



GROUNDTRUTH

**COVID-19**

**BAROMETER.**

Assessing the impact  
of the first 8 weeks of the  
coronavirus crisis  
on the lives of young people  
across Kenya.

**SHUJAAZ  
INC.**

**LETTER**

**FROM OUR**

**CEO.**

**'It's a make or break moment – for the generation that will shape Kenya's future.'**

The headline findings of this week's slightly expanded Barometer, put the impact of the last two months into stark focus.

In an SMS poll this week, 95% of young people said they earned less than \$3 last week – that's up from 40% in our 2019 annual survey (p.3). In the same poll, 74% said they went to bed hungry on at least one-night last week – just under half of those said they've gone to bed without food for more than 3 days (p.4). Put simply; most young Kenyans are now living in extreme and unsustainable poverty.

And as we all know, the ripple effects of a crisis like this one don't stop at rising debt, or even at malnutrition. So many of the indicators we've all worked to improve in the last decade are being thrown into freefall. Young people who are hungry and running out of options, are incredibly vulnerable – to transactional sex, to turning to petty crime or even to radicalisation. And, as the threat of day-to-day hunger overtakes the fear of COVID-19, compliance with vital public health measures is falling too.

But it's easy to get lost in those 'indicators'; to miss what's really at stake in the decisions being taken over the next few weeks. It really is a make or break moment – for the the generation that will shape Kenya's future.

Right now, 60% of the population is under the age of 25. That's tens of millions of people, who want to contribute to their local economies, to their communities, and to the future of their country. In our annual survey last year, 73% of young people said they felt that they 'personally have a role to play' in how their local communities are governed.

But right now, they're just not getting a chance – they're not even getting a hearing. This week, 81% of our network said they don't feel like the voices, hopes and struggles of young people are being sufficiently reflected in Kenya's response to COVID-19 (p.5). Neither do we.

So, how do we change that? Well, I've got three asks for you all this week. Firstly, watch the video on the next page. Spend two minutes listening to the young people we work with; absorb some of their energy, take in the potential that just bursts from their faces and their words. Hold it in your mind as you read on.

Secondly, take in the reality of the situation we've laid out in these next five pages. Then pick up the phone, hit the forward button, reach out to the decision-makers in your network – it's time to act.

The message we've heard from young people across the last 4 weeks is simple: something has to give. As one fan puts it: "Either the government sends us money – or they should let us go find it for it ourselves." As they've told us [time and again](#), partial lockdown measures, without financial or food aid is just not sustainable. Something has got to change.

**'It would be a wholly unnecessary loss to the world, if we don't give this generation a chance to contribute to the future.'**

Finally, pick up a post-it-note and write this down: 'I have something to contribute to my community and to the world'. As we've reported before, that's how 63% of young people 'strongly' feel. Now put that post-it somewhere you can see it.

As we all look ahead, I hope those words will hold us all to account: to ensure we give young people a chance to contribute; a seat at the table; a voice at the meetings we take with decision-makers; a chance to share their ideas on the interventions we design. I'm convinced their energy and vision will help us to find the right path forwards.

It would be a wholly unnecessary loss to the world, if we don't give this generation a chance to contribute to the future. It is a make or break moment. This report gives a clear picture of what that 'break' could look like, if we don't act now.

But it's also time to look ahead to the opportunity in front of us. We must all have been reminded recently of Freidman: 'Only a crisis produces real change...' Now is a time for the big ideas; the ones that suddenly seem possible – even, as Freidman put it, 'inevitable'.

So that's why we'll be taking a break from writing these Barometers for a couple of weeks. Instead we'll be working on some of our big ideas, about how to mobilise, activate and work with our network in ambitious new ways.

We want to hear your big ideas too – so drop us an email and tell us about them – we'd love to help bring them to life.

Keep taking care, we'll be in touch again soon,

**ROB BURNET**



# INCOME AND HUNGER.

## SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

Some of us lost jobs. Now I just stay home hungry together with my wife who has given birth a week ago. It is so sad, share with me any idea please. "

MALE, BUNGOMA

"Sleeping hungry because we don't have money and there's no going to work."

