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## SPEAKING OUT, REACHING OUT:

COVID-19's Impact on Youth  
Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan-Africa



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# Executive Summary

With formal employment growth in Sub-Saharan-Africa sluggish at best, countries are turning to youth entrepreneurship as a primary driver of economic growth on the continent. However, the enabling environments for young entrepreneurs in Africa have largely failed to keep pace with this expectation, and as a consequence youth are struggling to find the support they need to succeed. The result is that younger entrepreneurs are more likely to fail than their older counterparts. Furthermore, COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on these entrepreneurs, who were already struggling due to underdeveloped market conditions and a lack of youth-friendly support ecosystems.

There is a robust body of research documenting the secondary effects of COVID-19 on youth-run businesses in Africa, but what remains unclear is how they are surviving, coping, and adapting, and what they need to bounce back. Even more limited is a clear understanding of how young women entrepreneurs are coping and adapting, considering the unique challenges they face. Digital Opportunity Trust, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation conducted a youth-led investigation in 2020 to better understand the impacts and drivers of resilience among youth entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan-Africa during COVID-19. The investigation was carried out in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Ghana and Ethiopia and involved consultation with 763 (410 females, 353 males) young entrepreneurs and 87 representatives of youth-serving institutions.

The investigation focused on entrepreneurs who have participated in DOT and Mastercard Foundation programs and is therefore not intended to represent the experiences of all youth entrepreneurs in each country. However, the conclusions and recommendations presented should be considered indicative of wider trends in Sub-Saharan-Africa.



#DOTYouth Sharon Katushabe



## KEY FINDINGS

The youth entrepreneurs surveyed struggled to keep their micro, small, and medium businesses (MSMEs) open during the pandemic, with 26% of them closing their businesses altogether. Rates of business closure are roughly the same for women and men.

Youth entrepreneurs who managed to stay in business during COVID-19 reported, on average, a 35% decrease in earnings during the pandemic, with no difference in percent reduction for women and men.

The unpaid care burden and economic downturns wrought by COVID-19 lockdowns have taken many young women out of the labour force altogether, a worsened financial situation that is creating new hardships, and fewer income-generating opportunities. 30% of women surveyed report that they lost their jobs and have yet to find new employment, while 25% of women entrepreneurs closed their businesses altogether as a result of the pandemic. Women have been less successful than men in replacing lost income.



#DOT Youth Sarah Iranzi



**Youth entrepreneurs who reported having wage-based income in addition to business income have struggled to maintain their employment at the same number of hours during COVID-19.** 25% of youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported losing their wage-based employment altogether, while 23% maintained their employment, but with reduced hours.

**Youth business owners are using various coping strategies to keep their businesses afloat during COVID-19.**

Entrepreneurs received support from family and friends, accessed credit, and received some limited government financial aid. They also decreased business expenditures by reducing the number of hours or days their businesses were open, temporarily closing their doors, or laying off employees, to cope with economic shocks.



#DOTYouth Malik Abubakari

These coping strategies are largely **short-term survivalist strategies**. Few youth are employing longer term coping strategies, such as starting new businesses, leveraging digital tools, and adapting their products and services, that could help them increase their resilience to future shocks.

**Young business owners urgently need financial support** in the form of personal loans, non-recoverable grants, access to start-up and growth capital to reduce the risk of business failure.

**Youth entrepreneurs urgently need support to take advantage of new digital transformations in the marketplace.** E-commerce, digital financial services and social media have become a critical part of doing business in Sub-Saharan-Africa, and youth will be left behind if they are unable to access digital tools and effectively integrate them in their business operations.

**Women entrepreneurs are more likely than men to operate in insecure, low-income, and informal business sectors, making them more vulnerable to economic shocks.** Women are less likely to have access to relevant business support and services, have greater difficulty accessing business finance, and are less likely to integrate digital tools and services to optimize their business operations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed by the youth investigators from each country through a process of reflection and validation in December 2021.

### **Inject urgent, unsecured recovery capital<sup>1</sup> for youth entrepreneurs.**

Young women and men across the five investigation countries urgently need access to non-recoverable forms of finance and debt relief to help their businesses survive over the short-term.

### **Align short-term emergency responses with non-financial support to improve longer term viability and enhance the social and economic impact of youth-run businesses.**

Youth entrepreneurs need proactive solutions for rebuilding and re-imagining business models, forming new collaborations and alliances, and creating a culture of perseverance and resilience.

### **Bolster enabling environments for youth entrepreneurship to ensure solutions are inclusive, youth-led, flexible, and responsive to the diverse needs of young women and men.**

Youth-serving organizations and institutions should leverage the organic mobilization of youth entrepreneurs<sup>2</sup> that has occurred across Sub-Saharan-Africa during the crisis to help them thrive through peer-based support and coaching, access to investors and industry experts, business capacity development, and inspiration.

<sup>1</sup> Unsecured capital does not require collateral backing

<sup>2</sup> DOT's Street Team initiative is an example of youth mobilizing to respond to the pandemic's effects on their communities: <https://www.dotrust.org/launches-second-cohort-of-the-dot-youth-street-team-to-tackle-covid19-community-recovery/>

### **Support youth to develop and implement business adaptations. Digital pivots in particular offer the potential to transform youth-led businesses and respond to new market opportunities.**

COVID-19 has brought about shifts in consumer behavior, such as e-commerce and mobile money to purchase goods and services, that will persist after the pandemic has ended. But young entrepreneurs often lack the skills to effectively leverage these tools to digitize their businesses and respond to new market opportunities.

### **Ensure that gender-sensitive policies and programs are developed to bolster enabling environments for women entrepreneurs.**

More targeted support is needed to help women transition to formal businesses and enter higher margin markets and sectors.



#DOTYouth Kate Wondenya

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# Introduction

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous effect on everyone, the economic and social costs are disproportionately affecting young adults.<sup>3</sup> The negative impacts of global economic recessions have hit Sub-Saharan-Africa particularly hard, with economic activity shrinking by over 3% in 2020.<sup>4</sup> This economic downturn is amplifying many of the challenges African youth already faced, including structural barriers to entering the labour market, poor access to youth-friendly services, and underdeveloped enabling environments for youth employment and entrepreneurship. Young women on the continent are particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the pandemic, since they often shoulder the burden of household consumption shocks and are more likely than men to work in informal and less profitable sectors.<sup>5</sup>

As formal employment growth in Sub-Saharan-Africa struggles to match the increasing numbers of youth entering the workforce each year, countries are pinning their economic hopes on entrepreneurship.<sup>6</sup> But enabling environments for young entrepreneurs in Africa has largely failed to keep pace with this momentum, and youth struggle to find the support they need to succeed. As a result, younger entrepreneurs are on average more likely to fail than their older counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

Banks do not offer lending products that consider the constraints and needs of youth entrepreneurs, such as a lack of collateral and limited credit history. Governments often do not have robust financial support mechanisms, such as low interest loans for unbanked youth or grants to support youth entrepreneurship. As a result, many young men and women fail to obtain start-up and growth finance for their ventures.

COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on these entrepreneurs, who already struggle at the best of times to gain a foothold in business ownership due to underdeveloped market conditions and a lack of youth-friendly support ecosystems. How young entrepreneurs in Africa are surviving, coping, and adapting, and what they need to bounce back, remains unclear. Even more limited is a clear understanding of how young women entrepreneurs are coping and adapting, considering the new challenges they face.

Through this youth-led investigation conducted from October to December 2020, Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation sought to better understand the impacts and drivers of resilience among youth entrepreneurs in Africa during COVID-19. Grounded in an investigation

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<sup>3</sup>Fine, P., Reichle, S, and Lord, K. (2020). Youth or consequences: Put youth at the center of COVID-19 recovery. Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/06/08/youth-or-consequences-put-youth-at-the-center-of-covid-19-recovery/>.

<sup>4</sup>World Bank (2020). The World Bank in Africa. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview#1>

<sup>5</sup>World Bank. (2020). Supporting African women through the economic consequences of COVID-19. Retrieved February 2021: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/supporting-african-women-through-economic-consequences-covid-19>.

<sup>6</sup>Naude, W. (May, 2021). How COVID-19 is likely to slow down a decade of youth development in Africa. In: The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-likely-to-slow-down-a-decade-of-youth-development-in-africa-15928>.

<sup>7</sup>Azouzlay, P., Jones, B., Kim, D.J., and Miranda, J. (2020). Age and high-growth entrepreneurship. American economic review (2)1, 65-82. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aeri.20180582>.



## INTRODUCTION

committed to enabling young women and men to tell their own stories with their own voices, DOT and the Mastercard Foundation engaged youth investigators in Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, and Uganda to explore how young entrepreneurs in these countries are navigating and responding to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. This report synthesizes and articulates the results of this effort as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on youth-run micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and what young entrepreneurs need to bounce back. The findings of this investigation offer development agencies, policymakers, funders, community-based organizations, and financial institutions firsthand evidence of what young entrepreneurs want and need, not only to cope with the impacts of pandemic in the short-term, but to become more resilient over the long-term.

**"I wished I could do business, earn some money, and continue my education but there is no business to do. I was relying on cocoa, but the cocoa is spoilt, so life has become really hard"**

**- Male, Ghana**



#DOTYouth Elizabeth Katisiro

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# The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan-Africa

Youth-led enterprises were already facing significant headwinds prior to the pandemic. In addition to underdeveloped support ecosystems, young entrepreneurs typically start businesses in sectors with low barriers to entry and high levels of competition.<sup>8</sup> They also have less labour market experience, lower levels of business skills, have less of a financial cushion to absorb shocks, and lower capacity to capture uptick opportunities to overcome revenue loss compared to older business owners.<sup>9</sup> As a result of these broader constraints, the economic devastation wrought by COVID-19 has hit young entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan-Africa hard. Lockdowns, curfews, reduced consumer demand for goods and services, and disrupted supply chains have forced many youth to close their businesses, and others are struggling to survive as revenues have dropped precipitously.<sup>10</sup> Studies show that over 90% of MSMEs across Sub-Saharan-Africa report severe economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with women-led MSMEs particularly hard hit because of their smaller size, informality, and concentration in the most heavily affected sectors.<sup>11</sup>

Given the critical role that youth-run MSMEs play in countries throughout Sub-Saharan-Africa as

drivers of economic growth and job creation, their survival is paramount to recovery of economies overall. Youth-run ventures in particular present an opportunity to address new market conditions with innovations given that they are typically more agile and can adapt more easily than larger, more established enterprises. Since the start of the pandemic, youth have been centrally involved in developing solutions to help their communities combat the virus.<sup>12</sup> Young entrepreneurs pivoted their businesses to respond to the challenges that have emerged because of the pandemic. Young men and women pivoted their businesses to help improve supply and distribution chains, support patients and families, improve diagnostics and contact tracing, and produce personal protective equipment.<sup>13</sup> Scaling up such innovations is not only key to recovery, but also to future economic growth and resilience.

Supporting youth entrepreneurship, however, requires a targeted response by governments, international funders, business support organizations, and the private sector. Rapid digitization in Sub-Saharan-Africa was already transforming labour markets, modernizing banking, expanding financial services and

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<sup>8</sup> OECD (2020). Summary of proceedings: Supporting young entrepreneurs through the COVID-19 crisis: What's next? [https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/OECD\\_Webinar\\_Youth\\_Entrepreneurship\\_Policy\\_and\\_COVID-19\\_SUMMARY.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/OECD_Webinar_Youth_Entrepreneurship_Policy_and_COVID-19_SUMMARY.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Youth Business International (2021). Responding to the needs of young entrepreneurs. <https://www.youthbusiness.org/resource/responding-to-the-needs-of-young-entrepreneurs>.

<sup>11</sup> International Finance Corporation, 2021. COVID-19 and women-led MSMEs in Sub-Saharan-Africa: Examining the impact, responses, and solutions. Washington, D.C.: IFC. [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry\\_ext\\_content/ifc\\_external\\_corporate\\_site/financial+institutions/resources/covid19-and-women-led-firms-in-africa](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/financial+institutions/resources/covid19-and-women-led-firms-in-africa).

<sup>12</sup> Sadibe, A. (2020). In post-pandemic Africa, small businesses could be key to recovery. World Economic Forum and Project Syndicate: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/strengthening-africa-s-best-pandemic-defense/>

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

unlocking new innovative business models prior to the pandemic.<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 is poised to accelerate these shifts. However, youth entrepreneurs operating in largely informal micro and small business sectors have not taken advantage of digitization, and are less likely than salaried workers or formal business owners to effectively leverage digital tools.<sup>15</sup> Youth entrepreneurs will fall further behind if they don't embrace digital technology as a core part of their business models and operations, and they require policy interventions and upskilling to tackle obstacles to digital adoption.

Access to start-up and growth capital is also urgently needed for youth entrepreneurs to recover, and governments and banks need to come together to improve regulatory conditions that would enable youth access to finance.<sup>16</sup> Young entrepreneurs need entrepreneurship training and mentoring to access lower competition and higher income sectors, and to pivot their businesses in changing market conditions. Supporting youth-led businesses and innovations, therefore, requires policies and interventions that do not focus exclusively on entrepreneurship, but also on broader market conditions and policy environments.



