



# Coping with Coronavirus?

## Kenyan citizens' knowledge, attitudes and practices

### 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has wreaked havoc across much of the world. Several countries are already counting deaths in the tens of thousands, and lockdowns put in place to slow or stop the spread of the disease look set to cause economic difficulties for millions.

Kenya recorded its first recognised case on March 13, 2020. At this point, the pandemic had already caused major disruption and thousands of deaths across some countries in East Asia and Western Europe. The government took swift action, closing schools and higher education institutions, restricting travel into Kenya, suspending public and social gatherings, encouraging people to work from home as much as possible and introducing a nationwide 7pm-5am curfew. In early April, the President announced travel restrictions within the country, focused particularly on urban centres of Nairobi and Mombasa and other hotspots, which were later extended and relaxed according to the state of the outbreak in particular areas.

By mid-June (when this survey was being conducted), the number of cases recorded in Kenya had risen relatively slowly to 3,700, with 104 deaths. From mid-July, the number of cases began to rise more quickly – as this report goes to press on July 27, the number of cases has risen to 17,975, including 960 on a single day. Some lockdown restrictions have been relaxed, though the curfew has been extended. As case numbers rise, there are concerns that the outbreak will reach areas that had previously reported very few cases.

It is still too early to conclude with confidence whether the Kenyan government's response to the pandemic has been effective. Neither the health impact nor economic impact can yet be assessed fully. There are clear signs that the measures taken by government have helped to reduce and slow the spread of the virus, though it has not been possible to contain the outbreak entirely, and the recent rapid growth in case numbers is concerning.

This brief presents data on citizens' knowledge, attitudes and practices on matters relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. Are any citizens still unaware of the pandemic? Do residents know how they can protect themselves and others from the virus? Are they practising measures to reduce infection, such as social distancing and handwashing? How worried are they by the pandemic, and what specifically are their concerns? How confident are they in the ability of their government to handle the crisis? And what are their main sources of information on the virus?

Data for the brief come from a special round of Twaweza's *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile-phone panel survey. This was created through random sampling from a database of contacts from previous surveys to establish a new representative panel of the country's population. Statistical weightings have been applied to the panel, to ensure it is fully representative at national level, for rural and urban areas, as well as for Nairobi and Mombasa. For this brief, data were collected from 3,000 respondents in the first round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 29 May, 2020 and 30 June, 2020.

Key findings include:

## **KNOWLEDGE**

- Almost all citizens are aware of COVID-19, most are very aware of it
- Most citizens are aware of the main modes of transmission and identify public places and gatherings as the most likely places of exposure to the virus
- Some misconceptions about COVID-19 are widely held
- Citizens see older people, children and those with pre-existing conditions as being most at risk
- 6 out of 10 citizens are very worried about the Coronavirus outbreak in Kenya
- Most citizens do not feel at risk of being exposed to the Coronavirus

## **RESPONSE**

- Most citizens are aware of some measures the government has taken in response to the outbreak
- Citizens point to handwashing, masks and staying at home as actions they are taking to prevent infection
- 2 out of 3 citizens have confidence in the government's ability to handle the Coronavirus outbreak
- 4 out of 10 citizens say the money they have currently available to them would only last one day if no movement is allowed

## **ECONOMICS**

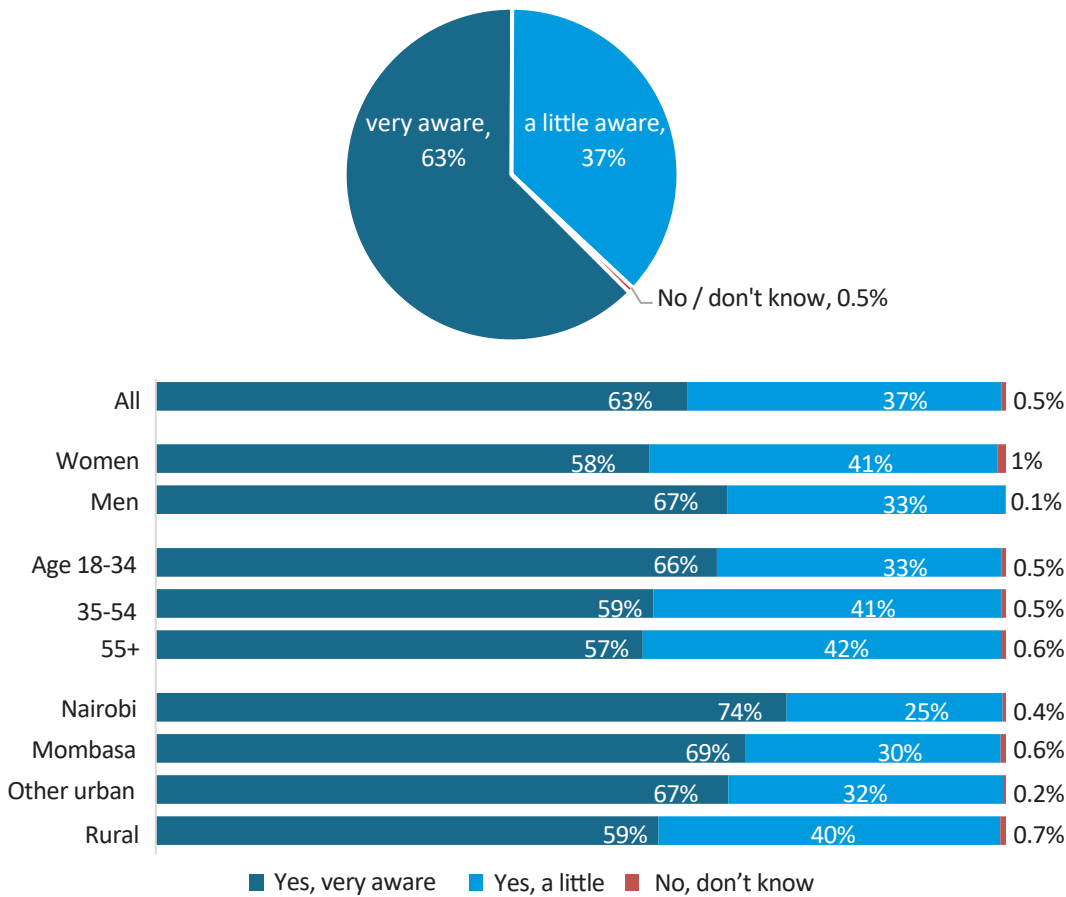
- More than half of citizens agree with the view that many people have resumed business as usual despite the outbreak
- Citizens are more concerned about the economic implications of the Coronavirus than the health effects
- The biggest impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak on Kenyan households have been on income and jobs
- Half of households have seen food price increases in the previous two weeks
- 7 out of 10 households report that their food intake has become worse in the previous month

## 2. Kenyan citizens' knowledge, attitudes and practices on the Coronavirus outbreak

### Insight 1: Almost all citizens are aware of aware of COVID-19, most are very aware of it

Almost all citizens (99.5%) are aware of the Coronavirus / COVID-19, and the majority (63%) say they are very aware of it. Four out of ten (37%) have heard of the virus but say they don't know a lot about it. Awareness is higher among men, younger citizens, and those living in Nairobi, Mombasa and other urban areas.

