# COMMUNITIES' CHALLENGES TO COMPLY WITH PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES FOR COVID-19

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK BRIEF

*10 June 2020*

## Background

The community feedback sub-working group was established by the risk communication and community engagement working group for the East and Southern Africa region. It helps to ensure the overall COVID-19 response is guided by the needs, priorities and concerns of communities across East and Southern Africa by analysing, sharing and encouraging action on the most frequent trends in community feedback collected across different agencies.

## Introduction

This brief gives an overview of the challenges shared by communities to adhere to rules such as physical distancing, hygiene measures, quarantine, isolation and the lockdown. There is a need across the region to find realistic and appropriate solutions for communities to protect themselves and reduce infections in communities. This brief should support this effort by highlighting the specific challenges and questions community members have shared, in order to identify which difficulties and information needs should be addressed most urgently. Information included in this brief was shared by the members of the community feedback sub-working group in the months of April and May 2020. Where deemed useful, community feedback from Western and Central Africa have been included additionally to the one collected in Eastern and Southern Africa.

## Overview

Overall, the challenges partners collecting community feedback in the region have been hearing, are linked to concerns about people's ability to cover their basic needs, access to certain equipment to follow rules, a lack of understanding of the purpose of public health measures, a lack of clarity on how rules are supposed to be implemented in people's specific contexts, and a fear resulting from these factors. When people understand the purpose and the reason for certain measures, they are willing to play their part – as long as they have the right information and can do so without experiencing severe food shortages.

## Recommendations

1. Scale up risk communication and community efforts to ensure communities understand how prevention measures are implemented in their country, and why these will contribute to ending the outbreak. Opportunities must be provided for communities to ask questions.

2. Work with communities to find local, affordable and practical solutions to implementing COVID-19 prevention and control measures, such as handwashing, physical distancing and isolation. This includes providing technical and financial support to community initiatives to make soap, provide water and produce face masks.

3. Increase support which mitigates the broader negative impact of public health measures such as lock-downs and quarantine, such as providing cash or voucher support to meet people's basic needs and ensuring access to sexual health and education services.

# Physical distancing

**General lack of knowledge and suspicion**
We have received questions about what physical distancing is in general, as well as what that means for people's daily lives. Some statements indicate misunderstanding of the concept, which is also linked to a lack of understanding of how the disease is transmitted. Questions and rumours about how the disease spreads have consistently been among the top community feedback topics received by the IFRC across Africa.[1] The fact of military and police not adhering to physical distancing rules has also made people question the purpose and legitimacy of the rules..

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"Where to do social distancing?" – South Sudan (IFRC)*
>
> *"How will it actually be maintained on the beach?" – Seychelles (IFRC)*
>
> *"My close relative is in self-quarantine, that is why I need to go stay with him, to take care of him" – Kenya (IOM)*
>
> *"How can the distance of one meter be a solution to the problem of corona virus, when the corona virus is transmitted in the air?" DRC (IFRC)*
>
> *"How you talk to us about going one meter away while we see cops crammed into a vehicle like sardines in a can..." – DRC (IFRC)*

**Challenge of physical distancing in big households or within families in general**
Community members share the challenge of many people living in big households and ask about how to keep a distance within the household and the family.

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"How can you respect social distancing (1m) living in the same family?" – Rwanda (IFRC)*
>
> *"How can you behave if you are 15 people in one house, if you have to keep your distance?" - DRC (IFRC)*

**Questions about physical distancing between couples**
Frequently asked questions form community members are about the necessity and feasibility of keeping a distance to their partner.

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"What is the meaning of social distancing? Does it mean that you cannot share a bed with your husband or wife, how can someone distance himself from his or her partner?" – South Sudan (IFRC)*
>
> *"What strategy can we use to keep the husband at a distance of one metre?" - DRC (IFRC)*

**Difficulties of keeping a distance in public transport**
Community members mention difficulties about close contact with other people in public transport and ask about feasibility to adhere to physical distancing in buses and moto-taxis. Many people are reliant on public transport to travel to work or to buy food.

