

# SHUJAAZ INC

# COMPASS

Navigating the road ahead

**GENERATION ENGAGED:**  
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CAN  
IMPROVE KENYA'S GOVERNANCE  
– IF WE LET THEM

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Kenya today, three in five people are under the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> In just a few years, they'll be the majority of the country's working-age population and its electorate.

This generation are Kenya's present and its future. Ensuring that they're able to contribute to all the ways their communities and their country are run is essential. And research shows that when young people are engaged, flourishing cooperation, trust, economic development and democracy all follow.

In this edition of the Compass, we look behind the headlines, put aside old stereotypes, and introduce you to a generation of young people who are overwhelmingly committed to supporting their communities and upholding their democratic rights. A generation who are eager to share their experiences and ideas – and who have a growing sense of the personal contribution they can make to their communities.

We'll see that COVID-19 has acted as a 'flashpoint' moment. Similar to an election year, the pandemic has reinforced young people's existing frustrations and dissatisfaction with politics – while engaging more young people in conversations about policy and governance. Like all flashpoint moments, the pandemic has both created an opportunity – to capitalise on young people's increased engagement – and a risk – that their increased engagement might turn to anger or disillusionment.

Kenya has a national election on the horizon, but as we look ahead to 2022, we're reminded that healthy democracies aren't just about politics or government – they're built around connected, networked communities. And in this Compass, we hope to highlight that, if we act now, the positive contributions this generation can make will extend far beyond the ballot box.

Before you read on, click the video below and spend a few minutes hearing how a few committed young people want to contribute:





## PART ONE

# SETTING THE SCENE

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND GOVERNANCE IN KENYA

### YOUNG PEOPLE AREN'T JUST 'THE FUTURE' – THEY'RE THE PRESENT

# 59%

OF KENYANS  
ARE UNDER  
THE AGE OF 25<sup>2</sup>

Before we begin, let's remember the big picture. Today, 59% of Kenyans are under 25 – that's three in five people.<sup>3</sup> Young people aren't 'the future' – they're the majority right now.

Almost a third of working-age Kenyans are aged between 15 and 24; how they earn, spend and save is already shaping Kenya's economy.<sup>4</sup> And within five years, this generation will form the majority not just of the working population of Kenya, but of its voting population too. Ensuring young people are engaged in how their communities and their country are run is indisputably essential.

What's more, research suggests that countries that create opportunities for young people to participate fully in their communities reap big benefits, from increased social cohesion to faster economic development.<sup>5</sup>

### 'YOUTH PARTICIPATION' IS ABOUT MORE THAN POLITICS

When we talk about young people 'participating' or 'engaging' in public life, what do we mean? Often the phrase 'youth engagement' is centred around formal politics – voting, campaigning or standing for an election.

But that's only part of the story. Elections only happen every few years, and 'career' politics isn't for everyone. At Shujaaaz Inc, we think it's important to expand the definition of youth 'engagement'. We know that participating in public life in a meaningful way looks different for everyone.

'Youth participation' could mean something quite formal, like taking part in barazas (community council meetings), or something much more informal, like playing for the village football club, volunteering at church or running a handwashing station. Whatever the outlet, all these types of participation are valuable – particularly when they're meaningful, sustained and long-term.

In other words, 'participation' isn't just about government or politics – it's more about governance. 'Youth participation' or 'engagement' means young people being involved at every stage of how their communities operate. There are lots of ways to build a stronger, more democratic society, and only a few of them involve politics.

“WE ARE THE MAJORITY – AND WE KNOW THINGS THAT BIG POLITICIANS AND EVEN OUR PARENTS DON'T KNOW ABOUT. BECAUSE WE ARE THE ONES WHO ARE GOING THROUGH THESE CHALLENGES.

MALE, NAIROBI



## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL – WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE CAN CONTRIBUTE, EVERYONE WINS AND DEMOCRACY GROWS

Whether youth participation is more or less ‘formal’, all these kinds of participation help to form the fabric of what political scientists like Robert Putnam call ‘social capital’.

Social capital is the value that’s created when we form social connections and networks in communities. These connections create ‘social trust’ and ‘facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.’<sup>6</sup>

Crucially, we know that where social capital flows – where young people feel connected to their communities and feel they can constructively voice their views and experiences – people trust each other more and cooperate more, democracy is strengthened and societies flourish. In other words, everyone wins.

## COVID-19 SPARKS A NEW CONVERSATION ABOUT GOVERNANCE

The pandemic has had a seismic impact on all aspects of young people’s lives. Many have lost their jobs or seen their income hit hard. A survey of our network in August revealed that 70% of young people had gone to bed hungry at least once in the previous week.<sup>11</sup>

But young people and their communities have also been more impacted by government policy than ever before. In particular, the roll out and enforcement of national lockdown, curfew, social distancing and face mask policies have led to a significant spike in conversations about the decisions and actions of government.

In this way, the pandemic has acted as a ‘flashpoint’ moment, shining a light on governance and sparking new conversations about government policy, just like the spikes we see around a national election. And it hasn’t been the only flashpoint this year – the global Black Lives Matter movement and #EndSARS in Nigeria have also prompted a rise in young people’s engagement with societal issues.

## LOOK BEYOND THE HEADLINES – THE KIDS ARE MORE THAN ALRIGHT

In Kenya, as around the world, when ‘young people’ and ‘politics’ are the subject, negative headlines all too often follow. Since the 2007 elections, such negative portrayals have abounded. For far too many people, the idea of young people engaging in politics remains synonymous with unrest and protest.

