to reflect on the impacts of the past four weeks.

But before we do, let’s start here: 3 in 5 Kenyans are under the age of 25. Right now, under 25-year-olds represent more than 60% of the total population. This generation must be at the very centre of Kenya’s response to the COVID-19 crisis.

In 10 years of Shujaaz, it’s never felt more essential that their voices, experiences and concerns are heard – and responded to. The stakes are incredibly high.

But there’s some good news. Young people are engaged and ready to act – 76% understand the threat posed by COVID-19 and we’re seeing a genuine willingness to adopt new public health behaviours (p.3). But there are some serious barriers standing in their way.

Young people across our network have lost their livelihoods at unprecedented rates. They’re increasingly telling us they’re unable to cover the rising cost of food; early reports of hunger are now becoming widespread (p.2).

And as they strive to stay home, they’re increasingly telling us that they don’t feel like the national response to coronavirus has been designed with them in mind; that they feel unheard by their leaders; large numbers say they could join in local protests (p.4).

But volatility isn’t inevitable. Despite the barriers they face, there are Shujaaz (heroes) all over Kenya innovating to keep their hustles going, to make face masks, to slash the prices of the soap they sell so their communities can still afford it (p.6).

Last year 63% of young people told us they felt ‘I have something to contribute to my community and to the world’. Let’s not forget it.

If young people are at the centre of our response to this crisis, they’ll help to rebuild stronger communities. So, here’s my ask: make sure young people’s voices get heard; read these six pages, listen to their stories, and share them.

ROB BURNET

INCOME AND HUNGER.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I'm just idle without anything to do for food and upkeep. This applies to most young people and may force them to turn to crime. The government should take care of things before they are out of hand."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

"I don't have money for upkeep. I don't know what to do."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"Help me with the money to buy food because I slept hungry for 3 days now."

FEMALE, 20, NAIROBI

"I lost my job as all restaurants were made take away. Everyone but two people were sent on compulsory unpaid leave and I'm so broke that even buying Ksh 10 airtime is a challenge."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"Joblessness. You stay hungry the whole day till your family wonders what's up with you. You lose friends coz you can no longer borrow."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"My hustle was shut down and life has become difficult here in Kilifi."

MALE, 26, KILIFI

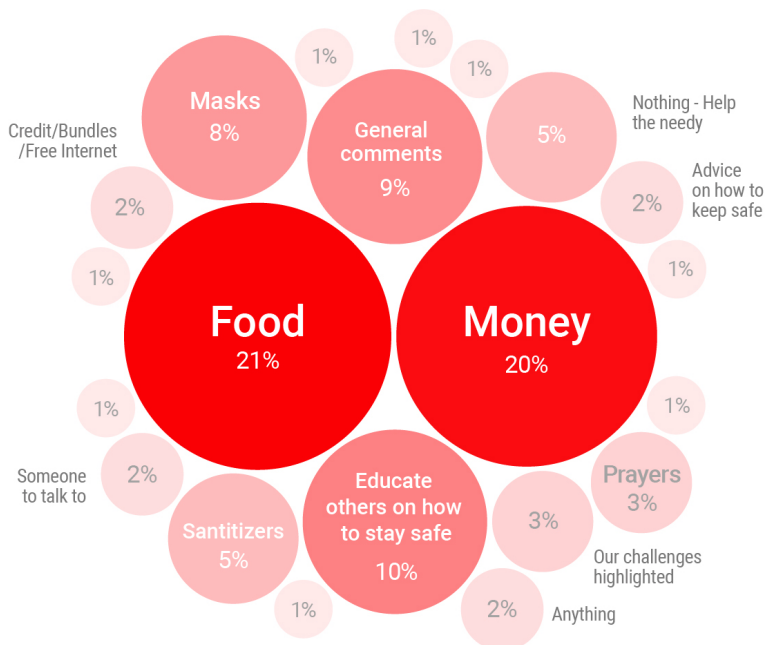
"I am so broke; I don't even have money to buy bundles."

MALE, 21, BUNGOMA

INCOMES COLLAPSE AND HUNGER BITES

Since the start of partial-lock-down measures in Kenya, young people have reported a rapid (60-80%) reduction in their income, exacerbated by sharp hikes in the cost of essentials like food and transport. Over the last four weeks, we've seen young people across our network sink deeper into chronic poverty; with hunger now appearing widespread.

