

The Financial Impact of Coronavirus in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

In the months since the COVID-19 outbreak started, it has already wreaked havoc on global economies; It is estimated that almost **half the world's population** is at risk of job loss due to COVID-19, and the **World Bank has forecasted** that the pandemic will cause the largest recession in over 50 years. Industries such as tourism are not expected to fully recover from the **economic shock for several years**, and global trade and demand are already decreasing.

The economic impact of COVID-19 is being felt globally, but economies classified as 'emerging' and 'developing' by the World Bank, which includes those in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, are **likely to be hardest hit**. The combination of largely **informal workforces**, **decrease in export demand**, and existing economic instability is expected to result in an outsize impact in countries such as **South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia**.

In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been predicted that coronavirus will result in the **first recession in that region for 25 years**. Most countries in the region have not yet experienced their **peak in COVID-19 cases**, and it's possible that coronavirus-related measures and the related economic impacts will continue for some time. Kenya, for example, has already experienced over **1.2 million lost jobs**, but continues to implement lockdowns and curfews in key areas such as Nairobi. South Africa, which has the highest number of COVID-19 cases in sub-Saharan Africa, has begun lifting restrictions and **introduced a stimulus package**, but many experts say more is needed to spur an economic recovery.

At the same time as countries themselves put COVID-related restrictions in place, the global economic pressures may result in decreased international lending for many of the countries that rely on outside funding; Mozambique, for example, has already accepted **\$309 million in assistance** from the International Monetary Fund. When taken together, these factors could prolong economic downturns in sub-Saharan Africa and result in decreased food security, access to education, and more.

Despite these predictions, we don't know yet how the economic impact of COVID-19 varies based on country, job type, income level, and other factors. In order to provide a more complete picture of the economic impact of COVID-19, GeoPoll has conducted a study in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Kenya, Nigeria, Côte D'Ivoire, Mozambique, and South Africa. The main areas GeoPoll's study examined are:

- Ability to work and income change since the outset of COVID-19
- Concern over expenses and the ability to pay for basic needs
- Usage of loans, savings, and income to pay for expenses
- The impact of COVID-19 on loans and mobile money services
- Receipt of aid and opinions of government priorities

To access an interactive dashboard of the results, filterable by country, demographics and other metrics, [click here](#).

Methodology

This study was implemented by GeoPoll using our own platform and respondent database. For more information on the sample and methodology, and to request copies of the questionnaire and raw data, please contact info@GeoPoll.com.

Questionnaire and Mode

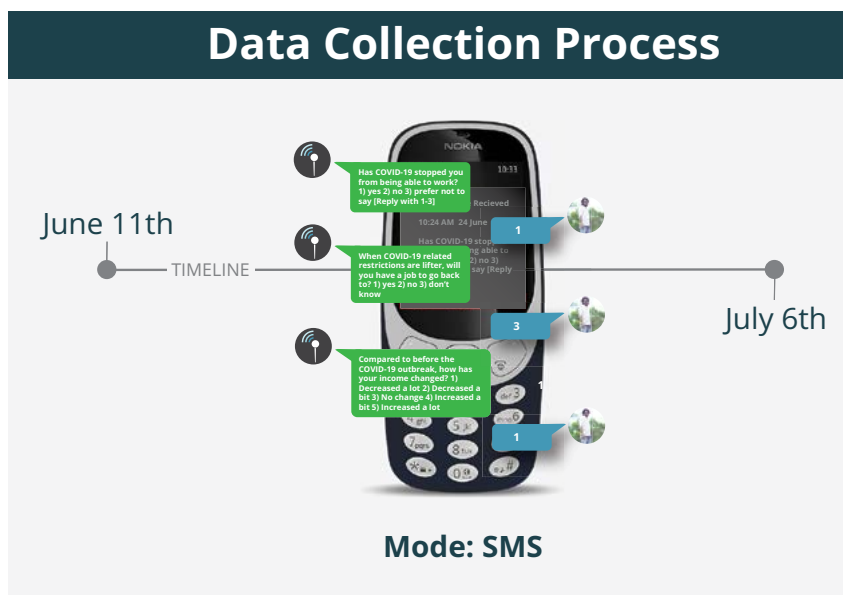
This study questionnaire was designed by GeoPoll's questionnaire team and translated where needed. The study was run in English in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria; French in Côte D'Ivoire; and Portuguese in Mozambique. Data collection occurred from June 11th to July 6th, 2020, with some countries completing data collection earlier than others.

The study was run through SMS, in which a 2-way text message conversation takes place, with one survey question being sent at a time. Messages utilize short codes which are free to respond to, meaning respondents can participate even if they do not have airtime in their accounts. A small incentive in the form of airtime credit was provided upon survey completion.

Sample

This study was run in five countries: Kenya, Nigeria, Côte D'Ivoire, Mozambique, and South Africa. The total sample size was 500 per country and 2,500 total, which provides a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval. GeoPoll used a simple random sampling technique from GeoPoll's respondent database, a list of mobile subscribers in each country surveyed. The sample was nationally representative by age, gender and location (ADM1), with a natural fallout of Socio-Economic Class or Living Standard Measures in all markets. For more information on the demographic breakdown, job types, and income levels of our respondents, see the demographic section.

While SMS surveys are generally able to reach wide portions of the population in most countries, the sample is made up of literate adults with access to mobile phones, and thus reaches wealthier populations than other modes such as Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).



