SURVEY REPORT:
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AFRICA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

BY MAWAZO INSTITUTE, MAY 2020

This report draws on responses received from 501 individuals who were surveyed on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their learning and ongoing research. The survey was carried out by the Mawazo Institute, a non-profit research institute based in Nairobi, Kenya. Our mission is to support the next generation of female thought leaders and scholars in Africa, and to get policymakers and the public engaged with their research. Mawazo used its digital platforms to issue the survey online, targeting students, academics, researchers and other actors in the higher education sector.

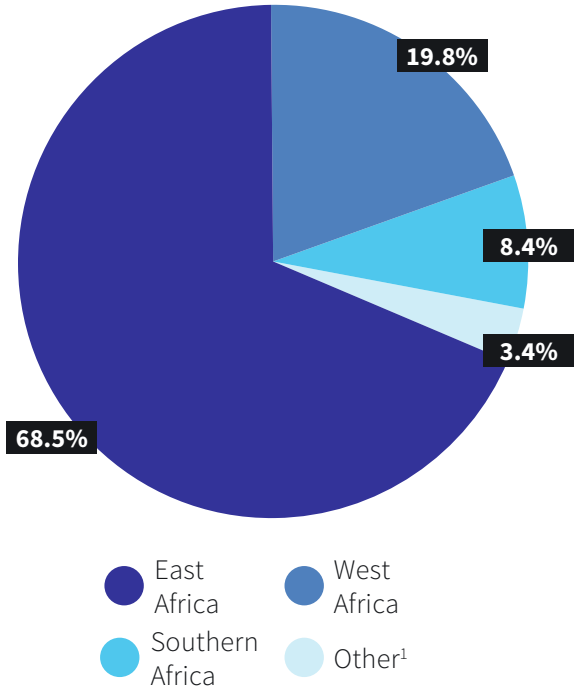
As a non-profit research institute working with early career researchers, Mawazo seeks to better understand where disruptions in our field are taking place, and how best to prepare higher education actors to respond to emerging needs. You can read the full findings from the survey by visiting the Publications page on our website:
www.mawazoinstitute.org/our-publications

MAWAZO INSTITUTE
WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

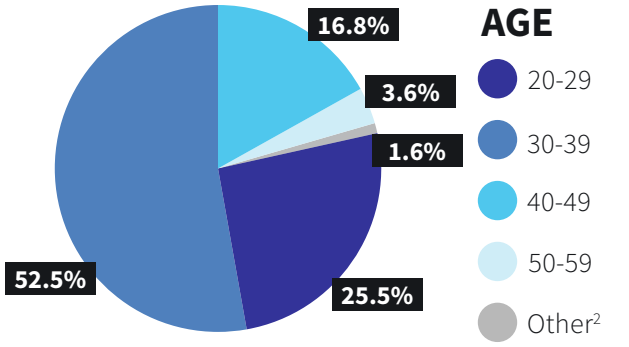
SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LEARNING AND RESEARCH IN AFRICA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 501