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<sup>14</sup> African Union Commission and OECD (2021). Africa's development dynamics 2021: Digital transformation for quality jobs. Paris: OECD.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Naude, W. (May, 2021). How COVID-19 is likely to slow down a decade of youth development in Africa. In: The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-likely-to-slow-down-a-decade-of-youth-development-in-africa-159288>.



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# Investigation Methodology

This study was a two-phased, youth-led investigation that involved a quantitative rapid survey of youth, followed by qualitative inquiry with young business owners and other stakeholders that was used to deepen and triangulate the quantitative results. Youth from each country were involved in every stage of the investigation, from initial design to data collection, analysis, and validation.

## PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The quantitative phase aimed to understand how youth in each country were coping with the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. With input from youth, the investigation team designed questions that aimed to probe the pandemic's impacts, identify barriers to recovery, understand how youth were responding to the challenges they face, and bring to light the new and innovative solutions they are developing.

Members of DOT's Youth Leadership Advisory Board were commissioned to participate in the development and refinement of investigation questions and to lead data collection efforts in each country. Data collection, analysis and synthesis was led by 60 Decibels (60db)—a lean data organization that was engaged as a partner. Under the guidance and supervision of youth team leaders, small teams of youth investigators in each country were trained in data collection techniques and conducted a rapid survey with other youth. Given government lockdown measures and the health and safety risks posed by the pandemic, surveys were conducted over the phone.

Youth investigators used Qualtrics, a data management software, to input data, and data was checked and cleaned regularly to ensure data quality. To protect confidentiality, unique identifiers were assigned to each respondent. 60db conducted descriptive analysis of the data, conducting calculations of central tendency and disaggregating results by country, gender, vulnerability score, and poverty profile. 60db also conducted various statistical tests to assess the significance between variables, in particular the differences between male and female respondents and age categories. Given the categorical nature of most variables in the investigation survey, contingency tests, such as Chi-Squared tests and Fisher's Exact Test, were commonly used to help determine if there are any non-random associations between the categorical variables. All tests were for a 0.1 significance level which corresponds to a 90% confidence interval.

## PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Leveraging the findings from the quantitative survey, phase two involved teams of youth investigators collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Participants in focus group discussions included: youth who had participated in the survey and representatives from youth-serving organizations that are helping youth navigate the pandemic. As with phase one, questions were designed with input from youth team leads in each country.

Qualtrics was used to input qualitative data, which was then cleaned and prepared for analysis. Analysis partner Fuata Africa led qualitative data analysis, which involved identifying emerging themes and patterns through thematic analysis. Importantly, to avoid pre-existing biases, the themes that were identified were not necessarily the most frequently mentioned beliefs or ideas. The thematic analysis paid particular attention to ideas that gave insight into resilience, innovation, and capacity for change. As such, the thematic analysis gave due weight to the complexity of the data to produce ‘adjacent possibilities’—narratives that offer alternative pathways of analysis and interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

In line with the commitment to youth-led research that forms the basis for this investigation, validation and recommendation sessions were held with youth investigators and youth research leads from each country. The sessions served to ground-truth the findings, and helped ensure that the interpretation of results and recommendations were derived in the real-life experiences of youth entrepreneurs.

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<sup>17</sup> Beckage, B., Gross, L. J., & Kauffman, S. (2011). The limits to prediction in ecological systems. *Ecosphere*, 2(11), 1-12. Retrieved January 2021, from Ecological Society of America: <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1890/ES11-00211.1>.



#DOTYouth Tobi Tumukunde

# Investigation Questions

There were several questions that guided the analysis of COVID-19's impact on youth entrepreneurship in the investigation countries.

1. How has COVID-19 impacted the lives and livelihoods of youth entrepreneurs?
2. What are the main concerns and challenges youth business owners are facing as they navigate the social and economic shocks brought on by COVID-19?
3. What coping strategies are entrepreneurs employing to sustain their livelihoods and keep their businesses afloat?
4. What proportion of youth have had to close their businesses due to COVID-19, and have they identified new ways to replace lost incomes?
5. How have entrepreneurs adapted their businesses in response to COVID-19?
6. What supports do youth entrepreneurs need to recover, and what services are available to them?



Representatives of the 46 Youth Investigators

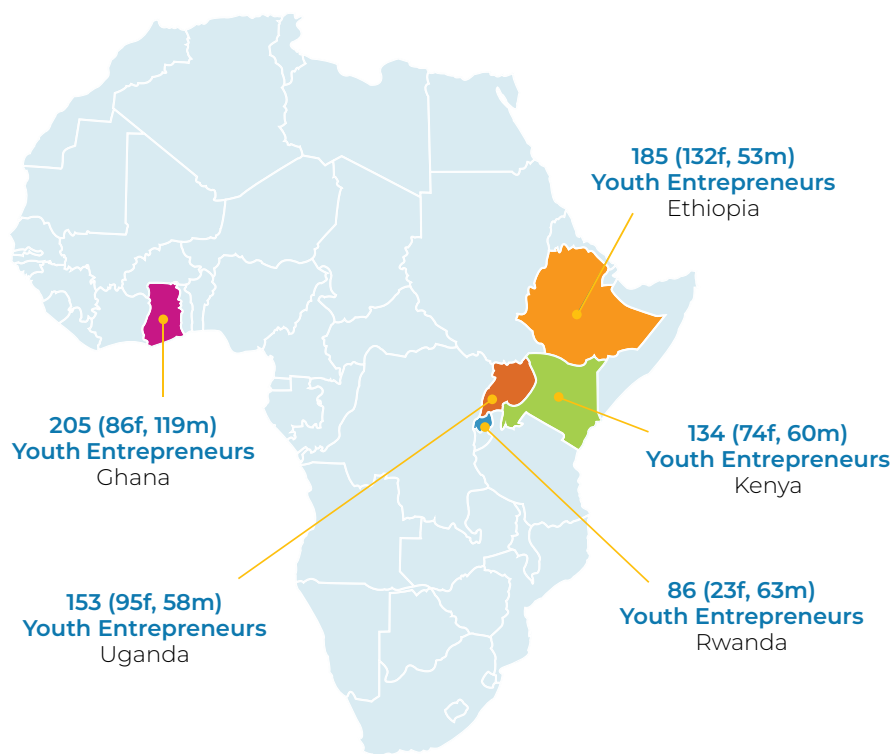


## Who is Speaking Out?

In line with the investigation's commitment to raise the voices of youth, the investigation was conducted in each country by a youth team leader and teams of six to nine investigators, with a minimum of 50% being female in each country. Team leaders were DOT alumni,<sup>18</sup> while youth investigators had prior experience with DOT or other similar initiatives. In Ghana and Uganda, youth investigators were selected in collaboration with community-based partners: the GhanaThink Foundation, and the Youth Equality Centre, respectively. All youth investigators participated in training on qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

Using mobile phones and tablets, 46 (25f, 21m) investigators conducted phone-based surveys using a standard questionnaire with 763 youth entrepreneurs (410f, 353m)<sup>19</sup> ages 18 to 35 who have participated in DOT, the Mastercard Foundation, or community partner programs in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda (Figure 1). Entrepreneurs were randomly selected from the population of program alumni to enhance representativeness. A subset of these respondents also participated in focus groups and in-depth interviews.

**FIGURE 1:** Youth entrepreneurs surveyed at a glance



<sup>18</sup> DOT Alumni are young women and men who have completed DOT's Youth Leadership Program, an experiential learning program that includes a community deployment period of 6 - 12 months where DOT Youth train their peers.

<sup>19</sup> This is a subset of the 1,535 (824f; 708m) youth from across the 5 countries who completed the survey, which included both entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs.

## WHO IS SPEAKING OUT?

50% of the total number of youth surveyed indicated that they are self-employed<sup>20</sup> or own their own businesses (Figure 2). As such, this investigation provides unique insight into the impact of COVID-19 on youth entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan-Africa, and how young business owners are coping and adapting their businesses in the face of the pandemic's negative economic effects.

**FIGURE 2:**  
Employment categories of survey respondents

Employment Category	Subcategory	%	Count
<b>Business Owners (49.9%)</b>	Self Employed	29.16%	421
	Formal Business	13.37%	193
	Informal Business	7.41%	107
<b>Waged Employment (38.37%)</b>	Full-Time Employment	23.06%	333
	Part-Time Employment	10.46%	151
	Informal Employment	4.85%	70
<b>Stipends (8.7%)</b>	Stipends From Parents	7.83%	113
	Stipends from Organizations	0.97%	14
<b>Other (4.1%)</b>	Other	4.09%	59

The highest proportion of entrepreneurs in the survey sample are from Ghana and Ethiopia, with the lowest proportion in Kenya and Rwanda (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3:** Percent of total respondents per country who are self-employed or business owners



<sup>20</sup> Across the investigation countries, 'self-employed' is an alternative term used by youth who own their own business or income-generating initiative.

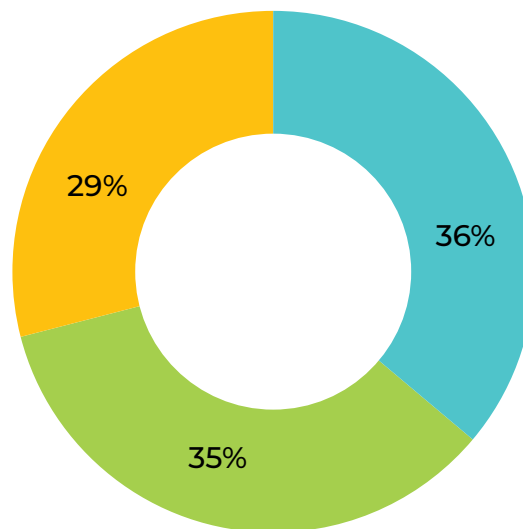
## SAMPLING STRATEGY

To recruit survey participants, a purposive, quota-based sampling strategy was used to randomly select youth entrepreneurs who had participated in Mastercard Foundation, DOT programs or community partner programs. The investigation aimed to recruit an equal or greater proportion of female entrepreneurs in each country to ensure adequate representation of women's voices. Overall, 54% of entrepreneurs surveyed are women.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

Over 70% of youth entrepreneurs surveyed are between the ages of 25 to 35 years old (Figure 4), with an average of four dependents. 62% indicate they are the primary income earners in their households.

**FIGURE 4:** Percent of youth entrepreneurs per age category

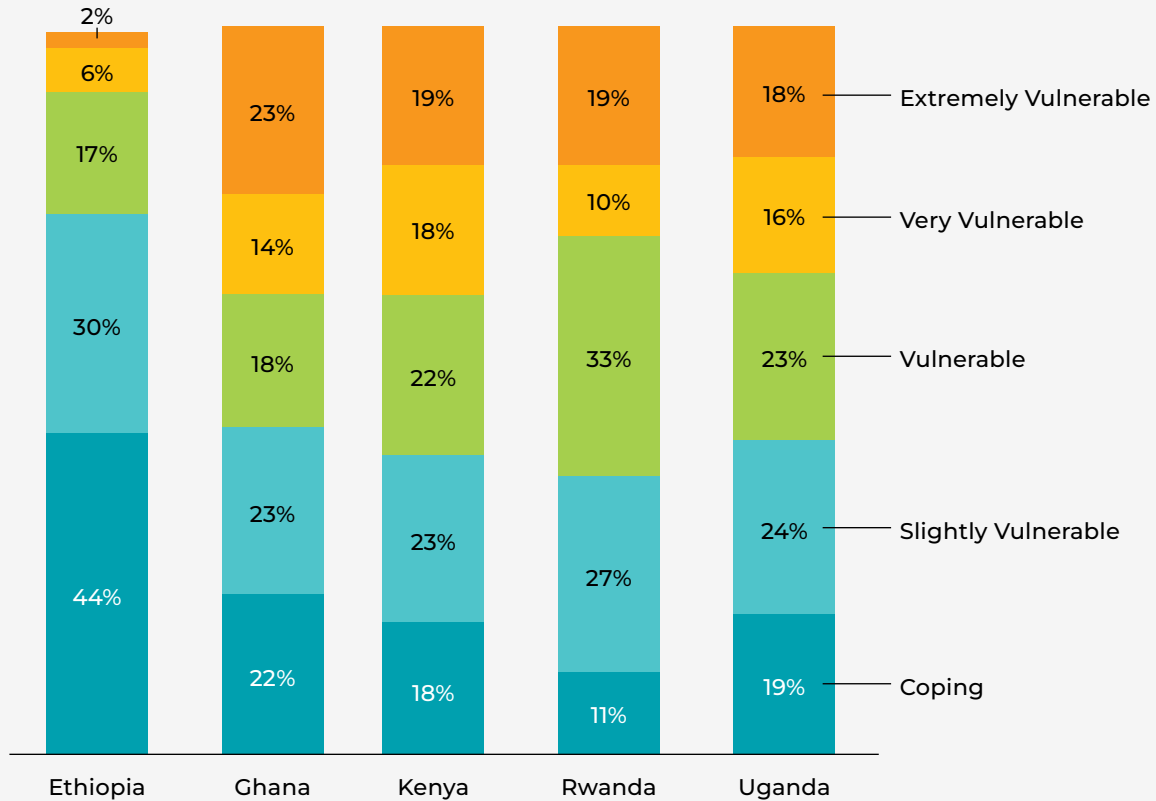


50% of youth entrepreneurs surveyed are classified as vulnerable according to 60 Decibels' vulnerability index, with the other half categorized as slightly vulnerable or coping.<sup>21</sup> For most of the investigation countries, the survey respondents fall into the vulnerable or slightly vulnerable category, other than in Ethiopia where 44% of entrepreneurs are classified as coping with the effects of the pandemic (Figure 5).