In both local and international discourse, the rhetoric surrounding young people is often violent, recalling images of war. Young people are described as a ‘time bomb’ that could ‘blow up the country’, or even an ‘obedient militia force’ ready to do the bidding of competing political leaders.<sup>9</sup> A secondary media narrative positions young people as apathetic, disengaged or unwilling to contribute positively. Young Kenyans were even likened to ‘mosquitoes’ during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>10</sup>


But the data beyond the headlines tell a very different story. As we’ll show, young people believe they have big things to contribute to change Kenya for the better. In our national youth survey last year, 88% of young people said they feel they have something to contribute to their community and the world. When asked what they’d do first if they achieved success, 55% chose ‘giving back to their community or family’ – by far the most popular answer. It’s time to change the story.

# 88%

OF YOUNG KENYANS FEEL THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Putnam R. D. (1995) ‘Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital’. *Journal of Democracy* 6:1, Jan 1995, 65-78. | <sup>7</sup> Stefan Vucojevic (2014) ‘Impact of social capital on the development of democracy’. *Defendologija*, v1, November 2014. | <sup>8</sup> Shujaaz Inc, 2019 annual survey (N=2,020) | <sup>9</sup> The Star, [Ruto has turned his back on me - Uhuru](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-10-27-ruto-has-turned-his-back-on-me-uhuru), 27 October 2020; Human Rights Watch, [From ballots to bullets: Organized political violence and Kenya’s crisis of governance](https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/03/16/ballots-bullets/organized-political-violence-and-kenyas-crisis-governance), March 16, 2008. Retrieved on November 6, 2020 from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/03/16/ballots-bullets/organized-political-violence-and-kenyas-crisis-governance>; <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-10-27-ruto-has-turned-his-back-on-me-says-uhuru/> | <sup>10</sup> The Star, [Millennials in ‘mosquito’ age group that infects but doesn’t die - CS Kagwe](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2020-10-27-ruto-has-turned-his-back-on-me-says-uhuru/), 19 May 2020 | <sup>11</sup> Shujaaz Inc, SMS survey (N=1,248), August 2020.





• **“IF YOU TELL A 50-YEAR-OLD TO TALK ABOUT THE ISSUES AFFECTING A YOUTH AT 18, IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE! YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WHAT IS AFFECTING THEM. IT IS BETTER TO GIVE YOUTH THE PLATFORM TO TALK ABOUT WHAT AFFECTS THEM.”**

**FEMALE, KAKAMEGA**



## PART TWO

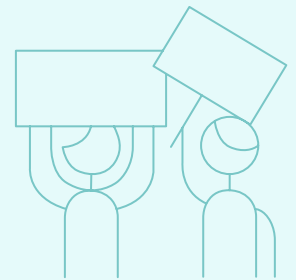
# MAPPING THE TERRAIN

## UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TO DEMOCRACY, PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Young Kenyans strongly believe in their democratic rights – and the values of civic engagement...

Over the last four years, as part of our ongoing work to increase youth participation, we've been tracking young people's attitudes to governance and government. While these attitudes fluctuate over time, a few key indicators have remained consistently high. Between 2017 and 2019, our annual surveys highlighted that, far from the stereotype of being 'apathetic' or 'angry', this generation of young people strongly believe in their democratic rights and the values of civic engagement.

In our 2019 annual survey, 77% said they believe that young people have a role to play in local governance (up from 69% in 2017) while 80% said they feel their opinion matters and should be heard by the government. Similarly, 75% said they felt they could personally play a role by voting in elections, a slight increase from 2017. That value statement appears to translate to intention too; in our 2019 annual survey, 75% said they intended to vote in the 2022 elections.<sup>12</sup>



# 77%

BELIEVE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A **ROLE TO PLAY** IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE<sup>13</sup>

# 73%

BELIEVE THEY **PERSONALLY** CAN PLAY A ROLE IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE<sup>13</sup>

# 75%

BELIEVE THEY CAN PLAY A ROLE BY **VOTING** IN ELECTIONS<sup>13</sup>

# 80%

FEEL THEIR **OPINION MATTERS** AND SHOULD BE HEARD BY GOVERNMENT<sup>13</sup>

# 88%

FEEL THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO **THEIR COMMUNITY**<sup>13</sup>



I'D REALLY LOVE US TO BE INVOLVED, SO THAT WE MAKE DECISIONS CONSIDERING THE FUTURE, BECAUSE THE PRESENT IS NOW BROKEN.

MALE, HOMABAY





## ...and they're increasingly keen to contribute to their communities

Perhaps most importantly, we've also tracked a gradual increase in the proportion of young people who believe they personally can play a role in local governance – increasing from 63% in 2017 to 73% in 2019. And when we look beyond more 'formal' governance participation, 88% said they feel they have something to offer their communities.<sup>14</sup>