Results

Demographics and Employment Types

The study was nationally representative by age, gender, and the first administrative district (ADM1) for each country, with an overall gender split of 50% female to 50% male and age split of 35% ages 18-25; 32% ages 26-35; and 33% ages 36+.

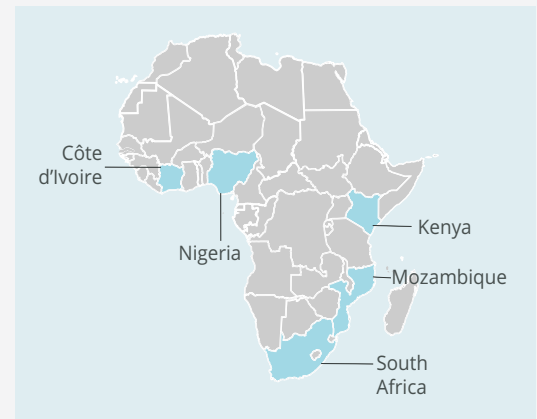
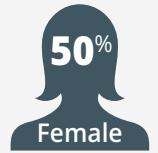
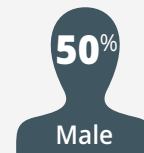
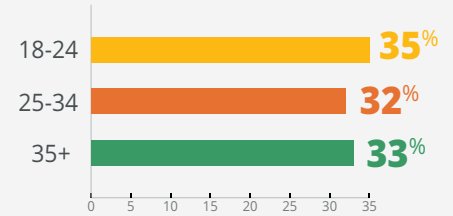
As this study focuses on the economic impact of COVID-19, we asked several questions around employment type and monthly income in order to get a picture of our sample's employment prior to the coronavirus outbreak. We felt this was especially important given the high existing unemployment rates in many of the countries studied. For example, Kenya had an **unemployment rate** of 9.3% in 2019, with **youth unemployment** even higher, and almost 30% of the South African population is **currently unemployed**.

Additionally, upwards of **80% of the total workforce** in the countries studied are part of the informal employment sector, which includes sellers, traders, farmers, and domestic workers. For this reason, we categorized respondents into 'formal' and 'informal' employment types by asking a series of questions about what type of work respondents did prior to coronavirus.

As expected, we found a high percent of the sample stated that from January to March 2020, they were already unemployed or a student. Overall, 30% stated that they were unemployed, and 19% stated that they were a student. These respondents were not asked the subsequent questions on job or income loss, but were directed to questions on expenses. Twenty two percent were employed full time, 12% part time, 15% self-employed, and 4% other.

We then asked two questions regarding more specific type of employment. In order to compare study findings from those in the informal sector, we classified those who identified as 'self-employed', a 'small business owner', or responded 'other' and then fell into certain categories, such as selling, agriculture, and construction, as being in the informal sector. Those who were employed in education, healthcare,

Demographic Breakdowns



Informal Workers Vs. Formal Workers

Of the 53% of respondents that were employed before coronavirus spread widely, **48% were informal workers** and **44% were formal workers**.

Construction Workers

Farmers

Beauty Service Providers

Sellers

Transportation Workers

Cleaners & more

Government Workers

Educators

Healthcare Providers

Employees of a Large Business

8% had uncategorizable professions

government, or by a large business were classified as having formal employment. Overall we found 48% of respondents who had been employed from January – March were in the informal sector, and 44% were in the formal sector.

To assess income level, we developed income ranges in collaboration with local partners. In all countries, over 50% of respondents who reported that they had been employed from January – March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, fell into the lowest income bracket.

Monthly Income Distribution									
Kenya (KES)		Mozambique (MZN)		Nigeria (NGN)		South Africa (ZAR)		Côte d'Ivoire (XOF)	
0-10000 (\$0-\$94)	53%	0-15000 (\$0-\$214)	70%	0-10000 (\$0-\$258)	67%	0-5000 (\$0-\$289)	55%	0-150000 xof (\$0-\$258)	72%
10001-20000 (\$94-\$187)	24%	15001-30000 (\$214-\$428)	17%	10001-20000 (\$258-\$516)	15%	5001-10000 (\$289-\$578)	23%	150001-300000 xof (\$258-\$516)	16%
20001-50000 (\$187-\$470)	17%	30001-45000 (\$428-\$642)	7%	20001-30000 (\$516-\$774)	9%	10001-20000 (\$578-\$1,156)	15%	300001-500000 xof (\$516-\$860)	9%
50001-100000 (\$470-\$939)	3%	45001-100000 (\$642-\$1,426)	4%	30001-40000 (\$774-\$1,032)	5%	20001-40000 (\$1,156-\$2,312)	5%	500001-1000000 xof (\$860-\$1721)	6%
Over 100000 (Over \$939)	3%	Over 100000 (Over \$1,426)	3%	Over 40000 (Over \$1,032)	4%	Over 40000 (Over \$2,312)	3%	Over 1000000 xof (Over \$1721)	3%

Employment and Income Changes

The restrictions taken by governments to halt the spread of COVID-19 have had a huge negative impact on economies around the globe; in the United States, over **35 million Americans** have applied for unemployment, and the euro zone **GDP contracted by 3.8%** just in the first quarter of the year, and globally the pandemic has had a **worse impact than expected on growth**. In sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank has predicted that **growth will fall over 5% in 2020** due to coronavirus. Sectors including tourism, retail, and agriculture are expected to be hard hit as many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have completely closed to outside visitors. Those who rely on informal trade will also be negatively impacted by the restrictions on movement that are still ongoing in many countries.

