Implications of COVID–19 on Women Professionals in the Kenyan Public Transport Sector

June 2020
Flone Initiative is a Pan-African woman-led non-profit organization working towards the realization of safe, accessible, inclusive and sustainable public transportation for all in Africa, with a particular focus on women professionals in public transport and vulnerable groups.
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June 2020
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**Annexure**
Acknowledgements

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<td>Friedrich Ebert Stiftung</td>
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<td>High Volume Transport Applied Research Programme</td>
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<td>ITF</td>
<td>International Transport Workers’ Federation</td>
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<td>Low-and Middle-Income Countries</td>
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<td>Public Service Vehicle</td>
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<td>Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus disease 2019</td>
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<td>National Committee on the Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic</td>
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Executive Summary

This report was developed by Flone Initiative after undertaking a rapid assessment to establish the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID–19) on women professionals (drivers, conductors, a booking clerk and a mechanic) working in public service vehicles (PSVs), commonly known as matatus, in the Nairobi Metropolitan Area. The assessment was conducted in April 2020 when 30 women were surveyed through telephone interviews.

The report highlights the interventions undertaken by Flone Initiative to respond to some of the challenges identified through the rapid assessment. It provides recommendations to different actors to create and maintain a sustainable public transport system.

Summary of our findings

Some of the measures put in place have led to reduced income for workers who are dependent on wages from the matatu industry. Fifty-seven per cent of women in the transport industry have lost their jobs largely because their employment is informal and does not come with job security.

Those women still working in public transport fear contracting COVID–19 since their job entails interacting with customers and handling money. However, for many women, staying indoors is not an option since they rely on the money they make every day to buy food supplies. Lack of food was cited as a primary concern affecting women in public transport during the COVID–19 lockdowns and curfews in Kenya. The uncontrolled fluctuation in the cost of basic foods and commodities further shrunk the wages earned by workers, making it difficult for them to access affordable food.

Access to clean and affordable water remains a challenge to women in public transport. The situation is worsened by rapidly diminishing financial resources and the need to purchase water to keep up with regular hand washing and observing general hygiene during the COVID–19 pandemic. Against the backdrop of diminishing wages, the women workers interviewed said that they were struggling with paying house rent and utility bills.

Women in public transport expressed general fear of police brutality after curfew hours. They stated that they are often delayed reaching home before curfew hours because they do not necessarily live along the routes that matatus operate in. It thus takes them longer to get home after work.

The Government of Kenya is implementing a cash transfer programme and has so far allocated 10 billion shillings to support vulnerable groups, including the elderly and orphans, during this pandemic. Public transport workers are, however, not covered in this relief initiative, and the government has not cushioned them from the economic effects of COVID–19, yet most of them have lost their primary source of income.

It is imperative that we ensure that equity and inclusion remain key considerations during this time of crisis. This calls for investing in long-term multidisciplinary approaches.

Summary of our recommendations

- Expand the government’s cash transfer programme during this crisis to include women in the public transport industry. Cash transfers could be accompanied with basic training on entrepreneurship or promoting other business opportunities that will allow women to work from home.

- Ensure that all policy and structural adjustments to support sustainable recovery go through robust gender and intersectional analysis. For instance, include women in transport in the Family Promotion and Protection Programme.

- The government should control food prices and those of essential commodities to ease the
consumption burden on the already strained population. It should continue school feeding programmes and adapt them to the context of this crisis by preparing rations for delivery or pick–up.

- Nationwide training on COVID–19 prevention for PSVs should be conducted. This should involve adjusting cleaning and safety protocols as a public health measure to protect commuters and operators better. There is a need to regularly monitor and ensure compliance with the containment measures put in place for the PSVs and the public.

- The government should conduct mass testing for women in transport and members of their households and, when necessary, quarantine them in the same facilities since they are mainly responsible for taking care of their households.

- The National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) should be more proactive in advising the government on arising issues in the public transport industry and in providing a comprehensive database on women in the public transport sector. NTSA should also spearhead the issuance of health guidelines specific to the public transport industry.

- The government should encourage the use of technology in the public transport sector. For instance, the current cashless fare payment system should continue post–COVID–19 to promote efficiency and hygiene in the sector. Commuter applications to minimise crowding and touting in vehicles should be promoted. An example is the locally developed “Myride Africa” application where commuters can pre-book their trips and vehicle operators can determine where they need to pick passengers. This eliminates unnecessary stops and touting.

- Civil society organisations (CSOs) should lobby the government to adopt Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This concerns half of the global labour force and more than 90 per cent of small and medium enterprises worldwide who are working and operating in conditions of informality.

- Labour unions and activists should highlight the impact of COVID–19 on the lives of women professionals working in public transport in the mainstream media and actively consult and participate in the design of work practices, processes and all healthy safety measures in the public transport sector.

- Matatu owners and operators should ensure that workers who are diagnosed with COVID–19 are allowed to take sick leave without fear of losing their jobs or incomes and should recognise that workers – irrespective of their employment arrangements – need to access health care and to stay at home when unwell without the worry of losing their jobs. These considerations would motivate workers who show COVID–19–related symptoms to seek treatment at the earliest opportunity rather than risk their health in fear of losing their jobs.