Figure 1: Are you aware of the Coronavirus / COVID-19?



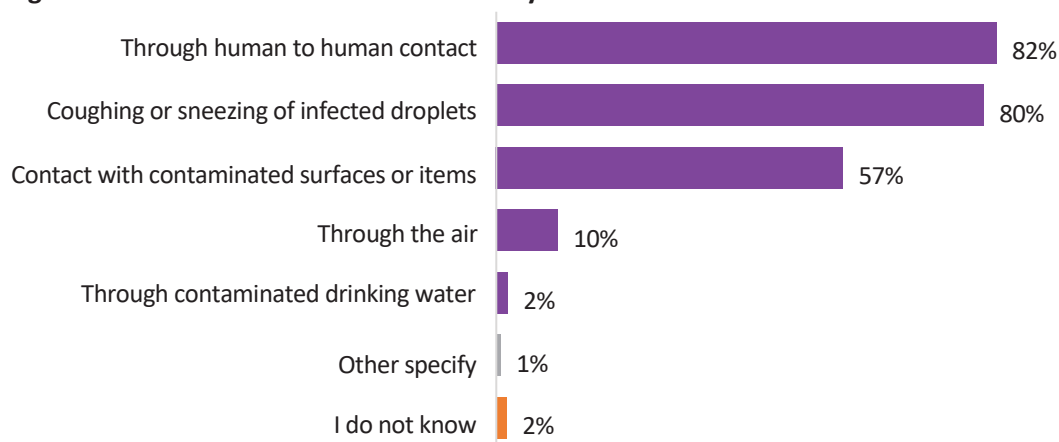
**Source:** Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

## Insight 2: Most citizens are aware of the main modes of transmission and identify public places as the most likely places of exposure

Eight out of ten citizens (82%) correctly identify human-to-human contact as one of the ways the Coronavirus can be transmitted, and a similar number (80%) point to coughing and sneezing.

A majority (57%) mention contact with contaminated surfaces or items. Smaller numbers of citizens cite airborne transmission (10%) or contaminated drinking water (2%)<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2: Please tell me all the different ways in which Coronavirus can be transmitted?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);

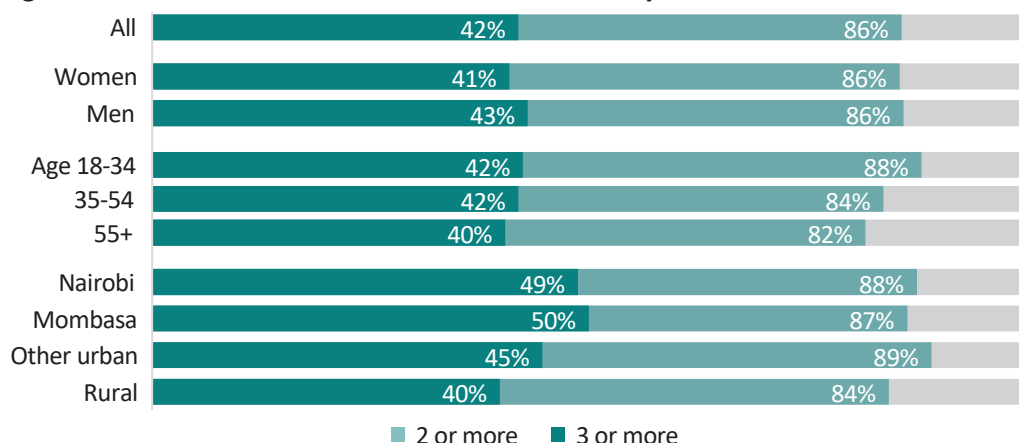
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

Four out of ten citizens (42%) named three or more modes of transmission, while nine out of ten (86%) pointed to at least two modes of transmission.

Understanding of modes of transmission is at similar levels among women, men and different age groups, but is higher in urban areas, particularly Nairobi and Mombasa.

1 The science of the virus is not yet fully understood, but it is believed that airborne transmission is rare. The virus has not been detected in drinking water, but most such research has been conducted in countries and contexts with high standards of water hygiene and distribution – see World Health Organisation (WHO) [https://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/news-events/wash-and-covid-19/en/](https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/news-events/wash-and-covid-19/en/)

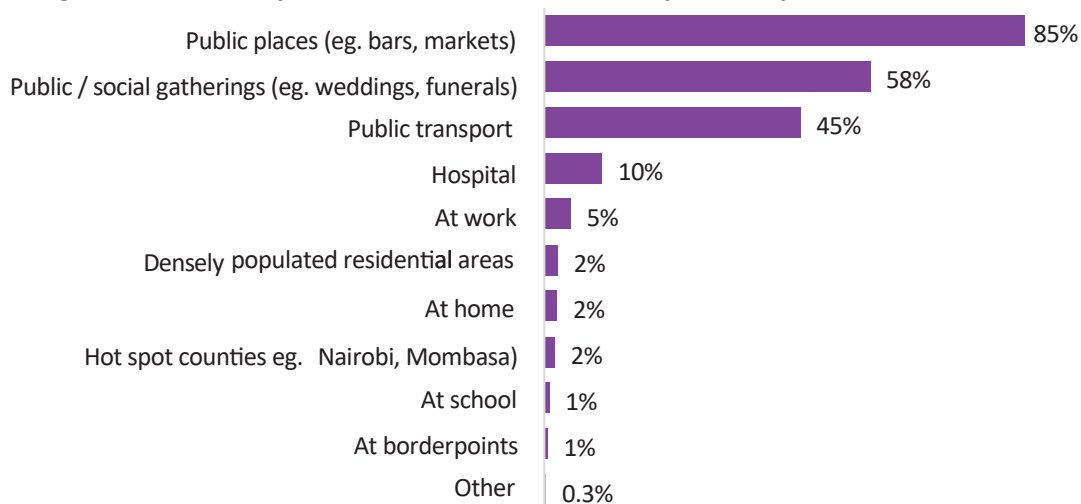
**Figure 3: Percent who could name more than one way the virus can be transmitted:**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

A large majority of citizens (85%) identify public places such as bars and markets as places where risk of exposure to the virus is higher, and a small majority (58%) also point to public / social gatherings such as weddings and funerals. Close to half identify public transport as a site of possible exposure.