With these factors in mind, GeoPoll examined changes in ability to work and income in Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Côte D'Ivoire, and South Africa. As unemployment rates are already high in many of these countries, this portion of the study focused on those who reported that they were working prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Ability To Work During COVID-19

A majority, 60%, of those who were employed from January – March 2020 say that COVID-19 has stopped them from being able to work. This number was highest in Nigeria and Côte D'Ivoire, and lowest in South Africa. While these statistics show that COVID-19 is having a clear negative impact on employment, we also found that over 50% state that they will have a job to return to when restrictions related to coronavirus are lifted. Only 15% stated that they would definitively not have a job to return to post-COVID-19 restrictions, indicating that many believe the impact will be temporary, though this percent was higher among those who are informal workers.

Of informal workers, 20% said they won't have a job to go back to, and 37% said they don't know,

compared to just 9% and 22% of those in the formal economy who say the same.

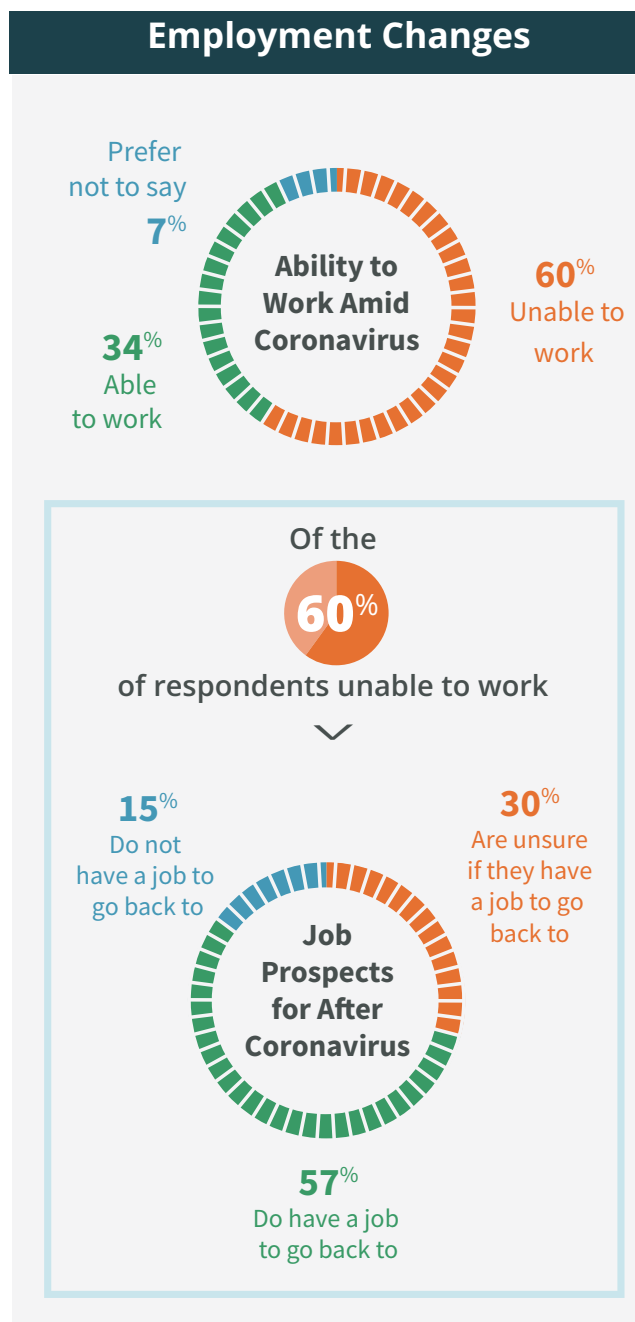
A slightly higher percentage in South Africa than the other countries stated that they do not know if they will have a job to go back to following COVID-19 restrictions, which could be related to the lower percent overall who stated they had been stopped from working during COVID-19.

When split by age and gender, we see that the youngest age group (ages 18-25) were less likely to say that COVID-19 had stopped them from being able to work, with 50% of this age group not working due to COVID-19 versus 60% ages 26 and older. Females were also slightly less likely to report that they cannot work due to COVID-19.

We also examined the ability to work by both income and job type, finding that job type has a greater impact on likelihood of being able to work than income. Income level had a slight impact on likelihood of being able to work, but this varied by country and did not always show a linear trend. For example, in Kenya those in the lowest income bracket (0 – 10000 ksh/month) were more likely to report they were still able to work than the next income bracket (0 – 20000 ksh/month).

In Nigeria 66% of those making under 200000 naira/month reported they were unable to work, versus 55% of those making above 200000 naira/month, and in South Africa 54% of those making under 10000 rand/month were unable to work versus 45% of those making over 10000 rand/month. In Mozambique, we saw a different trend; 52% of those making up to 15000 mzn/month said they were unable to work, compared to 62% making over 15000 mzn/month, although a higher percent in the lower bracket responded 'prefer not to say' which could impact the findings. In Côte D'Ivoire, 68% of the lowest income bracket are unable to work, compared to 63% of those in higher income brackets.