- Women professionals in the matatu industry should form self-help groups and workers’ organisations. This will ensure that their voices and roles are amplified in the transport sector.
Introduction
1.0 Introduction

The novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID–19) has spread to 188 countries, with over 6 million cases reported as of June 2020. The first cases of COVID–19 in Kenya were reported in Nairobi and counties within the coast region on 15th March 2020. As of 15th August, the country had confirmed 29,334 cases, 15,298 recoveries and 465 deaths, according to the Ministry of Health. Without a vaccine, COVID–19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) and has continued to spread rapidly across the world, disrupting daily activities, adversely affecting economies, and worst of all, claiming lives.

Public transport is among the most adversely affected sectors due to local and international travel restrictions and stringent measure to curb the spread of the virus. Globally, road transport activity was 50% below the 2019 average by the end of March 2020, while commercial flight activity was 75% below the 2019 average by mid-April 2020. It is evident that public transport has also been affected across the board.

The social and economic impacts of the pandemic have cut across gender but have affected men and women differently. Kenya’s Ministry of Health has noted that infection rates and deaths have been higher for men than women, while cases of gender–based and domestic violence have increased. Economically, women have been affected more across every sphere. Women, especially those in the informal sector, including women who work in public service vehicles (PSVs), commonly referred to as the matatu industry, have also been affected.

The government introduced various measures to prevent further spread of the virus. These included cessation of inter–county movement in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kilifi and Mandera; provision of sanitisers to passengers, maintenance of physical distancing by halving carrying capacity of PSVs, and mandatory wearing of masks while in public. While these precautionary measures are necessary, they continue to have negative economic impacts on businesses and workers. The country has witnessed job cuts across various sectors. Incomes of businesses, especially in the informal sector, have fallen significantly. Reduced ridership in PSVs has resulted in loss and/or reduced earnings for workers in this sector. These impacts and disruptions are likely to be felt both in the short and medium term.

Women and girls in low and middle income countries (LMICs) are particularly affected by COVID–19 and are exposed to greater health, economic, and protection risks. Over the years, Flone Initiative has implemented activities aimed at creating an enabling environment for women workers and commuters to operate in the public transport sector in Kenya.

With this aim, Flone Initiative carried out a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID–19 on women professionals in the matatu sector and undertook mitigation measures to alleviate these effects.

In this report, women professionals working in the matatu industry includes drivers and conductors.

1.1 Specific objectives of the report

This report aims to:

1. Elaborate on the impact of COVID–19 on women professionals, particularly women drivers and conductors in the matatu industry in the Nairobi Metropolitan Area;

2. Present the mitigation measures initiated by Flone Initiative – particularly for women professionals in the matatu industry – in Nairobi Metropolitan Area; and

3. Make recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure sustainable public transport systems post–COVID–19.

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1 International Energy Agency (IEA) May 2020 article
2 CARE, 2020
COVID-19’s Effects on the Labour Force in Kenya
The economic consequences of COVID-19 are likely to have a far greater impact on the population going forward. Sectors worst hit by the virus include the labour force, transport, health, trade and tourism. The supply and demand of goods and services in these sectors have been significantly hampered. Furthermore, restriction of movement within and beyond the country has adversely affected the revenues from the tourism and aviation sectors. Delays at border crossings due to testing of truck drivers have resulted in losses of profits to business owners. Measures imposed by the government to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 are resulting in job losses, both for casual workers in the informal sector and daily wage earners in the formal sector, both of which employ a high proportion of women.

Due to curfews and limited movement of people, many roles have become redundant, resulting in job losses or unpaid leave. Workers who already live in poverty and cannot afford to have precautionary savings consequently face a high risk of falling deeper into poverty and might experience even greater challenges in regaining their livelihoods after the pandemic.

The labour participation rate in the country has fallen significantly because of the pandemic. Data from the World Bank shows that in 2019 Kenya had a labour-force participation rate of 75%; this rate fell to 56.8% in April 2020. According to a Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) survey, the percentage of the adult working-age population in active formal and informal employment has fallen to 65.3% for men and 48.8% for women (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Percentage of adult population in formal and informal employment, 2019 and 2020

The reduction can be attributed to job losses in the informal and formal sectors. COVID-19 has disrupted the flow of revenues and limited the supply and demand for goods and services, pushing employers to use different coping mechanisms to stay afloat. Employers have been forced to downsize the workforce, give unpaid leave, or make temporary layoffs with neither notice nor consultation – which is evidently in contravention of labour laws.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population Council, Inc.’s COVID-19 “Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices & Needs” report (April 2020), women in five Nairobi informal settlements were disproportionately affected with increased time spent on chores (67% vs 51% of men). More women have reported complete loss of income/employment compared to men.

