



**CHANGES IN
HANDWASHING
ROUTINES
DURING COVID-19**

OVERVIEW

In 2018, Shujaaz Inc was funded by UK aid, through the Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF), to implement a large-scale behavior change campaign in Tanzania aimed at improving knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of young Tanzanians (aged 15-24) around Issues of WASH: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene.

The project dubbed JIPENDE (Swahili: Love Yourself) was launched in May 2018 and completed in June 2020. It comprised of 19 monthly media campaigns, which told stories about WASH challenges and importance across all Shujaaz media channels (comic, FM radio, social media and SMS).



ONE LESSONS FROM OUR GROUNDTRUTH STUDY

1. HANDWASHING BEHAVIOUR IS SOCIAL BY NATURE

Did you know that handwashing is more a matter of social politics than personal hygiene?

As strange as this question might sound to some in the development community, for a young person in Tanzania the answer is a definite “Yes!”. In fact, social politics often defined the norms and behaviours around handwashing and personal hygiene among young people in pre-COVID-19 Tanzania.

In 2018, Shujaaz Inc (then Well Told Story) was funded by UKAid through The Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF) to design and implement a media campaign encouraging young Tanzanians to adopt, among others, healthy handwashing routines. In April-May 2018, the Shujaaz Inc team conducted a unique formative study, GroundTruth, that revealed how handwashing behaviour was deeply social by nature.

The study used a qualitative approach engaging 140 young Tanzanians aged 15-24 (78 boys and 62 girls) in five regions in Tanzania (Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Mbeya, Manyara and Tanga) in an entertaining learning experience. The group played games and participated in scenarios that helped reveal their knowledge, perceptions and behaviours on sanitation and hygiene.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING “SMART”

The critical outcome of GroundTruth was the discovery of the concept of a “smart” person, which served as a framework for many young Tanzanians’ behaviours, including handwashing. According to the study feedback, it was important for young people to be seen as “smart” by their peers as well as by the adults in their communities, because:

“SMART” PEOPLE ARE WELCOMED BY THEIR PEER GROUP

Young people assign high value to belonging to a group and believe being a part of a group (better even, being a part of an exclusive and desirable group) is an important factor in their ability to achieve success.

“SMART” PEOPLE ARE VALUED BY INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

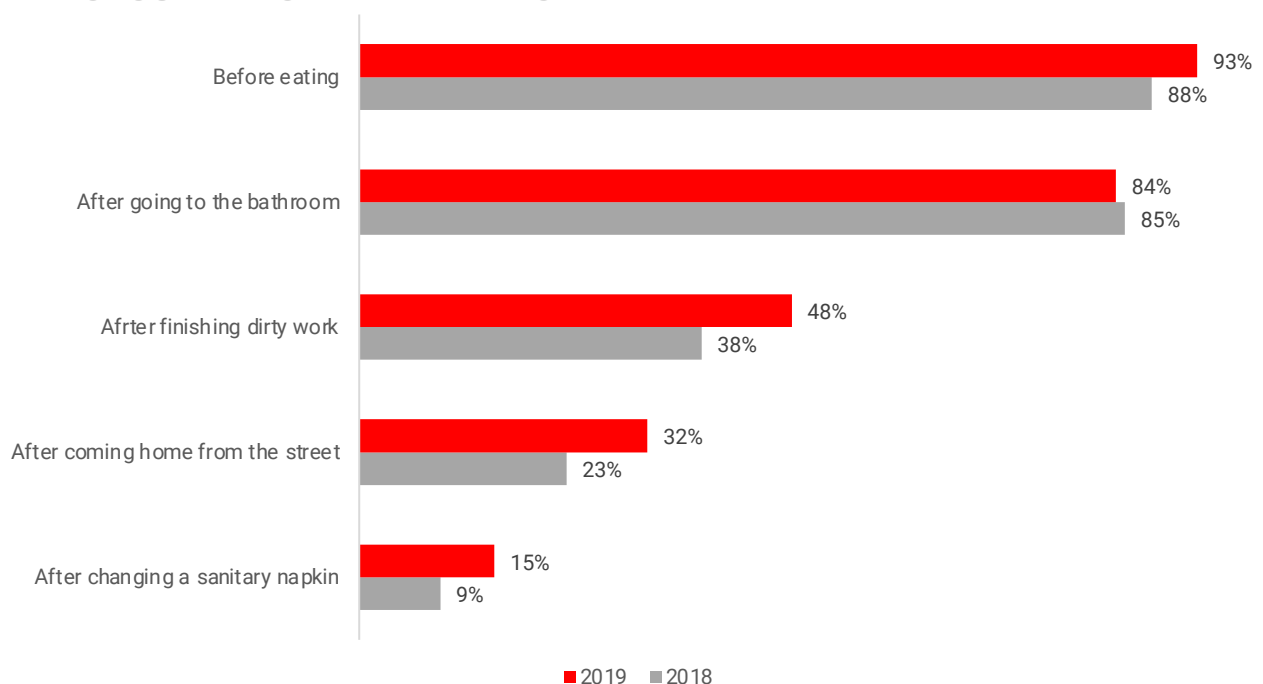
Being on good terms with influential adults (including family members, elders, chiefs, and politicians) is important for young people, who believe that they can link them to valuable opportunities – especially jobs.