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"It is hard to be 1 meter apart in public transport because they're overcrowded. Conductors wait till they pass roadblocks then they add passengers in the van, and you can't complain since you want to get home before curfew." – Kenya (Shujaaz Inc.)*
>
> *"Body contact cannot be avoided because of transportation here and there" – Nigeria (IFRC)*

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[1] IFRC (2020, May 20): *COVID-19 – Community feedback report #8. Africa region.*

*"What measure will we motorcyclists (taxi-motorcyclists) take for the distance of one meter because on a motorcycle, it will not be possible to avoid the corona virus?"* – DRC (IFRC)

**Difficulties of keeping a distance in markets**
Community members mention difficulties about close contact with other people in markets.

*Example comments:*

*"There is overcrowding at bus stations and markets, people are busy with their routine no precautions taken. Social distancing has not been well practiced."* – Tanzania (IFRC)

*"We can't always avoid touching or being touched by people at the market."* – Cameroon (IFRC)

# Hygiene measures

**Access to hand washing equipment, water and masks**
Oftentimes the lack of access to the right equipment to follow preventative measures is mentioned by communities and the provision thereof suggested. The cost of masks and hand sanitizer were mentioned as critical barriers to adoption in surveys conducted by Shujaaz Inc. in Kenya.[2] Many highlighted having to choose between buying water for cooking and cleaning – or preventative handwashing.[3] Feedback collected by Internews in Dadaab, Kenya, also points to the scarcity of water for hand washing.[4]

*Example comments:*

*"Masks should be a free provision by the government. I am not leaving the house so will not buy a mask."* – Kenya (Shujaaz. Inc)

*"Masks are not available in suburbs and countryside"* – Rwanda (IFRC)

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

*"The state of hygiene is good, though we have an issue with water adequacy. We only get 60 liters of water daily; this is hardly enough. We would like to request an increased water supply to sufficiently maintain proper hygiene at the household level."* – Kenya (Internews)

*"Young People raised concerns about limited access to clean running water needed for effective hand washing. Many highlighted having to choose between buying water for cooking and cleaning or preventive hand washing."* – Kenya (UNICEF)

*"Vulnerable households cannot respect handwashing as it is difficult for them to find water and soap/gel is not their priority"* – Madagascar (IFRC)

**Rumours and confusion around facemasks**
Questions on the right use of face masks have been asked across the region, while there were also many rumours on face masks shared. While some say that masks (mainly the masks coming from China) are infected with COVID-19, there are other rumours around negative effects of the use of masks.

*Example comments:*

*"I really do not know what to look at when buying a mask, I bought one [and then] was told it was so fake."* – Kenya (Shujaaz. Inc)

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[2] Shujaaz Inc (2020, May 08): *GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER*.
[3] Shujaaz Inc (2020, April 17): *GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER*.
[4] Internews (2020, April 28): *In The Loop*.

*"Why do government address mask to be worn by only affected or service providers." –
Tanzania (IFRC)*

*"Can tailored masks (zilizoshonwa) protect you from the virus?" - Tanzania (IFRC)*

*"The mask people wear contain corona." – DRC (CARE)*

**Stigmatisation of those wearing masks**
Some community members have shared concerns about people being perceived as being infected
when wearing a face mask.

*Example comments:*

*"I went to the market with my mask, but people started harassing me and got very angry. They
said I must be infected and wishing it on them, why else would I wear a mask?" – Somalia
(Hagaha Coronavirus)*

*"In the city here, people think anyone wearing a mask is a suspect case." – Burkina Faso (IFRC)*

**Challenges to avoid cash and questions about infections through cash**
Although mobile operators have cancelled the costs of mobile money for business transactions, this
does not apply to those not formally registered as a business, which is often the case of micro-
entrepreneurs – leaving them still reliant on cash-payments.