**Figure 4: Where do you think someone is more likely to be exposed to Coronavirus?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
**Base:** all respondents (n=3,000)

### Insight 3: Some misconceptions about COVID-19 are widely held

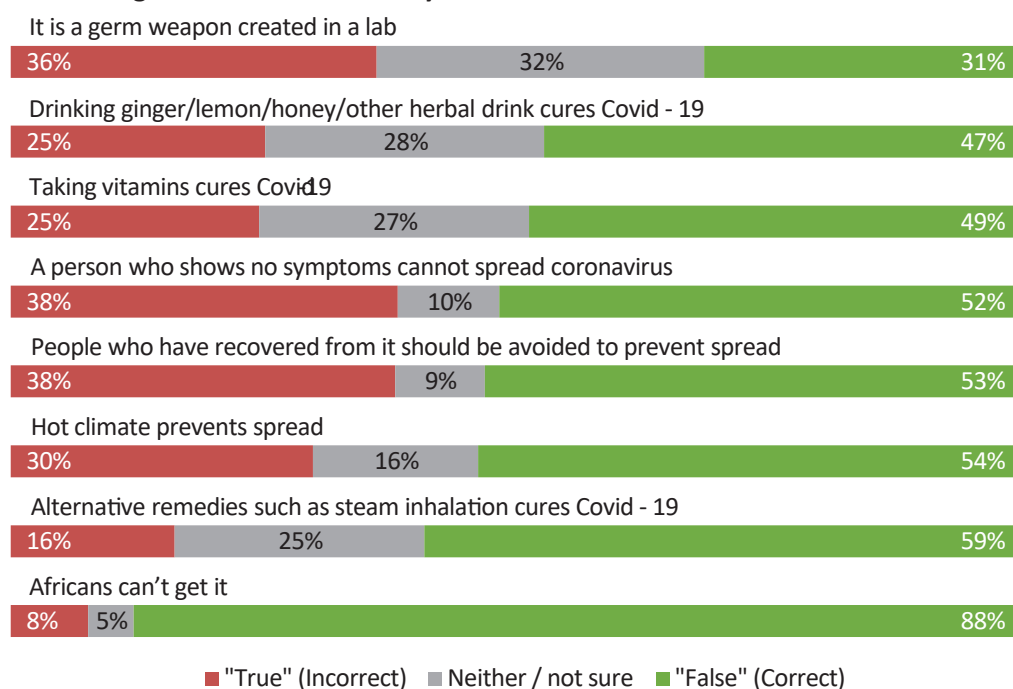
Several misconceptions about the Coronavirus are held by substantial numbers of citizens. This includes four out of ten (36%) who believe the Coronavirus was created by scientists in a lab, compared to three out of ten (31%) who (correctly) believe this to be false.

Some unproven remedies are also widely held to be effective, including drinking some combination of ginger, lemon, honey or other herbal drink (25%) to cure someone of the virus, or taking vitamins (25%), though in both cases more citizens correctly hold these statements to be false. In fact, while these treatments may help reduce some symptoms and strengthen the immune system a little, they will not prevent someone from becoming infected or cure someone who is already infected<sup>2</sup>.

More worryingly, four out of ten citizens (38%) do not believe that someone without symptoms cannot spread the virus, and a similar number believe that it is better to avoid those who have recovered from the virus, in order to avoid infection.

On the other hand, most citizens correctly recognise that hot climate does not prevent spread of the virus (54%), that steam inhalation is not a cure (59%), and that Africans can get the virus (88%).

**Figure 5: Please tell me if you think each statement is true or false:**



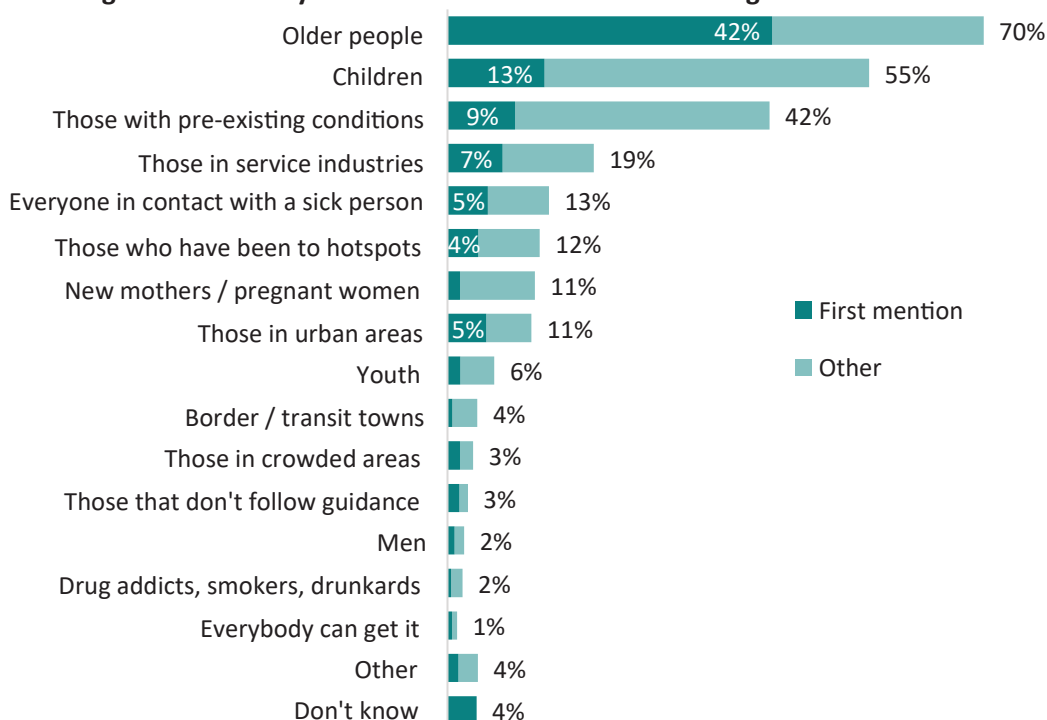
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey,  
special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

2 The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that there are currently no known effective medicinal treatments for Coronavirus, but also that most patients will make a full recovery. See <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

## Insight 4: Citizens see older people, children and those with pre-existing conditions as being most at risk

Seven out of ten citizens (70%) see older people as most at risk of contracting the Coronavirus, and four out of ten (42%) cite those with pre-existing conditions. In both cases, this matches the scientific consensus. However, citizens and the scientists differ on children: while the science tells us that children are less vulnerable to the virus, most citizens (55%) mention children as being a high-risk group.

