

# COVID-19 & Human Rights

IMAGINE LOSING YOUR LIVELIHOOD OVERNIGHT, AND NOT JUST YOU, BUT YOUR HUSBAND AND YOUR NEIGHBOURS TOO. THE PEOPLE YOU GO TO WHEN YOU NEED TO BORROW SALT AND MATCH STICKS WHEN YOU ARE IN NEED AND DON'T HAVE MONEY TO BUY THE ITEMS.



THAT WAS US IN VIWANDANI, AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN NAIROBI WHEN COVID19 HIT. IN MARCH 2020, WITHIN A FEW HOURS OF THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCING ALL THE COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES THAT THE COUNTRY WAS TAKING, WE HAD NO SOURCE OF INCOME AND OUR LIVELIHOODS WERE SHATTERED.



MY NAME IS MARIA TABU AND I AM AMONG THE MANY MILLIONS OF NAIROBI RESIDENTS LIVING IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENT. OUR COMMUNITY WAS HIT HARD BY COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES, THOUGH THE TRUTH IS, WE BELIEVED IT WAS A DISEASE OF THE RICH, WHOSE CONSEQUENCES WERE AFFECTING US.

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE CITY 33 YEARS AGO AND I HAVE FOUR CHILDREN.

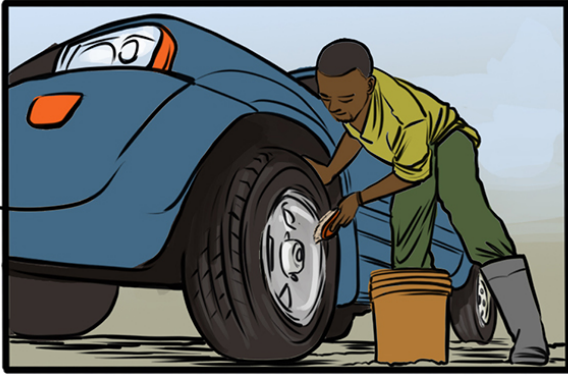


I WORK AS A 'MAMA FUA' DOING CASUAL LABOR IN DIFFERENT HOUSEHOLDS IN THE MORE AFFLUENT ESTATES IN THE CITY.

MY HUSBAND IS ALSO A CASUAL LABORER AND DEPENDS ON PIECEMEAL WORK AT THE INDUSTRIES AND CONSTRUCTION SITES IN THE NEARBY INDUSTRIAL AREA.

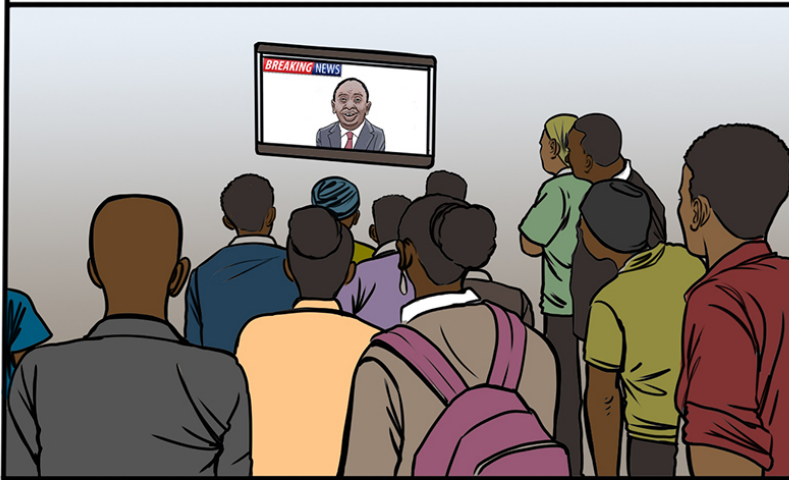


MOST PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY DEPEND ON DAILY HUSTLES FOR THEIR LIVELIHOODS. THESE INCLUDE CAR WASH, SOME DEPEND ON TRAFFIC TO ENABLE THEM HAWK WARES, YOUNG PEOPLE FILL UP THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT BUSES AND EARN A COMMISSION WHILE MANY WOMEN SET UP MAKESHIFT STANDS BY THE ROADSIDE TO SELL GROCERIES TO PEOPLE HEADING HOME FROM WORK IN THE EVENING.



