

GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER

Week Ending
10/APR

At Shujaaz Inc, we're harnessing our SMS, USSD and social media channels to ensure we stay in 24/7 contact with our network of 7.5m young people. Our GroundTruth briefs provide a weekly insight into how the lives of young people in East Africa are being impacted by COVID-19 and associated quarantine measures. This week, stories from our network show that the impacts of partial lockdown measures are already being felt, as young people report a rapid deterioration in their food security, and physical and mental wellbeing.

SOCIAL & SMS MESSAGES

"DJ B, I have not eaten for three days now and I don't have a job. I feel like I will die now that we are not allowed to go out and not given food. What does the president want the poor like me in the slums to do?"

UNKNOWN, NAIROBI

"I can barely get my daily needs plus I can't afford some because of hiked prices."

FEMALE, VIHIGA

"I am really affected by this outbreak, I have not paid my rent, no food I just put my trust in God."

FEMALE, 22, NYERI

"Honestly... it's been a tall order, empty streets, Locked businesses and yes empty pockets. most of our clients are affected and calling to inform they have closed business."

UNKNOWN

'I HAVEN'T EATEN FOR THREE DAYS'

This week, messages from young people across Kenya warn of the severe and present impact that increasing quarantine measures are having on their ability to afford critical essentials – with many saying they're unable to cover the cost of food, rent and transport.

Data from our 2019 nationally representative survey highlighted that, even before the current crisis, 37% of young people already struggled to cover basic expenses and 71% only just covered costs with their income, or by borrowing money. We believe this week's messages are a warning signal for an immanent and far-reaching crisis.

In a USSD poll (N=3,121) of Shujaaz fan this week, when asked which part of their life has been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, 44% said their money, income and ability to cover expenses had been worst hit.

44%

As last week, quarantine and curfew measures continue to hit the informal sector (which 96% of 'working' young people rely on), shutting off vital sources of income. This week, we're seeing that young people's financial insecurity has been exacerbated by hikes in cost of food and transport, as a result of COVID-19 measures.

Fans tell us that the cost of matatu (bus) rides are doubling, as social distancing forces drivers to carry fewer passengers. And whilst mama mbogas (street-side produce stands) close, young people are being forced to cover transport costs to find food from outside of their communities.

SOCIAL & SMS MESSAGES

"I really do not know what to look at when buying a mask, I bought one [and then] was told it was so fake."

UNKNOWN

"I have it [a mask] and I don't use because am not used to covering my face"

UNKNOWN

01

FACE MASKS SPARK CONFUSION

This week, health authorities recommended wearing face masks in public in Kenya. As a result, young people are saying they're confused about the type of masks needed, their cost and how to use them. Whilst awareness and understanding of health measures remains strong, this week, another USSD poll (N=3,220) showed that 10% of young people think it is OK to share a mask with others. A concerning trend, that highlights the need for clear, detailed public health behavior messaging in a fast-evolving climate.

SOCIAL & SMS MESSAGES

“Waah, DJB I have never feared anything in my life like I have for this corona”

UNKNOWN, 23

“I am afraid my parents might die and live me.”

FEMALE, 20, MACHAKOS

“If they know I have corona, honestly, I will be discriminated, guys from my hood will start judging me and they will be calling me ‘mtu wa corona’ (infected person) and they will talk ill about me. Even if I get cured it will be hard to be accepted...this the fact of the society we are living in”

UNKNOWN

“If I test positive, I will be stigmatized by them... and remember stigma can make one to commit suicide.”

UNKNOWN

“They will treat you as an outsider, if there are places where one coughed and he was almost killed so you expect when you test positive, they be happy with you?”

UNKNOWN

SOCIAL MESSAGES

“Why does the government remember only the youth when in times of crisis?”

“The youth can take lead in the fight against coronavirus [...]We can also educate the villagers about symptoms & how they can prevent spread in our mother tongue.”

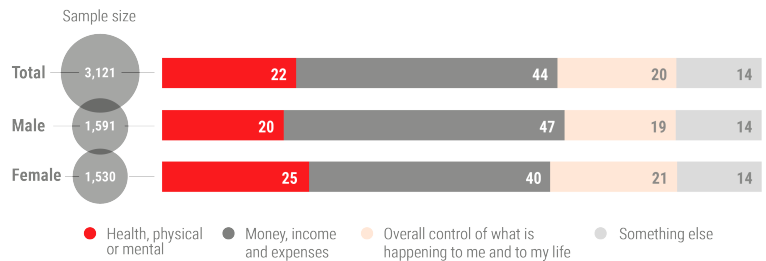
“Because of curfew measures most people with low income have been affected because most of their business were usually done in the evening.”