**Figure 6: Who do you think is most at risk of contracting the Coronavirus?**



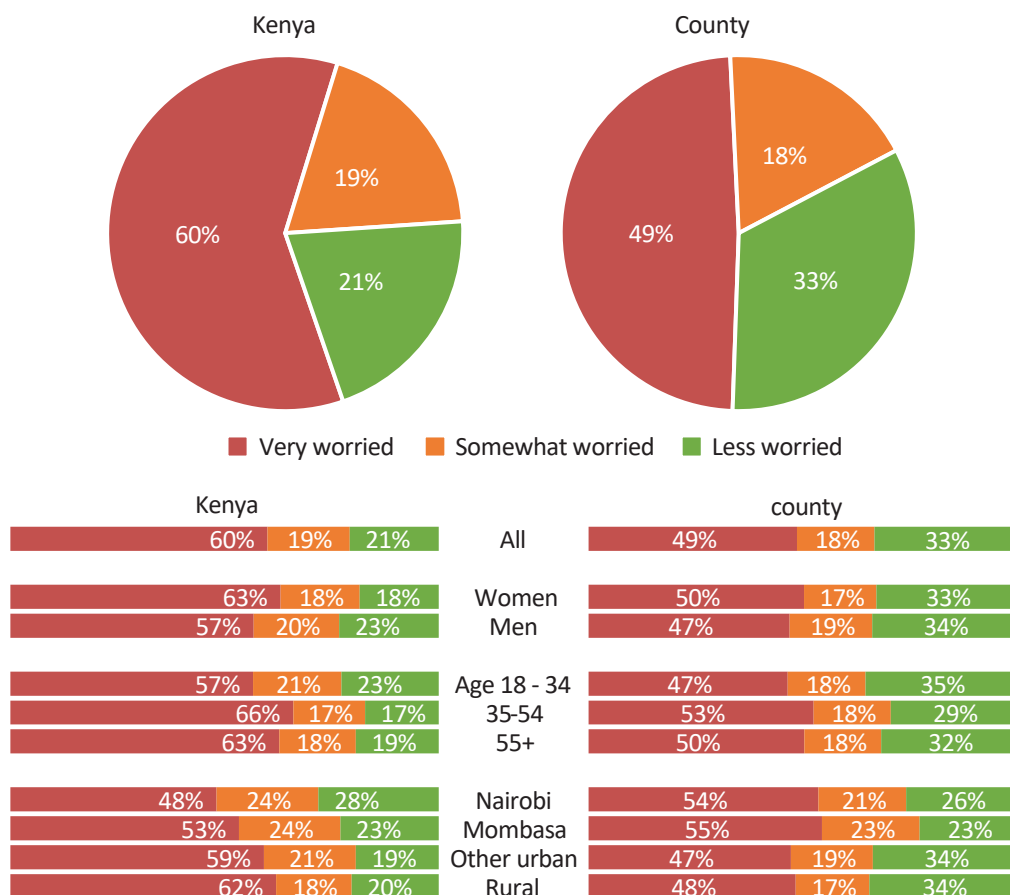
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

## Insight 5: 6 out of 10 citizens are very worried about the Coronavirus outbreak in Kenya

Six out of ten citizens (60%) are very worried about the virus spreading in Kenya, and a further two out of ten (19%) are somewhat worried, leaving two out of ten (21%) who are less concerned. Concerns about the outbreak at local levels are a little lower.

Residents of Nairobi and Mombasa are less concerned than others about the national outbreak, but more concerned about the local situation. Women are a little more concerned than men, but older citizens are no more concerned than others, despite the increased risks for them.

**Figure 7: How worried are you about the virus spreading in Kenya / your county?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

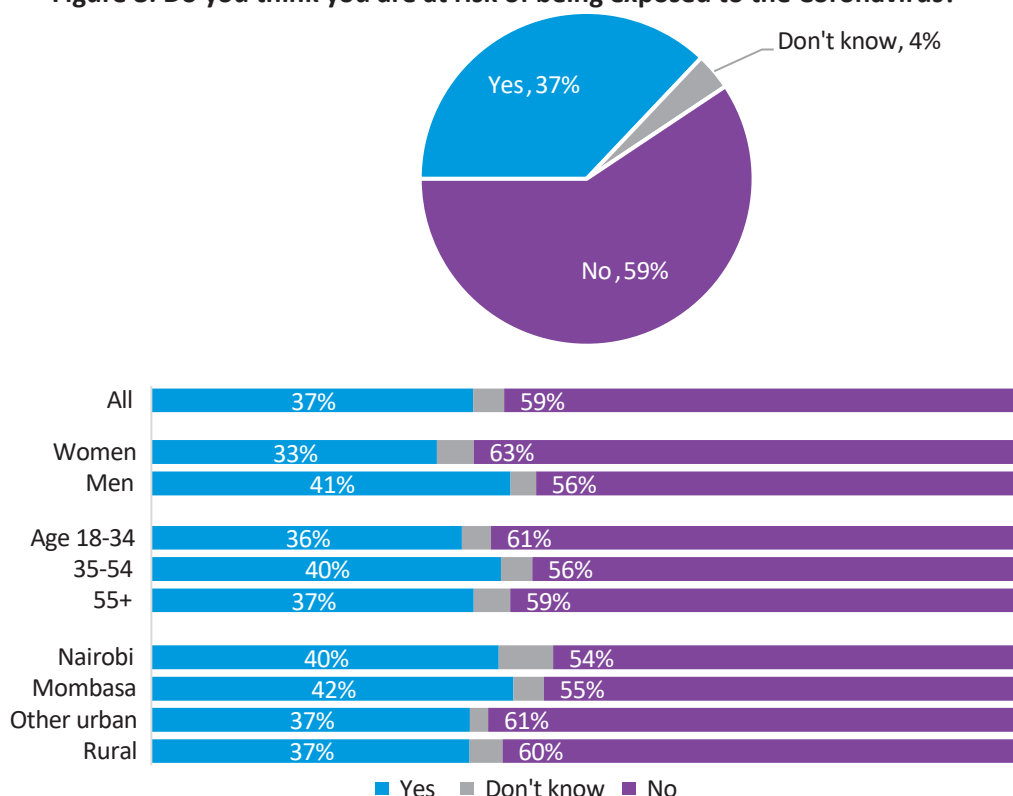
### Insight 6: Most citizens do not feel at risk of being exposed to the Coronavirus

Six out of ten citizens (59%) do not feel at risk of being exposed to the Coronavirus, while four out of ten (37%) do feel at risk, and a small number (4%) are unsure.

