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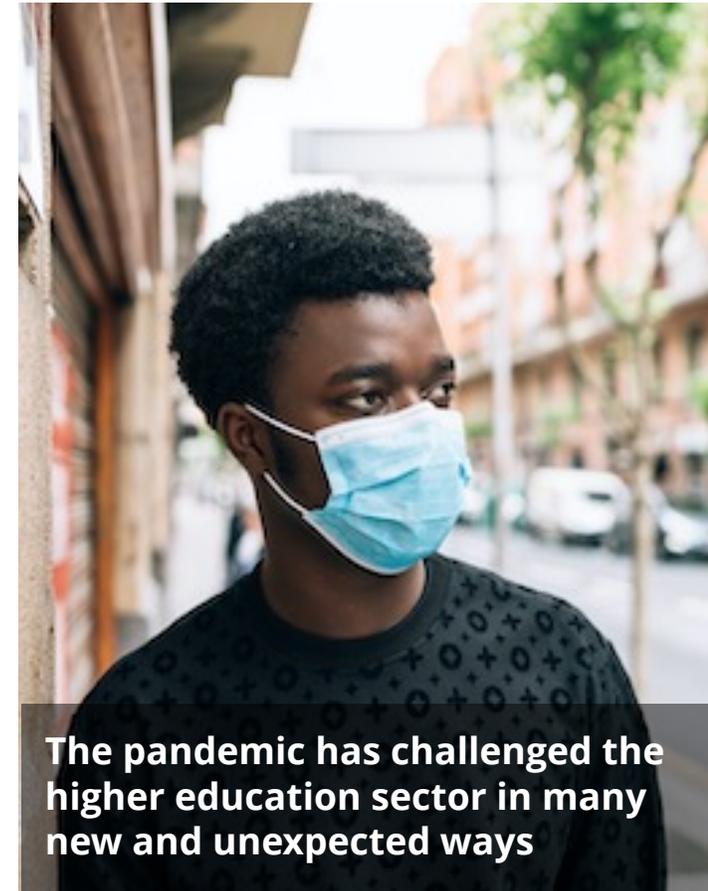
Case Studies on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Responses from West African Universities

Presentation Outline

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Introduction: why this study?

- The SARS-CoV-2, identified in December 2019 (in Wuhan, China), led to a pandemic in March 2020 which has affected every aspect of modern life, forcing societies to adapt to a global health crisis
- In terms of research, contributions are observed across the world and in almost every discipline
- West African research inputs largely missing from global empirical analyses on COVID-19 and its effects on research/researchers
- This study aims to contribute to scholarly knowledge on the topic by focusing on West African universities



The pandemic has challenged the higher education sector in many new and unexpected ways

Objectives

The study aimed at exploring the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on research activities and culture in West African Universities. This study specifically aims to:



01

Identify how COVID-19 is affecting the distribution of research resources.

02

Investigate the effects of COVID-19 on the geographical mobility of researchers – both faculty members and graduate students.

03

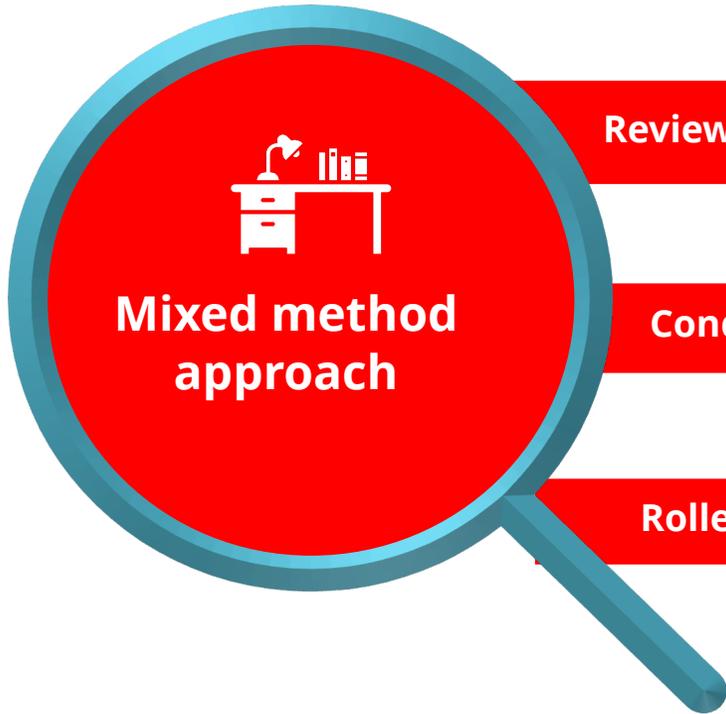
Explore the potential effects of COVID-19 on recruitment and career progression of faculty members.