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\(^{1}\)Socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in Kenya Report by Development Initiatives

Commuting in Urban Kenya

Tuktuk ride on a busy street in Mombasa.
Credit: Flone Initiative
Public road passenger transport in Kenya dates back to the 1930s. The industry has since experienced an evolution because of population increase and urbanisation. This industry is dominated by the informal sector that is composed of privately-owned and operated transport options, such as matatus (buses, mini-buses, and vans), motorcycles (bodabodas), bicycles, and three-wheelers (tuk-tuks). Features that are common in this industry include flexibility and demand responsiveness, lack of fixed schedules, fluctuating fares, poor working conditions, competition, the formation of cartels, and unpredictable stops and routes.

Despite the restriction of movement and closure of businesses, the PSV sector remains an essential service for many Kenyans. In Nairobi, about 42% of daily commuters walk, 48% ride a matatu, 5% commute by private car, and the remaining 5% use other modes. According to a 2019 KNBS survey, 32.2% of Kenyans walk to offset the high cost of public transport (see Figure 2 below).

![Figure 2: Transport mode shares in Kenya.](image)

Source: Flone Initiative based on data from KNBS

The KNBS (April 2020) survey indicates, middle and upper class Kenyans opted to use taxis and private vehicles, while some employers provided transport for their staff. Public transport providers also suffered losses as many regular commuters preferred to work from home due to COVID-19. Consequently, many transport workers, who are a minority in the sector, have been subjected to pay cuts or layoffs.

Notwithstanding certain relaxations, measures, such as working from home, social distancing while on public transport, and hand sanitising and washing will most likely remain in place in the medium term. This makes it likely that higher fares for public transport will also remain in place. The negative impact of this on the economy can only be mitigated if low-income earners resort to less expensive means of transport.

The government, through the Ministry of Transport, introduced a range of measures in public transport to slow the spread of the virus. These included: reduction of passenger numbers by half due to the 1.5 metres social distancing requirement (14-seater matatus are to carry a maximum of 8 passengers, 25-seater vehicles are to carry a maximum of 15 passengers and 30-seater vehicles and above are to maintain a capacity of 60 per cent); mandatory wearing of masks at all times while in PSVs; provision of hand washing and sanitising facilities at the point of boarding; the introduction of a curfew to limit movement at night; and promotion of cashless transactions.

However, limited access to basic sanitation services, including water for washing hands, and overcrowding at public transport stations in Nairobi and other major urban centres in the country could be the weak link in the transmission of the coronavirus if appropriate actions are not taken.

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Passengers have to disinfect their hands before they board matatus. Credit: Joost Bastmeijer/Al Jazeera
4.1 Response of PSV owners and operators

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, the PSV sector has taken the following measures:

- Providing sanitisers to commuters
- Operators wearing masks and gloves while working
- Sanitising matatus after every trip and at the close of business
- Introducing shift work where drivers double up as conductors
- Increasing fare prices.

These measures have not only increased the costs incurred by vehicle operators but have also reduced the number of passengers using public transport due to the rise in fares charged by operators to offset higher costs. According to a KNBS survey published in April 2020, there has been a 51.7% increase in the cost of transport nationally. This rise varies with proximity to the places that have reported a high number of COVID-19 cases and urban centres where there is the frequent use of public transport.

4.2 Response of the Government of Kenya

To cushion Kenyans from these impacts, the government has established the National Coordination Committee on the Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic (NCCRCP) to assess the impact of the virus and come up with various feasible recommendations for the economy. The government has placed various social and economic measures to contain further spread of the disease and mitigate its effects on the economy.

These measures include:

- Mandatory self-quarantine for people who have travelled from high-risk countries (and now all travellers), and any other high-risk cases reported by the public;
- A nationwide 7 pm to 5 am curfew which was later revised to 9 pm to 4 am;
- Closure of schools, churches, restaurants and entertainment places, and limiting social gatherings (presently, only 15 close family members are allowed to attend funerals);
- Advocating for frequent washing of hands, physical social distancing and mandatory wearing of protective masks in public places;
- Cessation of movement (which was later lifted) by water, road, rail or air in and out of the Nairobi Metropolitan Area and the counties of Kilifi, Kwale, Mombasa; and Mandera;
- Contributed to policy frameworks such as the proposed Public Health (Prevention, Control, and Suppression of COVID19) Rules, 2020;
- Approved over KES40 billion to cushion needy households in urban areas from economic shocks following reduced wages in the wake of the pandemic;
- Proposed various tax reduction measures (effective from May 2020) to cushion Kenyans from the rising cost of living during COVID-19; and
- Call to Kenyans to stay and work from home.

