Introduction

Kenya is a large culturally and ethnic diverse country, with over 40 different ethnic groups and numerous superimposed conflicts. Ethnic tensions and clashes coupled with political instability that manifests during the election period have been on the rise in the recent past. Recurrent drought that pushes herders into farmlands in search of pasture has led to violent clashes between herders and farmers in Garissa and Tana River counties. Ethnic group affiliation and highly centralised ethnopolitics are the primary identity of many Kenyans, especially during periods of turmoil. According to the Conflict Analysis of Kenya report, Kenyan Muslims have been marginalised within the Kenyan state and feel like they are treated as second-rate citizens.

Data collection and analysis

Data for the conflict snapshot COVID-19 series in Kenya was gathered from 21-25 September in the following target zones:

This coincided with a period of relative calm in terms of COVID-19 caseloads and containment measures in Kenya, as it fell in between the first and second wave of outbreaks and many people believed there would soon be a return to normalcy. This perception may have influenced certain survey responses and we expect to see changes in this in the next round of snapshot reports.

This report was prepared by the Search for Common Ground Kenya team, with support from Search’s COVID-19 Response Programming Team and Institutional Learning Team. For more information on the data collection methodology and tools used by Search for Common Ground for this research, click here.

To cite this report:


* This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.
Update: COVID-19 Measures and Impact on Conflict

Following the first confirmed COVID-19 case in Kenya on 13th March 2020, the Kenyan government took prompt measures in response to the pandemic starting on 15 March. Kenya, as of 24 October 2020, has recorded 47,843 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 884 deaths. The distribution of these cases has tilted disproportionately towards men. Currently, COVID-19 prevention measures in place include partial reopening of schools, nationwide curfew from 7 pm to 5 am, permitted maximum size of religious gatherings one third of normal seating capacity and maximum number of persons attending funerals and weddings has increased to 200 with strict adherence to all applicable guidelines and protocols issued by the Ministry of Health.

The recent reports of misappropriation of COVID-19 relief funds by politicians and business owners have resulted in outright defiance among the general population of the preventive measures put in place. A series of mass political gatherings over recent months, which have attracted large crowds without respecting any preventive measures, have further led people to question the seriousness of COVID-19 in Kenya. People assume that if politicians call for a political rally, it must be safe to meet and thus COVID-19 is not a real threat.

The greatest COVID-19 economic impact felt by the community so far are financial constraints mainly for the majority of Kenyans in informal employment sectors. The pandemic has brought about child protection concerns, increased sexual and gender-based violence, mental health concerns and more.

COVID-19’s Impact on Social Cohesion & Trust

Trust in media messaging on COVID-19 response is low, and information sharing is limited

What is shaping trust in the media?
- Widespread myths and misconceptions such as: the myth that COVID-19 does not spread in hot places, and COVID-19 is a punishment from God.
- The lack of confidence in the government response system for COVID-19 affects trust in information shared in collaboration with COVID-19 responders.

Do people trust the information about COVID-19 being spread through Search’s media partners?
- 32% Always, often
- 31% Somewhat, rarely
- 31% Never

Trust in media by county:
- 58% Kilifi
- 40% Kwale
- 16% Mombasa
- 15% Tana River

1. WHO Coronavirus disease dashboard.
3. Information shared about coronavirus through Search’s media partners. These partners include Amani FM, Radio Kaya, Pwani FM and Lulu FM. During the data collection, Search’s media partners for Nairobi and Garissa counties hadn’t been selected yet. Respondents from both counties were therefore excluded for this question.
For now these are mainly preventive measures such as: washing hands, using sanitizer and maintaining social distancing, suggesting that people are taking some level of ownership of this messaging, but are not promoting actions that would encourage dependency on government or non-governmental COVID-19 response workers.

Vertical Cohesion and the Legitimacy of Institutions Have Suffered

Analysis showed generally low levels of trust in authorities and low satisfaction with the services provided around COVID-19. This is expected to exacerbate current tensions and conflict dynamics as citizens feel pressured to stay at home, while government representatives do not heed to the same preventive measures put in place by the authorities. A report on NTV Kenya “COVID-19 millionaires exposed” further worsened this situation as people began doubting the existence of the virus, stating that the virus was a ploy for the COVID-19 responders to loot money allocated to the response budget.

Only 27% of the respondents said they have sought government services or support related to COVID-19 in the past 3 months despite high levels of need.

The top most sought governmental services/support were access to food at 43% and employment services at 38%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with COVID-19 services</th>
<th>The average level of satisfaction with how long it took to receive the support/service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly satisfied and satisfied</td>
<td>Highly satisfied and satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never received a response</td>
<td>Never received a response</td>
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</table>

Women are more satisfied with services than men

Women recorded a higher level of satisfaction with services received (20%), compared to men (14%). It is unclear why that is the case, but more research will be done to unpack how gender is affecting trust in COVID-19 response.

