

Small Business, Big Pandemic: Adapting to CoViD-19

ADOLF – BARBER

I cannot say that things have been okay. A tree fell on our shop the same week Covid-19 was announced to be in Kenya. We had just moved into this space.

That same week, the number of clients reduced greatly. We had to lay off two of our female staff after a while since we could not be able to raise their salaries.

I am however grateful that I have a place of business I can come to. Some people I know lost their jobs entirely. I would rather come here with hopes of a client walking in rather than staying at home. At least now people are starting to come so I can go home with some unga.

My landlord at home still insists on us playing the full amount in rent. If you are unable to raise the money, you can live with the initial deposit for a month before you find another place. It has gotten to a point where if I am in a fix, I am ready to move to a smaller place that I can afford until things get back to normal. It makes no sense to live in someone's property and accrue arrears. I am not the reason behind the pandemic right?

By the way, everyone would really love to stay home, but how do you feed your family? I have learnt to appreciate that little money that gets into my pocket.

Before CoViD, making money was easy. Now a lot of people are sleeping without a meal. It's no joke. Nowadays, if someone tells you 'ni kubaya', just know 'ni kubaya'.



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JANET – FISH AND CHIPS

Since Covid-19 came into our country, my fish and chips business has been affected. its has gone from selling three buckets of French fries to half a bucket. Fish prices in the market have gone up by twenty shillings. This means that not only are my margins down, but also the quantity of fish bought has reduced.

It has been a challenge but I am glad I can earn something to take food home. Between 6 and 8:30pm, I would sell plenty of fish to my customers. Nowadays, by 6:30pm we have closed shop before the police can rain down on us with canes.

I used to wake up at 4am and go to the market to buy fish. Now when I get there at 6am, most of the fish has been bought and I end up having to settle for what is left.

Going to the fish market in Nairobi is a big risk. I constantly wonder to myself if I will get the virus and bring it home to my children. The market is usually full of people. I just pray and hope that things get better.

Now I am getting to know my children better. They are always at home so now I get to know their traits. I never thought this small 'kibanda' would feed my family. My faith has grown stronger during these times.

Someday I shall have a 5 star hotel. These photos will be a reminder of the far I have come.



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TITUS - BODABODA

Let me say it has been so hard especially in my Boda Boda business. My peak hours are usually from 6 to 8 in the morning and we are now limited to waking up at 5am.

Most of my clients are parents who want their children taken to school but they were closed. Since the parents have no pressure to take their kids to school, they prefer walking to the bus stop. By 8am, I would easily have earned 500ksh. Now even getting 150ksh is a miracle.

In the evening, business peaked between 6 and 9pm. This is where curfew now commences.

So you see, three quarter of my income was during those peak hours while the rest was during the course of the day.

Nowadays it is impossible to work with a targeted daily income. What you earn goes straight to the mouth. There is no saving.

I have come to understand that there is no such thing as little or a lot of money. My biggest lesson has been to reduce my expenditure while on the job so that I have more money to take home.



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JULIANA – SMOKIE MAYAI

Corona virus made me open this business.

Looking back to the days before curfew, my friends would sell smokies and boiled eggs to revellers till late in the night. I was employed as a milk vendor until the pandemic was announced. My employer had to lay me off and started selling the milk herself to reduce cost of operation.

Nowadays it's hard to sell a crate of boiled eggs. Back when there was no curfew, I could see vendors sell up to 3 packs of smokies.

This pandemic has taught me to be an early riser. I am able to earn extra by starting my day a little earlier than usual.



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JOSEPH – LANDSCAPER

Everything now is dormant; stagnant like a puddle of water.

Landscaping is where I am able to earn my living. However, with this pandemic, most people cannot afford to hire me. They would rather focus on buying food and other essentials for their families.

It's a lesson learnt not to put all my eggs in one basket. It's important to have multiple sources of revenue for moments like this when things fall apart.

It is more bearable to come to work and chat with my colleagues rather than staying home. It's so easy to become depressed, you know? You just have to get out of the house despite the current situation.

I just hope things will get better because movement of people helps with cash flow.



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OMARI – PHOTOGRAPHER

When the schools were closed because of the pandemic, I was sent home and rendered jobless. I couldn't just sit idle in the house so I decided to find something to do that could sustain my household. That is what led me to purchase this camera.

Taking pictures has always been something I enjoyed so when I got this camera, I started shooting what was around me. I then posted the images on social media and people liked them. Some of them have even reached out for my services.

Advertising my services has played a key role in bringing in clients. Business is picking up now and I am shooting families, baby bumps, model portfolios and such. At least I am doing something rather than just staying at home just because of Corona.

Staying prepared is very important because it means you have a running business besides your job. You see when my job was put on hold, I found myself at home with nothing to do. So having multiple hustles is good because when one fails, you still have something that can sustain you.

I have discovered that I actually love the photography business. This has made me invest in more equipment that helps improve the quality of my work. From now henceforth, I would actually like to shoot photo and video more often. Let me see where this journey will take me. So far, so good.



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BRENDA - PHARMACY

We are what is considered an essential service and that has required us to step up in terms of hygiene. We are in touch with people more often since they come to us when they do not have access to a health facility. We are transferring the Ministry of Health's information to those who may not be aware of the regulations and hence the signage.

Should a new case of COVID be announced in our vicinity, there is a 75% chance of the person interacting with us. This means we have to be aware. We cannot shift our business online since we are regulated by the Pharmacy and Poisons Board not to sell online.

Sales have dipped by 30%. However, there has been an increase in sales and it shows that people are getting back to their normal habits and work schedules. I am not entirely sure that the spread of COVID has been slowed down at community level.

We need to adapt with changing times. Seeing the disease is not going away any time soon, we have to make things like social distancing, regularly washing hands and sanitising surfaces part of our new normal.

The shift to using mobile money is important and I am glad that banks and mobile service providers have made the technology readily available to the community.



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LILLIAN - HAIR STYLIST

Business was so good until we were asked to close down shop for first two weeks of the pandemic. It took a month for clients to start showing up and even then, a week would pass by without business.

Its not as it used to be. I used to make as much as 5000Ksh a day and 2000ksh on a bad day. Nowadays the best I can earn from the business is 500Ksh a day, sometimes making nothing.

Clients nowadays come and ask for my services with whatever cash they have at hand. I am forced to forfeit since I also need that money. The most important thing is to be considerate to my clients during these times and to ensure they reciprocate the gesture towards me.

Saving money and having multiple businesses are the virtues that have been instilled in me. The landlord still expects me to pay my monthly rent diligently.

I feel its better tor those who are employed. They know that there is a salary at the end of the month. Its tough when the business is your only source of income.



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KEN – COOKING GAS SUPPLIER

I can no longer allow clients to get cooking gas on credit any more. I also need that cash to buy gas to sell. Gas prices have gone up so it has not made anything easier for my clients.

I used to do business from 7:30am to 10pm. Even after the 6am to 6pm curfew was extended, there has not been any significant improvement in business. People are usually at home by 7:30pm so keeping the shop open till 9pm does not yield any business.

I have always been self employed and this has been more advantageous to me because I can still earn my living. My business has been affected but not that much.

I would advise those who are employed to have a business on the side so that they have somewhere to fall back to when worse comes to worst.