3. HANDWASHING WAS ASSOCIATED WITH NOT BEING “SMART”

Based on the GroundTruth study, then, “smart” people were accepted by the two most important social groups. However, the challenge was that to maintain the image of a “smart” person, young people would not wash their hands. In the case with peers, they would not wash their hands because they wanted their peers to smell the expensive, or “smart”, food they were eating. In the case with elders, young people would not want to wash their hands because that would be seen as an insult to the elders who did not wash their own.

The fact that handwashing was associated with not being “smart”, and therefore cost opportunities provided by elders or peer groups, helped us understand why young people did not wash their hands – despite knowing they should – and were not interested in discussing the topic (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. KNOWLEDGE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE ON WHEN THEY SHOULD WASH THEIR HANDS



Source: WTS/Sagaci/Ipsos National Survey of Youth Wave 2018 (15-24, N=2,111), April-May 2018; Wave 2019 (15-24, N=2,000), May-July 2019.

4. SOCIAL NORMS AND ACCESS ARE BARRIERS TO HANDWASHING

In the 2019 nationally representative survey of youth in Tanzania, only 35% of the respondents said that all or most of their friends wash their hands with soap and water (up from 33% in 2018), and only 33% said that all or most of their peers (who are not their friends) do the same (up from 26% in 2018). These findings confirmed the fact that handwashing was not a social norm in Tanzania, and that this was one of the two barriers to young people consistently washing their hands.

The second barrier to consistent handwashing, when young people were willing to do so, was access to clean water, soap and towels. As per the findings of the nationally representative surveys, we saw the reported access to all three decline between 2018 and 2019, with access to towels reducing the most: from 38% to 21%, or by 45% (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. QUESTION: DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THESE AT HOME?
TABLE: ALL YOUNG PEOPLE (15-24) WHO SAID "YES"

| | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------|------|------|
| Water | 99% | 97% |
| Soap | 92% | 82% |
| Towel | 38% | 21% |

Note: The answers constituted self-reported access, interviewers did not verify if the respondent had water, soap and towels at home.

TWO LESSONS FROM OUR COVID-19 CAMPAIGN

1. COVID-19 HELPED PROMOTE PROPER HYGIENE

The COVID-19 crisis brought about a number of changes to the handwashing context, which helped us promote proper handwashing among young Tanzanians. Since the early days of the pandemic, our team have been in consistent conversations with Shujaaz fans about their experiences, challenges, and concerns related to COVID-19.

In these conversations, many reported positive improvements in their household's dietary and hygiene habits, specifically highlighting that everyone in their household was now washing their hands more frequently to protect themselves from COVID-19.



Firstly, coronavirus has brought about positive health changes for the whole community in a way that makes the environment healthier and safer, as well as for the body parts, especially the hands and face. We used to sneeze randomly but now we cover ourselves while sneezing. The community has been careful following news and instructions from our Tanzanian government. In terms of our family, coronavirus has brought about a slight change in the use of high-quality foods such as lemon, ginger, garlic, and other immune-boost foods. Second, proper use of soap and hand sanitizers all the time and not only before and after eating. Third, the belief of God has increased 100%.