04

Determine how COVID-19 is affecting the research culture (collaboration, training, and institutional support) and output in the selected universities

Methods

To achieve our objectives, we:



Mixed method
approach

Reviewed relevant literature on COVID-19 with a focus on (West) African countries

Conducted Interviews and Focus Group discussions

Rolled out two online surveys

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the University of Cape Coast, in Ghana and the University Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in Côte d'Ivoire.

Lessons from scholarly knowledge

Analysis of existing research reveals that although a growing body of literature is devoted to assessing the impacts of COVID-19 in other geographic areas, very few empirical studies target West Africa.

Evidence from studies identified show that:



1

COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing scarcity and inequality in resource distribution in West African universities

2

The pandemic has caused a reduction of financial aid to research institutions

3

COVID-19 restriction measures have affected West African researchers' national and international mobility and weakened existing collaborations and partnerships

4

COVID-19 has affected career progression of academics, especially early career researchers

5

African Higher Education Institutions are among those most affected by the measures to deal with the pandemic, especially cuts in research funding

Data description

255 – 180 UFHB and 75 UCC – researchers responded to the online survey.

Approx. 70% of respondents were male and 30% were female academics.

Fig. 1-A: UFHB | Sample description: Gender



Fig. 1-B: UCC | Sample description: Gender



Age groups: compared to UFHB, respondents from UCC were younger (30 – 44)

Fig. 2-A: UFHB | Sample description: Age groups (in years)



Fig. 2-B: UCC | Sample description: Age groups (in years)



Data description

Academic disciplines: A greater proportion of researchers from social Sciences responded to the survey.

Fig. 3-A: UFHB respondents by discipline

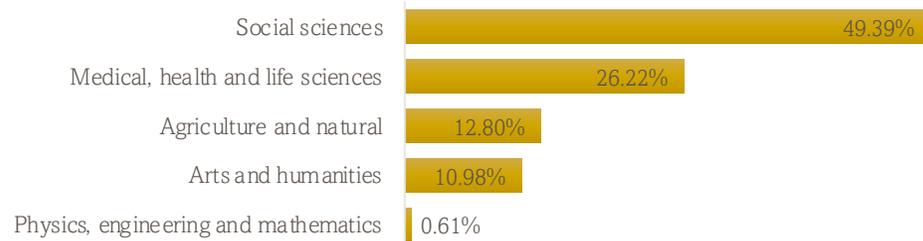
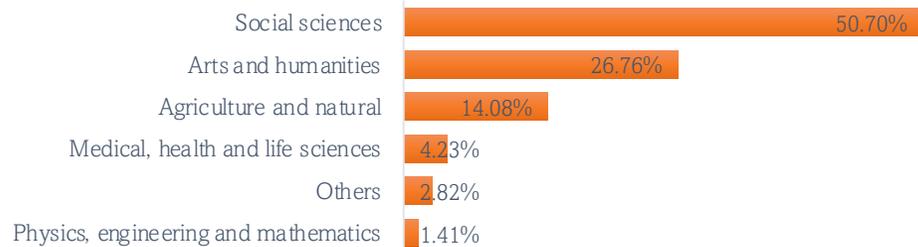


Fig. 3-B: UCC | UFHB respondents by discipline



Research Findings



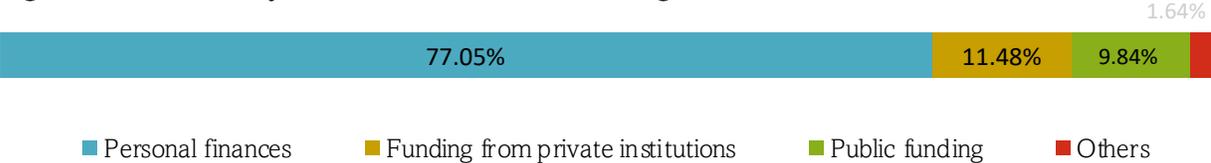
COVID-19 and research funding

Most researchers self-finance their research activities

Fig. 4-A: UFHB | What is your main source of research funding?



Fig. 4-B: UCC | What is your main source of research funding?