Men (41%) are more likely to feel at risk than women (33%), and residents of Nairobi and Mombasa are more likely to feel at risk.



**Figure 8: Do you think you are at risk of being exposed to the Coronavirus?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

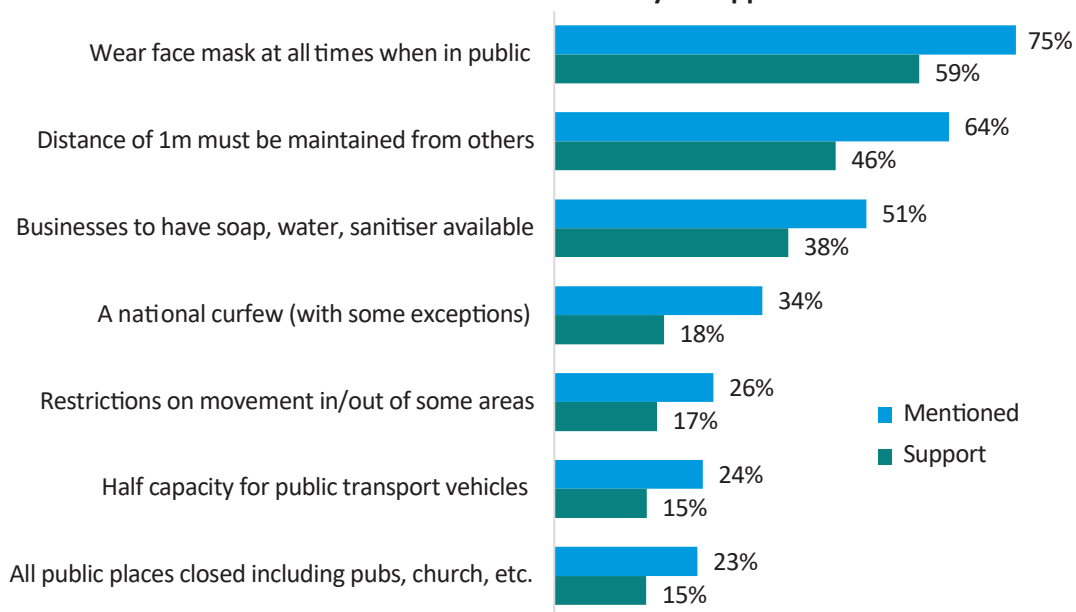
The main reasons given for feeling vulnerable there is no way to know who has it (19%), that interacting with others cannot be avoided, that there is a high number of cases locally (10%) and that some people are not sticking to the guidelines (9%) (not shown in charts).

### Insight 7: Most citizens are aware of some government measures against the Coronavirus

Most citizens are aware of several measures the government has taken in response the outbreak. The most widely cited include the requirement to wear face masks while in public (75%), the need to maintain distance from other people (64%) and the instruction that businesses must make soap and water and/or sanitiser available (51%). Other widely-recalled measures include the national curfew (34%), movement restrictions in some areas (26%), reduced capacity on public transport (24%) and the closure of public places (23%).

Broadly, these measures have public support. In all cases, most of those who are aware of a particular measure support it. This includes six out of ten citizens (59%) who support the compulsory wearing of masks.

**Figure 9: Could you mention any measures / directives of government for people / business to follow in order to deal with Coronavirus? Do you support these measures?**



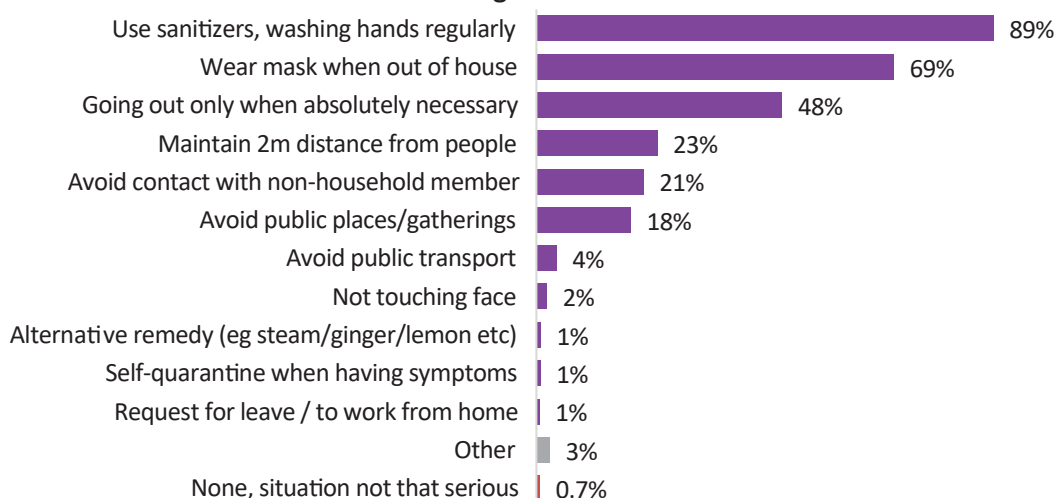
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

### Insight 8: Citizens point to handwashing, masks and staying at home as actions they are taking to prevent infection

Nine out of ten citizens (89%) report using sanitiser and/or washing hands regularly to reduce the risk of infection. Seven out of ten (69%) also report wearing a mask when outside the home, and half (48%) say they are only leaving their house when absolutely necessary.

Two out of ten (23%) report maintaining 2m distance from other people, and a similar number report avoiding contact with non-household members (21%) and avoiding public places and gatherings (18%).