<sup>21</sup> The vulnerability index was developed by 60 Decibels. The index is a composite of multiple indicators that together assign a vulnerability score between 0 and 97, with higher scores indicating higher levels of vulnerability.



**FIGURE 5:** Vulnerability index of youth entrepreneurs per country<sup>22</sup>

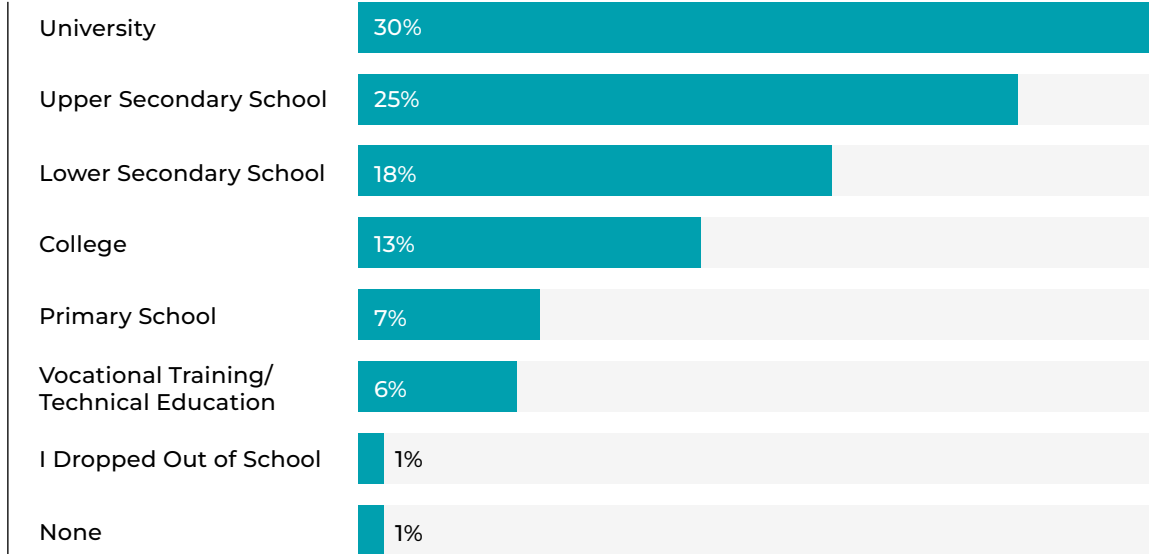


Almost half of respondents have completed some form of higher education. 30% have completed university, 13% have completed college education, and 6% have undertaken vocational training. An additional 43% have completed secondary education (Figure 6). The relatively high proportion of youth completing higher education suggests that youth who participated in this investigation have higher levels of education than the average young person in their countries. This is likely due to sampling bias – participants were selected from DOT and the Mastercard Foundation leadership programs that are often targeted towards youth with higher levels of education. In some countries, the regions where the investigation took place have higher literacy and education levels than the national average due to the presence of a college or university. For these reasons, the investigation sample does not necessarily reflect the average educational attainment of youth entrepreneurs in each country.

<sup>22</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

**FIGURE 6:**

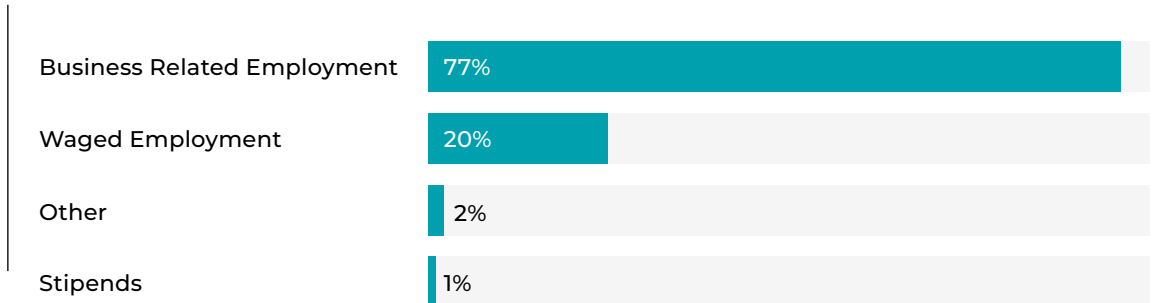
Highest level of education among youth entrepreneurs<sup>23</sup>



Of youth surveyed who indicate they are self-employed or business owners, more than 75% (N=586) report that their entrepreneurship was their primary source of income before COVID-19. Meanwhile, 20% (N=149) report that while they have some income from business related activity, salaried employment was their dominant source of income prior to the pandemic, and a small percentage (N=11) indicate relying primarily on stipends (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7:**

Dominant source of income among entrepreneurs before COVID-19



Almost half of youth entrepreneurs surveyed (N=317) have multiple livelihood streams, with 42% (43% of women and 41% of men) indicating they have waged income employment alongside their business-related livelihood.

<sup>23</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

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# Investigation Results

**The secondary effects of the pandemic are having a profound impact on the viability of youth-run MSMEs and youth self-employment.** Government lockdowns meant that many young women and men had to suspend their business operations temporarily or permanently. Economic downturns have made it difficult for young entrepreneurs to make ends meet as revenues have declined and access to inputs and markets reduced substantially.

**Lockdowns are forcing business owners to reduce the number of hours or days they are open, and stay-at-home mandates mean fewer customers, even for those businesses that can stay open.**

As a result, business owners are facing a shrinking customer base, limited access to raw materials, and reduced revenues. Youth entrepreneurs who participated in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews report that a steadily declining customer base is causing a significant drop in revenues. Several young people running established businesses that rely on contracts from large suppliers said they are struggling to make ends meet after major suppliers closed their doors or terminated their contracts.

**Unemployed youth who want to pivot to entrepreneurship, or those who want to pivot their businesses to respond to the impacts of COVID-19, struggle to access business start-up materials, business training and business advisory services.**

As a result, they are not able to access seed capital from venture funds or lending institutions due to underdeveloped or poorly developed business plans, which is exacerbated by limited capacity to conduct market research. Youth saw agriculture as

a viable market sector to enter during the pandemic, but there is a lack of enthusiasm for funding such ventures among investors in all of the investigation countries, particularly at the seed stage. Youth investigators report that several of the entrepreneurs they interviewed successfully grew new crops in large quantities, but in many cases, were unable to compete with larger agricultural companies, and the crops often went bad before they could sell them.

**For youth who have multiple income streams (N=317/42% of youth surveyed)-simultaneously juggling part-time employment and running a business-loss of employment is damaging the viability of their business due to a reduction in their assets and savings.**

Focus group discussions and interviews with youth highlight that access to finance to ride out the pandemic is the biggest challenge faced by young entrepreneurs, followed by temporary or permanent business closures. Young entrepreneurs in the investigation also report poor access to the support and services they would need to help keep their businesses afloat.

**Despite the grim statistics related to business closures and challenges youth-led businesses are facing, youth investigators report that entrepreneurs are having some success in reopening their businesses or starting new ventures as lockdown protocols are lifted.** While this investigation does not have data on these rebound rates, anecdotal information from each country suggests there is reason to be optimistic that many of these entrepreneurs will bounce back.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

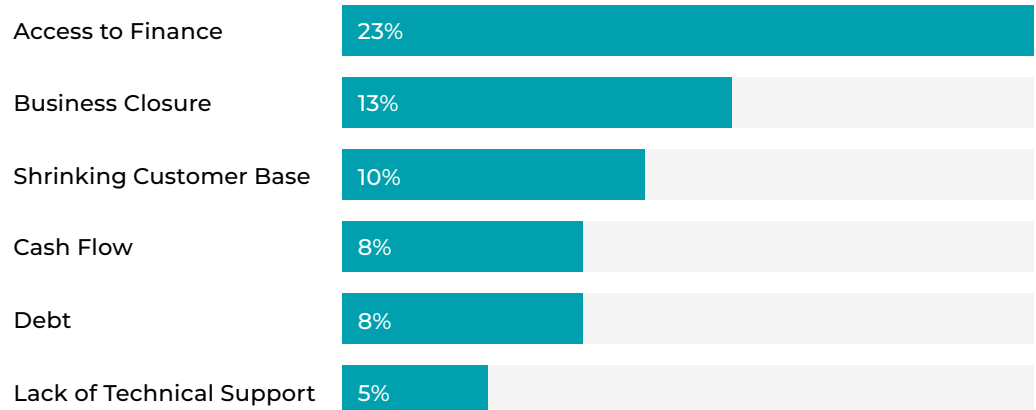
A quarter of youth entrepreneurs surveyed closed their businesses due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns, with closures occurring at roughly the same rate between men (26%) and women (25%). There is also little difference in rates of business closure between age groups (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8:** Proportion of youth entrepreneurs who closed their businesses by age group



In focus group discussions, youth entrepreneurs point to access to finance and business closures as the main challenges they have faced during COVID-19, also noting their businesses are suffering from a shrinking customer base and reduced cash flow (Figure 9).

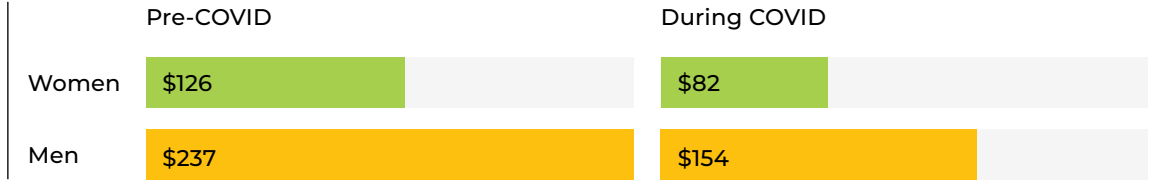
**FIGURE 9:** Main challenges youth entrepreneurs are facing during COVID-19



Among youth entrepreneurs who managed to stay in business during COVID-19 (75%), they report an average 35% decrease in earnings during the pandemic, with no difference in percent reduction between women and men (Figure 10).

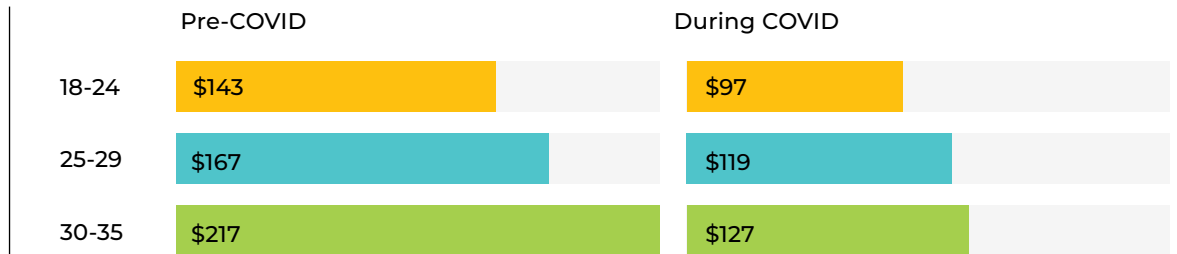


**FIGURE 10:**  
Average reduction in income among entrepreneurs by gender



Youth entrepreneurs between 18-24 and 25-29 years of age report similar percent declines in earnings on average (32% and 28% respectively), while youth aged 30-35 have experienced a greater decline (approximately 41%) in income on average (Figure 11). This may reflect that older youth are more established in their businesses, and as a result are often in higher income sectors that were harder hit during the pandemic. Youth entrepreneurs in the older age group are more likely to have several dependents, which may have made it more difficult for them to quickly pivot and find new opportunities for income generation. Finally, younger youth, who have less established businesses, tend to have more “side hustles”—multiple, small entrepreneurial activities—to meet their financial needs, which may make them more able to replace lost income during an economic shock. While they have less total income than older youth, such side hustles may be resulting in a smaller overall decline in their earnings.