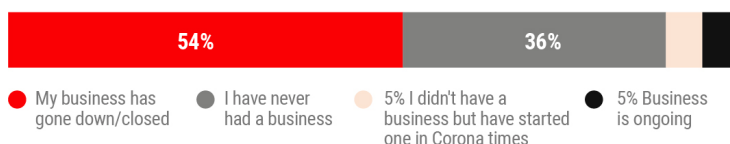
This week, when asked: 'what support do you need, to help you cope with coronavirus?' unsurprisingly, 41% said either food or money (SMS survey, N=608). Our social media teams are tracking the same trends; put simply, young people are now directly asking for urgent financial and food aid.



HUSTLES GRIND TO A HALT

According to results from our 2019 nationally representative survey, nearly one third of young people run micro-enterprises to earn their income. In a survey of our fans this week (N=435) 9 in 10 young micro-entrepreneurs or 'hustlas' reported that they've had to close their businesses, since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic.

WHICH STATEMENT DESCRIBES YOUR BUSINESS/HUSTLE THESE DAYS?



Micro businesses aren't just a critical income stream for young people; they're also the engine of Kenya's informal economy. At Shujaaz Inc, we believe that directly supporting young 'hustlas' is critical, not only to this immediate crisis, but as central to Kenya's longer-term recovery.

AWARENESS & ADOPTION.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I would like to be connected to other youths so that we can teach people in the villages about corona and giving assistance to those who are needy"

FEMALE, 24, MOMBASA

"To be honest, we can't afford Sanitizers at home, but I'm making sure that we have water and soap to prevent spread. I'm also wearing my mask whenever I'm in a public place."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"Buying masks on daily basis. They are more expensive than food.."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"Never in my life had I imagined life would be this way. Staying home ain't easy especially when you have nothing but your God."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"I work in mjengo and when I go to work, I wear a mask and wash my hands all the time although sometimes keeping distance is hard but we are trying. We no longer do handshakes."

23, MALE, HOMABAY

99% OF YOUNG PEOPLE CAN'T COMPLY WITH ALL PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, despite challenges posed by misinformation, young people in our network have maintained a strong understanding of the threat posed by coronavirus.

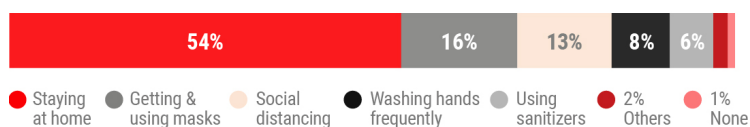
77%

In a USSD poll of our fans this week (N=2,977) 77% correctly identified that everyone in their community is at risk of contracting COVID-19.

In tandem, engagement with our multiplatform #LindaFam (#ProtectYourFamily) campaign has been high. Young people have proven their commitment to not only protect their own families, but to play a proactive role in protecting their wider communities too.

However, despite these high levels of understanding and engagement; young people face widespread barriers to adopting recommended public health behaviours. In an SMS survey this week (N=494), only 1% of Shujaaz fans said they could easily comply with all the recommended public health measures; including staying at home, practicing social distancing, washing hands, using hand sanitiser and wearing a face mask.

WHICH OF THESE PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES IS THE MOST DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO DO? PICK ONE



In conversations with our fans across the last month, young people have highlighted that government recommendations feel incompatible with the reality of their everyday lives.

In particular, 54% of respondents said they found staying at home the most difficult recommendation to comply with. Young people rely on travelling around their neighbourhoods to earn income and, as local market stalls have shut down, to travel to buy food. Likewise, the cost of masks, clean water and soap are simply inaccessible to many young people.

At Shujaaz Inc, we're supporting initiatives like Safe Hands Kenya, to get free soap, hand sanitiser and masks into the hands of young people. These efforts need to scale fast to meet the demand. It's also critical that public health recommendations and messaging respond, and are sensitive to, the lived experiences of young people. Top-down behaviour-change campaigns, which appear to gloss over the fundamental barriers to adoption that young people face, can deepen feelings of alienation and be counter-productive. Their initial enthusiasm for adopting these new behaviours, can quickly turn into rejection – when they'll be needed most.

