

## Context

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared that the outbreak of the new coronavirus, which was first detected in December 2019, should be considered a global pandemic (WHO 2020a). Although most infected people only develop mild symptoms and recover quickly from coronavirus diseases (COVID-19), elderly patients and patients who have major pre-existing medical conditions often develop much more severe symptoms that require hospitalization and may lead to death.

Because of the rapid spread of the disease, health systems can get overwhelmed by the influx of COVID-19 patients which can further increase the death rate. To avoid this, many countries are implementing policies and public advisories aimed at slowing down the spread of the virus. The virus is spread predominantly through droplets from infected persons who cough or sneeze and by touching surfaces that have been contaminated with the virus. Several countries have implemented strict policies aimed at reducing person-to-person contact, which may include temporarily banning international travel and local transport, prohibiting large gatherings, and requiring the closure of schools, houses of worship, non-essential businesses etc. (DCA Nepal 2020; Divala et al. 2020; Piryani et al. 2020; SSHA 2020). In some cases, densely populated areas – where the risk of transmission is high – have been ordered to implement a complete lockdown, in which people are prohibited from leaving their residences, except to obtain essentials such as food. Residents are typically advised to avoid all large gatherings, to practice social distancing (i.e., to keep at least one meter distance from other people), to regularly wash their hands with soap and water, to avoid shaking hands, and to avoid touching their face.

For these policies to be effective, it is essential that communities recognize the importance of the proposed (or required) preventive measures, and that individuals practice preventive behaviors.

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## 3-2-1 COVID-19 Survey

Viamo, as part of our COVID-19 response, added COVID-19 information on our 3-2-1 Service (<https://viamo.io/services/3-2-1/>) in 18 countries, including messages on symptoms and prevention. As of July 1 2020, these key messages have been listened to 25 million times by more than 3.3 million users. To further understand the information gaps and needs of our users, we added the 3-2-1 Service COVID-19 Survey to poll our users about their knowledge of the disease, as well as the impact of the disease on their livelihood.

To keep the IVR survey short, 12 different questionnaires were used, each addressing a specific COVID-related topic area (knowledge of COVID-19 and how to prevent it, attitudes, preventive behaviors, motivation, impact on food security, income, mental health, COVID-related school disruption etc.). The surveys were implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Madagascar, Malawi, and Rwanda. The first wave of the 3-2-1 COVID-19 Surveys, conducted in May 2020 and involving over 1,500 respondents for each of the 12 questionnaires, demonstrated the value of the 3-2-1 Service for providing rapid, reliable, low-cost data on country experiences during the pandemic. Compared to Random Digit Dial mobile surveys, 3-2-1 Service users are younger, slightly poorer, and more likely to get their information through their mobile phones.

We present here key findings from Wave 1 of the 3-2-1 Service COVID-19 Survey as longitudinal, cross-sectional data continues to be collected. These findings may be of interest to officials, planners, and policy-makers currently addressing the pandemic at all levels of the response.

## Highlights



Overall, 71% of respondents believe it is important for communities to take action to prevent coronavirus infection. However, less than 60% believe it is very important to stop attending large events, to stay home, or to close non-essential businesses.



Only one in three respondents (32%) reported more frequently washing their hands with water and soap. The main reasons for not doing so are the lack of soap (50%) and the inability to afford soap (31%).

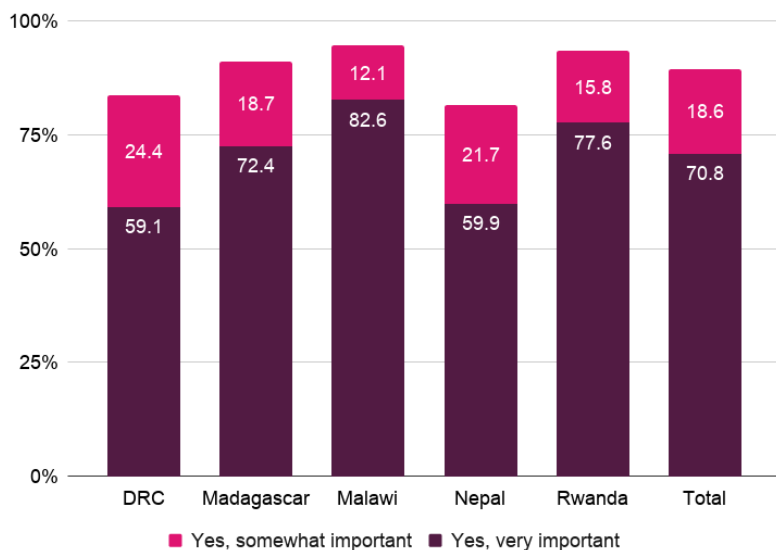


Most people reported social distancing most of the time or all of the time (24% and 49%). However, only 22% stayed home more than usual while an additional 20% did not leave their house in the past week (22%). The most commonly reported preventive behavior is avoiding touching one's face (66%).