Through a Gazette notice issued on 24th July 2020, the government further published additional guidelines on COVID-19-related operations of public service vehicles to include:

The operator of a public service vehicle shall ensure that:

- The crew of the PSVs are screened for COVID-19 at the bus terminus at the beginning and the end of a work shift;
- The crew of a PSV whose temperature is above 37.3 degrees Celsius shall not be allowed to operate the vehicle and the operator shall immediately notify the County Director of such findings;
- A register of the results of the body temperature of every crew member who is screened is kept and the register shall be produced by the operator, on-demand, to a public health officer;
- A health care professional trains the crew and employees of PSVs on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 and a record of the training maintained;
- A hand washing station, complete with clean running water, soap and paper towels, is installed at the ticket booking office and passenger boarding point and the effluent water from the hand washing station does not flow freely on the ground;
- A hand sanitiser approved by the Kenya Bureau of Standards is available for use by passengers;
- The interior surface of the vehicle is disinfected after every trip and a disinfection schedule maintained;
- Luggage is disinfected;
- The temperature of passengers is taken at the entrance of the vehicle using a contact-free thermometer;
j. The PSV carries the capacity set out in the Schedule;  

k. There is social distancing between passengers;  

l. There shall be no serving of food or drinks to passengers in PSVs;  

m. A system for contact-free payment shall be put in place by the operator; and  

n. A vehicle engaged in inter-country passenger travel shall maintain and keep a passenger manifest for any trip for a period of at least six months.

The crew of PSVs shall:

a. Wear face masks that cover the mouth and nose;  
b. Ensure that all passengers sanitise their hands before boarding;  
c. Ensure proper ventilation of the vehicle while on transit;  
d. Not allow any hawking, preaching, or begging in the vehicle; and  
e. Ensure that disembarkation at the destination is conducted by rows, starting with the rows closest to the exits.

4.3 Impact of the government regulations on women professionals in public transport

Women and girls across every sphere continue to face more socio-economic impacts of COVID–19. Regardless of the gendered impact of job and business loss, women are likely to be more vulnerable than men to any crisis-driven loss of income. Women also often hold less wealth than men for a variety of reasons. This is also true for women in the public transport industry. The public transport industry is dominated by male operators with women are concentrated in the lowest positions. According to a recent Flone Initiative survey report, women constitute 7% of the labour force in the matatu industry in Kenya, with the majority working as conductors. Their direct physical contact with many commuters makes them more vulnerable to exposure to COVID–19.

Some of the measures put in place have led to reduced income for workers who are dependent on wages from the matatu industry. The majority of the women in the public transport industry have lost their jobs since their positions are informal and do not have job security. According to a rapid assessment conducted by Flone Initiative in Nairobi Metropolitan Area, in April 2020, 52% of the women professionals in public transport stated that they are no longer in employment. While they are losing paid employment, these women’s unpaid care work at home has increased exponentially due to school and workplace closures. This greater caring responsibility makes it difficult for women to find alternative employment and income streams. These women live within informal settlements, and the majority of them are single parents. Disruptions, including movement restrictions, have compromised their ability to make a living and meet their families’ basic needs.

There is a general fear of police brutality after the introduction of the curfew, which is meant to restrict movement at night and, in turn, reduce the spread of COVID–19. While many have argued that the curfew has been effective in achieving this, some women and children have been negatively affected by it. There have been reports of police officers beating people, including women, who are found outdoors during the curfew hours. Generally, violence against women, especially domestic violence, has increased since the pandemic. A national helpline supported by the Department of Gender Affairs reported 1,108 calls in the month of June compared to 86 in February.
Rapid Assessment on the Impact of COVID–19 on Women Professionals in Public Transport in Kenya

Collected data from women professionals in public transport. Credit: Flone Initiative
Like in most sectors in Kenya, women working in public transport, particularly in the matatu industry, have faced massive layoffs. These women rely entirely on meagre earnings. Disruptions in their jobs have sabotaged their livelihoods and well-being. Moreover, there is uncertainty about when most workers will be able to return to their jobs. The waning job security is disconcerting to most of the women matatu workers. Unpaid care work provided by women who have lost their jobs has further been compounded by homeschooling obligations following the closure of schools. The aim of this assessment was to establish how women in public transport have been affected by COVID–19 as a result of the measures the government has put in place.

5.1 Methodology

The assessment was conducted through telephone interviews over a period of two days. A survey questionnaire (Annex 1) was designed and telephone interviews were conducted with 30 women working in the matatu industry in Nairobi.

5.2 Scope of the assessment

The study respondents were drawn from the women professionals in public transport in Nairobi Metropolitan Area. These women were selected because they have been beneficiaries of other programmes run by Flone Initiative and because of the existing rapport they had with the organisation, which made it easy to secure their consent. The women surveyed included drivers, conductors, a booking clerk, and a mechanic. The women have an average family size of 3, with 83% of them being single mothers.

5.3 Assumptions and limitations

This assessment was limited to women professionals working in the matatu industry. This study also assumed that responses from the sampled population would apply to the entire county. Future surveys on the thw impact of COVID–19 on women professionals in public transport should be conducted in other counties.

