

Press Release  
15 October 2020

## Casual workers in urban areas are hardest hit by the economic impact of the Coronavirus

*1 out of 3 have lost their source of income, and 8 out of 10 have less than a week of food at home*

**Thursday 15 October 2020, Nairobi:** Households which depend on casual work, generally concentrated in urban areas especially big cities, are by far the hardest hit by crises of food and income caused by the Coronavirus. One out of three of these households (34%) have seen the main breadwinner lose their source of income, compared to one out of four Kenyan households overall (26%). And more than half of these households have not found new sources of income.

In terms of food security, the picture is no better, with 8 out of 10 households (80%) that rely on casual work reporting to hold food stocks of a week or less at home, compared to 6 out of 10 of the population overall (64%). In the past three months, 4 out of 10 casual workers (43%) did not eat for a whole day due to a lack of money or other resources, compared to 3 out of 10 of citizens in general (32%).

These findings were released by Twaweza in two research briefs titled *Living with Coronavirus? Kenyan citizens' opinions and experiences on the economic effects of Covid-19* based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The panel was established through random sampling from a database of contacts from previous surveys to establish a new representative panel of the country's population. For this brief, data were collected from 3,000 respondents in the first round of the special *Sauti za Wananchi* panel, conducted between 17 and 29 August, 2020.

Although casual workers face particularly difficult conditions, all Kenyans are struggling with securing food and income. Fewer Kenyans now say their income is sufficient to meet their household needs: 1 out of 4 citizens (28%) report having enough income compared to 1 out of 3 in 2018 and 2017.

Perhaps most starkly, 4 out of 10 citizens (39%) say they would spend a hypothetical KES 10,000 gift from government on food.

In terms of food, 8 out of 10 Kenyans (77%) report increases in the price of food and other necessities, compared to January of this year. And 2 out of 3 households (64%) say they have food that would last a week or less at home. Compared to June 2020, more households (21% compared to 15%) report having no food at home. The situation is particularly bad in Nairobi where the share of households with no food at home has almost doubled (17% to 31%) this year.

Overall, half of households (52%) report that their current food situation is worse or much worse than in the previous month. Along a range of indicators of food stress, 2020 is comparable to 2016, a year of bad harvest. In the past three months due to a lack of money or other resources:

- 75% of people in 2020 and 2016 worried about running out of food
- 60% had in 2020 and 65% in 2016 had to skip a meal

- 51% in 2020 and 53% in 2016 found their household ran out of food

For many citizens, these tough household circumstances translate into pessimism about the status of the national economy. Overall 8 out of 10 citizens (78%) think the country is heading in the wrong direction, up from 7 out of 10 (71%) in 2018. Similar proportions think the current state of the economy is bad or very bad (83%) or (much) worse (87%) than 12 months ago. Findings are similar when citizens are asked about their personal economic circumstances: 1 out of 2 (56%) report these to be bad or very bad and 9 out of 10 (87%) say things are worse than a year ago.

Citizens however, remain steadfastly optimistic about the future with 4 out of 10 Kenyans (38%) reporting they think things will be better in the future.

James Ciera, Country Lead for Twaweza in Kenya, said: *“As we learn to live with the Coronavirus, we all need to focus on the recovery and reconstruction of our economy. Citizens’ voices reveal Kenyans’ unequal suffering. Many are vulnerable and hungry. But one group are particularly hard hit: urban casual workers especially concentrated in Nairobi. Their sources of income are most insecure and they are least well placed to adapt their work to the new context. However, those with formal jobs who are more likely to work remotely, and those who can still farm, are slightly better off.”*

*“These voices”* he continued, *“provide the government with clear signals: citizens all need help to ensure they make it through the personal food and financial crisis brought on by the Coronavirus. Starting with support to casual workers in urban areas may be worthy of serious consideration and action by the government.”*

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**Notes to Editors**

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org) / [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti)
- Twaweza works to demonstrate how citizens can come together to collectively address their problems, and make government work better for them; enable citizens’ voices, interests and experiences to be heard and taken seriously in decision-making; promote and protect open civic space which enables citizens to freely assemble or organise, speak and act in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Twaweza Kenya (Facebook), @TwawezaKenya (Twitter), Twaweza East Africa (Instagram).