FEMALE, UNKNOWN

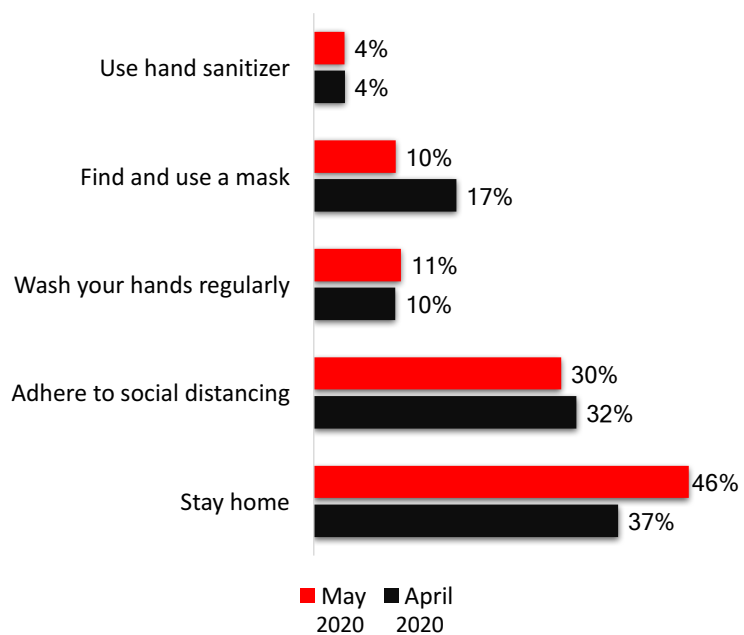


Every home has a water bucket outside where people have to wash hands before going in the house, churches and shops. You can't go to the hospitals without wearing face masks..."

MALE, MBEYA

In fact, during the pandemic, handwashing has emerged as one of the three Public Health behaviours that young people found the least difficult to adopt (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3.
SMS SURVEY WHICH
IF THESE IS THE
MOST DIFFICULT
FOR YOU TO
COMPLY WITH (PICK
ONE)



2. YOUNG PEOPLE TOOK CONTROL OF PROTECTION MEASURES

On top of this, in some locations we saw young people getting tired of waiting for the support from the government and taking matters of COVID-19 protection into their own hands. Some young Tanzanians, for example, were working with people in their neighbourhoods to 'enforce' public health behaviours - and in some instances charging penalties for those who break them.



In my area people are protecting themselves by wearing masks and practicing social distancing. We have made sure that there are water buckets and soaps in most of the areas. We charge a fine of 50,000/- to a parent who lets their kids outside their houses."

FEMALE, DAR ES SALAAM

3. THREE FACTORS HELPED CHANGE HANDWASHING BEHAVIOUR

Based on the feedback from Shujaaz fans, we believe that the adoption of proper handwashing behaviour during COVID-19 was made possible by the following factors:

ONE DISRUPTION TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL LIVES

Schools have remained closed for months and so have restaurants, pool tables, video dens and other places, where young people used to get together. Not being around peers meant that young people did not have to worry about how "smart" they looked.

TWO ADULTS PROMOTING HANDWASHING IN THE COMMUNITY

Since the influential people in the community now saw handwashing as part of being "smart", the second critical barrier to Tanzanian youth adopting proper handwashing routines was also removed.

THREE BETTER ACCESS TO WATER, SOAP & TOWELS

This improved firstly because more families started buying personal hygiene products due to fear of COVID-19. Secondly, many hustlers saw an opportunity in producing soap once the Public Health measures were put in place, so there was a wider range of affordable soap products available across the country.

4. SHUJAAZ SUPPORTED FANS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

We also believe that Shujaaz media, through its support from HDIF, made a significant contribution to supporting young Tanzanians through the crisis and encouraging them to adopt new behaviours, including handwashing.