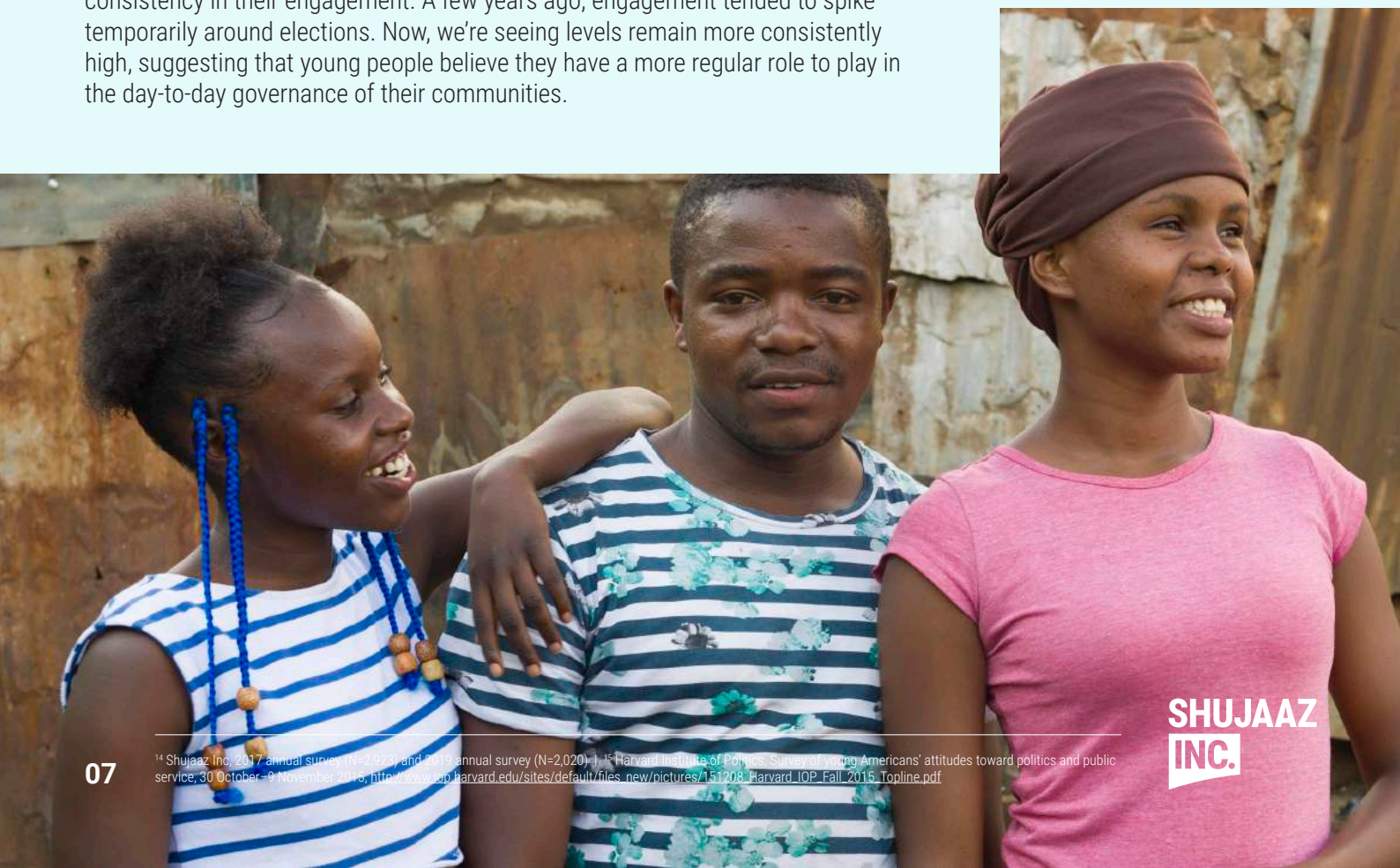
When we benchmark these levels of youth engagement in governance against those in other countries, they become even more striking. In the USA, for example, a 2015 study by the Harvard Institute of Politics showed that only 20% of Americans aged 18 to 29 considered themselves politically engaged, and only 36% considered voting to be part of who they were.<sup>15</sup>

Young Kenyans' enthusiasm is also relatively consistent across gender, age and location. The least enthusiastic group is younger girls – those aged 15–19 – who are often more dependent on their families and likely to be less confident about their role in society. But even so, engagement rates among them are relatively high.

And not only are young Kenyans increasingly engaged, but we're also tracking more consistency in their engagement. A few years ago, engagement tended to spike temporarily around elections. Now, we're seeing levels remain more consistently high, suggesting that young people believe they have a more regular role to play in the day-to-day governance of their communities.

“  
IN MY COMMUNITY?  
I'D LIKE TO GIVE BACK  
AND RUN A COMMUNITY  
BASED ORGANISATION  
AND USE IT TO GIVE BACK  
TO SOCIETY.

FEMALE, KAKAMEGA





## Young people mobilised and stepped up in response to COVID-19...

**75%** OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTED VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME OR MONEY TO COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID-19<sup>16</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis has created an opportunity for young people to act on their desire to contribute. In an SMS survey of young people in the Shujaaz Inc network, 75% reported volunteering their time or money to help their communities cope with the impact of the virus.<sup>17</sup>

Young people across Kenya have stepped up to host handwashing stations, distribute masks and soap, educate their communities on public health measures, and help to regulate movement in high-density places like open-air markets. In this way, the pandemic has created new opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities, building social capital and, consequently, trust – one of the key foundations of good governance systems.

“WE STARTED AN INITIATIVE TO DISTRIBUTE FOOD TO THE LESS PRIVILEGED IN MY AREA AND THIS MADE LEADERS GET INTERESTED AND NOW AM WORKING WITH THEM ON THE SAME

MALE, NAKURU

## ...but they have much more to contribute.

**2/3** YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THEY'RE UNABLE TO MAKE A BIG IMPACT IN THEIR COMMUNITY<sup>18</sup>

Despite their contribution to fighting COVID-19, young people report that they lack sustainable, long-term opportunities to participate constructively in their communities.