There are clearer trends when looking at job types and industries. Interestingly, when we group those in the informal sector such as sellers, farmers, and construction workers, versus those in the formal sector including education, government, and those who work for large businesses, we don't see a huge difference in being able to work, with 62% of those in the informal sector and 60% of those in the formal sector saying COVID-19 has stopped them from working. However, looking more specifically at job type we see larger differences: Those in education are the most impacted by COVID-19, with 80% of educators saying they are unable to work due to coronavirus. Healthcare providers, unsurprisingly given their role as essential workers, are the most likely to still be able to work, with 49% of healthcare workers continuing to work. Those working for large businesses are also less likely to have been impacted by COVID-19 than small business owners or employees, with 47% of those in large businesses versus 68% of small businesses owners or employees saying they are not able to work due to COVID-19.



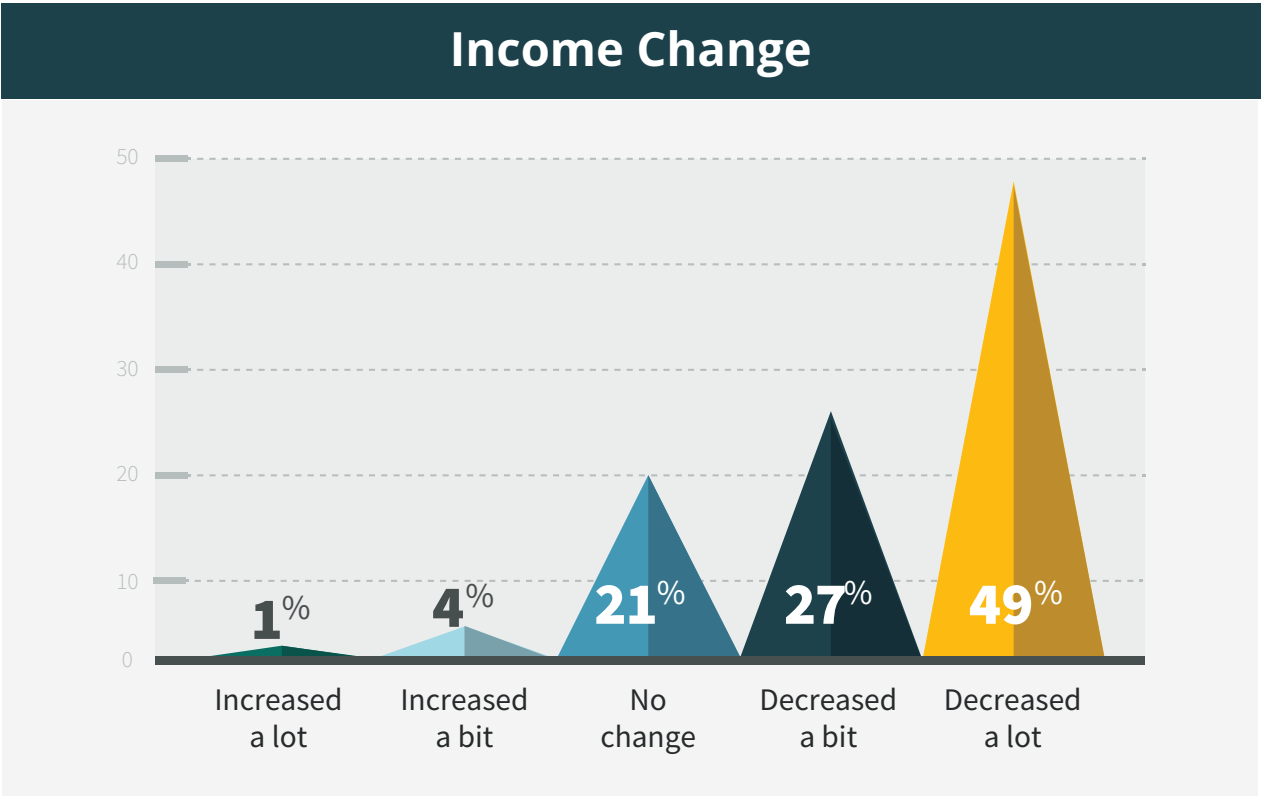
Of those in the informal economy, agriculture workers are the largest group that is most likely to still be working; 45% of farmers are still able to work, compared to 47% who are not able to work. The informal job types hardest hit by COVID-19 include construction/mechanic/electric work, of which 76% say they are unable to work, beauty services, of which 70% say they are unable to work, and transportation, of which 65% say they are unable to work.

Income Changes Due to COVID-19

In addition to the inability for many to work, we found that almost half, 49%, stated that their income had 'decreased a lot' since COVID-19, and an additional 27% stated that their income had 'decreased a bit'. Just 5% said their income had increased at all since feeling the impacts of COVID-19. Reported income loss was highest in Côte D'Ivoire, where 82% reported they had lost some income since the coronavirus outbreak.

In contrast to findings around the ability to work, on the income change metric we found a large difference between those in the formal and informal economies; While 63% of those in formal workplaces stated that their income had decreased either a lot or a little, 88% of those who are farmers, sellers, or other informal workers said income had decreased. Informal workers were also more likely to say their income had decreased 'a lot' than formal workers. Those working in transportation were most likely to say their income had decreased a lot, at 74%, while government and healthcare workers were most likely to report no change in their income, at 39% and 38% respectively.

Income level also has an effect on how much income has changed since prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Of those in the lowest income bracket in each country, 53% said that their income has decreased a lot, 26% said their income has decreased a bit, and 19% said there has been no change. Combining all upper income brackets, we find that 39% say their income has decreased a lot and 29% say income has decreased a bit, and 27% of higher earners saying they have not had a change in their income.

