

GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER

Week Ending
17/APR

At Shujaaz Inc, we're continuing to utilize our SMS, USSD and social media channels, to create a safe space for our network of 7.5m young people to share their experiences, concerns and fears during the COVID-19 crisis in Kenya. Our GroundTruth brief this week charts the increasing erosion of the basic physical and psychological needs of young people, as lock-down measures continue. Young people in our network are increasingly 'Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired' – four indicators that we know leave them vulnerable in an already volatile context.

SMS MESSAGES

"Hi DJ B, the corona situation has affected me a lot. I no longer go to work and my rent continues to pile up. I borrowed some money which I have been using to feed my family and its almost over. I am stressed please give me with any advice that will help me through this time."

MALE, 22, KISUMU

"We usually skip breakfast or lunch because there is no money and food. Initially we would have the three meals breakfast, lunch and supper. My dad says that there is not much work nowadays hence the little money."

MALE, 19, NYAMIRA

"Before the corona virus outbreak, we used to get meals daily & other essentials but right now things just changed. Prices of commodities have hiked, things like maize which was 80kshs (1kg) now goes for 120kshs, sugar which was 100kshs (1kg) is now 140ksh."

FEMALE, 18, VIHIGA

"Corona has impacted our economy negatively now food is so expensive."

MALE, 20, BUSIA

"I am so stressed because there are no jobs and I have kids who are depending on me."

FEMALE, 22, NAKURU

PRICE HIKES THREATEN WIDESPREAD HUNGER

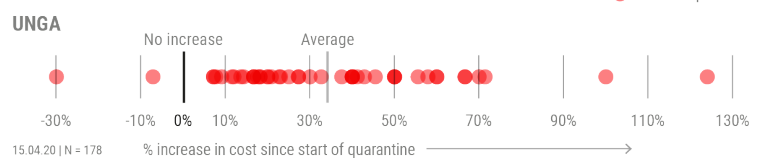
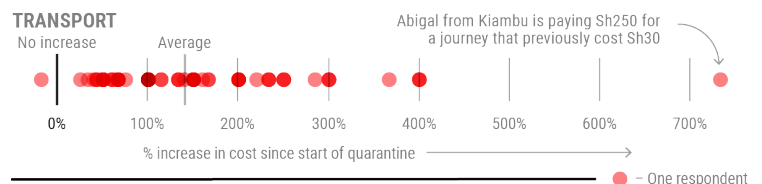
This week, young people across Kenya have reported a fast-deterioration in their food security and financial stability, as COVID-19 lock-down and curfew measures continue.

▼ 60-80% During phone interviews conducted by our team, young people reported a rapid reduction in their income of between 60% - 80%, since the start of quarantine measures.

Data from our 2019 nationally representative survey showed that 15-24-year-olds were on average earning KES 4,367 (\$44) per month. Based on a 60-80% reduction in income, young people could be earning as little as KES 1,747 (\$16) – 874 (\$8) across a month.

Reports from our network suggest that food insecurity is being exacerbated by significant price hikes. In a focused, rapid-SMS poll (N=172) conducted on Thursday, 81% of respondents reported an increase in cost of one or more essential items. According to early insights from our fans, the average price of transport appears to have increased the most (142%), since February. The price of unga (cornmeal) increased on average by 34% and the price of sugar by 24%, a small group of respondents highlighted a significant hike in the cost of fresh food (tomatoes) by up to 135%.

REPORTED PRICE INCREASES



As incomes rapidly decrease and prices continue to rise, young people are struggling to afford their most basic needs.

FOCUS GROUP MESSAGES

“Our biggest problem is water, we buy water from the dam, and it is far. So if you buy 20L jerrican at 10bob then you use like 60% of it washing hands, then that will make other people to skip washing hands since it is expensive and there is shortage of water ”

“It is hard to be 1 meter apart in public transport because they’re overcrowded. Conductors wait til they pass roadblocks then they add passengers in the van, and you can’t complain since you want to get home before curfew.”

“At the market most of them use liquid soaps that are over diluted, and the water is mostly dirty.”

“Masks are being sold from Ksh 100 but also most hustles are closed so we are being forced to use our savings. Will I buy unga or a mask?”

“DJ B, Masks are for the rich. We hustlas are living life normally. God will guard us.”

“Social distancing is a theory, it is impossible in practice.”

PREVENTION MEASURES ‘IMPOSSIBLE IN PRACTICE’

This week, we conducted 5 WhatsApp focus groups in different counties across Kenya. During these discussions, young people consistently highlighted the challenges they’re facing in complying to recommended public health behaviours.

BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

- **Hand Washing:** young people raised concerns about limited access to the clean running water needed for effective handwashing. Many highlighted having to choose between buying water for cooking and cleaning – or preventative handwashing.
- **Social Distancing:** young people in Kenya are reliant on public transport matatus (buses) and bodabodas (motorbikes) to travel to work or to buy food (particularly as local stalls close), where complying with social-distancing measures just isn’t possible
- **Cashless Transactions:** mobile network operator Safaricom has slashed costs of mobile money for business transactions, to reduce the use of cash. But the measure doesn’t impact young micro-entrepreneurs, the majority of whom are not formally registered as a business – meaning many report still being reliant on cash payments.
- **Mask Use:** many reported that the cost of masks remains prohibitively high, and limited access to clean water makes washing them, to safely reuse them nearly impossible.

It’s vital that public health recommendations respond to the context and everyday lives of young people; not only to increase adoption, but to ensure that young people remain positively engaged in prevention efforts and feel protected by them.