While 88% of young Kenyans believe they have something to contribute, only 36% feel they're able to make a big impact in their community.<sup>19</sup> Nearly three-quarters of young people feel they can play a personal role in local governance, but currently only 25% report that they have engaged with a government agency or an appointed official, including a police officer or tax official. Many young people also report that those interactions were often brief conversations or transactions (for example making a tax payment) rather than meaningful or constructive engagement. A similar number, only 28%, report having attended a neighbourhood public forum or public discussion group more than once. While the pandemic created opportunities for young people to contribute, these opportunities were short-lived.<sup>20</sup> Less than half (48%) said they had the chance to volunteer more than once.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, while most young people report that they belong to at least one group in their community, only 37% have been with the same group for more than six months.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that these groups are temporary – formed, for example, for a wedding committee or a photoshoot event.

Evidence that young people are volunteering their time and joining community groups is positive. But research suggests that in order to generate sustained social capital and unlock value for society, governance and democracy, groups need to be consistent and long-term in nature, and connected to a wider meaningful network of community groups.





## When it comes to politics, most young people feel ‘frustrated’ or ‘disconnected’

How young people feel about politics, government and governance – and why they feel that way – is an important and nuanced part of this picture.

Our mapping of young people’s attitudes to government shows that they fall, at a high level, into three segments:

### Onside



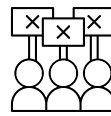
**33%**

of young people<sup>23</sup>

**Engaged** with politics and governance, and **favourable to the status quo.**

They might be actively involved in governance – attending barazas or campaigning for political parties – or they may prefer to discuss issues with their family and friends.

### Frustrated



**28%**

of young people<sup>23</sup>

**Somewhat engaged** with politics and governance, but **frustrated with the status quo.**

They’re informed and aware, and have opinions to be heard. They feel let down by the government – and while some are more passive and prefer to vent their frustrations online or to friends, others actively get out and protest.

### Disconnected



**40%**

of young people<sup>23</sup>

**Don’t care** about politics or governance, or **don’t know** why they would care.

They don’t see the government as relevant to their lives, or as having a day-to-day impact on their lives, and give little thought to governance and how things are run.

FOR ME, INTERACTION WITH LEADERS HAS AFFIRMED MY UNDERSTANDING OF GOVERNANCE BEING A TWO-WAY SITUATION. AS MUCH AS LEADERS HAVE A BIGGER ROLE TO PLAY IN GOVERNANCE, WE ALSO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN HOLDING THEM ACCOUNTABLE.

FEMALE, NAIROBI, FACEBOOK

WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME ABOUT GOVERNMENT ISSUES? SHOULDN’T YOU ASK A POLITICS STUDENT?

FEMALE, FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

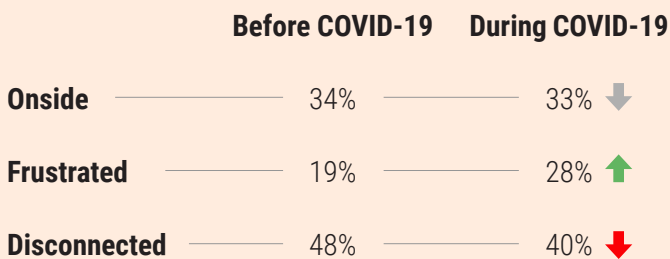


## COVID-19 has increased engagement with governance...but left many feeling let down

Last month, we ran a series of digital focus group discussions and SMS polls, to track how young people’s attitudes towards government have changed during the pandemic. It’s important to note that most young people move in and out of the above segments deliberately.

A personal experience with a government official or a significant moment in the news often informs attitudes towards government and governance – and the COVID-19 pandemic has supplied many of those moments.

### HOW YOUNG KENYAN’S SELF-REPORTED ATTITUDE TO GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE HAS CHANGED<sup>24</sup>



Our research has revealed a shift in the make-up of these groups as a result of the pandemic. As we highlighted earlier, COVID-19 has engaged young people in new conversations about government policy and governance (67%, for example, expressed strong views about government public health policies like curfew measures).<sup>25</sup> In that vein, we’ve observed that the proportion of young Kenyans who describe themselves as ‘disconnected’ has fallen – suggesting that some felt that they have become ‘engaged’ with politics as a result of COVID-19.

But these newly engaged young people are clearly unhappy – as the fall in the proportion of ‘disconnected’ young people has been accompanied by a rise in those who say they feel ‘frustrated’ and let down by the government.

## 82% of young people feel unheard in response to COVID-19

As schools closed, incomes fell and hunger levels rose, young people’s frustration with the government response to COVID-19 grew. The prevailing sentiment, during a time of crisis and turmoil, was that of feeling unheard, and even abandoned. In an SMS survey in April, 81% of young people in our network said they felt their voices, struggles and hopes were ‘not at all’, ‘poorly’ or ‘barely’ reflected in the government’s handling of the crisis.<sup>26</sup> Months later, despite the easing of lockdown measures and a reduction in hunger levels, that number has held steady, at 82%.<sup>27</sup> Interviews with young people in Kenya consistently

highlight that they feel ignored by their national or local leaders – or disrespected when government decisions clearly aren’t made with them in mind.

Analysis from our social media team suggests that young Kenyans are aware that young Rwandans and Ugandans have received state financial and/or food aid during the pandemic. Hearing about this support increased demand for direct aid from the Kenyan government – and raised questions among young Kenyans about why they haven’t received similar support.