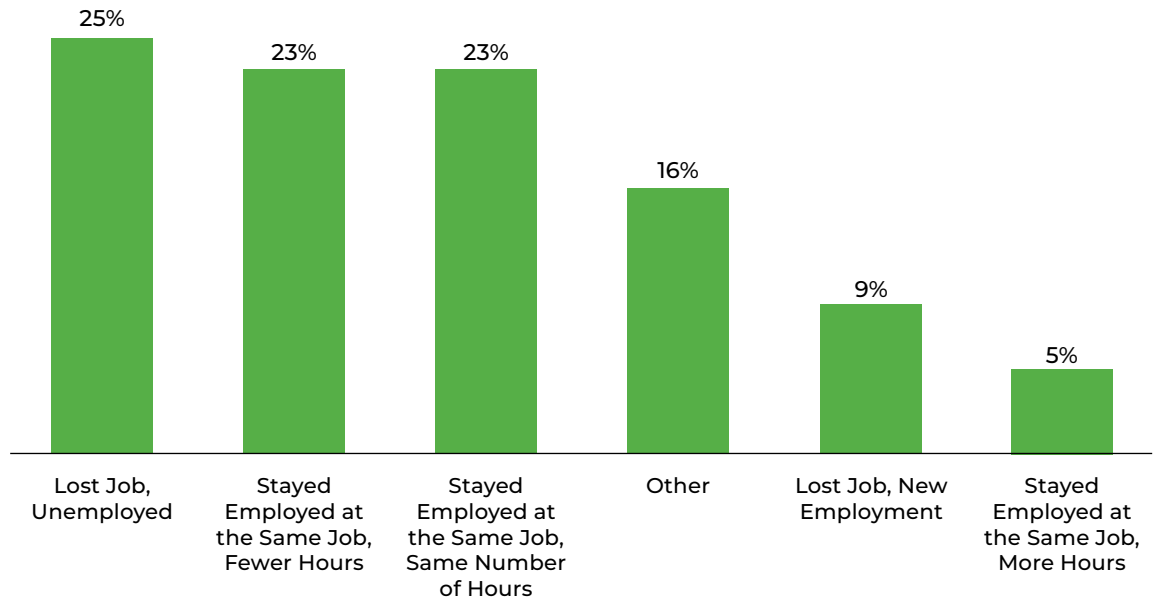
**FIGURE 11:**  
Average decline in income among entrepreneurs by age group



Youth entrepreneurs who report having waged income alongside their business activity have struggled to maintain their employment at the same number of hours during COVID-19. 25% of youth report losing their waged employment altogether, with 23% maintaining their employment, but with reduced hours. Meanwhile, 23% of youth entrepreneurs retained their waged employment at the same number of hours, while just 9% were able to replace their lost income with a new job (Figure 12).

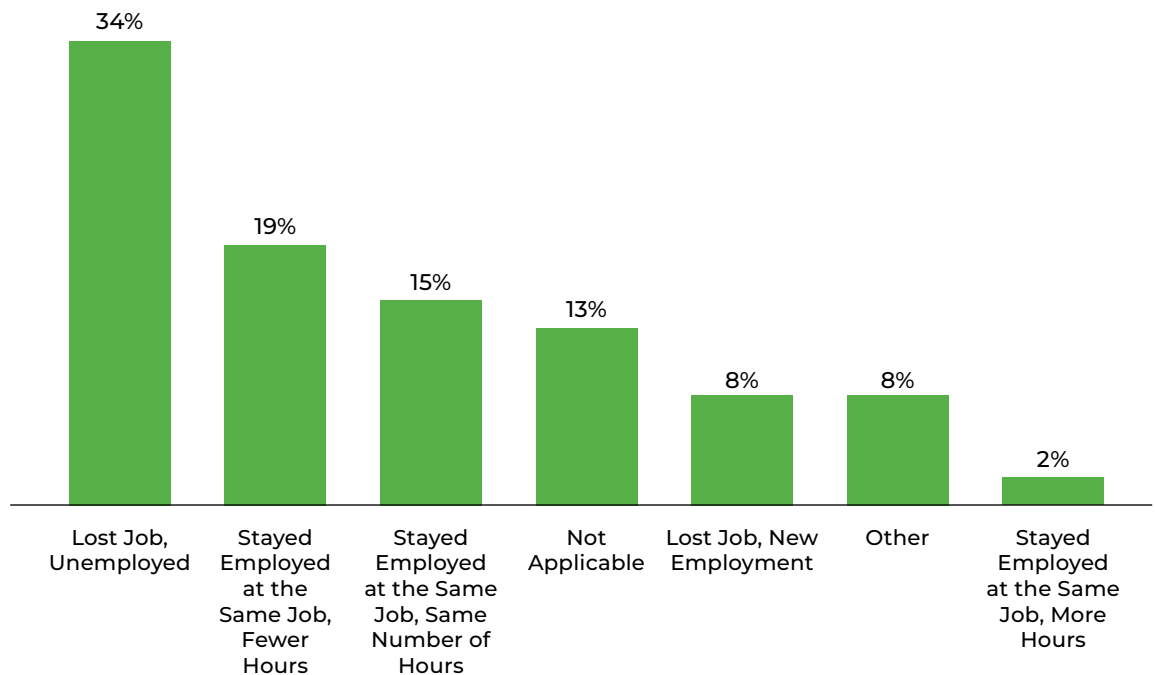
INVESTIGATION RESULTS

**FIGURE 12:**  
Impact on COVID-19 on jobs among entrepreneurs<sup>24</sup>



Interestingly, youth entrepreneurs with mixed livelihoods appear to be faring better than their peers who rely solely on waged employment, with 34% of wage earners reporting they lost their job during COVID-19 and remain unemployed. Entrepreneurs were also more successful than wage earners at retaining their employment at the same number of hours (Figure 13). These findings suggest that entrepreneurs with mixed livelihoods have an advantage in the labour market and are more resilient to economic shocks like COVID-19.

**FIGURE 13:**  
Impact on COVID-19 on jobs among waged employees (non-entrepreneurs)<sup>25</sup>



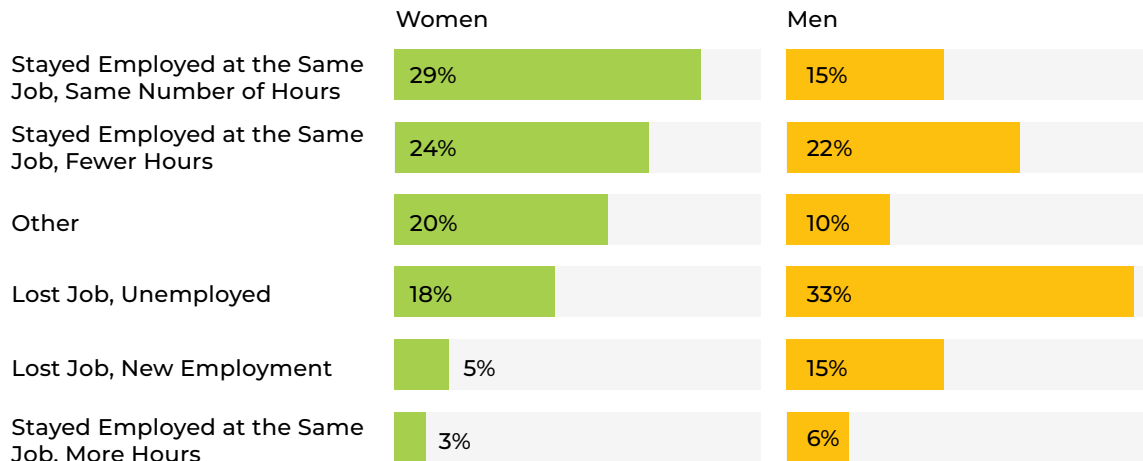
<sup>24</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

<sup>25</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

## INVESTIGATION RESULTS

Women entrepreneurs are significantly more likely to maintain their employment than men, with just 18% of women reporting they lost their waged employment entirely, compared to 33% of men. Similarly, 29% of women entrepreneurs report they stayed employed at the same number of hours, compared to just 15% of men (Figure 14).

**FIGURE 14:**  
Impact on COVID-19 on waged employment among entrepreneurs by gender<sup>26</sup>



The more pronounced impact of the pandemic on young men's livelihoods likely has to do with the fact that women-dominated business sectors in the investigation countries are often informal, and in many cases home-based, such as food services or handicrafts. For this reason, women may have been more able than men to continue working, where employment sectors dominated by men were likely more affected by government quarantine and lockdown measures.

Male entrepreneurs, on the other hand, have been more successful at replacing lost income with additional work, whether in the form of new jobs (15% of men compared to just 5% of women), or by taking on small, informal income generating opportunities (50% of men compared to 31% of women) (Figure 15).

**FIGURE 15:**  
Proportion of entrepreneurs doing additional work to earn income during COVID-19 by gender



This discrepancy is likely due both to the norms and expectations around men and women's roles in the household, and the sectors where work was available during lockdowns. Women were required to shoulder the burden of unpaid care during the

<sup>26</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

pandemic, reducing the time they have available to earn an income, operate a business, or participate in other economic activity.<sup>27</sup> Male-dominated sectors such as construction, farm work, or labour jobs were also less likely to be affected by lockdown protocols in the investigation countries than traditionally female sectors such as food services and hospitality. Youth investigators also indicate that some of the jobs that remained available during the pandemic required workers to sleep in common housing, which women were less willing or able to do because of safety reasons and child care responsibilities.



The types of additional work reported by youth include:

### Retail income

- “I sell second-hand goods”
- “I sell brewed coffee”
- “I started production at home of tomato sauce”
- “I started as a store-keeper”
- “I started selling spare car parts”

### Part-time manual labor

- “I’m providing labor services on others’ farms”
- “I took up plumbing”

### Training

- “I have been training campus students in TV production”
- “Tutoring some students at home”

### Agriculture

- “I started chicken farming and fruits farming”
- “I started helping my mom on the farm”
- “I planted cassava”

### Service industry

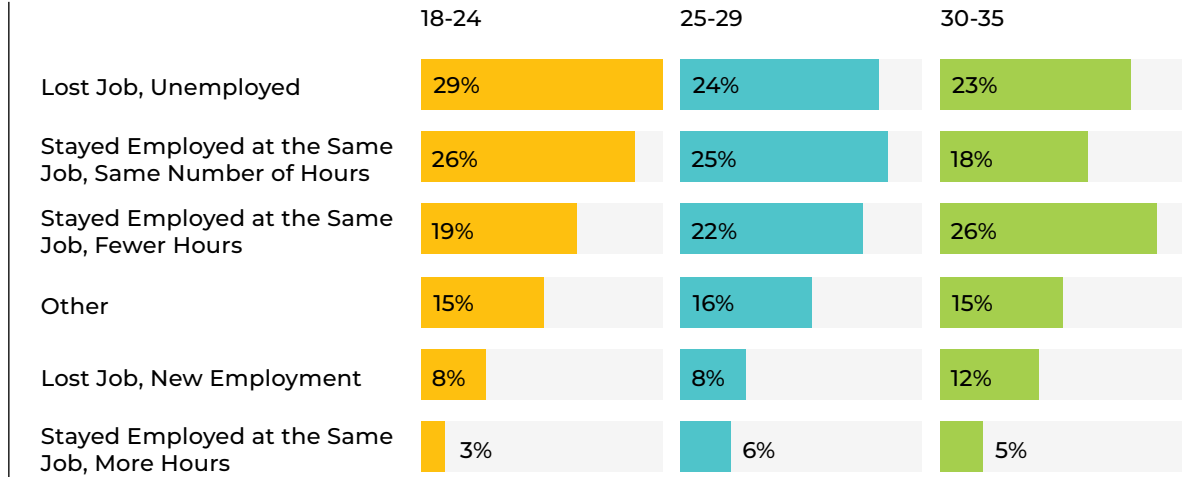
- “I started driving a taxi”
- “Started online writing”
- “Catering services”
- “Repairing laptops”
- “Tailoring”
- “I started a restaurant”

When comparing the impact of COVID-19 on waged employment of entrepreneurs, youth in the 18 – 24 age group are faring slightly worse than their older counterparts. 29% of youth ages 18 – 24 report they lost their job and have not found additional waged employment, compared to 24% of youth ages 25 – 29 and 23% of youth ages 30 – 35. Youth under 25 were also more likely to report staying employed at the same job with the same number of hours than women and men over 25 years old (Figure 16).

<sup>27</sup> CARE and the International Rescue Committee (2020). Global rapid gender analysis for COVID-19.

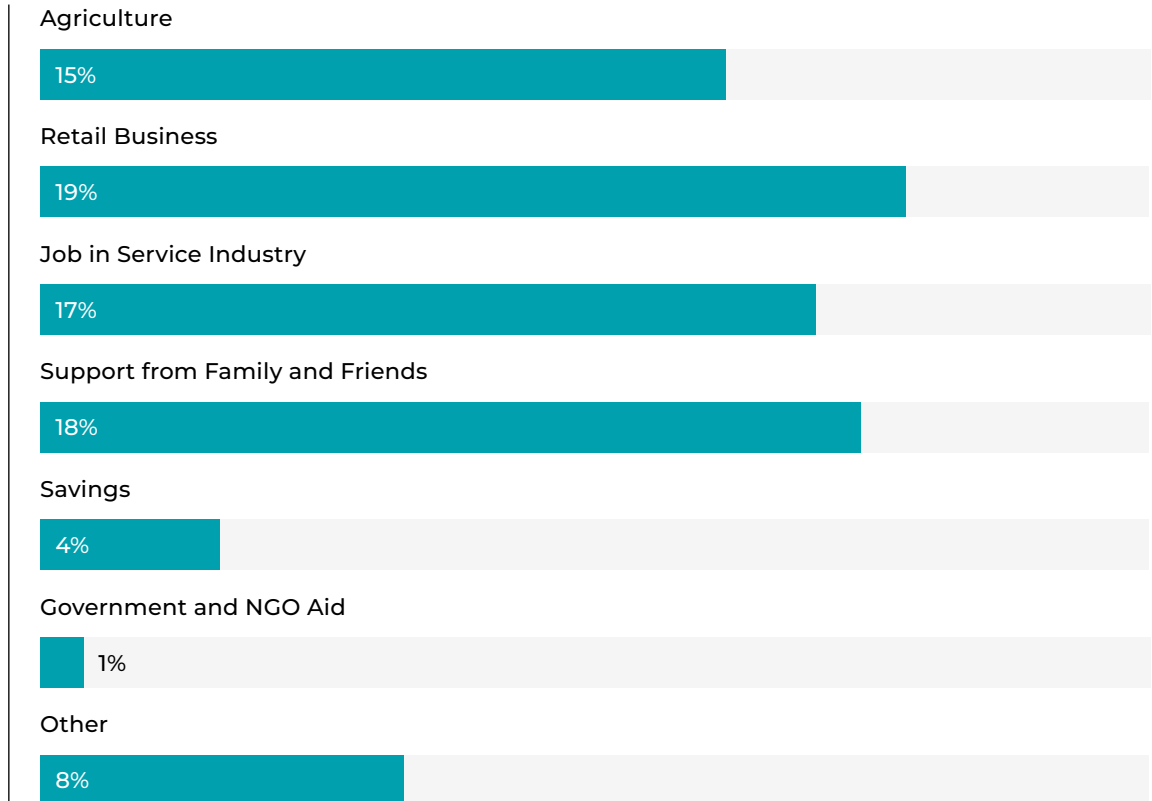


**FIGURE 16:**  
Impact on COVID-19 on waged employment among entrepreneurs by age group<sup>28</sup>



Given that many of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed took on additional work to replace income lost by closing their businesses or losing their salaried employment, the dominant source of income for many of them during COVID-19 has shifted from their entrepreneurship. They report a larger share of their income after COVID is coming from a variety of sources, including casual agricultural labour, jobs or business activity in the retail sector, jobs in the service industry, and support from family and friends (Figure 17).