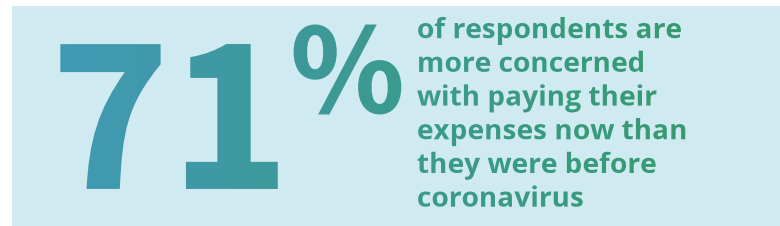


Expense Concern and Priorities

The loss of employment and sharp decrease in income that is being reported throughout the globe impacts the ability for people to afford basic expenses such as food and rent. A report by the [United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization](#) has found that over 45 million people around the globe, primarily in South and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, have been driven into food insecurity due to coronavirus. This is driven by factors including disrupted food supply chains, loss of employment, and existing humanitarian crises.

GeoPoll's study examined the level of concern over expenses and which items are seen as the top and lowest priority for payment. Out of our total sample, we found that 77% are either fully or partially responsible for their household's expenses, and this portion of respondents answered the remaining questions on expenses. Males were slightly more likely to report being responsible than females (82% of males reported being responsible for expenses versus 71% of females), and older respondents were also more likely than those aged 18-25 to contribute to household expenses.

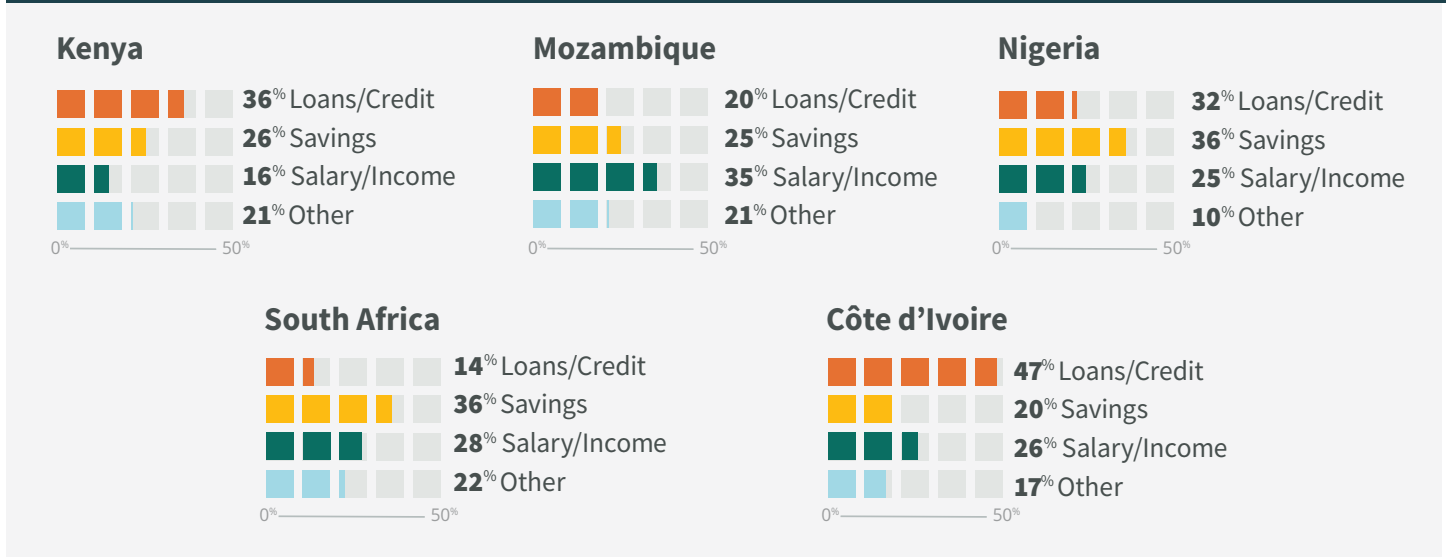
Concern over being able to pay expenses is extremely high, with 71% reporting that they are more concerned over paying expenses now compared to before coronavirus, and 62% reporting their concern at the highest level. Concern was highest in Mozambique, where 80% are more concerned over their expenses now, and South Africa, where 75% report being more concerned over their expenses than prior to coronavirus, and lowest in Kenya. Those in lower income brackets are more likely than those earning more to be more concerned over expenses, with 72% of those in the bottom two income brackets compared to 64% of those in higher income brackets reporting more concern since before coronavirus.



When asked how long respondents expected to be able to pay their basic expenses given their current income, we found that 41% reported that they could pay their expenses for less than a month, while only 21% reported they could pay expenses for 2 or more months.

We also looked at how expenses are being covered, and if income, savings, loans, or credit cards are being used most to cover expenses. On this metric we found that while savings and salary/income were