SMS & SOCIAL MESSAGES

“I wish the government could help us at this time of need because things are getting worse.”

FEMALE, 18, VIHIGA

“Let us hope after this gesture NOW youth will be given jobs not our grandfathers and mothers.”

UNKNOWN

“The president only cares about people in Entertainment industry yet there are people sleeping hungry because their hustles have been affected. ”

UNKNOWN

HUNGRY, DISGRUNTLED AND GETTING ANGRY

This week our team has launched a new research stream, to track social media conversations on a larger scale, using Big Data analysis tools.

As a starting point, we’ve begun by processing Twitter conversations tagged ‘#COVID19KE’ that address youth-issues, tracking the key issues we address in our weekly barometer. Early findings this week, track closely with the trends we’re spotting on our SMS channels. The most prevalent clusters of conversations centre around three topics. Firstly, the threat of extreme poverty, hunger and starvation, secondly the increase in food prices (particularly unga) and finally rising disgruntlement with the government’s response to the crisis. As last week, young people report feeling that they, and their experiences, aren’t prioritised by the government – who seem to prioritise older, wealthier groups.

As 60% of Kenya’s population, ensuring under 25’s feel their voices and experiences are being heard is critical to the COVID-19 response. Without that reassurance, this initial disgruntlement can fast turn into anger.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"There are many [challenges], starting with social distancing. Some of us like making new friends, visiting new places and adventure. We are now on house arrest. No hustle, no money to buy [phone data] bundles. You can't even spend time online. I hope once this is over, corona goes for good. Life has changed much."

MALE, KISII

"The outbreak has really affected my relationship, I don't know when I will see my partner again. it is frustrating."

UNKNOWN

"Corona is real, I cannot meet my boyfriend now."

FEMALE, 17, TAITA TAVETA

"On my side the directive given by the government has really affected me, I can't go see my parents and where I work, we are not allowed to go on leave because I am a security officer"

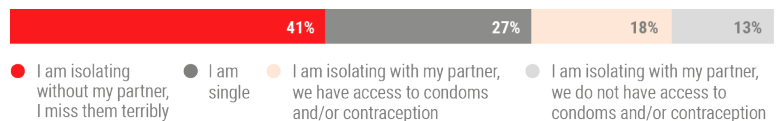
UNKNOWN

DISCONNECTED, DISTANCED & FEELING LONELY

COVID-19 is more than a public health crisis; it is also a loneliness crisis. For 15-24-year-olds in Kenya, social distancing and quarantine measures are hampering their social lives, and crucially their romantic and sexual relationships.

In a USSD poll (N=2,503) this week 41% of respondents said they were self-isolating apart from their boyfriend or girlfriend. At Shujaaz Inc, we know that sexual partners are incredibly important. Many young people in our audience have left their families, support networks and communities behind, to find work in urban and peri-urban settings. For many of our fans, their romantic or sexual partners are their only connection to a social network, sense of community, or emotional support. And with incomes falling rapidly, many are reporting being unable to afford mobile-data bundles to stay in touch online. Without those vital support networks, already vulnerable young people are even more exposed to economic and health shocks.

Q: WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RELATIONSHIPS UNDER THE CORONAVIRUS RESTRICTIONS:



We're closely tracking the impacts of COVID-19 quarantine measures on a range of sexual and reproductive health indicators. At present only 13% report that they do not have access to contraception, but we remain concerned that access will decline as stocks dwindle during lock-down.

FAN STORIES

01

NAME

Conphida

MESSAGE

“My greatest fear is hunger and not being able to get my daily needs.”

WHO ARE THEY?

An 18-year old living with her mum, who runs a street-side food stall.

“

I live with my mother who is a “mama mboga” (street-side produce seller). Before the coronavirus outbreak, we used to get meals daily and other essentials but right now things just changed. Prices of commodities have hiked, things like maize which was 80kshs (1kg) now goes for 120kshs, sugar which was 100kshs (1kg) is now 140kshs.

We are having it rough because even at the kiosk’s prices have changed. I can no longer buy the body oil I use because the price has gone up. I used to buy 100bob airtime right now I only buy for 20 bob or go without airtime completely.

My mum’s business has really been affected as she is not making sales, and this has led us to sleeping hungry sometimes. Getting food is difficult for us right now.

My greatest fear is hunger and not being able to get my daily needs. I am observing social distance and washing my hands frequently.

02

NAME

Joseph

MESSAGE

“At home, we usually skip breakfast or lunch depending on what is available because there is no money and food.”

WHO IS HE?

A 19-year old student, studying engineering and living at home with his parents.

“

I am currently a student at the university doing an engineering course and I live with my parents. My dad is the bread winner, while mum is housewife. Before the corona outbreak I would say life was just okay and there were no major issues like right now.

Prices have now hiked in both the transport and food industry. For transport the price has been doubled, for example places I used to pay 50 kshs its now 100 kshs. For food, we used to get 1kg of maize at 80kshs right now it is 120 kshs.

Generally, all the foodstuffs prices are not the same as before. As a community, we have been complaining to the sellers but on their side, they are also saying they have no other means of survival plus nowadays only a few people buy stuff as compared to the past.

At home, we usually skip breakfast or lunch depending on what is available because there is no money and food. Initially we would have the three meals breakfast, lunch and supper. My dad says that there is no much work nowadays hence the little money. I wish the government could help us at this time of need because things are getting worse.