**FIGURE 17:**  
Largest sources of household income among entrepreneurs during COVID-19



<sup>28</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.

The types of income youth are able to secure during COVID-19 likely reflects the nature of the lockdown policies in each of the investigation countries. In several countries, agriculture and industries providing essential goods and services were spared from lockdown protocols. Youth were able to find jobs or self-employment in small shops selling essential goods, on farms, and providing essential services like food delivery.

## HOW YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS ARE COPING AND ADAPTING

Despite the tremendous impact the pandemic is having on the livelihoods of youth entrepreneurs, three quarters of women and men surveyed (N=574) are weathering the storm – employing a variety of coping strategies to keep their ventures afloat. The investigation revealed that many youth are employing short-term survivalist strategies, such as using savings to keep operations running, shutting down their businesses, borrowing money, taking on additional work, or decreasing the number of hours the business is open per day. Fewer of them are employing more long-term coping strategies that could help them increase their resilience to future shocks, such as changing the product or service or starting a new business to meet new market conditions and demands, diversifying their revenue streams, or digitizing their business through e-commerce, fintech, or online marketing (Figure 18).



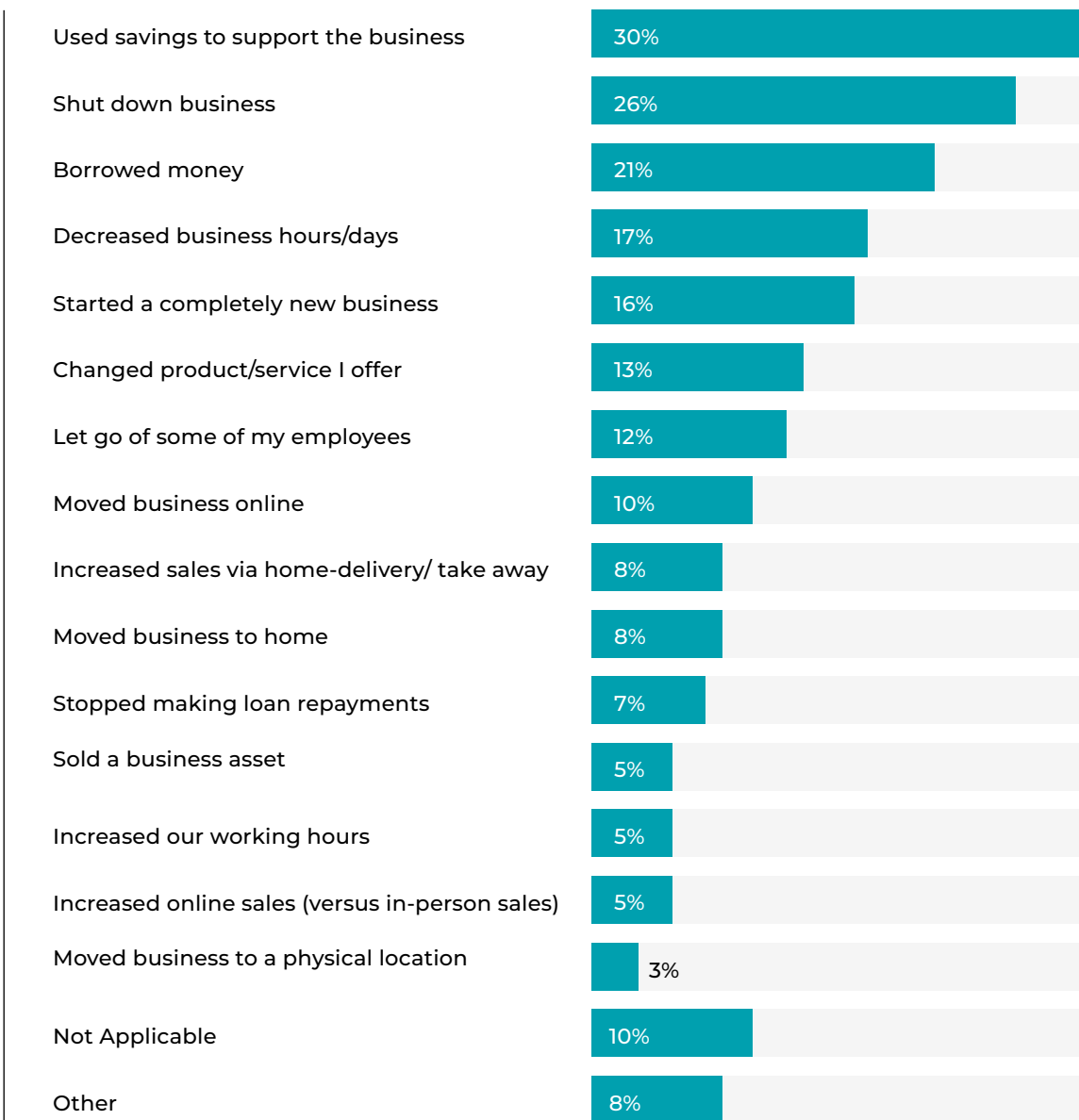
## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Unable to work at his telecom job in Uganda due to COVID related lockdowns, Davis Kamugisha was seeing his savings slowly dwindle. He decided to start a business to earn additional income. Realizing that food and grocery sales were one of the few businesses still allowed to operate under restrictions, he bought beans and rice from farmers and sold to retailers.

He has slowly built a customer base through marketing and increased his income, enabling him to replenish his savings.

**-Davis (29), Uganda**

**FIGURE 18:**  
Coping strategies employed by youth entrepreneurs



## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Wathira is a woman entrepreneur in Kenya. During COVID-19, with few other opportunities available, she developed an interest in hatching and selling chicks in her home village. With the little money she had in savings, she invested in purchasing chickens and started selling the eggs to build up her financial reserves.

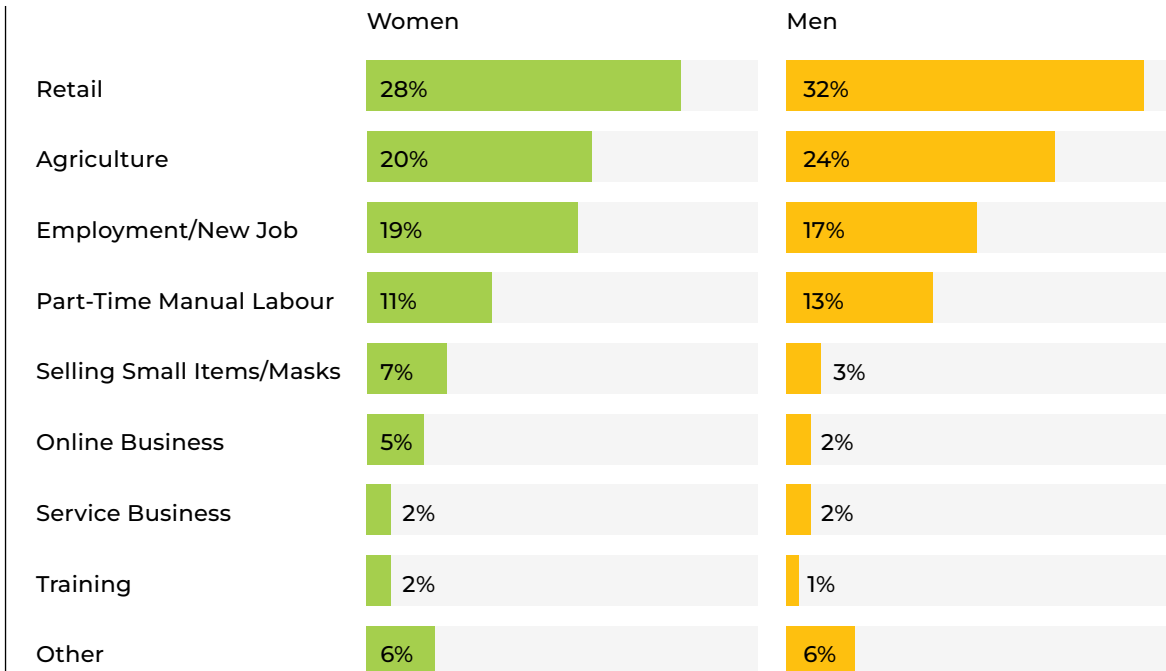
In September 2020, Waithira returned to Nairobi and was able to revive her online business with the income she made selling chickens and eggs. With the business at home generating income, she felt comfortable bouncing back to her online business.

**-Waithira (26), Kenya**

INVESTIGATION RESULTS

26% of youth entrepreneurs have taken on additional income generating activities, such as selling small items, doing manual labour or working on farms to recuperate lost business income (Figure 19).

**FIGURE 19:**  
Sources of additional income



Youth entrepreneurs are demonstrating financially resilient behaviors to address the economic effects of the pandemic on their businesses. Lacking other forms of financial access, young people commonly dipped into their savings, personal cash reserves, sought financial support from friends and family, or reduced their staff and business operations to keep their ventures afloat. However, men are more likely to report a reliance on saving, demonstrating that they typically have more of a financial safety



**YOUTH SPOTLIGHT**

When Rwanda imposed lockdown measures to deal with rising COVID-19 infections, Sharon Munyazikwiye was worried about the security of his job as a Project Manager. Sharon recognized that people were struggling to move from one place to another when public transit

was temporarily halted to flatten the curve. Sharon owned a car and, teaming up with a colleague, founded a new business to safely transport people across the country.

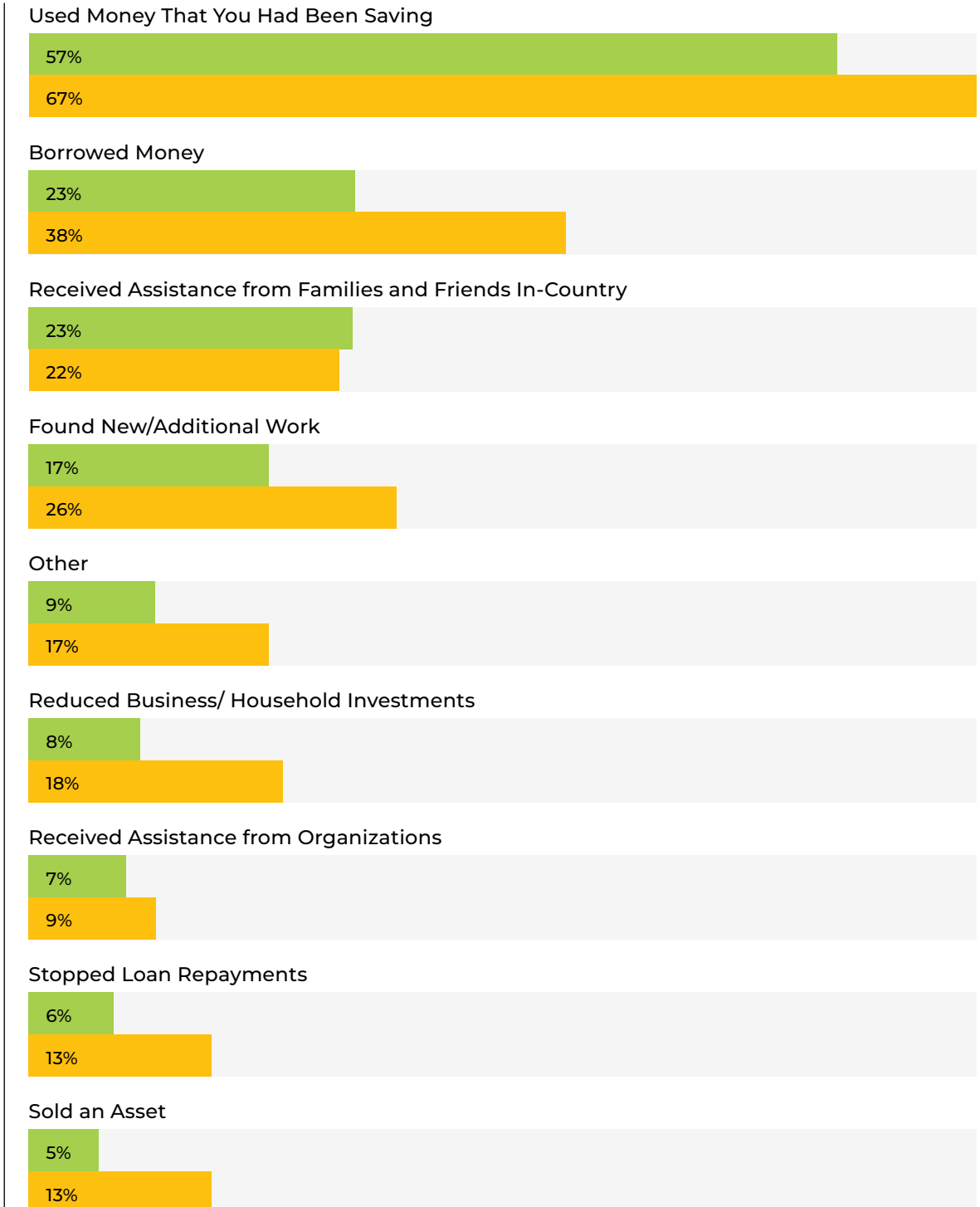
**- Sharon, Rwanda**



net to fall back on during shocks than women. Men are also more likely to report borrowing money from formal lenders compared to women who primarily relied on loans from family and friends, pointing to men's higher level of financial inclusion (Figure 20). However, women entrepreneurs in the investigation are less likely on average to cut costs by laying off staff, a finding that echoes other studies.<sup>29</sup>