WHEN THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THE COVID-19 CONTAINMENT MEASURES, IT HAD AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE INCOMES OF MANY KENYANS WHO WORK IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR.

INDUSTRIES REDUCED STAFF TO ENSURE SOCIAL DISTANCING AND COPE WITH LOW DEMAND IN THE MARKET.



THE TRANSPORT SECTOR WAS INTERRUPTED BY MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS.

DOMESTIC WORKERS WERE FIRED DUE TO FEAR OF THE POSSIBILITY OF THEM 'SPREADING' THE VIRUS TO THEIR HOSTS. BUSINESSES WERE DISRUPTED AND SOME WERE CLOSED, CHAOS, CHAOS, CHAOS!



CAN YOU IMAGINE LOSING YOUR JOB AND YOU CAN'T EVEN LEAVE THE CITY AND TRAVEL UP-COUNTRY BECAUSE THE BORDERS ARE CLOSED? I SAW PEOPLE GET INTO DEPRESSION, MEN WOULD SIT OUTSIDE THEIR HOUSES THE WHOLE DAY, TALKING TO NO ONE OR JUST LIE IN BED THE WHOLE DAY.



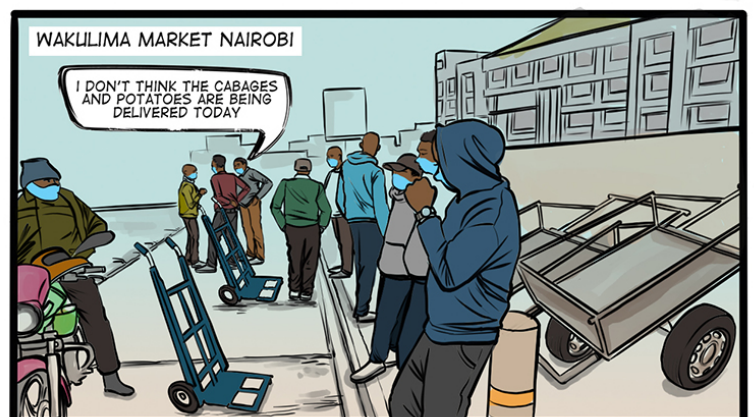
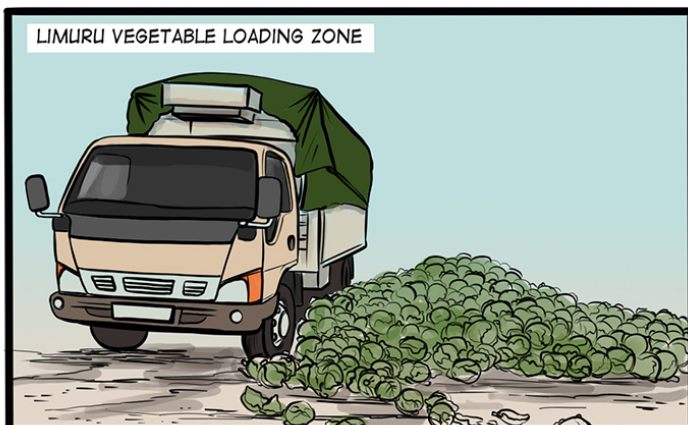
OUR CHILDREN WERE HOME FROM SCHOOL, THIS MEANT THEY WERE NOW EXPECTED TO HAVE ALL MEALS AT HOME, WHICH WERE NON-EXISTENT. NORMALLY, WHEN SCHOOLS ARE IN SESSION, THEY HAVE LUNCH AT SCHOOL, WHICH HELPS REDUCE OUR HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES.