FEMALE, 19, NAIROBI

"I am worried about my family because now with the lockdown there isn't a business that is doing well and getting food is difficult."

FEMALE, 18, SAMBURU

"Dj B here in Nyamira we are hungry. The government shut down all hustles we do not know what to do and we have children."

UNKNOWN

"I haven't eaten since Wednesday. "

MALE, 24, NAIROBI

"In the past one week I went hungry for three days and sometimes I had to eat at my neighbor's."

MALE, 23, NAROK

"For two nights I haven't eaten and for three days I had to take breakfast only."

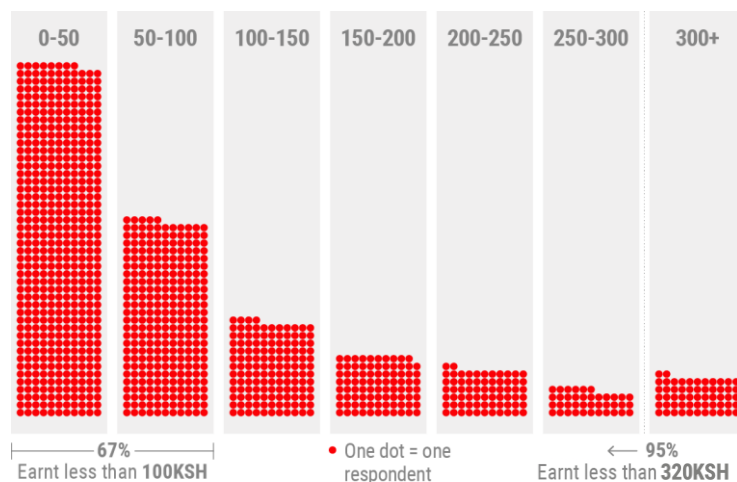
MALE, 24, KITUI

## 95% OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THEY EARNED LESS THAN \$3 LAST WEEK

Over the last eight weeks, we've seen a growing number of young people across our network slide into extreme poverty. In an SMS survey (N=1192) we conducted on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 95% of respondents told us they had earned less than USD \$3 (KSH 321) in the past week.

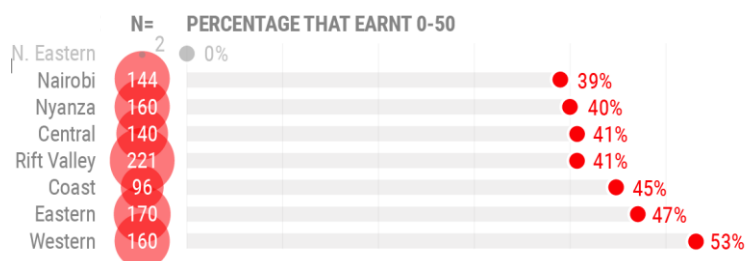
In our 2019 nationally representative survey, we found that, on average 40% of 15-24-year-olds earned less than USD \$3 per week. Though only indicative, the results of this week's SMS survey of Shujaaz fans indicate that a further 50% of young people are now earning under \$3 in a week. In the same poll, 67% said they'd earned as little as USD 90¢ or less across the week.

## HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU EARN IN THE LAST WEEK?



Further analysis of those who reported earning as little as USD 47¢ or less last week, shows that the worst affected areas appear to be in Western, Eastern and Coastal areas of Kenya. More than half of respondents based in Western Kenya (N=160) reported that they were only able to earn between 0-50 KSH last week.

## IN FOCUS: LOCATION OF THOSE WHO EARNED KSH 0-50



The low population density, higher rates of poverty and limited infrastructure significantly reduce the opportunities for young people in rural areas, like Western and Eastern Kenya, to modify or replace their sources of income, in the short-term.

At the end of the first two months of Kenya's partial lockdown, the results of this week's SMS survey throw the acute economic impacts of the Coronavirus crisis into stark focus. Under the current conditions, most young people in Kenya now face living in extreme and wholly unsustainable financial insecurity.