GOVERNANCE.

SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES

"Face masks are important! We cannot depend on the leaders we elected here in Kenya. They keep asking us to #StayHome, yet there are homeless people out there. Some don't even have food for their families. I do not see them giving us solutions to our problems. As a young person, what solutions would you suggest for this? "

"Talk of #LockDownKenya is a dangerous joke. GOK doesn't have the back of its citizens; so locking down the country will be mission impossible. We, who must be out and about everyday for our survival will not submit to be locked-in hungry, thirsty and anxious about overdue rents"

"The Kenyan government spends a lot of cash campaigning and they can't spend it to protect its citizens. Useless."

"I DON'T SEE THEM GIVING US SOLUTIONS TO OUR PROBLEMS" – ANGER ESCALATES

Over the last month, we've tracked a sharp increase in disgruntlement and anger surrounding the government's response to COVID-19 – particularly on Twitter.

RECURRING THEMES & CONCERNS:

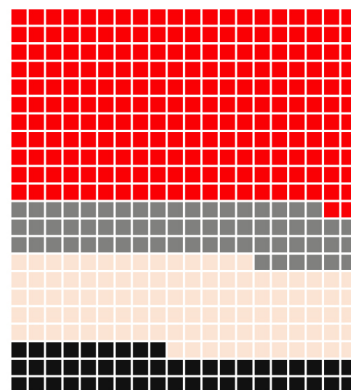
- Leadership appear more focused on upcoming elections, than COVID-19 and the impact of lock-down measures.
- Measures taken by government and recommendations made by them, seem designed for more developed countries, and don't respond to the realities of youth lifestyles and livelihoods.
- Corruption and police brutality appear to go unchecked by leaders
- Unlike in other East African countries (Rwanda is mentioned as a positive example) Kenyans do not receive free aid like food or water.

Initial trends from our new Big Data Analysis research stream highlight that calls for government to provide aid are high; the word 'gava' (government in Sheng, a form of Swahili) is frequently used alongside conversations about 'free food', 'masks' and 'hand sanitiser'.

In a focused SMS survey (N=435) of a segment of our audience this week, 50% of respondents said they were 'likely to join a protest in their neighbourhood', related to the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, and the response of elected officials. Whilst nearly a quarter said they still saw other ways to support their communities – so they wouldn't join.

If there is disturbance (protest) in your hood because of the challenges related to livelihoods and/or concerns related to the elected officials' response to the pandemic, are you likely to take part in it?

- 50% Yes, I am likely to take part
- 15% No, I'll stay at home & not get involved
- 24% No, I can help my hood in a different way
- 11% I don't know



Young people in Kenya can move from 'disengaged' with governance and local leaders, to 'disgruntled', to entirely 'disenfranchised' – fast. To maintain community stability, it's vital that young people feel heard; that they can see evidence that local leaders understand and respond to their needs. It's also important that they feel they have the ability to make their voices heard and the opportunity to constructively engage with their local communities and leaders.

MOOD AND RESILIENCE.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I have cut down on my budget because am not sure how long this situation will last, I can no longer meet my friends and I can no longer go to church"

FOCUS GROUP MESSAGE

"Having depression is there during these times. But we are currently trying to engage in other things like going to the shamba planting vegetables that may help you in future"

FOCUS GROUP MESSAGE

"I advise that if you're skilled in making these masks, you can volunteer and make masks. If you can be able to support someone who's making these masks, support them. If you can, buy several masks and give them to your friends who can't afford them. LindaFam, LindaRafiki."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

"There is a mechanism at our marketplace to avoid overcrowding whereby when you come to the market today to sell your goods then you will not come the following day. We have a leader at the market who has a list and keeps records of everyone who comes in to sell."