**FIGURE 20:**  
Financial coping strategies by gender

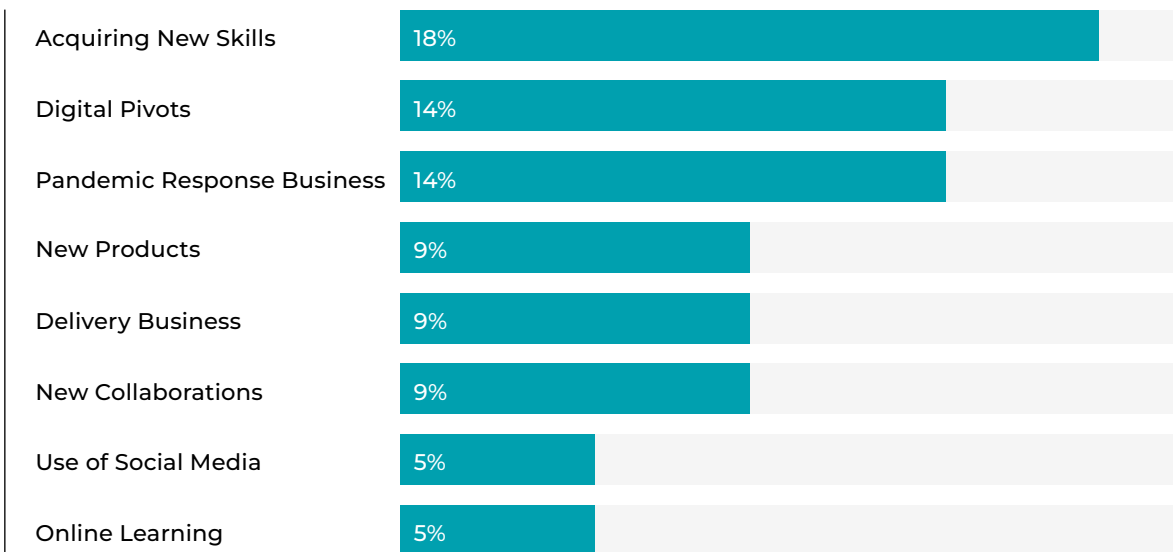
● Women  
● Men



<sup>29</sup> Ibid

Qualitative data supports these findings, demonstrating that while some youth are employing creative coping strategies, such as making digital pivots, the majority are struggling to survive. Focus group discussions with representatives from community organizations and financial institutions identified emerging business trends and innovations that youth entrepreneurs are developing to respond to COVID-19 and to capitalize on new market opportunities. Respondents reported they have observed the ability for young men and women to transform their personal or vocation skills into business opportunities. For example, youth that are digitally savvy have been able to start new tech businesses, or to use digital to transform existing businesses. Others are developing new skills to start a new skills-based business. Respondents also report that they have noticed a rise in pandemic response initiatives in their communities, as well as businesses that aim to support vulnerable communities, such as developing online learning courses, making masks, distributing sanitizers, or doing home delivery of foods and essential products (Figure 21).

**FIGURE 21:**  
Business innovations most commonly identified



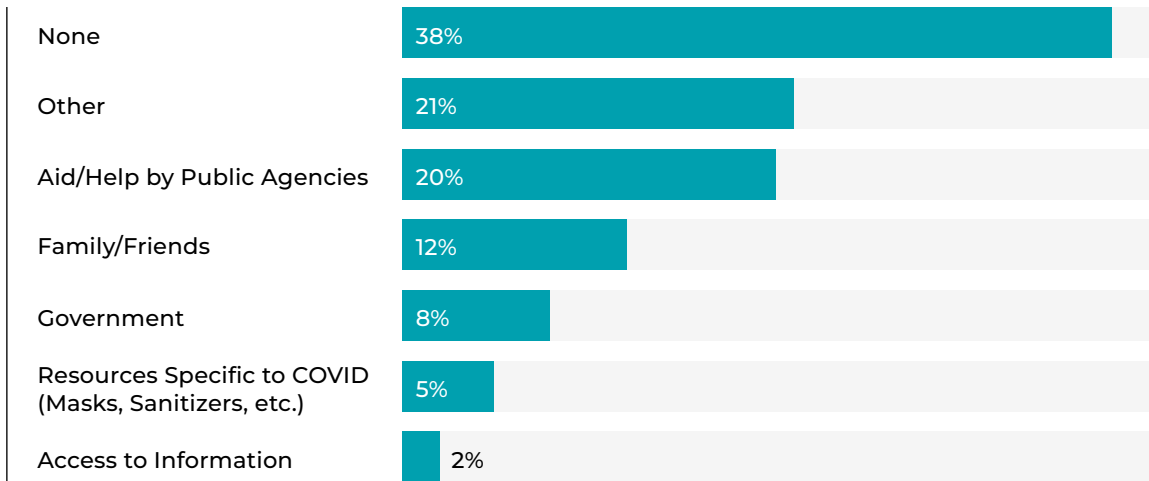
Validation sessions with youth investigators further supported this finding. They noted that young women and men who have adapted their business models by embracing digital marketing and sales have had greater success in keeping their ventures open or reopening after a period of closure.

Despite this potential, respondents from youth-serving institutions stress that many of these new ideas and innovations are necessity-based or opportunistic and, as such, are focused on short-term opportunities that may not be sustained post-pandemic. For this reason, they indicate it is important to provide young innovators with programmatic support that can build their capacities to move beyond a survival mindset, and to identify sustainable market opportunities that have longer term potential.

## SUPPORT YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS NEED TO SURVIVE AND RECOVER

Most respondents, particularly those outside of urban centers, did not seek assistance and were not aware of the existence of COVID-19 resources. For this reason, when asked what resources are available, most survey respondents (72%) didn't respond. Of those who did, 38% (N=284) indicate there is no support, followed by 20% (N=147) who are aware of aid being offered by public agencies, such as non-profit organizations (Figure 22).

**FIGURE 22:** COVID-19 resources available to youth entrepreneurs<sup>30</sup>



<sup>30</sup> Figure 22 includes the 7 most frequent responses from the survey.



### YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Adwoa is the founder and CEO of Women's Haven Africa (WHA), a female tech and innovation hub focused on increasing the participation of women in entrepreneurship, leadership, and technology in the Ashanti region of Ghana. WHA is a thriving social enterprise that had trained more than 100 women in entrepreneurship and technology prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the government

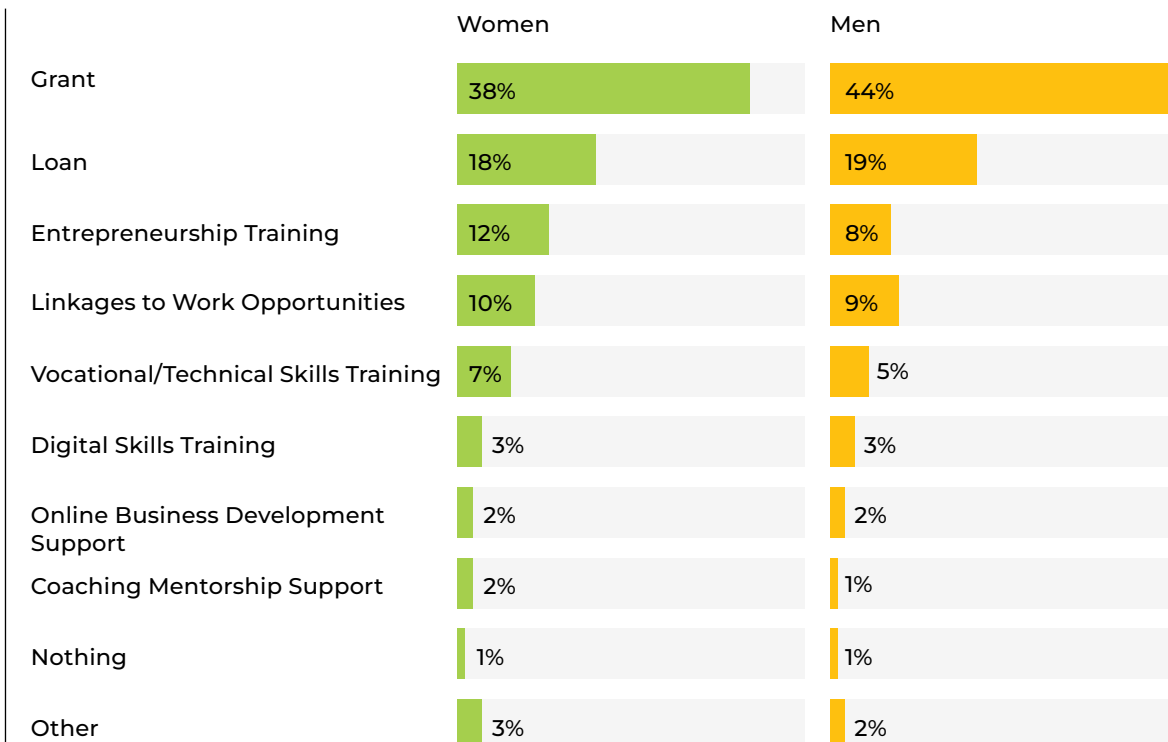
implemented strict lockdowns in Ghana, WHA had to adapt its in-person delivery system to the new reality and shifted all of its programs online. This adaptation has proven successful, with WHA training more than 200 young women in coding, data analytics, leadership, and enterprise start-up through Google Meet and Zoom.

- Adwoa (25), Ghana

## INVESTIGATION RESULTS

When asked what types of support they would find most valuable, young business owners most commonly reported they urgently need financial support in the form of personal loans, grants, start-up capital, and growth capital to help their businesses survive over the short and medium term. The second most important need among survey respondents is access to business training, which would have both short term and longer-term benefits (Figure 23).

**FIGURE 23:**  
Support youth entrepreneurs need to survive COVID-19<sup>31</sup>



Respondents in focus group discussions noted that over the short term, business training could help them determine how to cut costs, and how to use their resources more effectively and wisely. Over the medium to longer term, young entrepreneurs point to the importance of business training to help them gain the strategic management skills they need to move their ventures from the pandemic survival stage to sustainability and growth stages.

In terms of shorter-term support, focus group respondents consistently mentioned the need for loan structures and terms that are more youth-friendly and accessible. These include low-interest loans for youth without collateral, and lenders, including governments, that are willing to provide loans for high-risk borrowers and have more flexible repayment conditions. Entrepreneurs report they need on average \$2,236 to recover their businesses from the impacts of COVID-19. Men need significantly more capital to recover than women, reflecting that their businesses tend to be larger and more cost intensive to operate.

<sup>31</sup> Values are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum to 100%.



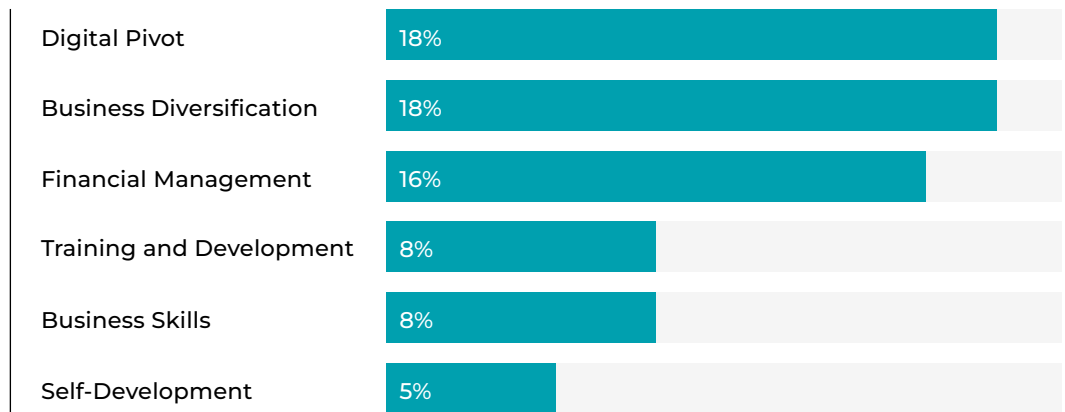
**TABLE 1:** Capital required for recovery

Age	Women	Men
18-24	\$785	\$2,057
25-29	\$1,490	\$3,558
30-35	\$2,175	\$3,650

Training was another consistent theme that emerged among focus group participants. Young entrepreneurs stressed the importance of training to help them adapt their businesses during COVID-19, such as online marketing and branding, as well as training in financial management to determine how best to cut costs while remaining open.

