

GROUNDTRUTH
COVID-19 BAROMETER

Week Ending
01/MAY
Issue 5

At Shujaaz Inc, we're continuing to harness our SMS, USSD and social media channels to track and share the stories, experiences and concerns of our network of 7.5m young people. This week, as April came to a close and Kenya's partial lockdown measures were extended, the long-term social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are beginning to emerge. As we enter this second month, we hope this Barometer will become a useful tool, not just to respond to the immediate crisis, but to look ahead and start planning how to rebuild more inclusive economies and more resilient communities.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"This month ends and I am done. I lost my job, but I am still searching for another one. Life has become so hard; God have mercy on us."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"Now that jobs are becoming scarce, we have entered a surviving mode. This is by taking loans from whichever APP that we have that can allow. For example, Tala, Branch, Fuliza..."

WHATSAPP

"Hi DJB, can you please pull out a plan for me to get flour, I am so hungry this corona has blocked all my hustle channels."

FEMALE, 22, NAIROBI

"Right now its difficult to get loans because even those lenders are in quarantine. They feel that at this moment we can't afford to pay them back."

WHATSAPP

I have a boutique and my stock is running out. I can't even travel to get more stock coz of the lockdown and the fact that Mitumba import was halted. Almost everyone has been affected but we hope and we trust God will have mercy on us.

MALE, FACEBOOK

'THIS MONTH ENDS, AND I'M DONE'

After five weeks of partial lock-down measures, the end of the month has brought acute new pressures for young Kenyans. Rent is due, debt burdens are increasing and – as income streams have collapsed – many can't see a route out of the crisis.

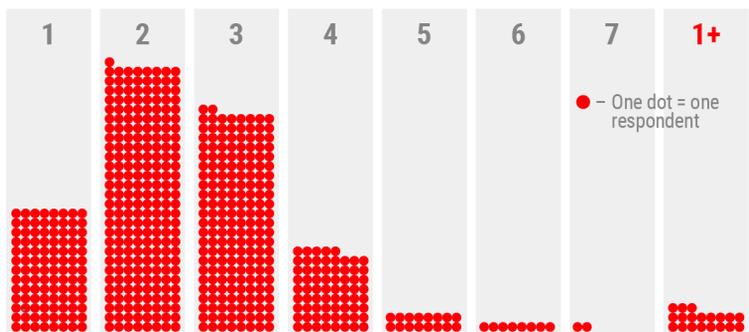
58%

The end of the month is always a financial stress point for young Kenyans; 100% of respondents to our poll this week report having a bill to pay; while 58% said their rent was due this week.

However, this month, many people in our network are approaching these deadlines with incomes that have reduced by between 60-80% and their savings exhausted. But defaulting on rental payments isn't an option; this week, there have been reports of landlords removing doors and roofs from the homes of those who're unable make payments. Put simply: as we enter the second month of partial lock-down, vulnerable young people risk losing their homes.

Unable to cover the cost of these basic essentials, people in our network, particularly 20-24-year-olds, report having turned to formal and informal lenders. In an SMS survey (N=631) this week, 84% of respondents said they had a least one active loan, with 47% having 2-6 loans in their name – most without the ability to repay them.

HOW MANY ACTIVE LOANS DO YOU HAVE?



As housing becomes unstable and debt burdens grow, we're beginning to see the long-term effects of this crisis. It is increasingly evident that, even if lock-down measures are lifted – young people will need sustained assistance to recover.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I am in a stressed state...I do not even have something to buy food, leave alone sending [any money] home."

MALE, FACEBOOK

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"If I were a President, I would reduce rent to 1000 and send free foods to every door."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"The government just says that it's making masks but I haven't got any. When are they being distributed? Are they waiting for Corona to end then distribute? My local Fundi is even more reliable.."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"If it were during (election) campaigns, they would be printing t-shirts and dishing them out. But now..."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"I have learnt one thing, if the government would have been serious all this time the way they are now, Kenya would be very far."

FEMALE, MURANG'A

"Masks should be a free provision by the government. I am not leaving the house so will not buy a mask."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"If I were president today, I would implement a complete lockdown with no movement in and out of the country for 1 month... am sure it would help .."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

REMITTANCES FLOWS SLOW

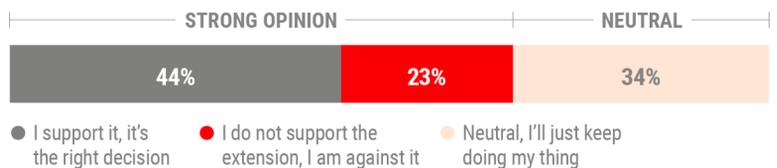
This week, stories from our network have highlighted the impact that COVID-19 is having on the flow of remittances into, and within Kenya. Disruptions to remittances internationally are effecting young people in our network who receive transfers from family internationally and locally (26% receive remittances). In addition, as young people face increasing financial insecurity, the 37% who send local remittances, risk being left unable to support their families.