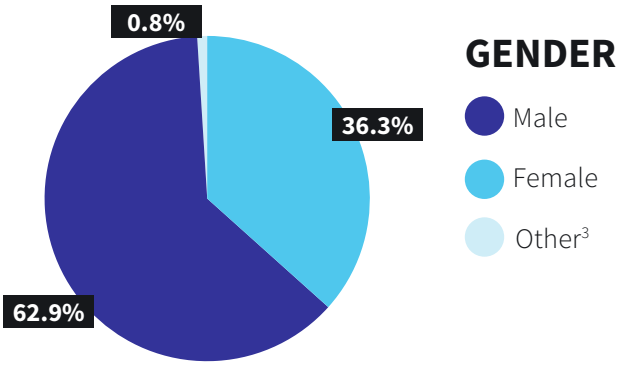
REGION

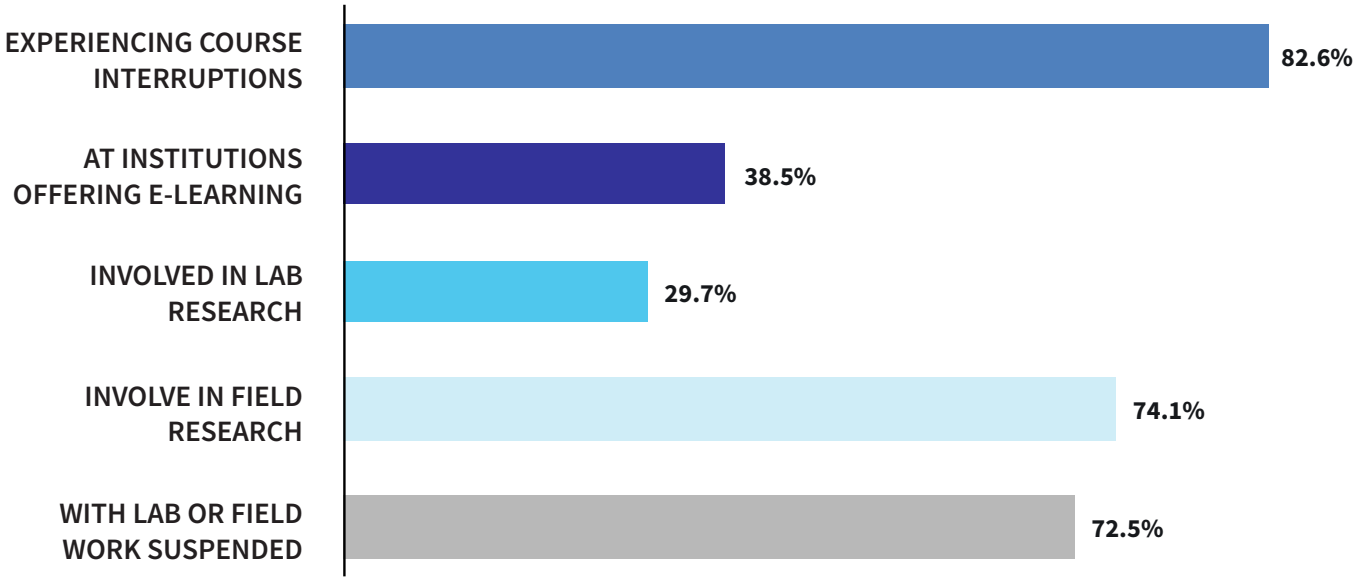


AGE



GENDER





[1] Includes respondents from North Africa (0.6%), Central Africa (0.8%) and Outside Africa (2%).
[2] Includes respondents aged 19 and under (0.4%), 60-69 years old (1%), and those who withheld their age (0.2%).
[3] Includes respondents who withheld their gender (0.6%) and respondents who wrote in an alternative (0.2%).

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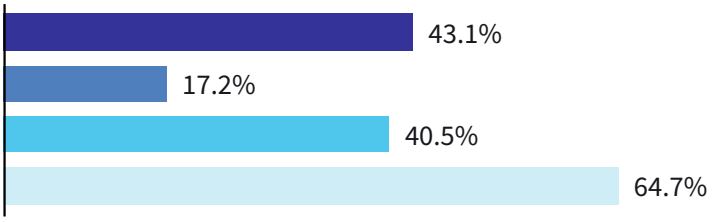
WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LEARNING AND RESEARCH BY REGION

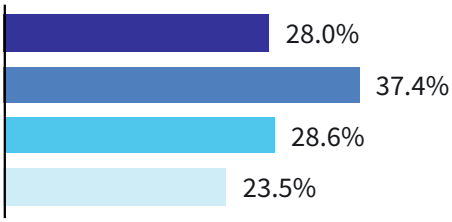
East Africa | West Africa | Southern Africa | Other[1]

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING COURSE INTERRUPTIONS

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OFFERING E-LEARNING



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN LAB RESEARCH



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN FIELD RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH LAB OR FIELD WORK SUSPENDED

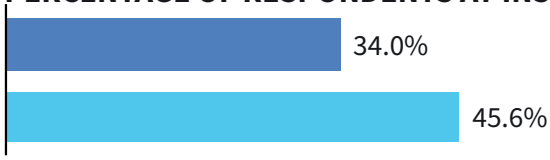
[1] Our sample included: 343 responses from East Africa; 99 from West Africa; 42 from Southern Africa; 10 from outside Africa; 4 from Central Africa, and 3 from North Africa. Due to limited data, respondents from North Africa, Central Africa and Outside Africa have been grouped together under the category 'Other'.

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON
LEARNING AND RESEARCH BY GENDER

Male Female

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING COURSE INTERRUPTIONS

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OFFERING E-LEARNING



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN LAB RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN FIELD RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH LAB OR FIELD WORK SUSPENDED

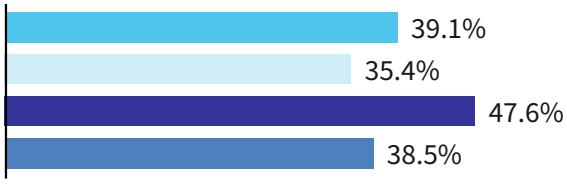
[1] Our sample included 315 responses from men, 182 from women, 3 from people who withheld their gender, and 1 from a person who listed an alternative choice. Due to insufficient data, respondents who withheld their gender or listed alternative choices have not been included in the chart above.