FOCUS GROUP MESSAGE

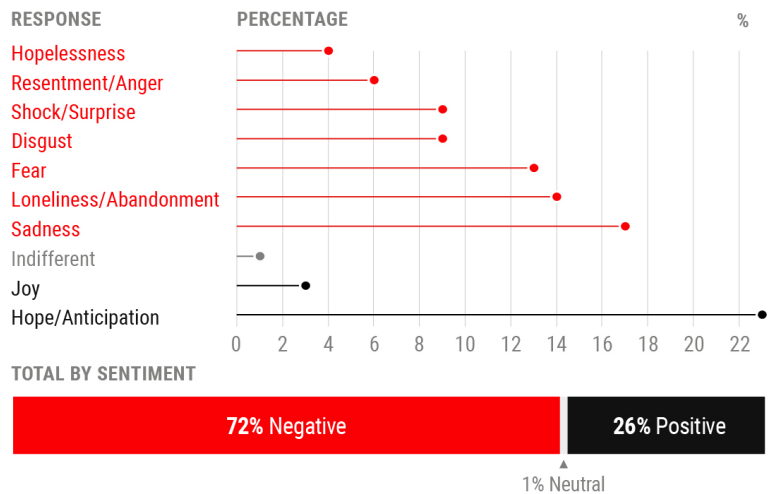
"Currently my friends and I are supplying foodstuffs to those who are far from the market. Its paying "

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

YOUTH OPTIMISM DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EXTINGUISHED BY COVID-19

In four years of nationally representative annual surveys, young Kenyans overwhelmingly (96%) say they expect things to get better year after year, despite the challenges they face. However, the impact of COVID-19 poses a significant threat to that optimism. In an SMS survey this week (N=608) 72% of young people said their prevailing emotion was negative – that they felt sadness, loneliness, or fear.

HOW DO YOU FEEL MOST OF THE TIME SINCE THE CORONAVIRUS MEASURES WERE IMPLEMENTED?



As messages from our fans demonstrate, those feelings are being exacerbated by physical isolation from friends and family– and increasingly digital isolation too. Falling incomes mean young people are unable to buy the data bundles required to stay connected to vital online communities.

RESILIENCE & CREATIVITY REMAIN

However, even in face of stark economic circumstances, stories from young people reinforce that young 'shujaaz' (heroes) in our network are actively seeking creative ways to maintain their income, and to support their communities during this time of crisis.

In particular, 10% (N=473) of young 'hustlas' (micro-entrepreneurs) said they were finding ways to keep their businesses going, or were seeing a new opportunity to start a business. We've heard many reports of boda-boda (motorbike) drivers, who're delivering food to households in their communities who're self-quarantining. Many fans in our audience have started producing and selling hand soap or sewing face masks. And we're also hearing reports of young people helping to establish new systems and structures within their local communities; to help their peers and neighbours stay safe while keeping their businesses going.

In our annual survey last year 63% of young people "strongly agreed" with the statement "I feel I have something to contribute to my community and to the world". Where there are opportunities to help, to adapt and survive, young people will take them.

FAN STORIES

01

NAME

Lenny

ORIGINAL MESSAGE

"I like the fact that we are helping people in this time of the outbreak"

WHO IS HE?

A micro-entrepreneur 'hustla' running a soap hustle in Trans Nzioa

“

I am in a group of 10 people who decided to start a hustle of selling liquid soap last year at around this time. So basically, we get the chemicals required and make the soap by ourselves then sell to the people in our community.

Before the corona outbreak, we used to sell the soap at a higher price than now. For example, the half a litre which used to go for 70kshs now goes for 50kshs. We decided to reduce the price because the demand has been so high since the outbreak. I can say Corona has made us make more sales than previously. Our business is thriving as washing hands with soap is one of the key factors on avoiding the spread of corona.

The reason why we chose to reduce the price was so that we could market ourselves more to our community and create the best customer relationship given that we have other competitors. So far it has been a good experience and I like the fact that we are helping people in this time of the outbreak and also saving as we plan for the future of our business after corona.

Initially I was employed by other people in another village and then daily I would learn how they were preparing the soap that's how I got the skills. After working for some time, I left with one of my friend to go start the biz in our own village. The youth in the village got interested and that's how we ended up adding 8 more people.

For one to qualify, we would challenge them to make sales at least for a month without pay to see their seriousness. Then after we got 10, we registered the biz as a youth group at the DC's office. I am the chairman of the group, there is the organizing secretary and the treasurer. When working no one displays superiority we all treat each other same.