COVID-19 CRISIS IS ENGAGING MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONVERSATIONS ON GOVERNANCE

Over the last four weeks, as young people's lives have been acutely and directly impacted by government policy, we have seen a consistent increase in engagement in conversations about governance. In fact, even before the COVID-19 crisis, we were tracking evidence of growing awareness and understanding of county youth policies among our audience.

It's unsurprising therefore, that in a USSD poll of our network (N=2,838), 67% of respondents held a strong opinion about the government's announcement to extend the partial lock-down measures in Kenya this week.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE EXTENSION OF THE PARTIAL LOCKDOWN MEASURES?



This week, our Big Data research stream highlighted that young people are increasingly shaping national online debates about governance. In an analysis of the '#40bn' conversation this week – which addressed the government's use of allocated COVID-19 funds – we identified 10 young people as being among the most influential individuals (those whose posts receive the highest number of retweets) shaping the debate.

We know that 'flash points' like elections and national crises, lead to a significant spike in youth engagement in governance. Previous Shujaaz Inc studies show that, during these periods, young people can quickly transition from total 'rejection' of government (those who believe governance has no role in their lives) to proactive engagement – when young people inform themselves about government policy and form their own opinions about key decisions. At Shujaaz Inc, we believe the COVID-19 crisis can be harnessed as an opportunity to increase young people's understanding of governance and to strengthen their interaction with local governance structures in the long-term.

SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I had planned to go to school this month but now I have been closed at school, so there is nowhere I can go, I will just have to relax and look at how situation will be. "

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"We're not doing it for the government. We are not protecting the government. We are doing it for ourselves and protecting our lives."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"No body can help me, I have been alone since my best friend was found with covid-19 virus,"

UNKNOWN, NAIROBI, 20

"For the last few days I cannot buy bundles, I only buy text messages..."

FEMALE, 21, NAKURU

It's been very hard to get bundles or SMS

MALE, 20, NAROK

"Wah, it was too much every week. At first I used 200 but then I reduced and only use 100 . "

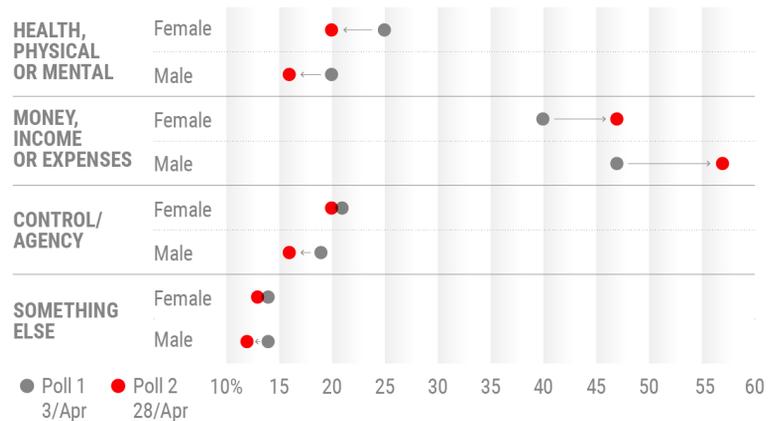
MALE, 18, EMBU

FEELING OUT OF CONTROL, ALONE & DISCONNECTED

We're continuing to track two indicators which we identify as crucial to young people's resilience, wellbeing and ability to cope in a crisis; a sense of 'control' or agency over your life, and a sense of connection to your community.

This week, we repeated a USSD poll (N=1,844) completed in the first week of April, asking young people which part of their life had been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. As expected, the number of young people saying that their 'Money, Income and Expenses' had been most hit increased from 44% to 52% this week. The number of young people in our network who said their 'sense of control over what is happening to me and my life' had been most affected, held steady at 18% (from 20%).

WHICH PART OF YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN MOST AFFECTED BY CORONAVIRUS?



In parallel, when asked directly in an SMS poll (N=797), 38% of young people said that they agreed with the statement 'I feel that I have no control over the direction my life is taking.'

Meanwhile, analysis of SMS messages received from our fans this week, showed that many young people feel that they are facing the COVID-19 crisis alone – telling us that 'no-one' is helping them to cope. This sense of isolation is of course being exacerbated by physical distancing and quarantine measures; but we expect it is also being accentuated by their increasing digital disconnection.

AIRTIME AND DATA BUNDLES BECOME A LUXURY

In our 2019 national survey (N=2,020), young people with smartphones reported spending KES 1200 (USD 12) per month – predominantly on calling, texting and communicating on social media. In a focused SMS survey (N=372) this week, 3 in 5 of our fans told us they were spending KES 100 (USD 1) or less per week – highlighting that even that airtime was 'bought' using reward or credit schemes with their network provider, not cash.

We know that a sense of 'agency' or control over your life, and a sense of being connected and supported by your community is crucial to young people's ability to cope during economic and health shocks. Ensuring airtime and data bundles are accessible to young people is critical step towards preventing further decline against these two crucial indicators.