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON
LEARNING AND RESEARCH BY AGE

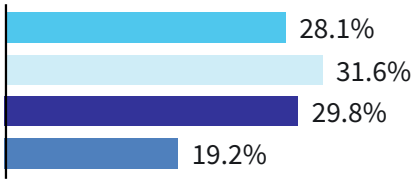
20 - 29 Years Old | 30 - 39 Years Old | 40 - 49 Years Old | Other[1]

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING COURSE INTERRUPTIONS

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OFFERING E-LEARNING



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN LAB RESEARCH



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN FIELD RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH LAB OR FIELD WORK SUSPENDED

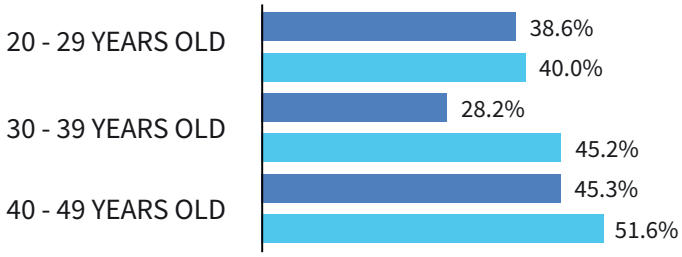
[1] Our sample included 2 respondents aged 19 and Under, 128 aged 20-29 years old, 263 aged 30-39 years old, 84 aged 40-49 years old, 18 aged 50-59 years old, 5 aged 60-69 years old, and 1 person who chose not to disclose their age. Due to insufficient data, respondents aged 19 and Under, 50-59 years old, 60-69 years old, and those who chose not to disclose their age were grouped together under the category 'Other'.

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LEARNING AND RESEARCH BY AGE AND GENDER[1]

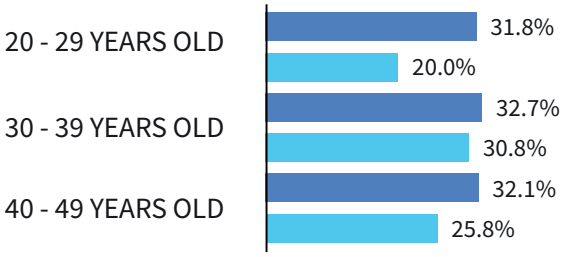
Male Female

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING COURSE INTERRUPTIONS

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OFFERING E-LEARNING



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN LAB RESEARCH



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN FIELD RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH LAB OR FIELD WORK SUSPENDED

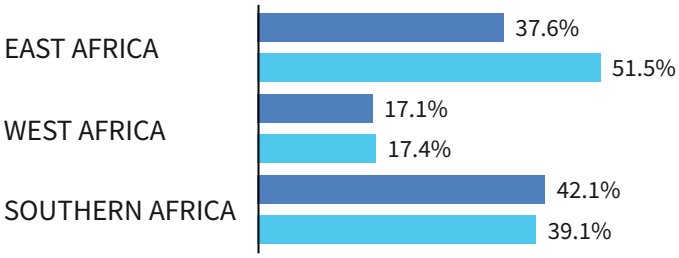
[1] The age groups included in the graph above collectively account for 475 (or 94.8%) of our respondents, with 128 (or 25.5%) of our respondents between 20-29 years old, 263 (or 52.5%) between 30-39 years old, and 84 (or 16.8%) between 40-49 years old.

SUMMARY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON
LEARNING AND RESEARCH BY REGION[1] AND GENDER

Male Female

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING COURSE INTERRUPTIONS

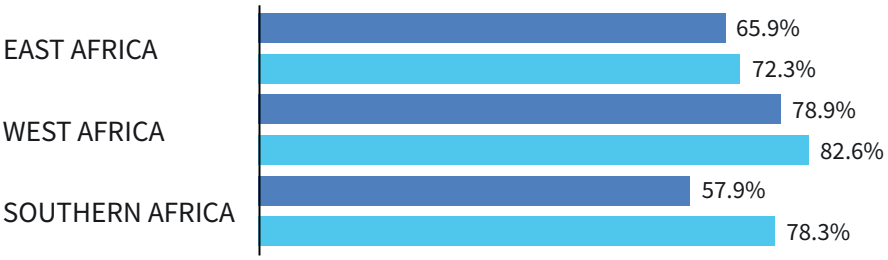
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OFFERING E-LEARNING



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN LAB RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN FIELD RESEARCH

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH LAB OR FIELD WORK SUSPENDED



[1] The regions included in the graph above collectively account for 484 (or 96.6%) of our respondents, with 343 (or 68.5%) of our respondents from East Africa, 99 (or 19.8%) from West Africa, and 42 (or 8.4%) from Southern Africa. Due to insufficient data, other regions have been excluded from the graph.