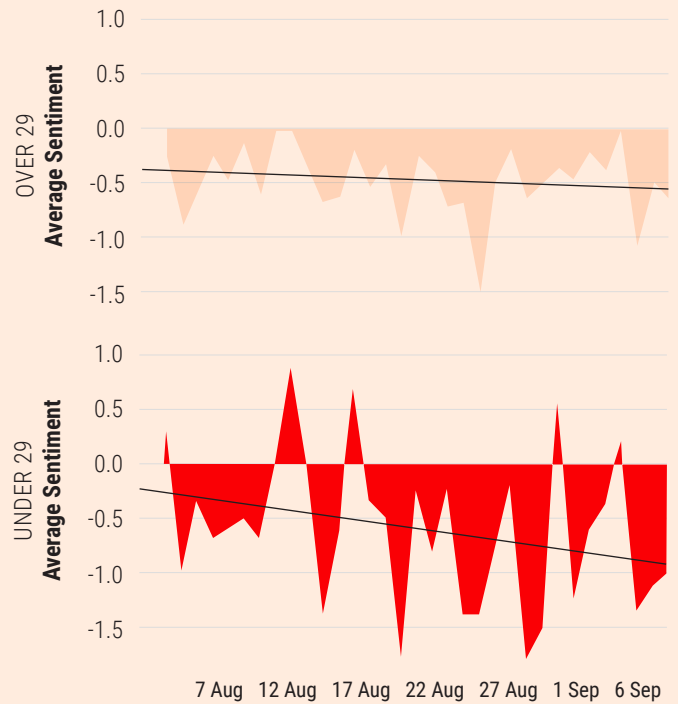
## Anger towards the government has spiked

Beyond frustration and disappointment, we've also tracked significant spikes in disgruntlement and anger surrounding the government response to COVID-19. Our analysis of hundreds of thousands of tweets focusing on COVID-19 demonstrates this growing anger.

As the year has progressed, online conversations among Shujaaz fans have begun to focus around reports of corruption, abuse and mistrust. Spikes were seen around the #40bn, which addressed the government's use of a reported KSH 40bn in COVID-19 funds, and around frequent reports of police brutality sparked by the implementation of public health measures.

These key sentiments were reflected in our recent digital focus group discussions.

### DECLINING SENTIMENT OF YOUTH TWITTER CONVERSATIONS RELATED TO GOVERNANCE



### Q: TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND THEIR WORK DURING CORONAVIRUS?

**FULL OF SELFISH BEING**  
**LOST DIRECTION INCOMPETENT**  
**VERY CORRUPT AND SELFISH**  
**PERSONAL INTEREST FIRST SELF INTEREST**  
**DISAPPOINTING NO TRUST**  
**UNSTABLE CORRUPT DISORDERLY**  
**INCONSIDERATE PRETTY MUCH CORRUPT**  
**CITIZEN LOST TRUST HIGHLY CORRUPT**  
**SELFISH DISOBEDIENT**

“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, SIAVA





## The pandemic risks leaving young people more vulnerable to radicalisation

In 2015, we carried out a study on the radicalisation of young people in Kenya. We found there were two factors that left them particularly vulnerable: financial insecurity and isolation.

When society fails to provide the opportunity to earn an income in traditional ways, and feelings of isolation, or lack of acceptance, love and belonging, push them to explore alternatives, young people are more likely to turn to radical groups.

Over the last few months, despite some signs of recovery, we have tracked a sharp decline in young people's financial security, as many lost their jobs and had to shut down or scale down their 'hustles' or microbusinesses. We've also seen an increase in feelings of isolation, and a growing sense among young people of separation from their community.

What's more, the 'infodemic' of fake news during the pandemic has further undermined trust in official information sources. In an SMS survey in October, only two in five young people said they knew 'very well' where to find reliable information. And when trust in official sources declines, young people are highly vulnerable to seductive 'alternate' narratives.

“WHILE OTHER COUNTRIES ARE FIGHTING CORONA VIRUS, OUR POLITICIANS ARE DRIVING BBI. WE MIGHT EVEN GIVE THE AL-SHABAAB A CHANCE TO GET INTO THE COUNTRY

UNKNOWN, SMS MESSAGE

### FACTORS THAT INCREASE VULNERABILITY TO RADICALISATION

#### Financial insecurity

Before COVID-19, 15% of young people struggled to earn enough for food.

**In August, 70% reported going to bed hungry, dropping to 50% in November.** <sup>28</sup>

#### Lack of support from the community

The percentage of young people who feel they have someone to turn to in a crisis **dropped from 89% before COVID-19 to 67% during the pandemic.**

And **just 58% currently believe their community gives them the support they need** – down from 71% before the pandemic. <sup>29</sup>

“I'M JUST IDLE WITHOUT ANYTHING TO DO FOR FOOD AND UPKEEP. THIS APPLIES TO MOST YOUNG PEOPLE AND MAY FORCE THEM TO TURN TO CRIME. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE CARE OF THINGS BEFORE THEY ARE OUT OF HAND.

UNKNOWN, FACEBOOK (APRIL 2020)

Disillusioned with their national and local governments, and yet increasingly keen to take action and make their voices heard, there's a danger that the pandemic is making conditions more fertile for young Kenyans to turn to radicalisation – unless their energy and engagement is constructively harnessed.



## PART THREE

# CHARTING A ROAD AHEAD

## THREE KEY CONSIDERATIONS FROM OUR ANALYSIS

Our analysis demonstrates that young Kenyans have a strong sense of civic engagement and are increasingly keen to contribute to their communities. But as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, they feel frustrated by the way governance works and ignored by those in charge.

Against the backdrop we described in part one, these trends lead us to three key considerations in charting a positive road ahead for young people and governance in Kenya.