**Figure 10: What actions have you / your household taken to prevent themselves from contracting Coronavirus in the last 2 weeks?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29th May – 30th, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

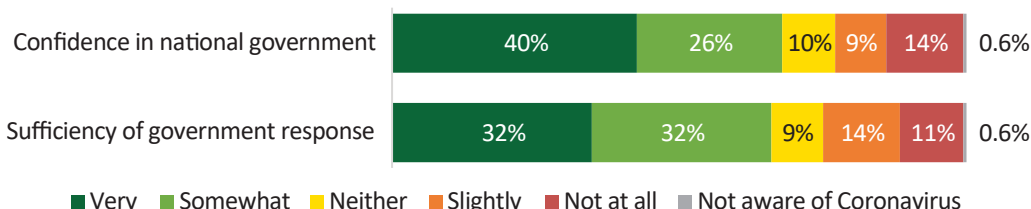
There is a high level of consistency in these measures across different demographic groups and different parts of the country (not shown in charts).

### Insight 9: 2 out of 3 citizens have confidence in the government's ability to handle the Coronavirus outbreak

Seven out of ten citizens (66%) have confidence in the ability of the national government to handle the Coronavirus outbreak, including four out of ten (40%) who are very confident. Similarly, most citizens (64%) say the government's response has been sufficient, including three out of ten (32%) who say it has been very sufficient.

In both cases, around two out of ten citizens say they don't have confidence (23%) or that the government's response has not been sufficient (25%).

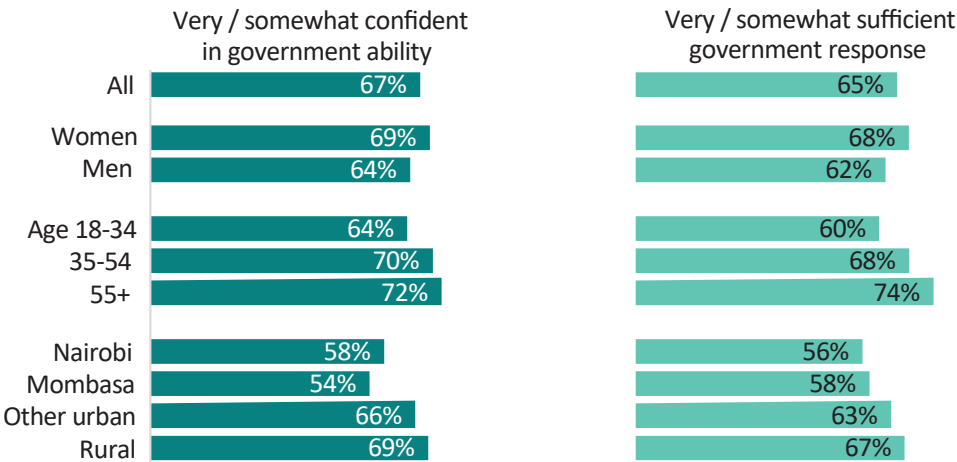
**Figure 11: How confident are you in the ability of the national government to handle the outbreak? And how sufficient would you say the government's reaction has been?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

Women, older citizens and those in rural areas are more likely than others to have positive feelings about the government’s ability to handle the outbreak and the actions the government has taken so far.

**Figure 12: Percentage who feel very/somewhat confident in the ability of national government to handle the outbreak, that the response has been very/somewhat sufficient:**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

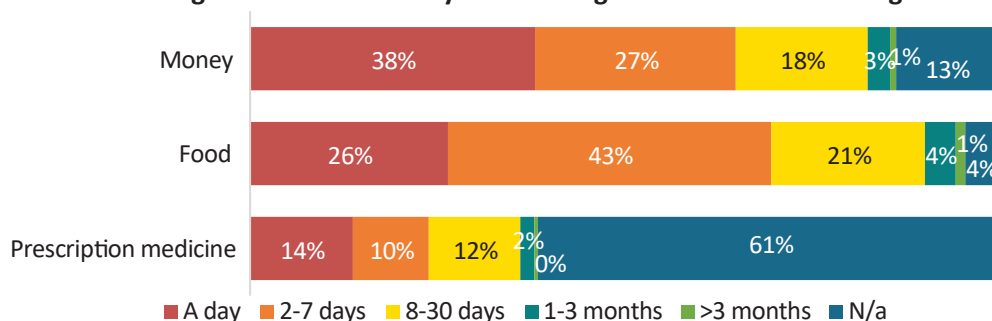
**Insight 10: 4 out of 10 citizens say the money they have currently available to them would only last one day if no movement is allowed**

Four out of ten citizens (38%) say the money that they currently have available to them would only last for a single day if a total ban on movement were imposed. A further three out of ten (27%) say their money would last no more than a week.

Food stocks would also be a problem, with seven out of ten citizens (69%) saying the stocks they currently have available would last no more than a week.

One out of four Kenyans (24%) would also run out of prescription medicine within a week.

**Figure 13: If everybody is told to stay home with no movement at all, how long would it be before you need to get more of the following?**



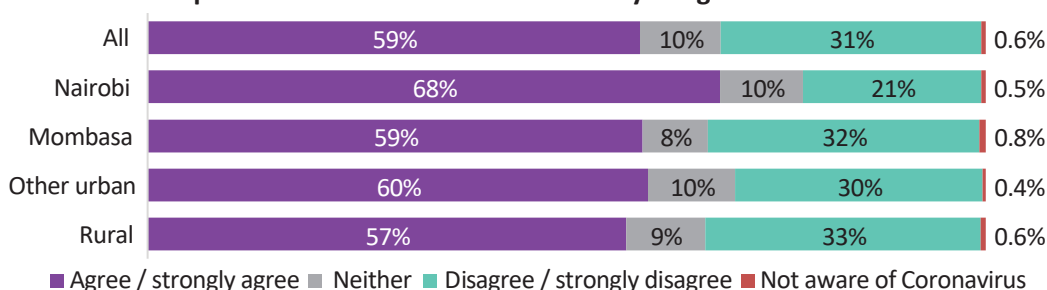
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

These challenges are broadly consistent across different parts of the country, though citizens in Nairobi (75%) and Mombasa (77%) are a little more likely than others (70%) to say that food stocks would be a problem (not shown in charts).

### Insight 11: More than half of citizens agree with the view that many people have resumed business as usual despite the outbreak

Six out of ten citizens (59%) agree with the view recently stated by government that many people have resumed business as usual despite the Coronavirus outbreak. This view is particularly widely-held in Nairobi (68%).