# INCOME AND HUNGER.

## SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"Hi Dj B, If there is any way you can help us youths we will appreciate, because we are going through a hard time. There is no food, no job or even money to pay rent."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

"Right now there is no job, I am very broke that I'm lucky to get some food ."

FEMALE, 18, KIAMBU

"We're bashing Tanzania for allowing everything back to normal and we'll be starving in a few months if things remain the same."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

"Right now life is hard and also very expensive since commodity prices are high. Most people are not going to work but only staying at home. Some are sick. Getting an income is therefore a challenge. Young people are so affected."

FEMALE, SIA YA

"As an individual, the amount of income I earn has really reduced since the pandemic. Even to pay rent has become a problem, where I live it has become difficult to pay rent."

MALE, KISUMU

## 74% OF YOUNG PEOPLE GOING TO BED HUNGRY "WE'LL BE STARVING IF THINGS REMAIN THE SAME"

As part of the same SMS survey (N=1140) of our network, nearly three quarters of respondents said they have gone to bed hungry on at least one night in the last week.

In our 2019 nationally representative annual survey, we found that 15% of young people said they routinely struggled to buy food. The results of this week's indicative SMS survey suggest that as many as 5 times more young people might now be unable to afford food, than in 2019.

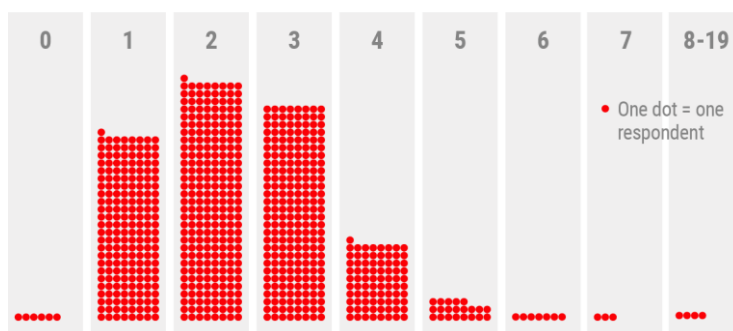
## HAVE YOU HAD TO SLEEP HUNGRY BECAUSE YOU LACKED FOOD IN THE PAST ONE WEEK?

74% - YES

26% - NO

Of the 74% of young people in our network, just under half said that they had gone to bed without food for more than 3 days. About 5% said they had slept hungry for more than 5 days. The responses of our fans, as well as their SMS and social media messages, suggest that young people in Kenya are now at risk of malnutrition.

## FOR HOW MANY DAYS HAVE YOU GONE TO BED HUNGRY?



Over the last eight weeks, our team has tracked a rapid deterioration in the financial security of young people across our network. As both the formal and informal sector have ground to a halt, young people have reported that they (and their parents) have lost their primary sources of income. This has been exacerbated by widespread reports of hikes in the cost of food and transport, the slowing of remittances flows – and the increasing difficulty of loaning money through formal or informal channels.

As young people in our network have highlighted across the last two months; the current situation is simply not sustainable – they cannot survive unless something changes.

In WhatsApp Focus Groups conducted earlier this month (08.05), young people advocated either for sustained financial or food aid, or for an easing of lockdown measures that would allow for a return to work – with continued precautionary measures for vulnerable groups. As one fan put it: "either the government sends us money – or they let us go find it for it ourselves."

# GOVERNANCE.

## SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I haven't seen anything from government – it's like we have to look after ourselves. We are fighting coronavirus ourselves."

MALE, MOMBASA

"Many young people are looking up to the government to give them money to support their families, but, many county governments are selfish and corrupt."

FEMALE, SIAYA

"Ahhh! I don't trust my country any more. I will just leave the house and get myself a hustle or else I will die of hunger."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"You can't tell me curfew is the solution, no. You are lying to yourselves. I have family needs to look after but there is no money, food and even clothes. Just imagine."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"This government isn't serious, doing things at the wrong time. You extend lockdown and curfew and continue doing demolition surely? Who are the advisers of this government?."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"The partial lockdown isn't helping Nairobi and Mombasa as people are still mingling. After 21 days and we return to normal, covid will spread like bushfire."