5.4 Findings

All (100%) of the women interviewed confirmed that they were physically healthy but not in a good mental and emotional state. They reported general anxiety, lack of clarity of thought, and frequent headaches, because of:

a) **Loss of jobs** – 52% of the respondents stated that they are no longer employed because the owners of the matatus they were employed in have closed down their business due to restrictions imposed to contain COVID–19. The respondents revealed that the owners of the matatus did not see the economic sense in keeping their vehicles on the road during a time when they are required to only carry between 50% and 60% of their maximum capacity. This loss in earnings is compounded by insurance charges and county fees. The women currently rely on the goodwill of their former colleagues for short-term jobs, such as helping the conductors to call out for passengers. In such cases, they end up taking home between 100 and 200 shillings per day, whereas as in the past they would take home between 600 and 1,200 shillings per day after a days’ work as a conductor. This reflects an 83% reduction in income. The majority are worried that they will be unable to provide for their families and to keep their children in school. With meagre or no earnings, some who were servicing loans from savings and credit cooperative societies (SACCOs) are likely to default. As a mitigation measure, they are considering moving to cheaper housing, skipping meals and suspending their monthly savings. The respondents further noted that some of their male colleagues take advantage of the situation and ask them for sexual favours in exchange for jobs.

b) **Fear of contracting COVID–19** – 100% of the respondents stated that they would feel safer if they stayed indoors since their job entails interacting with customers and handling money. All of them further revealed that staying indoors is not an option for them since they rely on the money they make every day to buy food supplies. Whereas there are sanitation measures in place in...
most of the matatus, the respondents revealed that some passengers are reluctant to use sanitisers, citing that they are fake and ineffective. There are so many sanitisers in the market, and one cannot distinguish genuine products from fake ones. The women expressed concern about contracting the virus and passing it on to their family members.

Further, while at work they rely on shared sanitary facilities, which further predisposes them to the virus and poses the challenge of effective self-quarantine if they exhibit COVID-19-like symptoms, which could result in them potentially losing their livelihoods completely.

c) **Food insecurity** – 97% of the respondents cited lack of food as their primary concern. The uncontrolled fluctuation in the cost of basic foods and commodities had further shrunk the wage earned by workers, making it difficult to access affordable food.

d) **Access to clean water** – Access to clean water was also noted as a challenge since most city dwellers buy water from private companies or local vendors. The fact that water comes at an extra cost against rapidly diminishing wages and incomes could mean that workers may eventually feel the financial strain of keeping up with regular hand washing and observing general hygiene. Furthermore, alcohol-based hand sanitisers are also unaffordable to women workers who are grappling with meeting their most basic needs in the wake of lost jobs and/or reduced earnings.

e) **Rent** – Landlords still expect to receive their monthly rent on time. 30% of the respondents stated that they had defaulted on rent. Against the backdrop of diminishing wages, women workers interviewed said they were struggling with payment of house rent and utility bills.

f) **Presence of children at home** – Since schools are closed and children have been sent home, there is a strain on the food resources available to these families, especially in cases where the children were beneficiaries of school feeding programmes or receiving meals at their boarding schools. 2% of the respondents stated that they were forced to leave their children at their neighbours’ houses when they go out in search of work, an arrangement they considered unsafe. Additionally, there is an extra burden on them to purchase data bundles for internet access since learning materials are currently sent through the WhatsApp mobile app by school administrations. They further revealed that they must take some time off their schedule to assist their children with their studies, as well as administer and assess examinations. As a result, some of the respondents have sent their children to rural areas to live with relatives in order ease the pressure that comes with keeping them in town.

g) **Fear of being caught outside after curfew** – 14% of the women expressed general fear of police brutality after the curfew hours. One of the women professionals in public transport surveyed has been a victim of police brutality. The women stated that they are sometimes found outside their homes after curfew hours because they do not necessarily live along the routes the matatus they work in operate in. It thus takes them longer to get home after work.
An incident of police brutality as shared by a woman in public transport

I am among the PSV conductors that were laid off due to the impact COVID 19 has had on PSVs. Two weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to be called for a day job to relieve a fellow conductor who wanted to take the day off. We had a bit of a delay in closing in the evening, and I had to stay on to receive my dues since it was the only money I was relying on. Just as I was about to leave, at around 9.15 pm, two police officers started hitting me from the back. Shortly after, they lifted me and threw me into the Landcruiser they were patrolling in. Once inside, I found two other police officers who continued hitting me on my back with pipes. I tried explaining to them that I was a conductor and had my PSV badge with me, but they ignored my pleas. When I could not bear the pain, I turned and lay on my back. They then hit me on my hands and face. This went on for quite some time until they started driving off, picking other people and subjecting them to the same torture.

They then asked how much money I had on me. I lied that I did not have money since I could not afford to part with the 1,200 shillings I had made that day. They threatened to take me to the police cells where I would pay a hefty fine and later go into quarantine. It was at that point that I decided to part with the money. I pleaded with them to at least leave me with 200 shillings to buy my child something. They ignored my plea.

I had left my child alone at home, and the thought of getting back home with nothing was just painful. I was in both physical and emotional pain. They asked where I lived and if I wanted to alight, this time around laughing heartily and even joking about visiting me at my workplace. I walked home, all the while scared that I would bump into other police officers or robbers. I got home and felt so discouraged and defeated. I switched off my phone, took painkillers, and slept. My colleagues were able to reach out to me the next day and contributed some money for me, but I could not eat well for about three days after, and my hands felt numb.