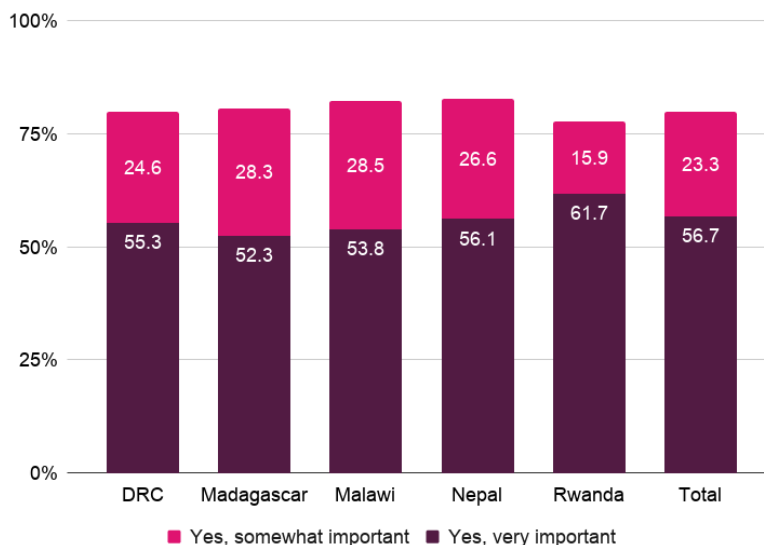


Figures 1a-1e: Across the five countries, the large majority of respondents (70.8%) said they considered it very important for their community to take action, and an additional 18.6% considered it somewhat important (see Figure 1a). Respondents in Malawi were most likely to say it was very important for their community to take action (82.6%), while those in DRC and Nepal were least likely to do so (59.1% and 59.9% respectively).

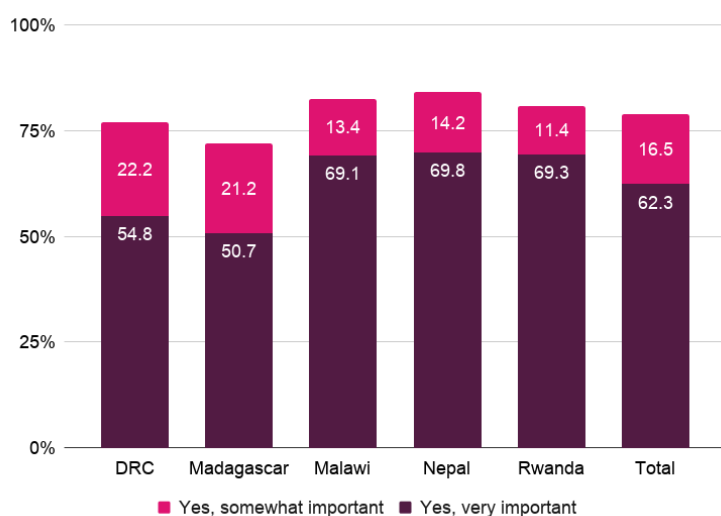
**Fig 1a: Percentage of respondents who consider it important for community to take action**



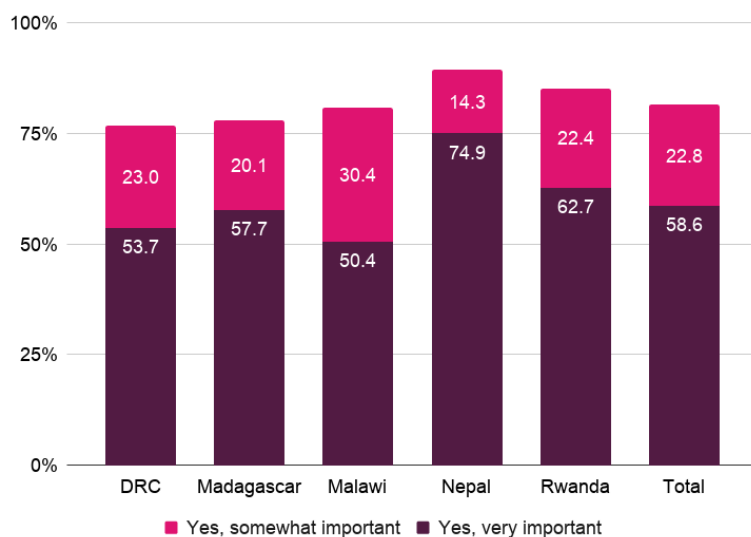
**Fig 1b: Percentage of respondents who consider it important for community to stop attending large events**