MALE, FACEBOOK

## "I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYTHING FROM GOVERNMENT" 81% FEEL UNHEARD IN KENYA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

Across the last eight weeks, we have tracked spikes in disgruntlement and anger surrounding the government response to the COVID-19 crisis; with overall negative sentiment in social media conversations rising. In an SMS survey of our network this week, 81% of young people said that they didn't feel their voice, struggles and hopes were being sufficiently reflected in the government response to COVID-19.

## HOW WELL DO YOU THINK THE YOUTH VOICE, STRUGGLES & HOPES ARE REFLECTED IN KENYA'S COVID-19 STRATEGY?

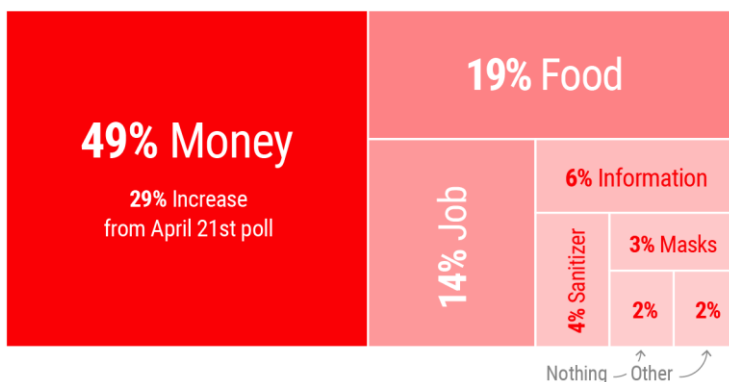
— 81% DON'T THINK THEIR VOICES HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENTLY HEARD —



The COVID-19 crisis has engaged more young people in conversations about governance; as government policies have directly impacted their day-to-day lives. Whilst disgruntlement has risen, young people have also displayed support for government lockdown measures (01.05.20 44% in support) – demonstrating an understanding of the need for public health measures.

## "YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LOOKING TO THE GOVERNMENT TO GIVE THEM MONEY"

This week, we repeated an SMS survey first conducted on April 21<sup>st</sup> asking our network 'What support do you need, to help you cope with coronavirus?' Nearly half of respondents (N=1,266) said they needed money – up from 20% last month. The proportion of young people asking for food has remained the same, whilst those asking for masks, hand sanitiser or information has reduced.



Analysis from our social media team suggests that young people in our network are aware that Rwandans and Ugandans have received state financial and/or food aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hearing about this support has accelerated the demand for direct aid from the Kenyan government – and to question why they haven't received similar support. Young people in our network are consistently calling for new interventions, policies and measures to respond to the reality of the challenges they are facing. It's vital that county and nation-level funding is redirected to address the urgent needs of Kenya's youngest citizens.

# AWARENESS & ADOPTION.

## SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"I'm from Moiben and in my hood people are consuming a lot of lemon and concentrated tea."

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK

"I know Corona is there but it's a scam with hidden hypocrisy; it's now meant to inflict people with fear. Imagine a halt in transport, construction etc this means a lot of people are at home spending without earning..."

FEMALE FACEBOOK

"In my hood, Corona has no cure, so we're just staying home, sanitizing and leaving the rest to God."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"Hi DJ in my opinion, gava doesn't speak the truth about the spread, the other day here in old town a man died and was buried the same day. The next day, his family was taken to the quarter even without being tested."

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

"We're avoiding any unimportant gathering, ensuring we wear masks when in any public space."

MALE, FACEBOOK

"We're creating awareness by writing on posters: 'remember to stay safe, stay at home – and keep levels of hygiene for better tomorrow – regrets come later.'"

MALE, FACEBOOK

## AWARENESS RAISED – BUT MYTHS BEGIN TO TAKE HOLD

Awareness and understanding of the risks posed by COVID-19 have remained consistently high among 15-24-year-olds in Kenya. However, in the last few weeks, we have begun to track a slight increase in conversations around a series of potent myths and fake news stories. This low-level increase is tracking alongside a small uptick in messages that suggest young people are losing faith in the government's official reporting of COVID-19.