In the three months of the campaign, Shujaaz media reached millions of young people in Tanzania through a special edition of the comic, SMS and social media interactions. The reach on social media alone is estimated at 2.5 million, with an additional 1 million engaged via the comic (Chapters 44-63). The digital space in particular provided Shujaaz with an opportunity to support fans through emotional, social and economic hardships, and encourage them to be champions in their communities. The Shujaaz media campaign during the COVID-19 period focused on three critical pillars:

ONE INFORM

Share accurate, relevant, relatable and consistent information with the Shujaaz audience, helping them to understand the pandemic and the best ways of protecting themselves.

TWO LISTEN

Engage young Tanzanians in conversations related to coronavirus and the public health measures, understand the challenges they experience as a result of the virus, and inform the Shujaaz production team and external partners on how to support young people during these times.

THREE MOBILISE

Encourage young people to exercise healthy behaviours and become change agents in their communities while educating others and being role models for COVID-19 response.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

One of the biggest achievements of Shujaaz in this campaign was the fact that 96% of the fans surveyed via SMS said they are clear on their role in helping the country overcome the pandemic. Other campaign achievements were as follows:

ONE PICKING SYMPTOMS

99% of fans were able to pick at least one correct symptom, 55% picked 2+, 5% picked all symptoms.

TWO IDENTIFYING PROTECTIVE MEASURES

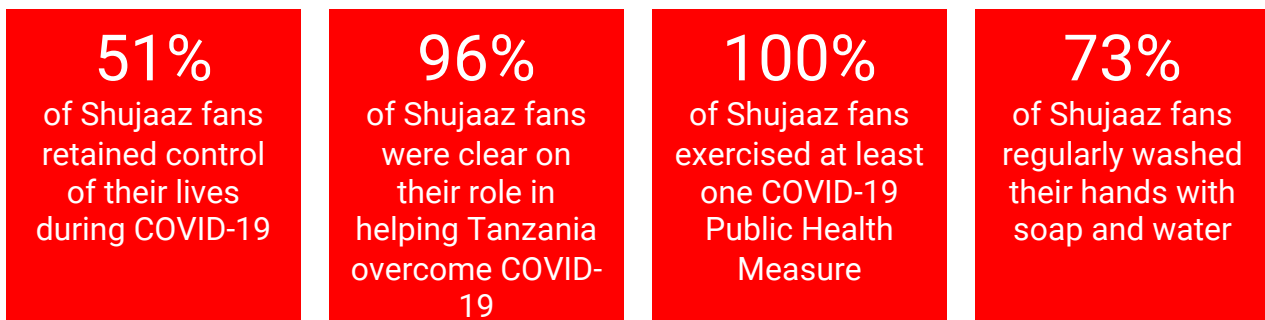
All fans were able to correctly identify at least one protective measure, 62% identified 2+ measures, 25% identified all protective measures.

THREE ACCESS TO PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

All fans have access to and use at least one public health measure: 73% wash hands with soap and water, 51% wear masks, 51% use hand sanitizers, 20% exercise social distancing.

The team is also proud of having succeeded in helping Shujaaz fans retain control over the situation. In a different SMS survey, over half of the Shujaaz fans disagreed with the statement, "I feel like my life spins out of control". The fans' ability to maintain agency despite the pandemic-induced crises was the true success of the Shujaaz campaign.

FIGURE 3. SHUJAAZ'S KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE 3-MONTH COVID-19 CAMPAIGN



CONCLUSION

Finally, 73% of Shujaaz fans reported washing their hands with soap and water on a regular basis at the end of the campaign. While we cannot attribute this success exclusively to the work of Shujaaz, we are proud of our contribution to changing young Tanzanians' handwashing behaviour which, according to the GroundTruth study, seemed almost impossible only two years ago.

We do not intend to say that the battle for proper handwashing behaviour has been won. Yet from our conversations with young Tanzanians, we see that the removal of key barriers has allowed new behaviours to emerge, and that there are early signs of personal hygiene stepping up a level among the new generation. The time is right to actively advocate for the "new normal" in handwashing to ensure that proper handwashing continues and eventually becomes a habit among young Tanzanians.