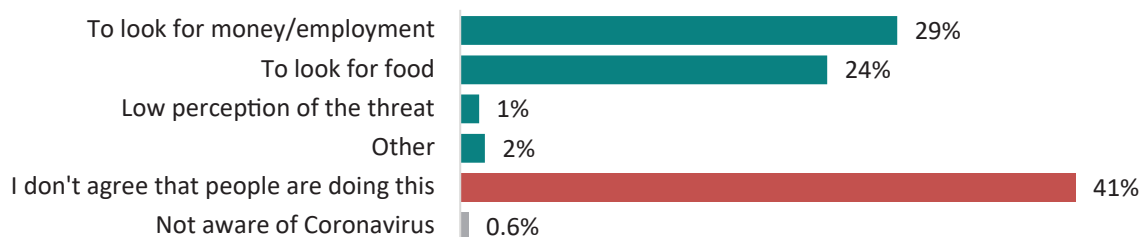
**Figure 14: The government has recently stated that citizens have resumed business as usual despite coronavirus. To what extent do you agree with this statement?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

Two main reasons are suggested for why some people are doing this: that they need money / employment (29%), or food (24%). Very few citizens (1%) think this is happening simply because people are not aware of the threat presented by the outbreak.

**Figure 15: What is the main reason that has made people behave this way?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

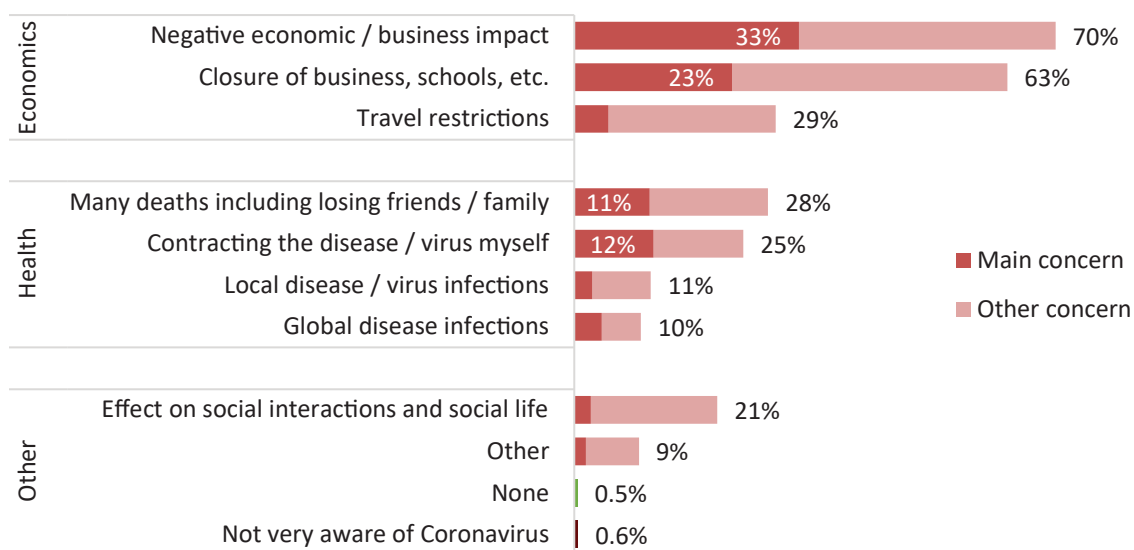
## Insight 12: Citizens are more concerned about the economic implications of the Coronavirus than the health effects

More citizens are concerned about the economic effects of the Coronavirus outbreak than the health effects. The top three concerns are all economics-related, including negative impact on the economy and businesses (70%), closure of businesses and schools (63%) and travel restrictions (29%).

These are followed by health-related concerns, including the possibility of many deaths (28%) and the chance of contracting the virus personally (25%).

The negative effects of the outbreak on social life is also widely cited (21%).

**Figure 16: What concerns you most about the implications of Coronavirus?**



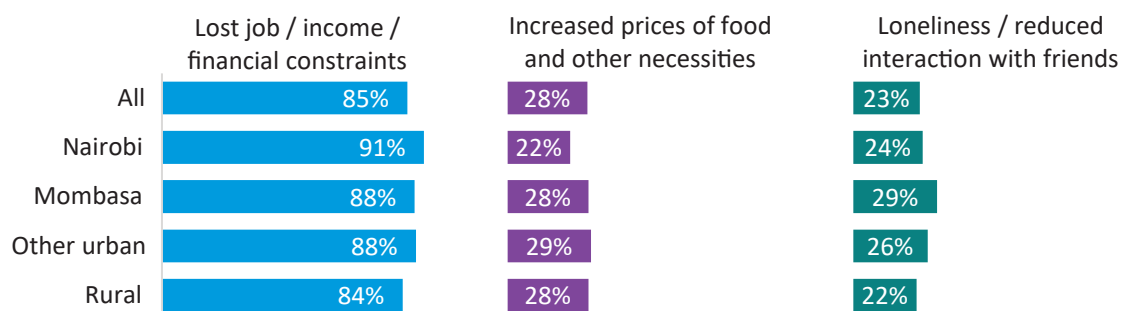
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=2,845)

### Insight 13: The biggest impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak on Kenyan households have been on income and jobs

Most citizens (85%) report that lost income or other financial constraints are one of the ways their households have been affected by the Coronavirus so far. This is followed by increased food prices (28%) and reduced interaction with friends (23%).

These effects are broadly consistent across different parts of the country, though residents of Nairobi, Mombasa and other urban areas are a little more likely than their rural counterparts to report lost income or financial difficulties, and Nairobi residents are less likely to report increased food prices as a problem.

**Figure 17: How have you/your household been affected by Coronavirus so far?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

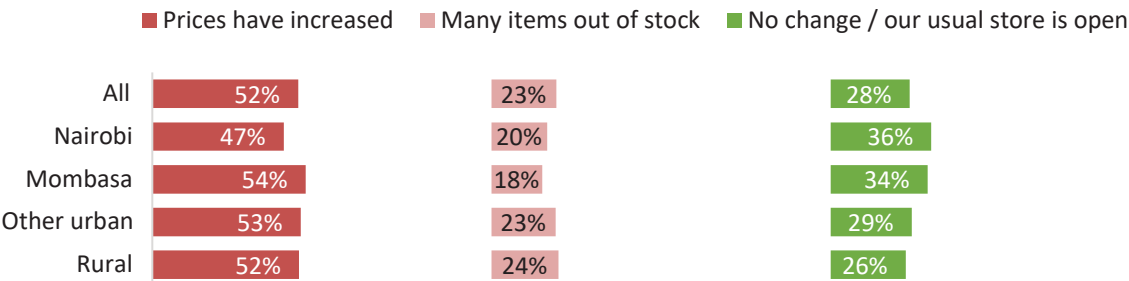
More positively, some citizens (15%) report having more time to bond with their family, or improved hygiene standards (10%). However, three quarters (73%) report having experienced no positive effects, compared to 3% who report experiencing no negative effects (not shown in charts).