### #1 COVID-19 IS A FLASHPOINT – AND THEREFORE AN OPPORTUNITY

The pandemic is a ‘flashpoint’ moment, much like an election. During these moments, young people tend to shift from ‘apathetic’ to ‘engaged’ – and as the analysis in part two showed, that’s exactly what we’re observing in 2020.

The most important thing? Flashpoints bring opportunities – to capitalise on increased engagement among young Kenyans and create constructive and lasting change.

But they also bring the risk that engagement turns to anger and disillusionment – so the time to act is now.



“AS A YOUNG PERSON, I AM MORE CHALLENGED TO DO MORE OTHER THAN MY DEMOCRATIC DUTY IN CHANGING THE STATUS QUO. PREVIOUSLY, I’D SAY OUR LEADERS ARE NEVER AVAILABLE TO LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE. MIC YETU [A SHUJAAZ EVENT] HAS PROVED LEADERS ALSO WANT TO LISTEN TO [...] YOUNG PEOPLE.

MALE, NAIROBI



## #2 GOVERNANCE IS ABOUT MORE THAN POLITICS

Engaging young people and unlocking their potential to participate as citizens is about more than ensuring they vote in elections, or connect with a local official – it's about embedding them within the systems of cooperation and trust in their local communities.

As we've highlighted, governance is about more than government. It's about how local communities are run, connected, organised and networked.

In the same way, young people's current 'disconnection' with politics isn't just dictated by their experiences of national government. It's also down to their everyday experiences with local government officials, with local regulatory systems and with their communities.

“ I WOULD LIKE TO BE CONNECTED TO OTHER YOUTHS SO THAT WE CAN TEACH PEOPLE IN THE VILLAGES ABOUT CORONA AND GIVE ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO ARE NEEDY.

FEMALE, MOMBASA



## #3 TIME TO UNLOCK YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNREALISED POTENTIAL

Year on year, young Kenyans' sense of civic engagement and democratic duty is growing. In 2019, 88% of young people felt they had something to contribute to the community and to the world, and 73% felt they could play a role in local governance.<sup>30</sup>

Three-quarters of those we spoke to had volunteered to help in the fight against COVID-19.<sup>31</sup> But two-thirds of young Kenyans say they haven't had the opportunity to make a big impact on their communities.<sup>32</sup> Nurturing young people's growing sense of civic responsibility, by recognising and encouraging the importance of local community participation, represents a significant opportunity for Kenya. Creating more opportunities for young people to contribute, and strengthening existing networks, increases social capital, strengthens democratic systems and improves social cohesion and trust.<sup>33</sup>





## SHUJAAZ INC SNAPSHOT: THE POWER OF FRACTAL DEMOCRACY

In 2017, we started looking in depth at the concept of ‘fractal democracy’ – the idea that community-level social groups, like football teams or wedding committees, replicate the structure of governance at a national level. The goal of our ‘fractal democracy’ campaign is to make governance processes relevant to ‘disconnected’ young people by setting them in the context of their daily routines.

Over the last three years, we’ve used this technique across Shujaaz media to explain how the national government and devolved government system works, by making references to basic group structures that young people are already familiar with.

Young women in Kenya are most likely to be ‘disconnected’ – they don’t see government as relevant and they give it little thought. But a story across Shujaaz channels about the failures of a poorly organised wedding committee threw into sharp relief the importance of well-chosen leadership, making good governance suddenly relevant and interesting to a key, excluded demographic.

Our fractal democracy campaign has proven highly effective and engaging, with campaign stories eliciting thousands of SMS responses from young people across Kenya. Engagement has been among the highest we’ve ever seen for a media campaign.



## PART FOUR

# THE BARRIERS TO BREAK

## UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF KENYA'S ENGAGED GENERATION

The key to unlocking young people's governance potential is to understand the barriers that are standing in their way. Which systems are failing them? What are the frustrations they face in their everyday lives? What makes them disillusioned about existing government structures? What's preventing them from contributing to their communities?

In other words, what barriers need to be broken down, and how can we help young people overcome them? To drive long-term, sustainable change, we need to meet young people where they are today.

We've identified a number of key barriers, which fall into four core categories. These barriers reflect the challenges most frequently cited by young people in our network, and those we've identified during our work over the last ten years.

### MOTIVATION: REACHING THE 'DISCONNECTED' BY SEPARATING GOVERNANCE FROM POLITICS

01

#### BARRIER

##### 'It's got nothing to do with me'.

Like many of us, young people tend to assume that 'governance' is about politics and formal government structures. They can't see how government policies or formal systems affect their everyday lives. Too often, young people are only encouraged to engage in the most formal of government structures – to go to their governor's office, or to attend a county meeting. But for most, such things are alienating, intimidating and too far disconnected from their everyday lives. Instead, we need to remind young Kenyans that governance isn't just about government; there's space for everyone to contribute and to experience the benefit of that contribution in their everyday lives.

#### BARRIER BREAKERS

For this segment of young people, it's important to engage with them on the issues that impact the things they care about most – their loved ones, their communities, their security and their health. That means normalising things like reporting local incidents of corruption, collective problem solving, working on local projects and volunteering for groups in their community. More opportunities need to be created for young people to forge the connections, relationships and trust that build the foundations of a high-functioning community.

Showing young people that local change can happen when they get organised and work together – that a petition signed by 100 people can encourage a local leader to repair a road, for example – can be a crucial win.