Analysis of conversations across our social media channels highlight four key myths, which we're actively seeking to address, including:

1. That drinking alcohol or smoking weed can cure or protect you from COVID-19
2. That a cure has been discovered (for example in Madagascar)
3. That drinking black tea without sugar will protect you from COVID-19
4. That only the elderly and small babies are at risk of dying from COVID-19

We have also tracked some discussion of distrust of 'Western' organisations, including conspiracy theories relating to WHO and Bill Gates. To tackle misinformation it's vital that young people have access to multiple, relevant, trusted sources of information. Messages from friends that contain fake news carry weight – they can only be counter-balanced by many, trusted voices to contradict powerful 'alternate' narratives.

## YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO PROTECT THEIR FAMILIES – BUT THEY CAN'T AFFORD TO STAY HOME

Across the last 8 weeks, young people have faced significant barriers to adopting key public health behaviours, in particular: affording the cost of face masks and in complying with social distancing measures. In an SMS survey (N=1192) this week, 60%

**60%**

of respondents said that staying home simply isn't possible for them. As we charted earlier this month young people in our network say that many people in their communities are now ignoring partial lockdown measures – as the reality of day-to-day hunger and the need to earn money has overtaken the fear of coronavirus.

However, we're seeing strong evidence to suggest that young people are adopting new handwashing behaviours. In our survey on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 42% of respondents said they'd continue to wash their hands frequently, even after the end of a lockdown period. In tandem, engagement with our multiplatform #LindaFam (#ProtectYourFamily) campaign remains high.

Conversations with our network have demonstrated that young people are committed to protecting their own families, and their broader communities from COVID-19. However, to sustain youth engagement in the long-term management of this virus, it's vital that public health recommendations and messaging respond and are sensitive to the everyday experiences of young people.

# MOOD AND RESILIENCE.

## SMS AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

"The advice I can give young people is don't sit idle. If you stay idle you will get into bad company, which will affect you. You might use drugs, or start to steal because you have no money, so look for something that will keep you busy. Enter your neighbourhood, look for a little money, and be happy with that because it is a blessing to get that little money, many others have lost their jobs."

MALE, THIKA

"Youth, look for work to do, even if it is just selling clothes, or go open a place to sell food, things like that. If you just sit idle you will not be helped, and this story of corona we don't know when it will end, so it is a must we look for any source of money, so I urge all youth, find anyway that you can to get money."

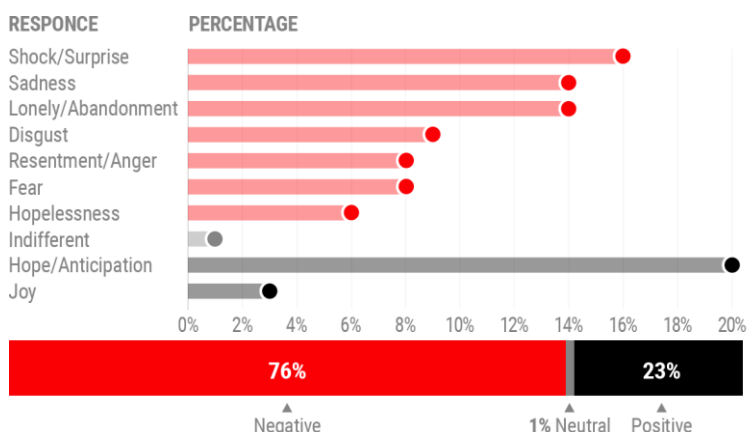
FEMALE, NAIROBI

## "I PRAY AND HOPE THAT THIS WILL END SOON" YOUTH OPTIMISM FURTHER ERODED

This week, our repeated SMS survey (N=1,298) showed that the COVID-19 crisis is continuing to erode young Kenyan's sense of optimism.