MY PARENTS LIVE IN KOROGOCHO, ANOTHER INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN NAIROBI. WITH OUR INCOMES AFFECTED, IT MEANT THAT MY SIBLINGS AND I WERE NOT ABLE TO SUPPORT THEM AS WE USED TO. THANKFULLY, MY IN-LAWS LIVE IN THE VILLAGE AND THEY WOULD SEND FOODSTUFF SUCH AS MAIZE AND BEANS ONCE IN A WHILE. THOUGH LATER ON THE MOVEMENT FROM RURAL TO URBAN AREAS WAS ALSO DISRUPTED.



SINCE THE ONSET OF COVID-19, FOOD HAS BECOME MORE EXPENSIVE, DUE TO THE INTERRUPTION OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN, AS THE CITY HEAVILY RELIES ON FOOD SUPPLY FROM THE UP-COUNTRY.

THE MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS AND RESULTANT PERMIT REQUIREMENTS INTERFERED WITH THE FOOD SUPPLY AND INCREASED THE COST OF FOOD THAT ULTIMATELY REACHED OUR MARKETS.



WE HEARD ON THE RADIO THAT WE SHOULD EAT MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES TO BOOST OUR IMMUNITY DURING THIS TIME, BUT THIS WAS NOT EASY AS THEY WERE MORE EXPENSIVE IN OUR COMMUNITY, DESPITE REDUCED LIVELIHOODS



WE WERE FORCED TO ADOPT VARIOUS COPING STRATEGIES INCLUDING SKIPPING MEALS, REDUCING MEAL QUANTITIES, BORROWING, AND BEGGING FROM NEIGHBOURS TO SHARE THE LITTLE THEY HAD.

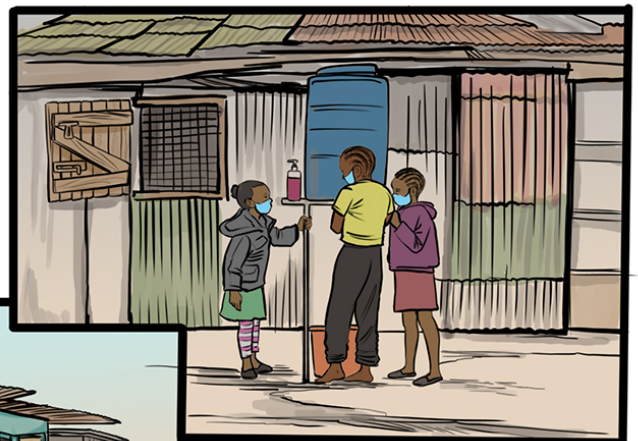


SADLY, SOME IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD RESORTED TO SCAVENGING FROM THE DUMPSITES, EXCHANGING SEX FOR FOOD AND THEFT. YOUNG GIRLS WHO WERE NOT IN SCHOOL DUE TO COVID 19 RESTRICTIONS ENDED UP GETTING PREGNANT, SOME OUT OF BEING IDLE WHILE OTHERS AS THEY EXCHANGED IN TRANSACTIONAL SEX TO GET FOOD.

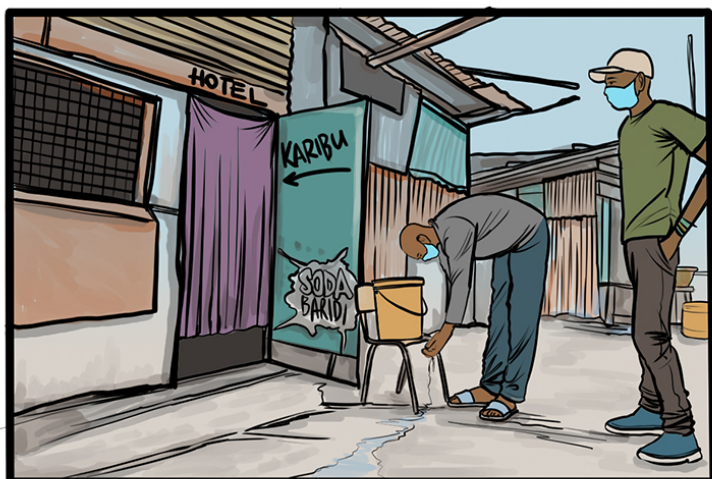
HIGH STRESS LEVELS RESULTED IN INCREASED CONFLICTS IN MANY HOUSEHOLDS, VIOLENCE AND SEPARATION OF SOME FAMILIES



DESPITE THE MANY NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COVID19 AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES, THERE ARE ALSO SOME POSITIVES. BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, WE HAD VERY FEW WATER POINTS. THIS CHANGED WHEN THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PARTNERS PROVIDED WATER IN DIFFERENT AREAS IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS.