Youth entrepreneurs who participated in focus group discussions have several recommendations for how to strengthen the resilience of MSMEs to withstand future shocks, including better integrating digital technology more successfully into businesses, diversifying products and services to better adapt to rapidly changing market conditions, and developing financial management skills to build a stronger safety net (Figure 24).

**FIGURE 24:** Peer recommendations for youth entrepreneurs to strengthen businesses (Qualitative)<sup>32</sup>



**“The government could really help businesses survive by providing loans with better payment plans.”**

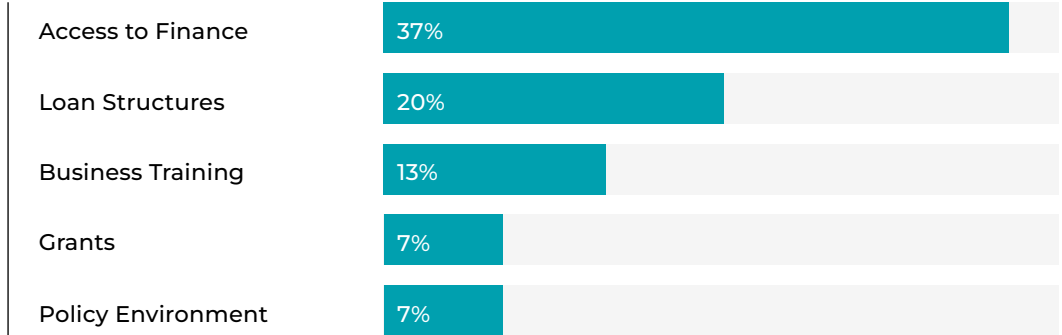
**- Entrepreneur, Uganda**



<sup>32</sup> Figure 24 includes the 6 most prominent themes emerging from the qualitative sessions.

Supporting survey data, focus group participants overwhelmingly point to the need for access to financial resources to recover from the effects of the pandemic and to get their businesses back to pre-COVID levels of stability (Figure 25).

**FIGURE 25:** Support youth entrepreneurs need after COVID-19 (Qualitative)<sup>33</sup>



**“The big word is capital. Capital to existing youth-led businesses to boost them up, and to those who are just starting to help them start.”**

**-Entrepreneur, Kenya**



<sup>33</sup> Figure 25 includes the 5 most prominent themes emerging from the qualitative sessions.



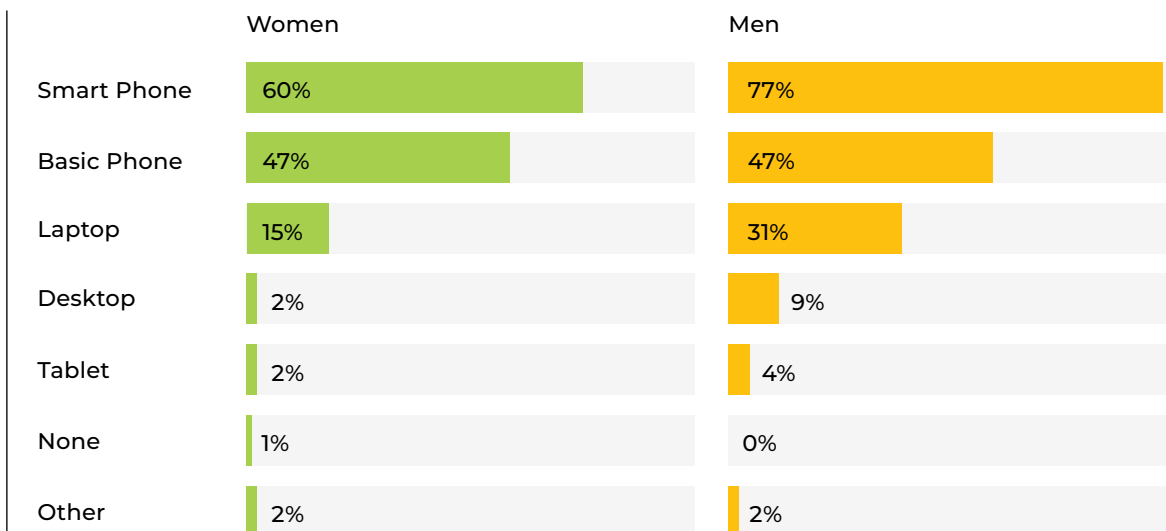
#DOTYouth Jaariah MisyaJeis

## ACCESS AND USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS AMONG ENTREPRENEURS

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the critical importance of digital platforms and technologies to provide and access essential services and consumer goods, facilitate remote working, connect with family and friends, facilitate new income generating opportunities, and access educational and training opportunities. Some studies suggest that COVID-19 has accelerated digital adoption globally by several years.<sup>34</sup> Across Sub-Saharan-Africa, the effects of the pandemic could accelerate digital transformation in certain sectors, such as health, financial services, retail, education, and government.<sup>35</sup> As such, there is tremendous opportunity for entrepreneurs to take advantage of these market shifts by integrating a digital component to existing businesses or starting a new business that takes advantage of rising consumer demand for e-commerce, fintech, e-learning, e-health, remote collaboration, and teleconferencing services.

Access to internet enabled devices is high among the entrepreneurs surveyed. The rate of ownership far exceeds the proportion of adults who use mobile internet in Sub-Saharan-Africa on a daily basis, which was 23% at the end of 2018.<sup>36</sup> However, despite high rates of device ownership, there is a clear gender digital divide, with men reporting significantly higher rates of access to internet enabled devices than women (Figure 26).

**FIGURE 26:**  
Digital device ownership among youth entrepreneurs



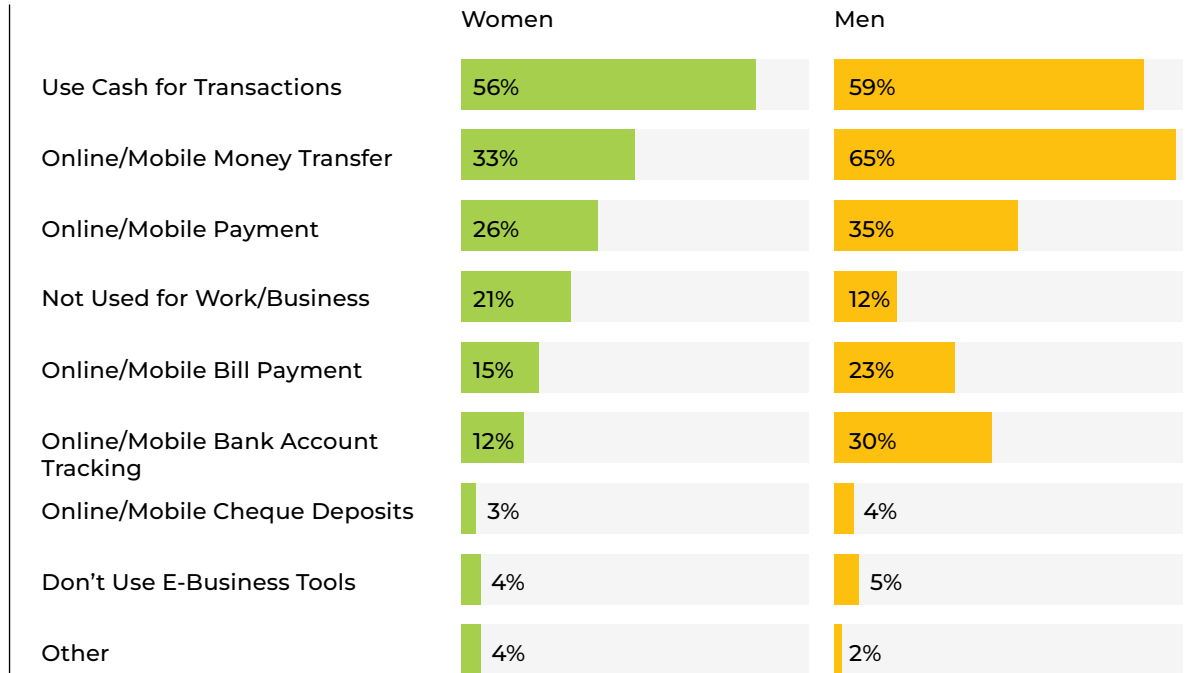
<sup>34</sup> McKinsey & Company (2020, October 5). How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever. Retrieved February 2021, from McKinsey: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever#>.

<sup>35</sup> Binda, T.L. (2020, September 24). New Voices in Africa - Covid-19 As a Catalyst for Digital Transformation. Retrieved February 2021, from Instiut Montaine: <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/new-voices-africa-covid-19-catalyst-digital-transformation>.

<sup>36</sup> GSMA Association (2019). The mobile economy in Sub-Saharan-Africa 2019. Retrieved January 2022 from GSMA: <https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/sub-saharan-africa/>

While entrepreneurs surveyed report using some fintech services for their businesses, adoption is lagging, with 56% of women and 59% of men reporting they primarily use cash for business transactions. Women entrepreneurs are less likely than men to use digital financial services in their businesses, with 21% of women vs 12% of men reporting they do not use them at all. The most commonly reported tool among both men and women is mobile money transfers (Figure 27).

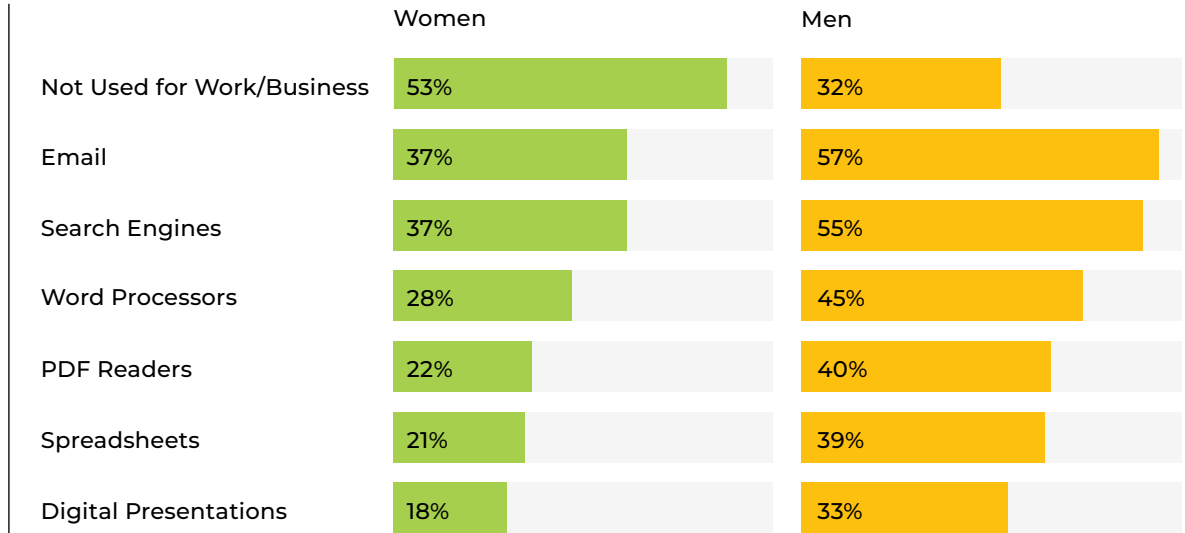
**FIGURE 27:**  
Fintech used for business



Male entrepreneurs are also using basic digital tools such as email, search engines, word processors and spreadsheets at higher rates than women, with 53% of women respondents vs 32% of men reporting they do not use any digital tools in their businesses. For both genders, email and internet search engines are the most commonly used tools (Figure 28).