“During job employment they were not recognizing the youth but now when things become more tough then we are given the priority”

LOSING CONTROL & COMMUNITY

This week, conversations with our network have begun to signal the deterioration of two indicators, which we identify as critical to the wellbeing, resilience and safety of young people; a sense of control or ‘agency’ over your life; and a sense of belonging to a community.

WHICH PART OF YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN AFFECTED THE MOST BY THE CORONA VIRUS?



In a USSD poll this week, when asked which part of their life has been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, 24% said their physical & mental health and 20% said they were losing control over what’s happening in their lives. While in a WhatsApp focus group, most participants said that they believed their community would abandon them if they had symptoms of COVID-19.

Previous studies led by Shujaaz Inc show that, a sense of belonging within a social community and a sense of ‘agency’ or control over your life, are both crucial to young people’s ability to cope in a crisis. Without them, young people in an already precarious context, are left even more vulnerable to economic and health shocks.

‘WHAT DOES THE PRESIDENT WANT ME TO DO?’

This week, as government spokespeople have called on young people to step up in the fight against COVID-19, we’ve seen an uptick in conversation about the government response to the crisis. Broadly, we’re seeing two responses. In part, young people are displaying a willingness to assist in the coronavirus response, and an understanding of the positive role young people can play.

However we’re also tracking an increase in disgruntlement and disappointment towards the government; particularly the feeling that young people are only important to the government when they can be of use to them – whereas ordinarily their priorities are ignored. That discontent is of course exacerbated by a sense that the partial-lockdown and quarantine measures are disproportionately impacting their lives, and the lives of their communities. We’re also beginning to see young people ask what the government is doing to protect them.

Engaging young people is key to the COVID-19 response in Kenya; but to win their support, it’s crucial that they feel their voices and experiences are genuinely being heard and prioritised.

FAN STORIES

01

NAME

Lillian

MESSAGE

"I am surviving on my savings right now and I am worried if they end what next."

WHO ARE THEY?

A 24-year old female, who sells women's clothes in Trans nzoia county.

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My Name is Lilian. I have been selling "mitumba clothes" (for ladies) for two years now at a shop I rented in Trans nzoia county. I used to get my stock from Nairobi and in a day, I would roughly make ksh 3000. Out of this I would save 2000 on mshwari and spend 1000kshs on my basic needs. I used to work till 8pm at night as most of my customers were from the universities around.

Right now, I closed the business because the students went home after the government directives. Plus, the curfew also affected me in that most of my clients passed by the shop in the evenings. I used to get the stock from Nairobi and ever since the corona outbreak happened it stopped. My sister who lives in Nairobi would go to the market and buy stuff then send me.

I am surviving on my savings right now and I am worried if they end what next. My biggest fear is going back home to my parents as I had already become independent other than that I am thinking of what hustle I can do at this time to sustain me because I don't want to be a burden at home.

02

NAME

Robert

MESSAGE

"This year has not been good to me. I don't have money to buy the inputs and I don't know what to do anymore"

WHO IS HE?

He is a 22-year old male, working as a farmer and living in Kericho.

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I am a farmer (of maize, beans & kales) and I have been doing this since I cleared high school in 2016. Before the Coronavirus outbreak I would sell my produce to people in my community i.e. mama mbogas (roadside stalls) who would buy kales and sell at their kiosks, and some men who largely bought the maize and beans in bulk - transporting them to Nairobi and Nakuru mostly to sell. I would get a total profit of around 4000-6000 kshs (\$37 – \$56) after harvesting and selling.

Since the outbreak, I can say I have had a difficulty in getting to market, since the mama mbogas closed their kiosks and they are staying home, also the men are no longer buying maize and beans, leaving me with the option of selling them at cheaper prices so that I clear the stock.

Currently I am only focusing on the kales and am making a profit of like 50-70 ksh (\$0.5) which is not enough though there is nothing much I can do. My biggest worry right now is market since people are not buying anymore and getting corona. I am washing my hands with soap and water regularly and staying at home too to prevent the spread of the virus.