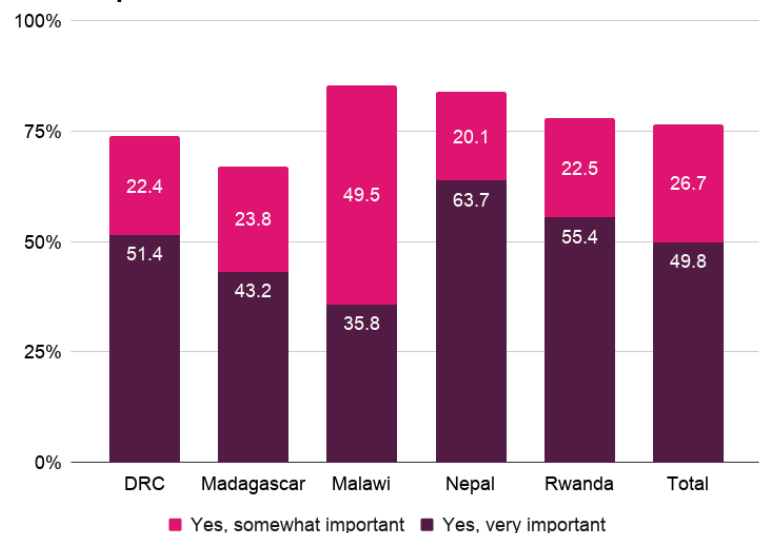
**Fig 1c: Percentage of respondents who consider it important for community members not to shake hands**



**Fig 1d: Percentage of respondents who consider it important for community members to stay home**



**Fig 1e: Percentage of respondents who consider it important for non-essential businesses to close**



Despite the high importance given to community action, support for specific actions is not as strong. In all five countries, the percentage of respondents who consider it very important for community members to stop attending large events is relatively fairly low, ranging from 52.3% in Madagascar to 61.7% in Rwanda. Support for not shaking hands, staying home, and closing non-essential businesses varies across countries (see Figures 1b-1d). Only 54.8% of respondents in the DRC and 50.7% of those in Madagascar believe it is very important for community members not to shake hands, compared to 63.1-69.8% in the other countries. In Nepal, 74.9% of respondents believe it is very important to stay home, compared to only 50.4%-62.7% in the other countries. The highest support for closing non-essential business was observed in Nepal and Rwanda, where 63.7% and 55.4% deemed this very important. By contrast, only 43.2% of respondents in Madagascar and 35.8% of those in Malawi considered it very important for non-essential businesses to close.

**Fig 2: Percentage of respondents who washed hands with water/soap more often than usual (past week)**

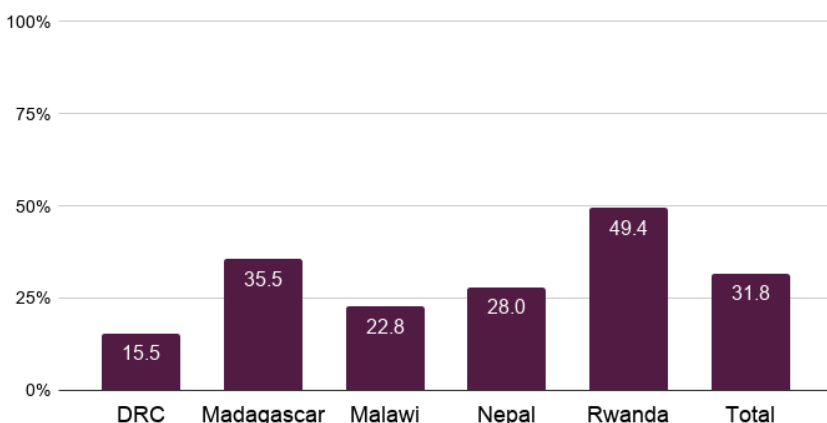
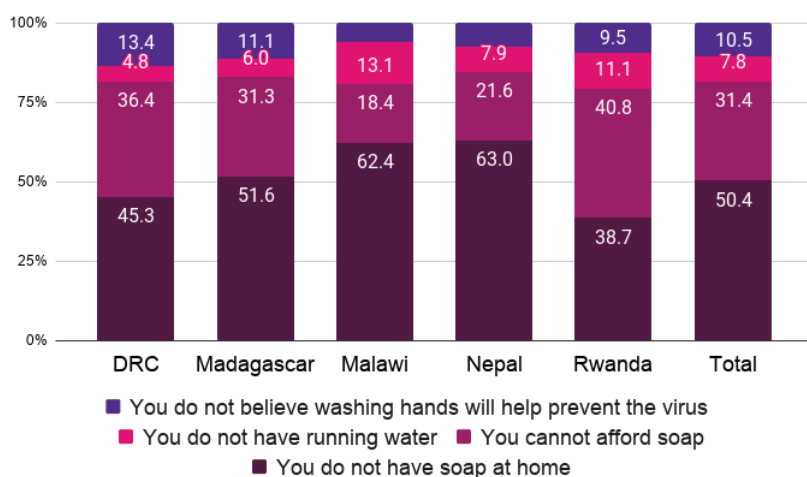


