

Sokowatch e-voucher scheme delivers relief to Kenya's vulnerable

East African e-commerce startup Sokowatch has launched an e-voucher scheme to help ensure that essential food and goods are available, free of charge, to vulnerable families impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.



The pandemic presents a significant challenge for the informal economy, which accounts for a significant percentage of [employment](#) and [consumer purchases](#) in sub-Saharan Africa. Lockdown measures and the wider impact of the pandemic on the economy also means that many low-income families, as well as the local shops they rely on, are at risk of not being able to access the food and goods they need.

Sokowatch is using its network of over 15,000 shop owners and unique technology systems to distribute e-vouchers to families in need living in informal settlements. Recipients are identified in partnership with organisations such as Uweza Foundation and World Hope in Nairobi.

E-voucher redemption

Families receive SMS e-vouchers to redeem at a nearby shop supplied by Sokowatch and once the goods are collected, the transaction is confirmed via the Sokowatch app and the shopkeeper is instantly credited for goods issued.

The scheme has already been deployed in the Kawangware and Kibera informal settlements of Nairobi. Over 1,000 e-vouchers have already been sent to vulnerable families, with over 90% of vouchers redeemed within 48 hours, according to the startup. All redemptions thus far have been spent on essential goods such as maize flour, rice, wheat flour, cooking oil, beans, sugar, toilet paper and sanitary pads.



Bypassing costly relief inefficiencies

"When we investigated ways to respond to the outbreak, we didn't have to look any further than the ecosystem we are currently in - households and local shops. We believe that, as we explore how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, we must not forget the most vulnerable among us and this has driven us to start this scheme," Daniel Yu, global CEO of Sokowatch.

"Our tech-enabled platform makes it possible for local shops to continue to serve communities without the costly inefficiencies that often come with relief efforts, giving shops a way to increase sales and maintain revenue through and after the crisis," he adds.



R2m food voucher system rolled out to at-risk communities

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Through its operations across the nine largest cities in East Africa, Sokowatch says an estimated 1.5 million vulnerable families and 15,000 local shops could be provided with direct assistance digitally, eliminating the many logistical challenges that usually face relief efforts, while providing shops with a way to increase sales and maintain revenue through and after the crisis.

"Since the launch of the scheme, shops taking part have seen average weekly sales volume increases of 54%. The e-

voucher programme has also seen good acceptance in the community with over 94% of vouchers redeemed," the company says.

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