## OPPORTUNITY: CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE

# 02

### BARRIER

#### There's a lack of smaller, local opportunities for young people to participate.

As we've highlighted, 88% of young Kenyans feel they have something to contribute to their community, and 73% feel they personally can contribute to local governance – but very few have the opportunity to do so regularly.<sup>34</sup>

It's brilliant that there are county youth representatives and a national network of Youth Bunges to allow young people representation in government structures. However those formal settings aren't always appropriate for a majority of young Kenyans, who would benefit from smaller, localised ways to contribute to their communities. As the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam highlights, broadening and increasing opportunities for young people to constructively participate in community groups and networks is a critical part of healthy governance.

THE BEST WAY I CAN BE A LEADER IN MY COMMUNITY? FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME WHO HAS ALREADY GONE TO UNIVERSITY...I'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO REACH OUT AND GET A CHANCE TO MENTOR [YOUNG PEOPLE] AND MOTIVATE THEM.

FEMALE, FACEBOOK

### BARRIER BREAKER

When setting out to help create more opportunities for young people to contribute to the governance of their communities, it's vital that we meet young people where they are already.

Most young people report being part of a 'group' of one kind or another, like a sports club or a wedding committee. But they rarely last for longer than six months before they disband. To unlock the potential of those groups, research tells us they need to be long-term, meet regularly and be connected to a broader network of similar organisations.

Investing in strengthening and building the capacity of existing community groups and clubs is therefore an important next step. In particular, young people highlight that their groups and clubs would benefit from being connected to existing resources (e.g. NGOs, charities, religious organisations) for mentorship, training and funding. Providing support with basic infrastructure (access to safe, community spaces, online digital tools, etc.) would also add value, particularly in helping disparate groups to connect and work with each other. Young people consistently highlight their desire to be connected to bigger 'meaningful networks', beyond their own social spheres.

Our research shows that when local leaders (for example religious leaders) proactively help youth-led community groups and clubs to grow and work collaboratively, they can become a powerful part of community governance – helping to create social cohesion and tackle larger community challenges.

When setting out to create new youth engagement programming, it's vital that young people are involved at every stage; youth-led design processes are proven ways to create effective, long-lasting interventions.





## SHUJAAZ INC SNAPSHOT: ACTIVATING OUR SUPERFAN HEROES

Our three social ventures are run by our team of 60+ young producers, researchers, designers, strategists and creatives. But we're powered by a network of well over 3,000 Shujaaaz 'SuperFans' who accelerate our impact across Kenya. Our SuperFans are young people who own and run small youth-friendly businesses and community projects across the country. For years, we've worked with them to help distribute our Shujaaaz comic books – but during the COVID-19 pandemic our SuperFan network mobilised like never before.

Our SuperFans stepped up to help spread the word about COVID-19 and combat the circulation of fake news. Between February and November this year, they helped to safely distribute 3.6 million comic books, 500,000 flyers and 30,000 posters, containing critical public health information and advice on coping with the impacts of the pandemic.

Working closely with our team, and in partnership with the National Business Compact for Coronavirus, we distributed over 500 handwashing stations to our SuperFans in hard-to-reach COVID-19 hotspots. Our SuperFans helped maintain and run the handwashing stations, serving an estimated 25,000 people daily with water and soap to safely wash their hands. They're also stepping up as citizen journalists, filming updates and insights from young people in their communities and helping to get young people's voices heard by key decision makers through our COVID-19 Barometer and Compass briefs.

The pandemic has reminded us all that Shujaaaz Inc is a living network of 7.5 million young heroes – there's no limit to what they can do. Watch this space – we're only just getting started.



# 03

## ABILITY: EXERCISING 'GOVERNANCE MUSCLES' THROUGH PRACTICE, INFORMATION AND SKILLS

### BARRIER

#### Young people haven't had much governance practice.

Many young Kenyans haven't been exposed to important 'democratic' or 'good governance' behaviours and skills; how to form meaningful groups and connections, to hold people to account, to call out corruption, to identify good (and bad) leadership, to build local coalitions to drive constructive change, or to make informed voting decisions.

### BARRIER BREAKERS

Encourage 'fractal democracy'. Young people are, without knowing it, modelling 'good governance' in the groups they're already a part of – friendships, school clubs, football teams and wedding and harambee committees. In these groups, young Kenyans come together to find solutions to problems, call out poor behaviour and ask for help. These are skills and insights that are needed and repeated at every level of leadership and government. We need to role-model successful groups, recognise the power that micro stories and experiences have to frame the macro national stage, and encourage young people to acknowledge and exercise their 'governance muscles'. If young people feel empowered to hold their own peer leaders to account at the level of a youth-led group, then with time and practice, they will feel empowered to hold them to account at other levels of governance, all the way to parliament.

### BARRIER

#### Information gaps persist.

Young Kenyans often tell us they don't know enough about how government works, or about their rights and responsibilities. In a 2017 SMS survey we conducted, 23% said they didn't understand the term 'devolution' – a core principle of Kenyan democracy – and 45% had an incorrect understanding of it.<sup>35</sup> Without knowledge like this, conversations about governance and government seem abstract and irrelevant.

### BARRIER BREAKERS

Young people, particularly those who are 'engaged' but 'frustrated' with government, frequently highlight that they're keen to learn more about how national and local government systems work. But direct, didactic 'information-led' interventions are rarely effective in filling knowledge gaps.

In our recent large-scale qualitative study, we spoke to young people about the most effective modes of reaching them and their peers. They highlight that they'd like key governance information to be delivered to them through a collection of relevant channels, including social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp), as well as directly, through youth organisations and youth-focused events (including sports tournaments, town halls, camping tours and church concerts) that they're already a part of.