This week, 76% of young people identified that they had felt a 'negative' emotion 'most of the time' since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, an increase of 4 percentage points from a month ago. The number of young people feeling 'hopeful' has decreased, along with those saying they felt 'fear' – being replaced by young people saying they felt 'shock', 'hopelessness' or 'anger'. This trend tracks with analysis from our digital team; we're seeing fewer SMS and social messages referencing fear of Coronavirus – as the economic impacts of the crisis are more acutely felt than fear of infection.

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



## YOUNG HUSTLA'S TRY TO GET BACK TO WORK

Despite the increasingly challenging economic landscape, young people are still working hard to make the most of opportunities to help their communities; or to earn money for their families.

15%

In a USSD poll (N=1967) completed this week, 15% of Shujaaz fans said they had opened a new micro-business or 'hustle' during COVID-19 – an increase

Of 10 percentage points from a month ago. Though only a small increase, the trend speaks to the remarkable creative, resilience of young 'hustlas'.

At Shujaaz Inc, we're working hard to support young micro-entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 crisis; utilising our platforms to spotlight the stories of 'shujaaz' heroes who're innovating to find new sources of income. According to results from our 2019 annual survey, nearly one third of young people run micro-enterprises to earn their income. 'Hustles' aren't just a critical income stream for young people; micro-businesses also the engine of Kenya's informal economy. We believe that directly supporting young 'hustlas' is crucial, both to the short-term crisis, and to Kenya's long term economic recovery.



# FAN STORIES

## 01

### MESSAGE

**"My biggest fear is being homeless and contracting the disease, I pray and hope that this will end soon"**

### WHO IS SHE?

A 22-year-old ex-MPESA agent, living with her parents – who has been impacted by recent flooding.

“

I used to work at an Mpesa shop but after the corona outbreak the shop was closed and now am just indoors. I live with my parents here in Budalangi and things have not been good at all. For the past two months we have been struggling to survive as most of the businesses were affected by covid 19. Products at the market are scarce nowadays (e g tomatoes, sukumawiki among others) and the lockdown and curfew measures played a big role in bringing this challenge. People are not happy because most of them are self-employed.

There is a lot of stress and anxiety from our community as we have also been affected by the ongoing floods. Personally, I lost a cousin due to the floods who was trying to save some of their properties and the most hurting thing is that we couldn't do a normal funeral for him. It is depressing living in these times because you can't just tell what might happen next.

We have been airing our complaints to our area MCA and he has tried to reach out though not as expected. So far, he has donated blankets to community members and food that I feel is still not enough. At home, we have received food donations twice (flour, rice and cooking oil). I feel floods are more life threatening than corona since it comes with a lot of damage and deaths. I wish the government would look into this matter urgently for us.

My biggest fear is being homeless and contracting the disease, I pray and hope that this will end soon. I am preventing the spread of corona by wearing my face mask and washing my hands frequently. People around here are keen on putting on masks because if you are found without you are caught by the police.

## 02

“

### MESSAGE

**"So far, so good, at least am making a profit of 200kshs per day, am busy and am making some little income."**

### WHO IS SHE?

A 20-year-old girl living in Kakamega – running a small farming 'hustle' to save up money to go to college.

I live with my parents and before corona I used to work at a supermarket as a cashier. After the outbreak the supermarket was closed and I figured I had to continue doing something else to help me in raising funds for joining college.

I talked to my parents to let me use our farm for planting "sukumawiki" (kale) and I have been doing that for the past one month. I decided to buy tomatoes and onions to sell together with the sukumawiki and so far, so good, at least am making a profit, I am busy and am making some little income. My hope is by the time this situation is over I will have saved enough money to enroll for college.

Most of the people in my community are anxious but not that keen to follow the government directives. Some feel that corona is not a life-threatening disease hence living normally, also they are angry because the curfew has affected their businesses.

Most of the people here, their businesses (butchery, bodaboda, barbershop, mutura) usually operate well in the evenings but they have been interrupted by the curfew.

My biggest fear is contracting the disease and this has made me stay home more and wash my hands regularly.