**FIGURE 28:**

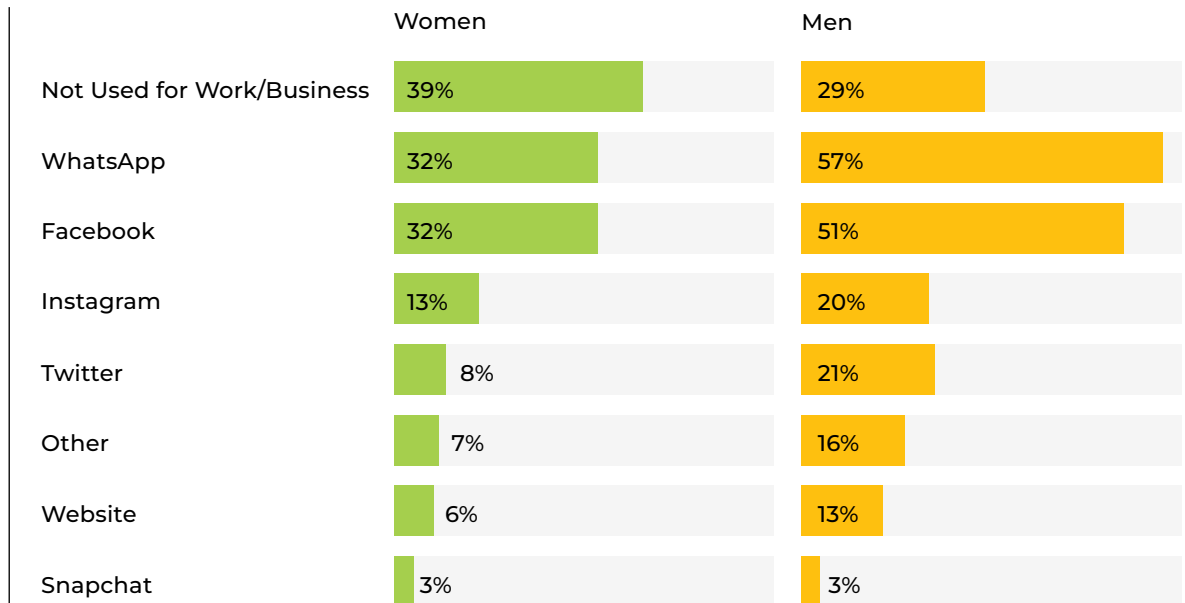
Digital tools used for business



Whatsapp is the most commonly used social media platform for business among survey respondents, followed by Facebook. Similar to other digital services and tools, men are much more likely than women entrepreneurs to use social media as a part of their business operations. 39% of women compared to 29% of men report they do not use social media at all for running their ventures (Figure 29).

**FIGURE 29:**

Social Media Used for Business





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## Conclusions and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dire impact on youth entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan-Africa. Moreover, while often considered drivers of economic growth and recovery, youth entrepreneurs are often left out of discussions on how to support business sector recovery after COVID-19, and their needs are seldom considered in policy response. Youth entrepreneurs tend to have micro or small businesses and are most often engaged in informal business sectors that have low barriers to entry by high market competition. This informality has meant that they often cannot access formal finance and social protection instruments.<sup>37</sup> Youth also typically have less access to entrepreneurship support ecosystems that could help them build business resilience. Finally, despite high levels of access to digitally enabled devices among the youth entrepreneurs who participated in this investigation, at least 30% are not using digital tools and services at all to optimize their businesses. These conditions, which have been further exacerbated by COVID-19, mean that a critical opportunity to help African economies recover through youth innovation and entrepreneurship may be missed.

As numerous studies on the impact of COVID-19 on youth entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan-Africa demonstrate, young women entrepreneurs are disproportionately impacted, and women-led enterprises across the continent are facing greater revenue losses than those owned by men.<sup>38</sup> This is largely due to well-documented differences in the types of businesses women own compared to men, which are often in informal and less profitable sectors, smaller in size, and

have less assets that could be used to weather the storm during economic shocks. Women entrepreneurs are less likely than men to employ the use of digital tools in their businesses, and they are missing out on important opportunities to take advantage of the rapid digitization occurring in the investigation countries. Furthermore, the pandemic makes long-standing challenges with access to finance for female entrepreneurs even more difficult as lenders become more risk-averse amidst economic recessions.

There is evidence from the investigation that youth entrepreneurs are surviving the difficult economic conditions they face. Three-quarters of youth have managed to stay in business, either by adapting their businesses to changing conditions, pivoting to online sales, and marketing, reducing operating costs, securing grants or loans, taking on additional paid work, or using their personal cash reserves or support from family and friends to offset revenue losses. However, most of their efforts are focused on short-term survival, and few have been able to move beyond meeting their immediate needs to improving their resilience to withstand future shocks.

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<sup>37</sup> Saisha, A. (2020). Leveraging Africa's informal economy for young people. Project Syndicate: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/africa-informal-economy-youth-unemployment-by-alice-saisha-2020-10>.

<sup>38</sup> Koyama, N., Sock, M., and Kwan, K. (2020). Applying a gender lens to post-COVID economic recoveries: A spotlight on women-led businesses in Africa. Dalberg Advisors: <https://dalberg.com/our-ideas/applying-a-gender-lens-to-post-covid-economic-recoveries-a-spotlight-on-women-led-businesses-in-africa/>.

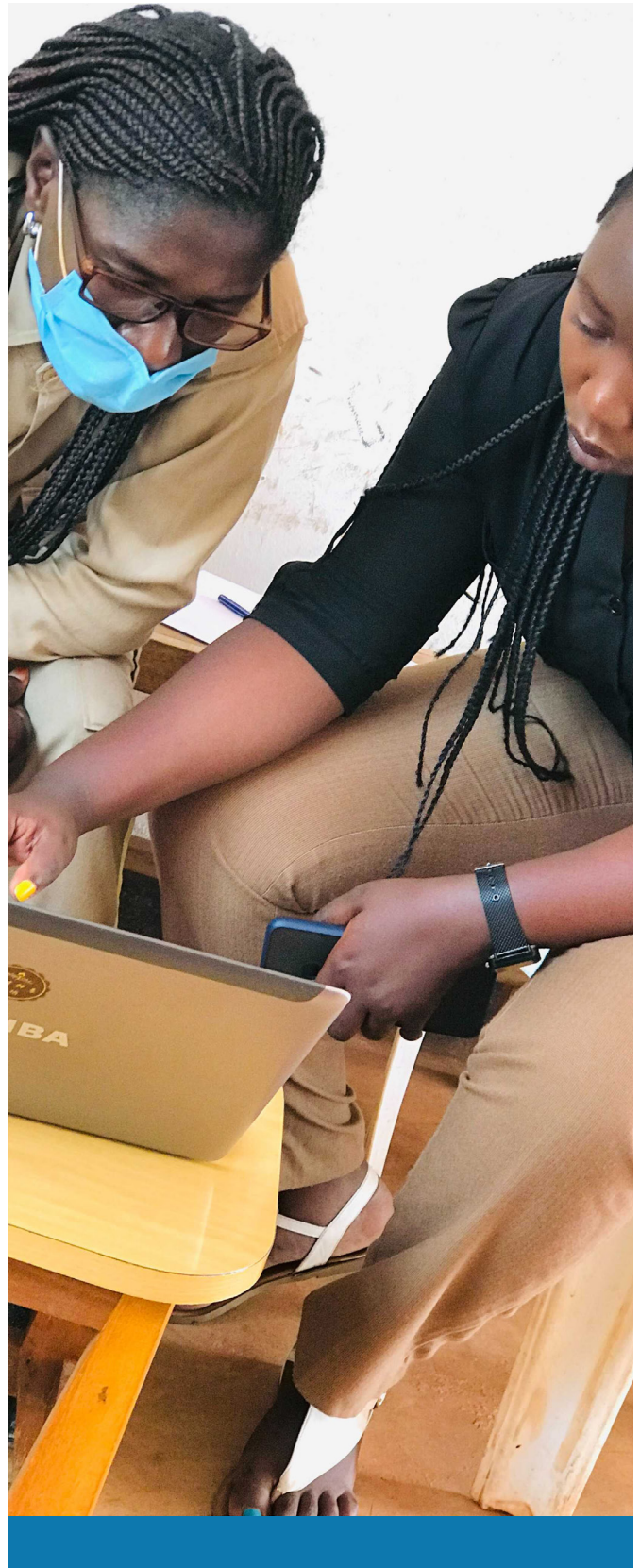


## RECOMMENDATIONS

**We urgently need unsecured recovery capital.** Young women and men in countries of focus urgently need access to non-recoverable forms of finance and debt relief to help their businesses survive over the short-term. Only then will they be able to start building the adaptive and transformative capacities they need to build back better.

**There is no quick solution, we need short-term emergency support that is aligned with longer-term social and economic recovery.** Youth entrepreneurs need proactive solutions for rebuilding and re-imaging business models, forming new collaborations and alliances, and creating a culture of perseverance and resilience. Ongoing skills training, access to innovative financial products, and access to tailored business advisory services, coaching, networks, and sources of motivation and inspiration.

**We need solutions that are led by us, flexible, and responsive to our diverse needs.** Leverage the organic mobilization of youth entrepreneurs that has occurred across Sub-Saharan-Africa in response to the crisis as a way to reach the most vulnerable youth and help them thrive through peer-based support, business capacity, motivation, and inspiration. Design flexible and demand-driven mechanisms to equip entrepreneurs with the funding, training, and network-building they need to harness the potential they possess to drive transformative change and economic growth in their societies.

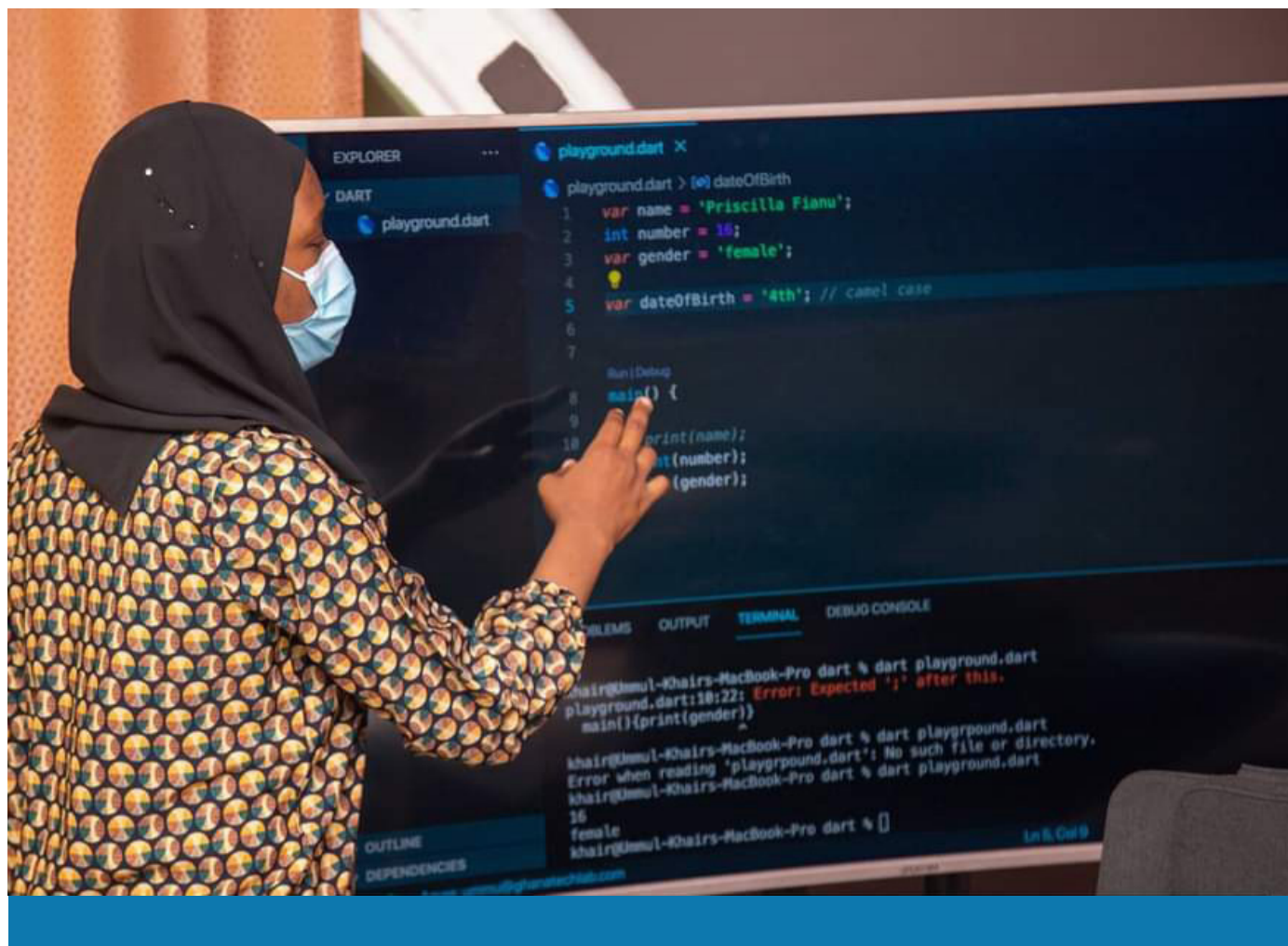


#DOTYouth Rosine Igirimpuhwe

**Support us to transform our businesses and respond to new digitally-enabled market opportunities.**

COVID-19 has brought about shifts in consumer behavior, such as online e-commerce and mobile money to purchase goods and services, that will likely persist long after the pandemic has ended. Youth that do not embrace digitization in their businesses will be left behind. Young women entrepreneurs are lagging behind men in their adoption of new technologies. Supporting youth enterprises, particularly women-led ventures, to digitize through gender-sensitive digital skills training and tailored coaching could help scale micro and small enterprises and improve their resilience.

We need an entrepreneurship ecosystem that understands and responds to our unique situations and needs as young female entrepreneurs. Gender-sensitive policies and programs are required to bolster enabling environments for women entrepreneurs. Women continue to do business in high competition sectors with low barriers to entry at rates much higher than men. This means that they tend to operate informal and low profit ventures. More targeted support is needed to help women transition to formal businesses and enter higher margin markets and sectors.



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