*Example comments:*

*"Can money not transmit infection on hands since it is hold by unknown persons?" – South
Sudan (IFRC)*

*"Can you get infected from banknotes?" – Burundi (IFRC)*

**Lack of knowledge on how the disease spreads**
There are many rumours circulating on how the disease is transmitted, having an impact on people
not adopting certain measures as they do not understand how they will protect them. In a poll
conducted by Shujaaz Inc on 8 April with young people in Kenya, 10% stated it was ok to share a face
mask and 14% that it would be ok to share a tea cup or plate.[5]

*Example comments:*

*"Can we be infected using the same object?" – Burundi (IFRC)*

*"Sexual intercourse can also transmit corona." – Namibia (IFRC)*

*"Is Corona virus an airborne disease?" – Kenya (IFRC)*

# Isolation of sick patients

**Lack of knowledge on isolation and mix-up with quarantine and lockdown**
Some feedback comments indicate that there is some confusion around isolation, what it means
and how this is different to measures such as quarantine and lockdowns.

*Example comments:*

*"Isolation is to get people to take the vaccine and die" – South Sudan (IFRC)*

*"What is the difference between isolation and lock-down?" – DRC (IFRC)*

*"We have heard people talk about isolation, but we don't really know what it is." – Cameroon
(IFRC)*

*"Isolation means quarantine?" – Cameroon (IFRC)*

*"I prefer being treated at home rather then being taken to isolation." – Togo (IFRC)*

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[5] Shujaaz Inc (2020, April 17): *GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER*.

**Lack of a separate room to isolate sick patients**

The study conducted by PERC across 20 African countries shows that many Africans are not able to isolate COVID-19 patients, as they would not have a separate room available to do so.[6]

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"They are isolating people with Covid-19 at their homes why don't they use that money that is being donated to rent or construct buildings for isolation?" – South Sudan (IFRC)*

# Quarantine

**Fear and misperception of quarantine centres**

Misperception of the role of quarantine centres. It is currently perceived by some community members as a 'prison' and not a public health intervention because people are getting quarantined for breaking the public health Act on COVID-19, and talks of people 'escaping' from quarantine. There are also fears of further spreading the virus due to inadequate infection prevention and social distancing in some quarantine centres.

This is linked to a fear and a lack of trust of mass testing imposed by governments.

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"General fear of government-imposed quarantine of those who tested positive, at own expense" – Kenya*
>
> *"Physical and verbal harassment (not necessarily proper 'attacks') against healthcare workers when those tested positive are put into quarantine in hospital, don't show severe symptoms, but family isn't allowed to visit (which is against culture), and the person cannot leave the hospital still. This usually starts becoming an issue after ca 1 week of quarantine." – Somalia (Hagaha Coronavirus)*
>
> *"Rumors about the probable persons returning from abroad but who escape the quarantine fixed by the Government" – Burundi (IFRC)*
>
> *"When you visit health facilities, you get tested for covid and be quarantined" – Kenya (IFRC)*

# Lockdown

**Concerns about impact of lockdown on livelihoods**

Community members ask about how they should stay at home, if they are not able to feed themselves and their families. A survey conducted by GeoPoll in 12 sub-Saharan countries found that more than 81% were concerned about having enough food to eat. Over the last two rounds of data collection the concern about the economic impact of the outbreak was the second highest concern (following the concern of contracting the disease).[7] Surveys conducted by Shujaaz Inc. in Eastleigh and Mombasa, Kenya, suggest that, even when cases do spike locally –young people and their communities will still be forced to break lockdown measures in order to secure food and sustain their income.[8] Community feedback shared with Africa's Voices Foundation during radio

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[6] Partnership for Evidence-Based Response to COVID-19 (2020, May 5): *Responding to COVID-19 in African Countries: Analysis and Report of Survey Findings*, p.8.