Garissa and Kwale counties recorded the highest level of satisfaction with services received and with how long it took, keeping in mind that Kwale county recorded the lowest rate of respondents asking for services. None of the respondents from Garissa county sought support services related to access to food, despite the broader trend. This was attributed to communities’ dependence on relief from other actors, such as non-governmental organisations. Some people in Garissa also shared the belief that relief food offered by the government is not fit for human consumption.

4. According to GeoPoll’s study conducted in September 2020, 77% of Kenyans reported that the pandemic has affected food availability in their localities with most foods and other necessities out of stock: Community knowledge and perceptions of Coronavirus COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa.
Respondents trust people working on COVID-19 more than government but confidence remains low

**Respondents’ Trust in Government**
The government is doing its best to consider the needs of everyone equally when making decisions about services.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Do not trust</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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**Trust level in the government’s COVID-19 response per county**
- 46% Garissa
- 45% Tana River
- 13% Kwale
- 2% Mombasa

Confidence in government is lowest where dependency on authorities is highest.

**Respondents’ Trust in other COVID-19 responders**
People working on COVID-19 have my best interest in mind when they do their work.

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<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Trust level in the responder’s COVID-19 response per county**
- 70% Garissa
- 50% Tana River
- 13% Kwale
- 2% Mombasa

Horizontal Cohesion Remains High, But With A Key Risk of Politicization of COVID-19 Response

General trends about collaboration and interaction across groups send important signals for conflict. However, when examining horizontal cohesion, the most important trends to pay attention to are the outliers: who values this type of collaboration, who does not, and what influences willingness to collaborate across different dividing lines.

The counties with the highest rates valuing this type of collaboration are Garissa and Kilifi (both at 92%) and the lowest rate is Mombasa at 70%.

**The number of respondents that see the value of interaction across dividing lines for COVID-19 response.**

86%

**The lowest levels of appreciation for interaction between citizens and government authorities.**

74%

84% of the respondents recorded to have positively interacted with individuals from another group, either remotely or in person, in the past three months.

The lowest levels of interaction were recorded between citizens and government authorities (64%) and people with different political party affiliations (72%).

Important Regional Differences to Monitor
Mombasa county recorded the lowest level of satisfaction for services received and how long it took. Importantly, Mombasa was the second most affected county in terms of COVID-19 cases and recorded the highest rate of respondents asking for services. The enforcement of cessation of movement could be a contributing factor to these findings.

5. Respondents were asked about collaboration across multiple dividing lines, such as religion, cultural background, political party affiliation, ethnic groups, and authority structures. This is the average percent of belief in collaboration across questions related to horizontal cohesion.
Garissa county recorded the highest frequency of interaction along dividing lines at 90% while Tana River county recorded the lowest frequency of interaction at 70%. Widespread belief in “Qadar” (destiny that whatever happens has been prescribed by Allah) may have contributed to the near normal interaction along dividing lines in Garissa County. Despite Tana River county recording minimal cases of COVID-19 in the past quarter (22 cases), compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures was enforced in all sectors such as a ban on gatherings, limiting interaction.

**Next Steps For COVID-19 Response Efforts**

**Enhancing Credibility of Messaging on COVID-19 Response**

- Dissemination of credible information is critical in supporting COVID-19 response. Local partners need more information on how and why misinformation spreads related to COVID-19, and should focus on supporting response workers to build their credibility so that these relationships can weather misinformation.

- Messaging needs to focus on transparency of institutions and setting realistic expectations in communities, particularly in terms of economic and food relief, acknowledging the impact on informal economies. More information is needed about which coronavirus response workers are trusted and why in order to identify those who have the most clout across different groups.

**Minimizing Risk of Politicization of the Response**

- While the population overall is still committed to collaboration across different dividing lines, a significant portion are not in favor of this type of collaboration, particularly in relation to government and across political parties, indicating a high level of risk for politicization of the credibility of the COVID-19 response. Our snapshots will continue to monitor this trend over time, and response efforts should include response workers across party lines to ensure this risk does not increase.

**Improving Access to Services for Rural Communities**

- Remote areas like Tana River and Garissa counties have limited access to accurate and timely information, due to lack of access to radio, television, newspapers and internet. Thus, people depend on networks of friends and family and grassroots organisers in these counties. Non-governmental, civil society and community-based organisations who have the trust of these communities need direct financial resources and collaboration channels with the government so that they can share locally relevant messaging and implement initiatives that encourage communities to take ownership of COVID-19 compliance measures.