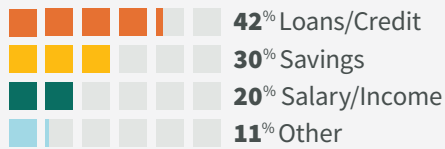
How Expenses Are Being Covered



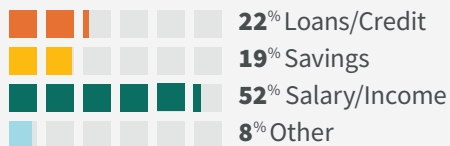
How Expenses Are Being Covered

INFORMAL VS. FORMAL ECONOMY

Informal Workers



Formal Workers

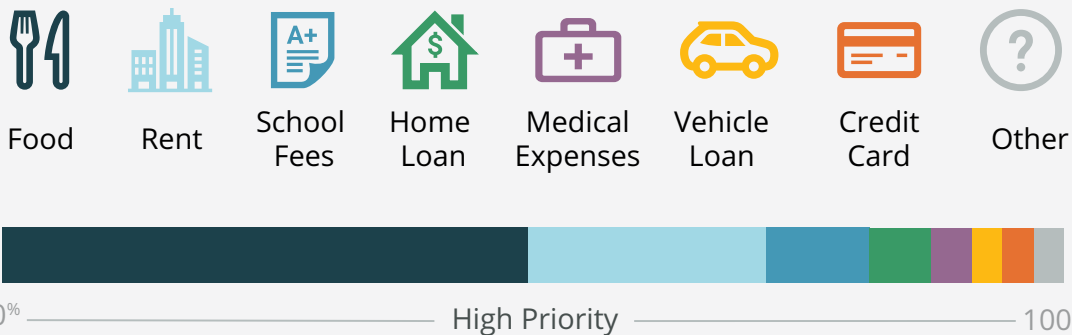


cited as the most common ways to cover expenses overall, usage of loans or credit differed by country. In Kenya, in which digital loans and mobile money applications are very popular, 36% said that they will use loans or credit to pay for their expenses, and 47% in Côte D'Ivoire stated the same. In South Africa, savings was the most common way of paying expenses. We observed some differences by age, finding that 37% of those aged 18-25 stated they are paying for expenses with savings, compared to just 20% of those aged 36 and older. Additionally, those in the informal economy were more likely to report that they will cover their expenses with loans and savings, while those in the formal economy were more likely to say they would cover their expenses through their salary.

Food was the clear top priority for expenses: 51% report that food is the expense they will prioritize

first this month, followed by rent with 23% of responses. While food was the highest category in every country, in Kenya and Mozambique it was cited as the top expense priority by the most respondents, at 63% and 57% respectively. The lowest priority for payment was more mixed; While school fees was reported as the lowest overall at 21%, rent, vehicle loan, and credit card payments were also listed by about 13-14% of respondents each. There are some differences in low payment priority by country, with Kenyans being most likely to deprioritize school fees, and Nigerians reporting that they would not prioritize paying for vehicle loans in greater numbers.

Priorities for Paying Expenses



Loans and Mobile Money

Over the past decade there has been a growth in the use of mobile money apps and digital lending throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Mobile money in particular has been credited with improving financial inclusion in many countries by providing **financial services** to those who are unable to open a traditional bank account, especially for youth populations. Digital loans, often taken out in small amounts for both personal use and in order to support business growth, have also proliferated in the region. However, there is some debate over the use of digital loans, as it has been found that in countries such as Kenya one in five are **unable to repay their loans**, which usually have high interest rates attached.

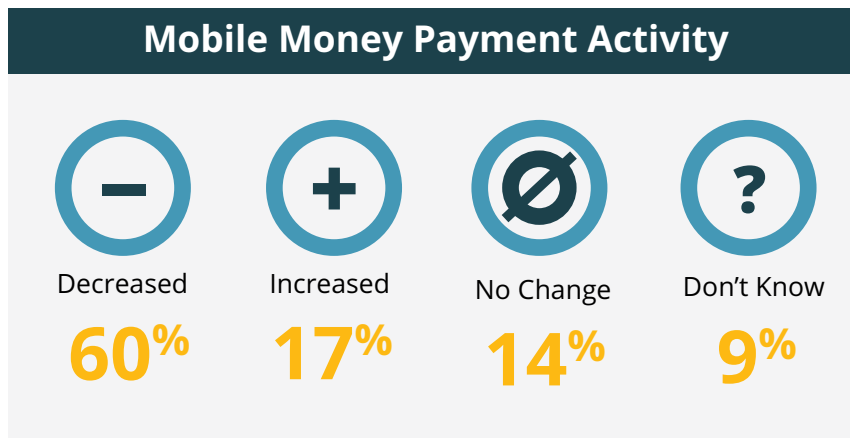
COVID-19 is already resulting in decreased incomes and job loss for many in sub-Saharan Africa, and this study found that loans are already being used by many to fund their daily expenses. Forty-eight percent

across all five countries reported that they have taken out loans specifically to cover expenses due to COVID-19. On this metric, we observed some differences in trends by country, finding that 77% in South Africa noted that they have taken out loans due to COVID-19, compared to 46% in Mozambique. The oldest age group, those aged 36 and up, are least likely to report having taken out loans due to COVID-19, at 42%. Loans due to coronavirus were common across both informal and formal workers, and for all income brackets.

48%

of respondents have taken out a loan to cover expenses because of coronavirus

We also looked at mobile money use since the outbreak of COVID-19. As contact between people is being discouraged, cashless transactions through mobile money applications are **thought to be growing**. However, GeoPoll’s study found that 60% say their mobile money usage has decreased since prior to coronavirus. This is likely not due to an increase in usage of cash or other transaction types, but rather due to a decrease in overall spending. When asked if people have been able to deposit money or cash out at a mobile money agent, we found that 51% of respondents reported being able to deposit money or cash out, and 49% reported that they are not currently able to do so. In future studies, we would recommend comparing the use of mobile money to other payment forms including cash to get more information on this finding.