Fig 2: Despite recommendations to frequently wash one's hands with water and soap to prevent infection with the coronavirus, few respondents report that they have been heeding this advice. Overall, only 31.8% of respondents reported that they washed their hands with water and soap more frequently than usual during the week before the survey. Respondents in Rwanda were most likely to have increased their frequency of handwashing with water and soap (49.4%), while those in the DRC and Malawi were least likely to have washed their hands more frequently (15.5% and 22.8%, respectively).

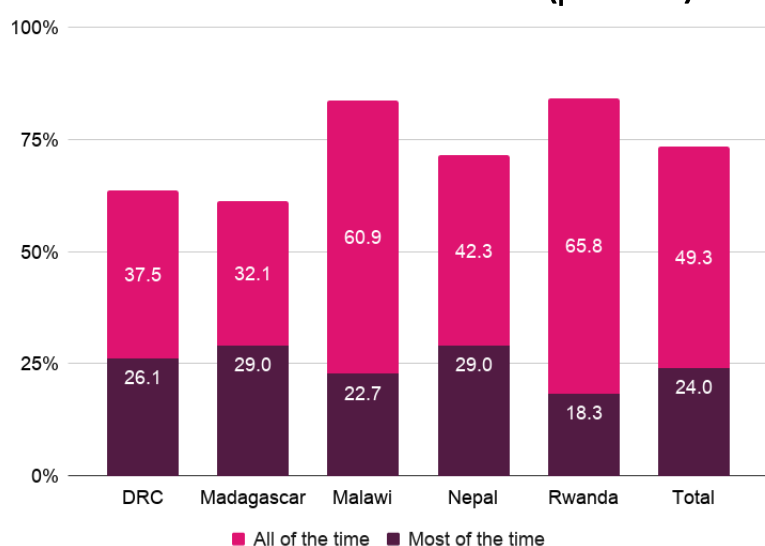


**Fig 3: Percentage of respondents who report various reasons for washing hands less frequently than usual**

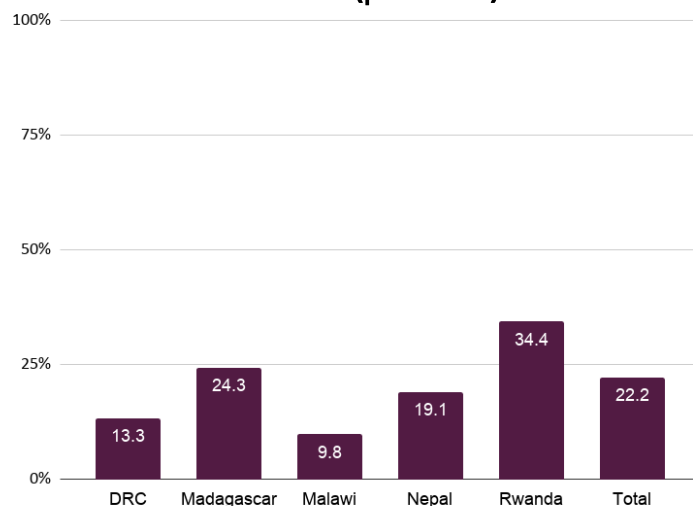
Figure 3: Inquires about the reasons why respondents have not been washing their hands with soap and water more frequently reveal that the most common reason is that they lack access to soap. Specifically, 50.4% reported that they do not have soap and an additional 31.4% that they cannot afford to buy soap. Between 4.8% and 13.1% of respondents in each country reported that the reason was a lack of running water. Overall, only 10.5% of respondents reported that they did not increase the frequency of hand washing because they do not believe it helps. The highest percentage reporting that handwashing does not help is observed in the DRC (13.4%), while the lowest percentage was reported in Malawi (6.1%).