[7] GeoPoll (2020, May 18): *Coronavirus in sub-Saharan Africa: Data shows changing food habits, increased testing*. 0

[8] Shujaaz Inc (2020, May 08): *GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER*.

shows in Kenya indicates that people understand the importance of lockdown measures and also support them, but call for livelihoods support.[9]

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"The government's directive is great, but I would like to ask them to take care of the poor and those who cannot afford to support their families." – Kenya (Africa's Voices Foundation)*
>
> *"For me the government guidelines are really affecting me so much because my work has been closed and they are still adding a few more weeks to the curfew. I have to pay rent and buy food. I am a single mother and it is affecting me." – Kenya (Africa's Voices Foundation)*
>
> *"Lockdown without food kills more than covid-19." – Cameroon (IFRC)*
>
> *"How to respect the lockdown against corona virus and in our houses there is nothing to eat?" – DRC (IFRC)*
>
> *"Our business depends on the neighbouring country of Kenya. What's the situation now the border is closed?" – Tanzania (BBC media action)*

## Rumours and beliefs on inequality of lockdown measures

Rumours are circulating on social media on the South African government favouring formal and established businesses during the lockdown regulation while leaving out family businesses, small shops, and marketplaces.[10]

## Concerns about impact of lockdown on sexual and reproductive health

Surveys conducted by Shujaaz Inc. in Kenya show that as the lockdown continues, young people are reconnecting with their partners, finding new relationships or having casual sex. Access to condoms or emergency contraception from kiosks, pharmacies, public clinics, bars, clubs and University campuses has decreased and half of respondents said they 'urgently need' a form of contraception in a survey conducted by Shujaaz Inc.[11]

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"Am I supposed to buy condoms or am I supposed to eat?" – Kenya (Shujaaz inc.)*
>
> *"Cause we are in a total lock down I can't go to buy [condoms] in the shop or get the government ones for free." – Kenya (Shujaaz inc.)*

## Concerns about places of worship and schools being closed

While the support of restricting public gatherings is generally high across Africa as shown in the report by PERC, the support of closing churches and mosques is lower, with 77% supporting this measure compared to 92% supporting the closure of restaurants and night clubs for example.[12] Al-Shabab has denounced the decision taken by some countries to close mosques in order to limit the spread of the virus, which is being discussed on social media as shown by Africa CDC.[13] Community members also share their concern about schools not being open. Remote learning is not an option for many in East Africa due to lack of access to internet.

> *Example comments:*
>
> *"We want the government to give the opportunity to open schools and churches." – DRC (IFRC)*
>
> *"Why do you prohibit all the activities of the churches but instead consider those of the state?" – DRC (IFRC)*

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[9] Africa's Voices Foundation (2020, May): *COVID-19 Kenya Response, Weekly insights, 4-10 May 2020.*

[10] Africa CDC (2020, May 18): *Rumor Tracking Report.*

[11] Shujaaz Inc (2020, May 15): *GROUNDTRUTH COVID-19 BAROMETER.*

[12] Partnership for Evidence-Based Response to COVID-19 (2020, May 5): *Responding to COVID-19 in African Countries: Analysis and Report of Survey Findings*, p.8.

[13] Africa CDC (2020, May 18): *Rumor Tracking Report.*

*"Our wish is that churches and schools will be open without forgetting the rules of hygiene. " – DRC (IFRC)*

*"Coronavirus has affected our education because education has become online and I cannot afford this means." – Somalia (Africa's Voices Foundation)*

**Reports of increased violence and corruption during lockdowns**
People's perceptions of their governments handling the outbreak well vary across sub-Saharan countries.[14] Some feedback received points to an increase of corruption in the region. Citizens particularly mention the actions of police.

*Example comments:*

*"Why are police taking bribes from business people during this time of COVID-19?" – Kenya (Africa's Voices Foundation)*

*"People complain on the way the police/military deal with the lockdown, especially during the curfew" – Seychelles (IFRC)*

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[14] GeoPoll (2020, April 15): *Coronavirus in Sub-Saharan Africa.*