HYGIENE PRACTISES IMPROVED AS EVERYONE UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDWASHING. EVERY SHOP, KIOSK OR KIBANDA (GROCERY STAND) NOW HAS A HANDWASHING STATION.



WHAT DID NOT CATCH ON WAS MASK WEARING. WE EVEN HAD SOME PEOPLE ARRESTED BY THE POLICE FOR NOT WEARING MASKS.



MY NEIGHBOR DELIVERED A BABY RECENTLY BUT SHE TOLD ME SHE IS SCARED OF TAKING THE BABY FOR VACCINATIONS. JUST LIKE HER, MANY PEOPLE NOW FEAR GOING TO HEALTH CENTERS FOR THE FEAR OF CONTRACTING THE VIRUS THERE.



PRIOR TO DELIVERY, THE COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER VISITED AND ENCOURAGED HER TO ATTEND PRENATAL CLINICS.



I NOTICED THAT THOSE WHO HAD BEEN GROWING VEGETABLES IN SACKS OUTSIDE THEIR HOMES WERE ABLE TO EAT BETTER.



THE SCHOOLS IN OUR COMMUNITY HAVE SOME LAND THAT WE COULD USE TO GROW FOOD TO SUPPLEMENT THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LUNCHES.



GOING FORWARD, WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO EMBRACE URBAN FARMING AND GROW VEGETABLES IN GROUPS OR AS A HOUSEHOLD. IT WOULD ALSO BE GREAT IF WE INVOLVE THE PUPILS IN FARMING CLUBS SO THEY CAN EMBRACE AGRICULTURE.



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER, THE SPIRIT OF UTU (HUMANITY) IS WHAT HELPED MOST OF US SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC. WHENEVER WE HAD SOMEONE IN OUR COMMUNITY WHO WAS IN DIRE NEED, WE WOULD COME TOGETHER AND SUPPORT.

NEIGHBOURS MADE SURE THAT EVERYONE HAD SOMETHING LITTLE TO EAT, ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN.

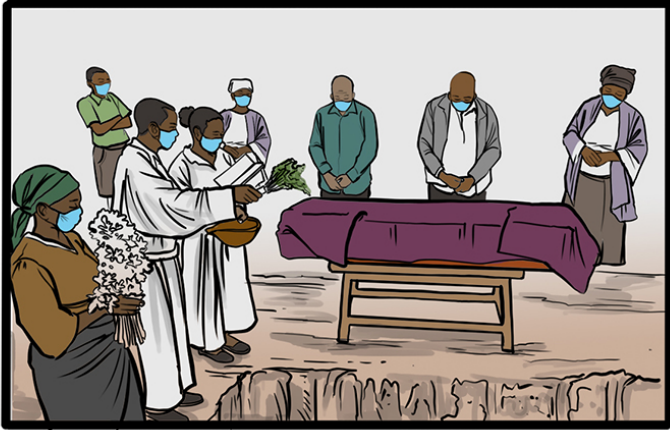


LANDLORDS WERE MORE PATIENT WITH RENT DUES.

WE PROVIDED PARENTAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS WERE LOCKED OUTSIDE NAIROBI.



WHenever we could, contributed money to help offset medical bills and cover funeral costs for those who succumbed.



We also shared word on job opportunities when they arise.



Some households in our community received a small cash transfer from the government during the first year of the pandemic. However, there were limitations as this was not enough to sustain household needs. Furthermore, the government support did not reach all households in need.

The external support from NGOs and CBOS was a great welcome as they provided food aid, hand washing stations and sanitizers.



The social protection measures to cushion the community from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were a good move, but we need better coordinated, government-led, human-centered approaches that respect human rights in dealing with such situations in future.





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