Aid and Government Priorities

Both humanitarian organizations and local governments around the globe have acted to support those who need it during the coronavirus outbreak. This support has come in many forms, ranging from government support for those who have lost jobs or income, to food aid, to assistance that addresses healthcare needs related to COVID-19. The ability for governments to provide assistance varies by country; While the South African government has **committed \$26 billion** to help its country recover from the pandemic, Kenya’s government has focused on **strengthening their health care system**.

GeoPoll’s study finds that across all 5 countries the majority have not received aid as of yet, with 84% stating they have not received any aid. Those in South Africa and Côte D’Ivoire were most likely to report they have received aid, at 21% and 34% respectively. There were no major differences in receiving aid by age or gender.

of respondents have received some form of aid since the coronavirus crisis began

17%

Of those who had received aid, the most common aid source was friends or family, at 36% followed by the government at 33%. Only 7% said that they had received aid from aid organizations, and 9% received aid from religious organizations. This metric differed by country;

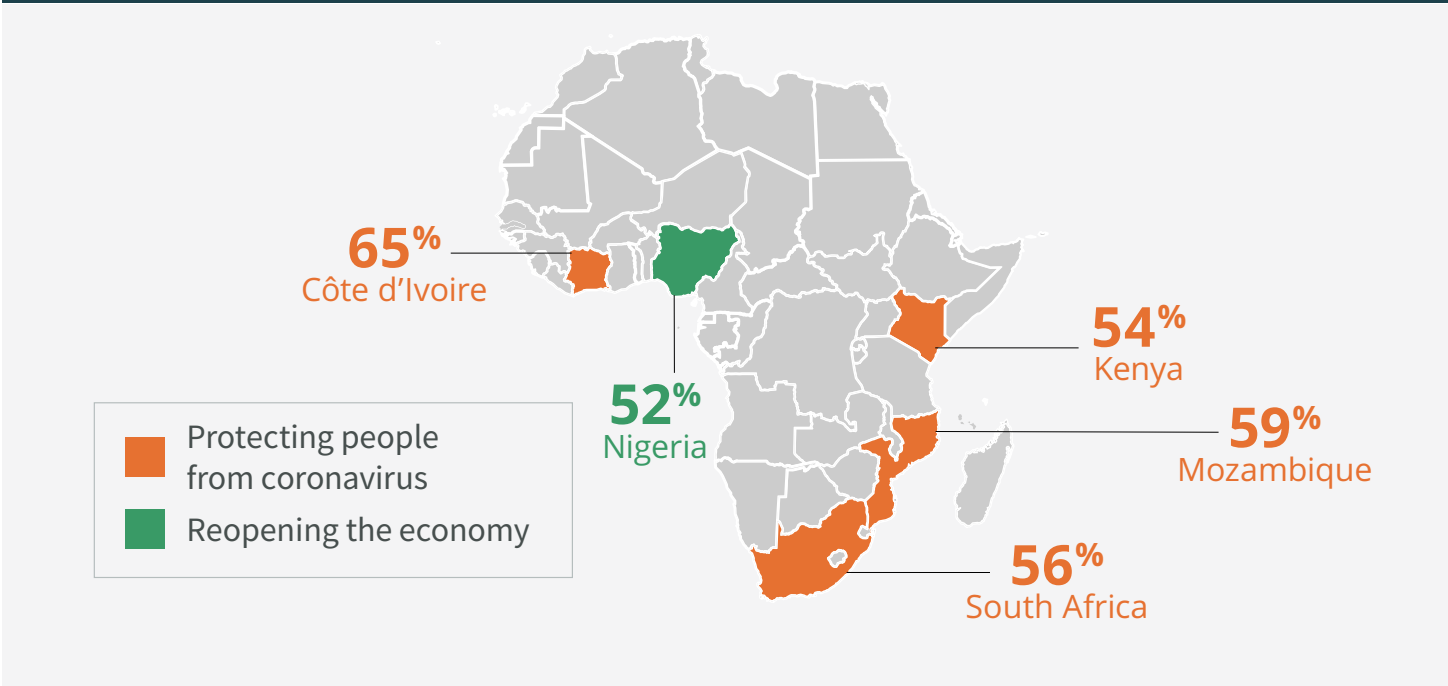
Those in South Africa and Nigeria reported higher levels of government aid, while in Côte D'Ivoire, Kenya, and Mozambique, friends and family were the most common source of aid.

Even though the peak of COVID-19 infections has yet to be seen in many countries and states, governments are eager to lift restrictions on movement in order to prevent a continued economic collapse. In Nigeria, **churches and hotels began to open** in June even as cases continued to rise, while Kenya is observing increased cases of **COVID-19 in rural areas**, even as restrictions are being **eased in Nairobi**. Since lockdowns and other restrictions have direct impacts of the economic viability of populations, we examined if citizens themselves think their countries should prioritize protecting people from the virus itself, or reopening economies so that economic hardships begin to lift.