Since that event, I have declined offers to stand in for other colleagues. I am still traumatised by that experience. I have even considered quitting and leaving the matatu industry. Making an honest living is proving to be extremely difficult.
Flone’s involvement in the Fight against COVID-19
Flone Initiative has undertaken the following COVID-19 related interventions:

6.1 Unconditional cash transfers

There exists a general fear among policymakers that unconditional cash transfers will make recipients “lazy” and create disincentives for work. Research, however, shows that productive economic activity increases in response to cash transfers\(^6\). Evidence from an unconditional cash transfer programme in Kenya\(^7\) and in other parts of the developing world shows that cash transfers have enabled poor households to consume nutritious foods and make essential investments in their children’s schooling and health.

The characteristic chaos during food distribution makes cash transfer a better option than food aid. Mobile money cash transfers are preferred since they provide people with cash to buy food while avoiding the massive gatherings that food distributions can draw, which can fuel the spread of the disease. The humanitarian sector has used this tactic for years to ensure that communities living through crises do not slip deeper into poverty.

The Government of Kenya is implementing a cash transfer programme and has so far allocated 10 billion shillings to support vulnerable groups, including the elderly and orphans, during this pandemic. Public transport workers are, however, not covered in this relief initiative, and the government has not cushioned them from the economic effects of COVID-19, yet most of them have lost their primary source of income.

Examples of other countries that have launched cash transfer programmes include Burkina Faso, which has a new USD10 million cash transfer programme for fruit and vegetable sellers. Colombia has announced a one-off payment of USD108 for informal workers. Egypt is targeting 1.5 million individuals working in areas such as construction, ports, agriculture, fishing, plumbing, and electricians. El Salvador has pledged to give USD300 to about 1.5 million households in the informal economy. Haiti announced a one-off cash transfer to about 1.5 million households, according to the World Bank.

Flone Initiative is working towards raising funds to cushion women professionals in public transport who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Flone is working with various partners, among them Humanity Kenya, well-wishers and the Cotswold Foundation, to offer an unconditional cash transfer. Consequently, Flone has renegotiated with some of its donors to repurpose some of their funding for COVID-19-related initiatives. Flone’s core principle is to trust its beneficiaries to know how best to address their individual family needs and respond to this unexpected crisis.

Since May 2020, this initiative has supported 31 women professionals in public transport with cash transfers of between 500 and 2,000 shillings each to cater for their basic needs. Several well-wishers have contributed towards the cause and the proceeds have gone directly to supporting the women.

A follow-up conversation with the women indicated that they spent the money on basic needs shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: How women professionals in public transport used cash transfers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking Oil II</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice: 10</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar: 6</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power: 5 (Electricity, Gas, Kerosene)</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour: 10 (Maize, Wheat, Miller)</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Soap: 4</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: 7 (Garbage, Water, Groceries, Pamper, Body Oil, Sanitizer, Membership Fee)</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
At least 71% of the women who received the stipend had lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19 and were relieved to have the money to purchase food and other necessities for their families. According to the Overseas Development Institute, there is evidence that females make more productive investments than males when given a cash transfer. Cash transfers can also lead to an increase in employment options and increased well-being and empowerment.

**6.1.1 Quotable quotes from the women**


Translation: God Bless you. I had a difficult time because everyone is dependent on me because most of my family members are jobless. Moreover, we have a small young one amongst us. The money helped me purchase food supplies.

“I had prayed in the morning for a miracle because I did not even have the fare to go to work that day, and so when the money came through, I saw my prayers answered. I managed to buy grains. From time to time I also support young people and share with them what I have. I, for example, know someone who was affected by the demolition of houses in Kariobangi and he is the person who came first to mind when I bought the grains.”

“When I received the money, I first thought of buying commodities that would sustain me for longer. I, for example, refilled my gas and bought something like coffee because it lasts longer and one does not need to use it with milk. One must learn how to survive now. I am extremely grateful.”

“I was shocked and kept waiting for the person who sent the money to reverse it. It is later that I realized that it was facilitated by Flone. I was just so humbled and grateful that we are in your thoughts. I was able to buy food and pay the Flone membership fees.”
6.2 Partnership with UN-Habitat

Flone Initiative developed the customer service charter and sexual harassment messages for public service vehicles (PSVs). The posters were put up by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) together with graffiti to spread messages around the prevention of COVID-19 infection.

6.3 Policy framework

Flone Initiative partnered with the Social Just Public Transport working group, hosted by Friedrich–Ebert–Stiftung (FES–Kenya), which brings together civil society organisations, labour unions, academicians and government officials to develop a policy paper on COVID–19 and the public transport industry. This policy paper was submitted to the National Emergency Response Team. The National Emergency Response Team draws various government agencies to coordinate Kenya’s preparedness, prevention and response to the threat of the coronavirus.

Secondly, Flone Initiative developed a policy paper on COVID–19 and Women Professionals in the Kenyan Public Transport Industry.