### Insight 14: Half of households have seen food price increases in the previous two weeks

Half of households (52%) report having seen food increase in price over the previous two weeks. This is a little lower in Nairobi (47%) than elsewhere.

One out of four Kenyans (23%) report that many items are out of stock, while a similar share (28%) report that the previous two weeks have seen no change in the availability or price of food and other necessities in their local area.

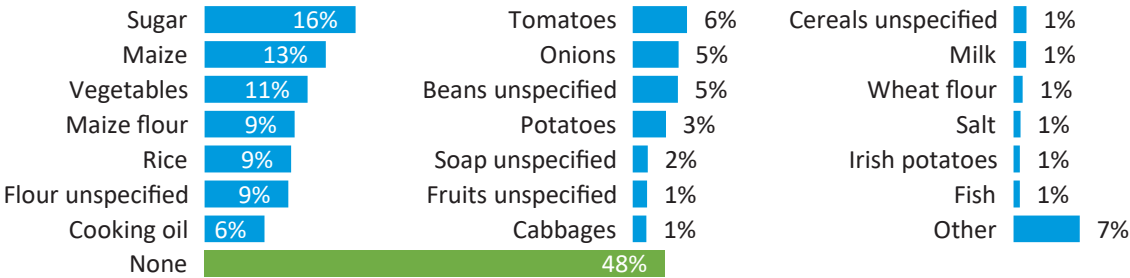
**Figure 18: In the last two weeks have you seen any changes in terms of access, availability, prices, etc. for necessities at stores/markets near you?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

Citizens say they have mostly seen price increases in the previous two weeks for sugar (16%), maize (13%) and vegetables (11%).

**Figure 19: Items seeing price increases:**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

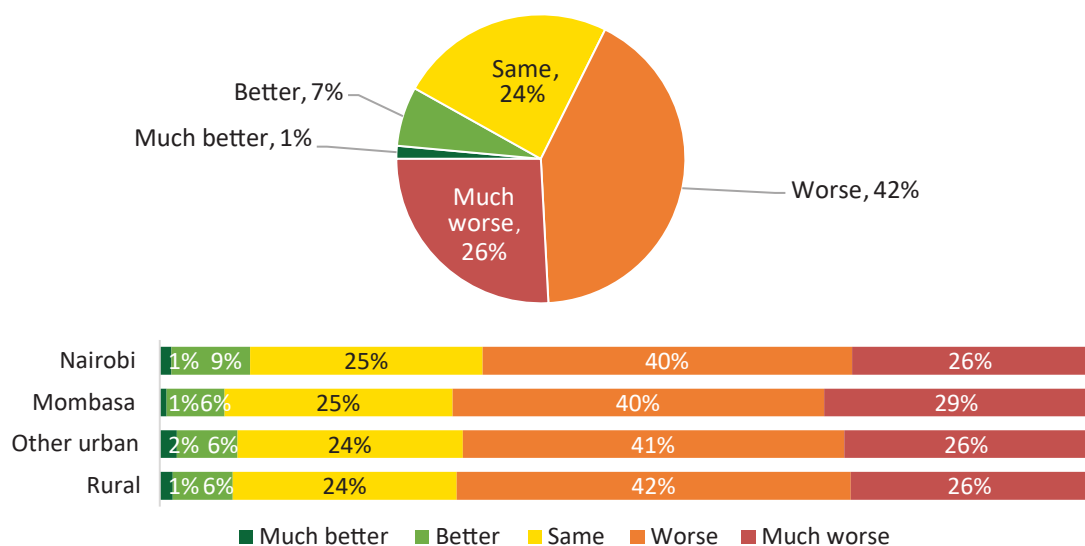
**Insight 15: 7 out of 10 households report that their food intake has become worse in the previous month**

Seven out of ten households (68%) report that their basic daily food intake has become worse over the previous month, including three out of ten (26%) who say it has become much worse.

This pattern is broadly consistent across different parts of the country.



**Figure 20: What do you think of the basic daily food intake situation in your household in the last month?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special panel round 1 (29 May – 30 June, 2020);  
Base: all respondents (n=3,000)

### 3. Conclusions

This report highlights important aspects of the public response to the Coronavirus outbreak in Kenya. It is still far too early to assess whether the response has been successful. Nevertheless, this report identifies several areas where the first stage of that response has delivered substantial achievements, as well as raising citizens' concerns and vulnerabilities as the outbreak and response move forward.

In terms of achievements, there are two that are particularly worth highlighting. First, public understanding of the Coronavirus – how it is transmitted, how this can be prevented, the state of the outbreak in Kenya – is remarkable for such a new disease. While some significant misconceptions remain – for example that it was created in a lab, and that those with no symptoms cannot spread the virus – the level of public understanding is high for a disease that only began to spread within the last few months. The high proportion of citizens who report having heard public health messaging on the matter must be part of the reason for this, though of course blanket news coverage has also played a major role.

Second, the government has earned and (thus far) maintained public confidence in its ability to respond effectively to the outbreak. The public are generally aware of the measures the government has taken in response, and generally support these measures. This is no small achievement, as there are other countries where the government has lost public confidence, making it much harder to convince the public to take difficult actions to slow the spread of the virus.

Nevertheless, citizens have some major concerns. The most obvious of these is on economics. Citizens are currently far more concerned about the economic impact of the outbreak than the health implications. This is where citizens have seen the biggest impact so far, and large numbers of households report that the outbreak (and the measures taken in response) have already had serious negative impacts on their finances and food intake. The government will need to manage these concerns with care, as there is a clear possibility that frustrated citizens trying to cope with difficulties putting food on the table will lose confidence in the national response and starting taking preventive measures less seriously. Already, a majority of citizens – and a large majority of residents of Nairobi – see this happening.

As we move forward, we will need to learn to live with the Coronavirus for at least several months to come, and probably a couple of years or more. Finding ways of limiting the number of cases without doing real harm to citizens' livelihoods and the national economy will not be easy. But that is the task ahead of the nation.



