

# UNHEARD VOICES: YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES OF STRUGGLE, HOPE, AND RESILIENCE IN A COVID-19 AFFECTED ECONOMY – KENYA

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Kenyan government announced a raft of measures to be adopted, focusing primarily on people's health and the economy.

- The government implemented a series of measures to ensure that people were not overly exposed to health risks, and that the economy would not be obliterated by the pandemic. Economic measures included loan renegotiations, cash transfers, financial support, and tax relief for businesses and individuals.

The hardest-hit sectors are those largely employing young people. Workers in these sectors are characterized by being young, urban, informal workers.

- Sectors such as hospitality and tourism, transportation, and micro and small businesses are some of the hardest-hit sectors. These sectors are characterised by largely employing young people.
- In Kenya, 30% of household-run businesses reported being temporarily closed. While the majority of them have plans to re-open, without appropriate support their survival is uncertain.
- These businesses – characterised for being small-scale, operating informally, usually employing family members, and susceptible to economic shocks – have not been able to benefit from incentives, cash injections, and tax reliefs.

Measures taken to combat the spread of the virus severely affected labour markets and economic opportunities for youth.

- Young people – many of whom work in the informal sector – have faced a loss of work, reduction in their working hours, wage cuts, and layoffs, significantly affecting their livelihoods.
- Young people have also been affected by disruptions in education and training and difficulties in transitioning from school to work and moving between jobs in a recession.

Active labour market policies can help young people generate an income while providing valuable public goods.

- The Kazi Mtaani initiative – implemented by the Government of Kenya – has provided income relief through temporary work opportunities for unemployed youth while also providing valuable public work support in local communities.
- The initiative focuses on informal workers and has been developed in close collaboration with local governments with a huge success in targeting and supporting those most in need while ensuring the provision of public goods.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments and policymakers should:

- Apply, design, and implement policies with a youth lens.
- Scale up existing social protection programmes and re-purpose them to protect young people.
- Provide access to education and training, ensuring support for the most vulnerable.
- Ensure young people receive financial assistance.
- Provide support to keep building the evidence based on what policy approaches work best for youth.

# UNHEARD VOICES: YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES OF STRUGGLE, HOPE, AND RESILIENCE IN A COVID-19 AFFECTED ECONOMY – KENYA

**K**elvin is a 28 year-old fashion designer from Mukuru Kwa Njenga, an informal settlement located in the eastern part of Nairobi. He is a recent graduate, with a Bachelor's degree in English and Linguistics. Kelvin is the second child of five siblings and he is the sole provider of the family.

Kelvin is the owner of an Ankara design (African outfit) shop that designs and sells Ankara bomber jackets, laptop bags and pillowcases. Before the pandemic, he used to work for 8–10 hours a day and made an income of roughly US\$10–50 per week. Since COVID-19 hit, Kelvin still spends the same amount of hours working, but his sales have decreased by 80%, which threatens the survival of his business.

In order to cut costs and accommodate his reduced income, Kelvin and his family have had to make some difficult decisions, including cutting back on food consumption. If the situation continues over the next 6 months, Kelvin is worried that he might end up losing his only source of income, which would take a huge toll on him in taking care of his siblings.

While Kelvin and his family have been fortunate to receive cash transfers from the government and food support from a local organization, he is dissatisfied with the measures put forth by the government to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. He is particularly upset about the curfews, which have severely affected his business.



Kelvin also mentioned that most of the youths in his community have lost their jobs. Some were forced to take on part-time work like collecting garbage, while others were lucky to be enrolled in the Kazi Mtaani initiative. Kelvin mentioned the need to support young people through training on entrepreneurship skills, financial skills, business management skills, and proposal writing, as well as access to funds. According to Kelvin most young people are unable to access funding due to high levels of bureaucracy and he would like the government to create opportunities for young people.

## The research

These findings are based on a research study exploring the effects of COVID-19 on young people's lives in Bangladesh, Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania with respect to income and employment opportunities. A youth-led research approach was utilised as part of the study.

The study outlines the evidence and provides recommendations to shape future crisis management's responsiveness to youth-specific issues and provide guidance on measures that can be taken to avoid exacerbating the exclusion and poverty experienced by many young people.

The research in Kenya took place in Nairobi, Kilifi, Isiolo, and Laikipia counties.