6.4 COVID–19 SMS course

Flone Initiative has partnered with Zydii, an online training platform, to offer a COVID–19 SMS course to 150 women in public transport. The course was delivered through an SMS platform and provided clear, practical and productive communication on how to prevent COVID infection among women in public transport.

6.4.1 COVID–19 SMS course feedback

“Thanks, Flone, I learnt a lot from those lessons, may God continue to give you showers of blessings.”

“Thank you Flone for the lessons, they indeed are very helpful.”

“I showed my mother the lessons and we want to print and circulate them to clinics so that patients can also benefit.”

“I am speechless and grateful to Flone. I am now more aware of COVID–19.”

“I am now taking the necessary measures, thanks to the educative lessons.”

6.5 Personal protective equipment

Flone Initiative recognises that public transport workers must be adequately protected to enable them to carry out their work. Flone will be providing masks and hand sanitisers to 150 women in public transport.

6.6 Webinars

Flone Initiative has participated in the following webinars to create awareness on the impact of COVID–19 on women in public transport:

a.) Overcoming COVID–19 as Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) hosted by the Open Institute.

b.) The Impact of COVID–19 on Women in Transport hosted by High Volume Transport Applied Research Programme (HVT) and PIARC.

c.) Gender and Mobility hosted by Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety.

d.) A Gender Equal New Normal hosted by the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF).

e.) Women Informal Workers in Public Transport During and Post COVID–19 hosted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES).

6.7 Provision of information to women professionals in public transport

Flone Initiative has been providing information to women professionals in public transport on the COVID–19 outbreak and its impact on the public transport systems and helplines are available on its different WhatsApp platforms.
7 Key Recommendations
These recommendations are aligned to the health, economic and social impacts of COVID–19. They are based on the survey findings, interventions implemented, and discussions with key players in the public transport sector.

7.1 Recommendations to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection State Department of Labour on COVID–19 response

Economic recommendations

- Expand the cash transfer programme during this pandemic to include women in the public transport industry. The definition of vulnerable persons in government policies, including the recently drafted regulations on Public Finance Management (COVID–19 Emergency Response Fund), 2020 should be expanded to include all unemployed persons and workers who have lost their jobs to the pandemic. Such individuals should benefit from income support in case of a crisis-related reduction of working time or job loss. Cash transfers could be accompanied with basic training on entrepreneurship or promoting other business opportunities that will allow women to work from home.

- Provide wage subsidies, particularly to those employers hiring casual labourers and daily income earners, as is the case in the matatu sector, to support the sustainability of employment. This could also include access to loans and waiver of licence fees and taxes.

- The government should prioritise tender awards to industries that are able to produce or provide protective equipment, such as masks and hand sanitisers, and a bailout fund should be launched to keep these industries afloat. This should make it possible to provide free masks and sanitisers to all public transport workers, who are essentially frontline workers. The personal protective equipment should take into account differences in women’s and men’s physiognomy and physical characteristics as evidence shows that this equipment is designed with male models.

7.2 Recommendations to the Ministry of Public Service and Gender

Social recommendations

- Ensure that all policy and structural adjustments to support sustainable recovery go through robust gender and intersectional analysis, For instance, include women in transport in the Family Promotion and Protection Programme to:

  a) Promote a development recovery and re-integration strategy to cushion families from shocks during emergencies and disasters situation; and

  b) Provide psychosocial support, linkages, and referrals to those under distress and publicise available hotlines, for instance, virtual counselling services to COVID–19 suspected cases and referrals for survivors to health facilities through Ministry of Health Helpline No. 719.

7.3 Recommendations to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries and the Ministry of Education

Economic recommendations

- Control food prices and those of essential commodities to ease the consumption burden on the already strained population and continue school feeding programmes and adapt them to the crisis context by preparing rations for delivery or pick–up.

7.4 Recommendations to the Ministry of Water and Sanitation and Irrigation and the Ministry of Health

Social recommendations

- Ensure access to sufficient and affordable water, sanitation, and hygiene services in informal settlements.

- Conduct nationwide training on corona prevention for PSVs that involves adjusting cleaning and safety protocols (covering essential vehicle services and facilities such as benches) as a public health measure to protect commuters and operators better. There is a need to regularly monitor and
ensure compliance with the containment measures put in place for the PSVs and the public.

- Conduct mass testing for women in transport and members of their households and, when necessary, quarantine them in the same facilities since they are mainly responsible for taking care of their households. In addition, facilitate regular health check-ups to ensure that the drivers, conductors and other staff in the public transport sector are healthy and safe as they work.

- Ensure that informal workers benefit from the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF). Currently, NHIF contribution is mandatory for formal workers but voluntary for those in the informal sector and those who are unemployed. Informal workers pay 500 shillings a month while those in formal employment contribute between 500 shillings and 1,700 shillings a month to access healthcare services at NHIF-accredited facilities. It is essential for NHIF to ensure that contributions are affordable to informal workers like matatu crews. It can do this by lowering the monthly contributions, especially for workers in precarious employment. NHIF can also consider waiving deductions for a certain period of time for workers who have either lost their jobs or have suffered salary cuts.