GENERAL OUTLOOK

As part of the survey, we asked respondents to share open-ended answers on how the crisis has changed their lives. We received responses from 53% of survey respondents which are summarised in the word cloud below. Words that came up more frequently in the responses are shown in larger and bolder text.

"IT HAS LED TO UNCERTAINTY AND ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE."
Survey Respondent

"COVID-19 HAS DAMPENED RESEARCH MORALE DRASTICALLY."
Survey Respondent

"[COVID-19] HAS CREATED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO GET INTO E- LEARNING WHICH IS A GREAT METHOD FOR TEACHING POST SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS."
Survey Respondent

"WE ARE NOW WORKING FROM HOME, WHICH BRINGS WITH IT A SET OF CHALLENGES AS THE HOME ENVIRONMENT MAY NOT ALWAYS BE CONDUCIVE FOR WORK GIVEN THAT THE ENTIRE FAMILY IS HOME."
Survey Respondent

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY FINDINGS

CLASSES AND E-LEARNING:

Our survey showed that **despite a majority of respondents, 82.6%, reporting that their classes had been affected by COVID-19, only 38.5% are at institutions offering e-learning** options. With little known about how long the pandemic is expected to affect the region, this presents a critical gap for continued learning for students in the region.

We also found disparities in access to e-learning based on respondents' region, gender, and age. **Notably, only 17.2% of West African respondents reported being at institutions with e-learning options**, compared to 43.1% of East African respondents and 40.5% of Southern African respondents. More women reported that their institutions were offering e-learning (45.6% of women compared to 34% of men), as did respondents aged between 40-49 years old compared to other age groups.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES:

In our sample, 74.1% of respondents reported being involved in field research, compared to only 29.7% in lab research. Across regions, we found that 37.4% of West Africans reported being involved in lab research compared to 28% of East Africans and 28.6% of Southern Africans[1]. Overall, however, **a majority of respondents, 72.5%, have suspended their lab or field research as a result of the COVID-19 crisis**. Depending on how long restrictions on research activities are kept in place, as well as downstream impacts on research funding and the broader higher education sector, this could have a significant negative impact on research productivity in the region.

GENDER:

We found that a smaller percentage of women, 27.5%, are involved in lab research compared to 31.4% of men. **The gap between men and women's participation in lab research is especially wide among very early- and late-career respondents**. Our data showed that in the 20-29 age group, 20% of women report being involved in lab research, compared to 31.8% of men. When it came to the 30-39 age group, 30.8% of women report being involved in lab research, compared to 32.7% of men. For the 40-49 age group, 25.8% of women report being involved in lab research, compared to 32.1% of men. This trend reverses in the 50-59 age group, with 28.6% of women reporting being involved in lab research, compared to only 16.7% of men. These findings may be indicative of accelerated career paths among men versus women.

Our findings also showed **a slightly higher percentage of women, 74.2%, reported having their lab or field research suspended, compared to 71.7% of men**. **This disparity holds across all regions where there is adequate data**, but it is especially large among respondents from West and Southern Africa. In East Africa, for instance 72.3% of women compared to 69.5% of men report a suspension of research activities. However, in West Africa, the figure is 82.6% of women compared to 78.9% of men, and in Southern Africa, the figure is 78.3% of women compared to 57.9% of men.

Lastly, our findings showed that **a higher number of women, 85.2%, reported their classes being affected by COVID-19, compared to 81.3% of men**. As in the previous section, the largest differences were among respondents from West and Southern Africa. In East Africa, 83.8% of women compared to 80% of men reported class disruptions. In West Africa, the figure is 91.3% of women compared to 84.2% of men, and in Southern Africa, the figure is 87% of women compared to 78.9% of men.

AGE:

Mid-career respondents, aged between 40-49 years old, were more likely to report having their lab or field research suspended than other age groups. Specifically, 77.4% of the 40-49 age group reported a suspension of their research activities, compared to 67.2% of the 20-29 age group, 73.8% of the 30-39 age group, and 66.7% of the 50-59 age group. Interestingly, the difference here appears to be driven by the fact that **a disproportionately large number of mid-career women, 90.3% of women aged 40-49 years old, reported having their lab or field research suspended, compared to 69.8% of men their age group**. Amongst those aged 20-29 years, 67.5% of women reported they had suspended research activities compared to 67% of men. Among those aged 30-39 years, 71.2% of women have suspended research activities compared to 76.3% of men.

[1] This difference may be the result of regional differences in academic focus. In 2016, the World Bank report *A Decade of Development in Sub-Saharan African Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics Research* found that 32.3% of West & Central African research output is in the physical sciences and STEM compared to 28.0% in Southern Africa and 25.3% in East Africa.

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