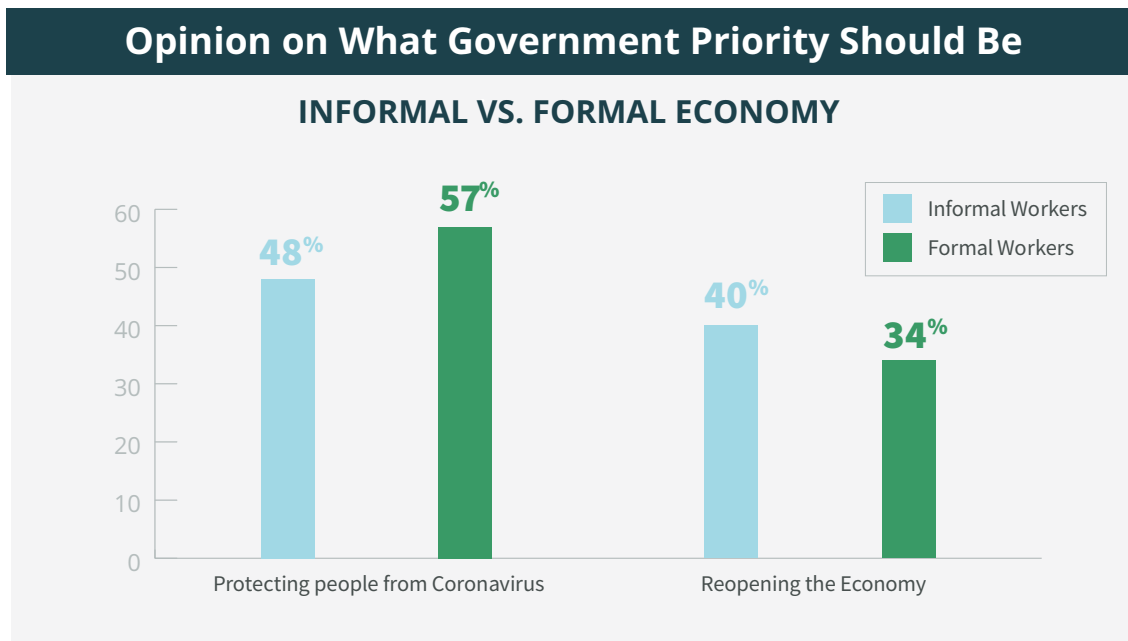
There are split opinions on government actions. While a majority believe their governments should still be focusing on protecting people from COVID-19, over a third note that they believe the government should start reopening the economy. As would be expected, these answers vary by country; Respondents in Côte D'Ivoire, which has experienced a **growing number of cases** throughout June, were most likely to state that the government should focus on protecting people from COVID-19, with 65% prioritizing health concerns over economic pressures. In Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, over a third state that they want the government to prioritize reopening the economy, and Nigeria was the only country where the majority want to reopen the economy rather than protect people from coronavirus. While we did not observe large differences in these metrics by gender, we did find that those aged 26 and older were most likely to prioritize opening the economy, at 38% compared to 30% of those aged 18-25.



Opinion on What Government Priority Should Be



Those who reported that their income had decreased 'a lot' were most likely to state that the government should prioritize reopening the economy, with 40% of this group stating reopening should be a priority, compared to 32% who saw no income change or an increase in income. We also found that those in the informal economy were more likely to prioritize reopening the economy over those with jobs in the formal economy.



Conclusion

Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been able to successfully prevent a wide spread of coronavirus; Compared to the high case numbers seen in the United States, Italy, and Brazil, countries such as Kenya and Mozambique have seen very few cases and deaths. They have achieved this by swiftly implementing strict lockdowns and other restrictions which have undoubtedly saved lives. However, as is being seen across the globe, these actions to stop the virus' spread are resulting in a negative effect on employment and economic growth.

GeoPoll's findings demonstrate that COVID-19 is already having a large impact on income, employment, and the ability to pay for basic expenses in the countries studied. Moreover, we find that the pandemic is having a disproportionate effect on those in the informal economy and those in lower income ranges. COVID-19 is preventing a large portion of those in both the informal and formal sectors from working currently, but those who earn less and who rely on informal positions such as selling and agriculture are more likely to report higher decreases in income, and have more uncertainty surrounding their future employment. A positive finding is that a majority of those who work for formal businesses say they will have a job to go back to once coronavirus-related restrictions are lifted, indicating their current position is only temporary.

While there is high concern over paying for expenses among all groups, concern over expenses is also related to income loss, with those who report higher decreases in earnings being more concerned about paying their expenses. A vast majority have not yet received formal aid related to COVID-19, but GeoPoll did find that many are already reliant on loans to assist with expenses. As the pandemic and related economic impacts continue, it will be important to track loan usage and repayment.

As governments look to lift restrictions in order to spur economic growth, it will be important to better understand what actions populations themselves would prioritize. GeoPoll finds that there is still uncertainty around reopening economies, with a majority stating they think their government should continue to prioritize protecting people from COVID-19. However, over a third saying they want

governments to reopen the economy, and those who have felt the biggest economic impacts due to restrictions are most likely to be looking for an economic reopening.

The effects of COVID-19 will continue to be felt for many months to come, and this study demonstrates the economic impacts of the pandemic in one region. As economies begin to reopen, governments and other organizations will be weighing the need to prevent increased infections with the economic hardships many are facing. In order to assist recovery efforts, there will be a need for ongoing research into who is being most impacted, what assistance they most need, and if the recovery is being felt by those on the ground.

About GeoPoll

GeoPoll is a leading provider of remote research solutions, conducting over 10 million surveys per year through mobile-based methods in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Working with partners including international development organizations, academic groups, and private sector companies, GeoPoll facilitates projects that measure vital indicators around the world.

GeoPoll combines a robust mobile platform that collects data through voice call, SMS, and other modes with a vast database of respondents and experience conducting research in over 70 countries. Strengths lie in GeoPoll's ability to target extremely specific populations, deploy surveys in multiple countries with ease, and provide expert guidance on how to collect accurate, reliable data through the mobile phone. For more information visit www.GeoPoll.com.

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