(We conducted a rapid assessment of NHIF uptake among women in public transport. From the findings, 64% of them have NHIF cover while 36% don’t. 71% of women in public transport pay their own monthly NHIF subscription while 29% are supported by their employers, SACCOs or spouse to make their monthly NHIF payments. 77% of them have NHIF payment arrears while 23% are up to date on their payment.)

7.5 Recommendations to the National Transport Safety Authority (NTSA)

- The National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) should be more proactive in advising the government on the arising issues in the public transport industry and in providing a comprehensive database on women in the public transport sector. NTSA should also spearhead the issuance of health guidelines specific to the public transport industry.

- Launch individual campaigns: For example, signage at stations and stops to remind passengers to maintain social distancing.

7.6 Recommendations to the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works

Social and Economic Recommendations

- Ensure implementation of the two-thirds gender rule in the ministry to increase the role and numbers of women and women’s agencies in decision-making processes, including around prevention and response to COVID-19. Offer public childcare spaces to working parents in essential services, such as those in public transport. Provide emergency public transport vehicles (or ambulances) to serve different routes across cities during curfew hours and a manned and supervised call line to support this service.

- Improve walking and cycling infrastructure to complement public transport while addressing the barriers that women face with regard to cycling. This will mitigate crowding but also encourage improved air quality, health and decongestion post-COVID-19.

- Encourage the use of technology in the public transport sector for instance:

  a) The current cashless fare payment should continue post-COVID-19 to promote efficiency and hygiene in the sector.

  b) Promote the use of commuter applications to minimise vehicles crowding and touting. An example is the locally developed “Myride Africa” application where commuters can pre-book their trips and vehicle operators can determine where they need to pick passengers. This eliminates unnecessary stops and touting.

7.7 Recommendations to the Nairobi Metropolitan Area (NAMATA) and Nairobi Metropolitan Services
• Support interventions that seek funding for gender programmes.

• Install sanitation facilities and water points at bus parks.

7.8 Recommendations to civil society organisations

• Lobby the Government to adopt the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) of the International Labour Organization (ILO). It concerns half of the global labour force and more than 90 per cent of small and medium enterprises worldwide who are working and operating in conditions of informality.

• Foster dialogue with sector players for harmonised, inclusive and comprehensive responses and interventions that will be more impactful.

• Enhance lobbying and advocacy on policy and practice reforms to ensure the government remains accountable in its commitments and deliverables in safeguarding human and labour rights.

• Support the government in sourcing up-to-date data and information on the grassroots on COVID-19 as well with in disseminating accurate government information.

• Provide platforms for psychosocial support to vulnerable populations, especially regarding gender-based and domestic violence, as well as child abuse cases, that are likely to emerge.

• Amplify the spaces that women occupy in transport for purposes of linkages among and between the transport sector.

7.9 Recommendations to labour unions and activists

• Highlight the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women professionals working in public transport in mainstream media.

• Actively consult and participate in the design of work practices, processes and all healthy safety measures in the public transport sector.

• Unions must campaign to ensure that governments recognise the demands of unpaid work, that unpaid work by women is often undervalued, and that they are subject to sex discrimination and gender-based occupational segregation in transport.

7.10 Recommendations to matatu owners and operators

• Ensure that workers who are diagnosed with COVID-19 are allowed to take sick leave without fear of losing their jobs or incomes and recognise that workers – irrespective of their employment arrangements – need to access health care and stay at home when unwell without the worry of losing their jobs. These considerations would motivate workers who show COVID-19–related symptoms to seek treatment at the earliest opportunity rather than risk their health in fear of losing their jobs.

• Lobby the Ministry of Labour to enforce Section 34(1) of the Employment Act, 2007 that requires that employers ensure that workers have access to proper medicines and medical care during illness.

7.11 Recommendations to women professionals in public transport

• Women professionals in the matatu industry should form self-help groups and workers organisations. This will ensure that their voices and roles are amplified in the transport sector.

• Women professionals should actively vie for positions in the matatu unions and associations so that their issues are represented in these spaces.
References


Internet sources

- https://news.trust.org/item/20200706165923-pey3m/
Annexure

Annex 1–COVID19 Survey Questionnaire

1. How are they? Wellness, emotional,
2. Are they themselves sick?
3. Are all the members of their household in good health?
4. How many are they?
5. Are they currently working?
6. What kind of work?
7. Are they the main bread winners or do they have support?
8. Where do they live?
9. If they have kids, how many? Are they learning now that schools are closed?
10. What are you doing to protect yourself and your family?
11. Do you feel safe/what are your concerns? (Covid 19, police brutality, curfew restrictions, access to food and essential services, job security, sanitation, etc)
12. What would make you feel supported? /What can we do to support you now?
Flone Initiative is a Pan-African woman-led non-profit organization working towards the realization of safe, accessible, inclusive and sustainable public transportation for all in Africa, with a particular focus on women professionals in public transport and vulnerable groups.