I'D LIKE THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE WE ARE GETTING EDUCATED ABOUT HOW THE BUDGET IS PREPARED AND ABOUT RESOURCE ALLOCATION. WE KNOW THESE RESOURCES ARE BEING ALLOCATED AND YOU KNOW PEOPLE ARE IN THE DARK.

FEMALE, KAKAMEGA

Whatever the channel or platform, what's crucial is who the information is presented by. Our research shows that it's important that new information is delivered by people that young people trust. Peer-to-peer training is often highly effective because it creates a perception of a 'norm'. Based on our experience, stories of role models and authentic local peers and relatable 'positive deviants' are all effective tools for delivering new information to young audiences.



# 04

## STRUCTURES: DESIGNING GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS FOR A NEW GENERATION

### BARRIER

#### 'This system isn't designed for me'.

Young people are often left feeling frustrated and excluded by the bureaucratic systems they interact with. From securing birth certificates or ID cards to getting a business licence, they face complex systems they're not able to navigate. Young people also report frustration with corruption within these systems, which significantly erodes their trust in official government structures. Without these critical pieces of paperwork, young people are kept outside of the system, frustrated and defeated.

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IT'S HARD FOR A CITIZEN TO GET A LOAN SINCE THEY DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO SHOW THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THEMSELVES.

MALE, NAIROBI

### BARRIER BREAKER

Simplifying and digitising these processes would make government structures more accessible to young people. Complex paperwork could be translated into simple mobile formats, or transactions paid for using M-Pesa. In the meantime, educating young people on how to navigate existing systems, and creating safe ways to report corruption or discrimination, would increase transparency and trust.

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I'VE CERTAINLY COME TO KNOW THAT IF WE HAVE PLATFORMS THAT WE CAN USE TO CHECK THESE LEGISLATORS, MAKE THEM ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS, THEN MAYBE THEY WOULD BE MORE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.

MALE, UNKNOWN





# 04

## BARRIER

### Young people feel unheard.

Young people in Kenya consistently highlight that they feel unheard and misunderstood by their government representatives. The negative rhetoric surrounding young people works to fuel that disconnection, leading to mutual confusion and distrust. Many young people highlight that there are a lack of obvious mechanisms for fruitful conversation between them, the government and its leaders.

## BARRIER BREAKER

It's vital that young people have access to a variety of community and national-level platforms, and formal and informal engagement structures, to give them an opportunity to connect with their leaders. Crucially, those platforms must be safe spaces, and must directly connect to government policies – young people don't just need to feel heard, they need to see that they're a priority. At Shujaaz Inc, we've seen first hand that when we create new online or in-person opportunities for young people to share their experiences and ideas with their local and national leaders, everyone leaves with a more positive and constructive perspective.

I'D LIKE THE GOVERNMENT TO ENGAGE ME AND ASK IS THIS THE BEST WAY WE CAN ASSIST YOU?

FEMALE, NAIROBI



## BARRIER

### Young people don't feel protected by core governance systems.

Young people in Kenya report experiencing frequent police brutality, violence and corruption. They say that they don't feel safe when reporting crimes, and in fact often feel they are disproportionately targeted by the police. This feeling of insecurity has a pervasive impact on young people's lives, and acts to dismantle their trust in government structures and voices.

## BARRIER BREAKERS

Again, creating safe, visible platforms for young people to report incidents with police – which lead to action in the form of prosecutions – is critical. Young people need to see that the local and national government is committed to end the abuse of police power. In the short term, educating young people on their rights in interacting with the police, and raising the profiles of NGOs working in this space, would also help to break down barriers.

IN MY HOOD, YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLICEMEN DON'T HAVE A GREAT RELATIONSHIP. THERE'S THIS FEAR PEOPLE HAVE ANY TIME THEY SEE A POLICEMAN, BECAUSE THEY ARE ALWAYS LOOKING TO FIND FAULT IN YOU SO THAT YOU CAN BRIBE THEM.

FEMALE, FACEBOOK



## SHUJAAZ INC SNAPSHOT: WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE 'THEIR SAY'

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've taken our flagship 'Mic Yetu' ('Our Say') engagement events online. This year we're running regular online live events, designed to connect young people across Kenya to their local leaders, spark vital conversations and elevate the voices of young people on the issues that matter most.

Designed and moderated by our team of young producers and researchers, our Mic Yetu live events have engaged thousands of young people in vital conversations throughout the pandemic. In August, Professor Kivutha Kibwana, the Governor of Makueni County, was joined by nearly 5,000 young Shujaaz fans for a live conversation about the COVID-19 crisis and the impact of lockdown measures on their livelihood.

Like all Mic Yetu events, young people commit to taking positive action after joining the session. But our Mic Yetu events have also demonstrated that creating constructive, youth-led opportunities for young people to connect with their leaders helps to change the conversation – and challenge negative stereotypes. At the end of the session with Governor Kibwana, young people reached out to tell us how the live conversations had changed their perspective. As one fan put it: 'Governor Kibwana is a reminder that young people can be heard, and there are still leaders in this nation.' In his closing message to Shujaaz fans, Governor Kibwana said: '...I like the positivity of this platform...it shows young people want to be part of the solution.'



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since 2010, Shujaaz Inc's work to understand and strengthen governance in Kenya has been supported by a number of important partners, including:

- The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to Kenya
- Luminate
- The Hanns Seidel Foundation
- The World Bank

We are grateful for their continued support, without which reports like this would not be possible.

**SHUJAAZ**  
**INC.**