**Fig 4: Percentage of respondents who always or often maintain at least one meter difference (past week)**



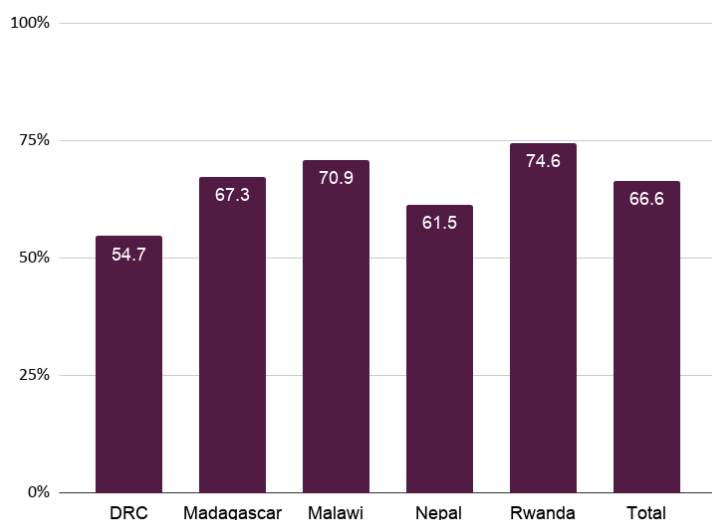
**Fig 5: Percentage of respondents who stayed home more than usual (past week)**



Figures 4 and 5: Recommendations to practice social distancing (at least one meter) or to stay home can be difficult to implement. When asked how often they practiced social distancing (at least one meter) during the past week, 24.0% reported they did so most of the time, and 49.3% all of the time. The percentage who report social distancing all of the time is highest in Rwanda (65.8%) and Malawi (60.9%) and lowest in the DRC (37.5%) and Madagascar (32.1%). Only 22.2% of respondents reported they stayed home more than usual during the week prior to the survey. Respondents in Rwanda were most likely to have increased the time they stayed home (34.4%), while those in the DRC and Malawi were least likely to have done so (13.3% and 9.8%, respectively).



**Fig 6: Percentage of respondents who avoided touching their face (past week)**

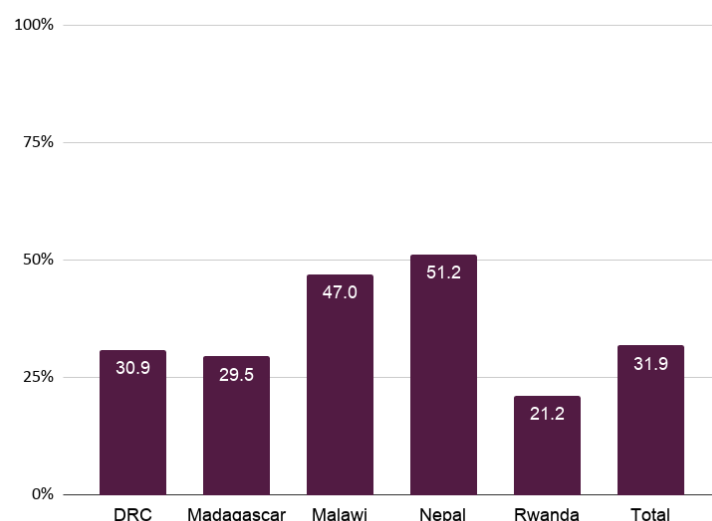


**66.6%** of respondents reported that they have been avoiding touching their face during the past week.



**31.9%** of respondents reported they have been attending large public gatherings less often than usual.

**Fig 7: Percentage of respondents who attended public gatherings less often than usual (past week)**



Figures 6-7: In theory, recommendations to avoid touching one's face and to avoid large gatherings are easier to implement, as they are unaffected by economic resources, employment, etc. As shown in Figure 6, the majority of respondents (54.7% to 74.6%) in each country reported that they have been avoiding touching their face during the past week. However, only 31.9% of respondents reported they have been attending large public gatherings less often than usual. Respondents in Malawi and Nepal are most likely to have reduced the frequency of participation in large gatherings (47.0% and 51.2%), while those in Rwanda are least likely to have attended fewer larger gatherings (21.2%). This modest change in the attendance of large gatherings may reflect the importance of culturally significant events, such as weddings, baptism, and funerals.

## References

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## Suggested Citation

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