“Personal finance. I do not have funding for the thesis.” (PhD student, UFHB)

“You know, the grant from government is not enough. It can't even pay my fees. I depend on my salary, and my wife has also been very helpful.” (PhD student, UCC)

For more than 58% and 61% of UFHB and UCC academics respectively, COVID-19 has caused a decrease in their research funding

Fig. 5-A UFHB | Impact of COVID-19 on research funding -1

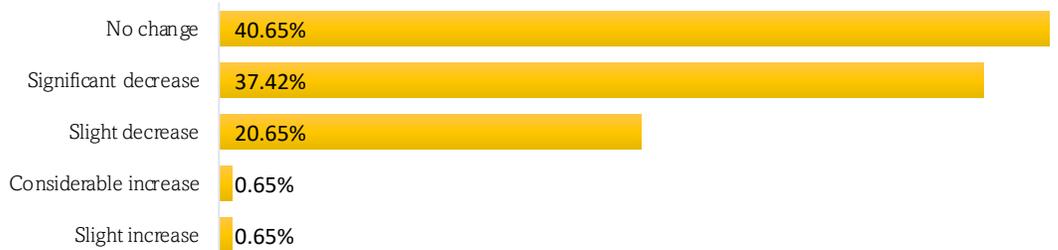


Fig. 5-B: UCC | Impact of COVID-19 on research funding - 1



COVID-19 and research mobility

At UFHB and UCC, respectively 95% and 73% of academics, indicated that national and international mobility are a normal part of their teaching and/or research activities.

Fig. 8-A: UFHB | To what extent has COVID-19 affected your research mobility?

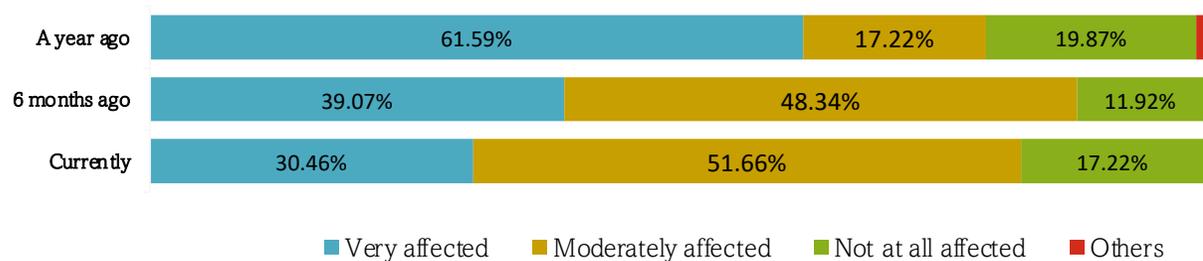
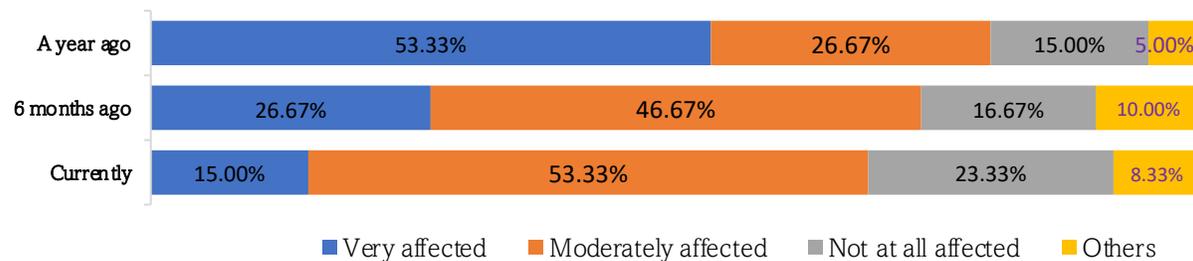


Fig. 8-B: UCC | To what extent has COVID-19 affected your research mobility?



Overall, it was observed that data from both UFHB and UCC reflected changes in the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on academic mobility over time.

COVID-19 and career progression and recruitment

Compared to before the pandemic, how would you evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the following aspects of the career of researchers at your institution?

Fig. 9-A: UFHB | COVID-19 and research career progression

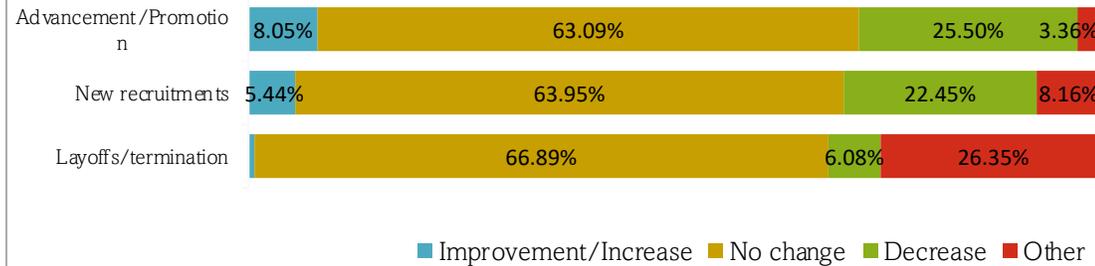
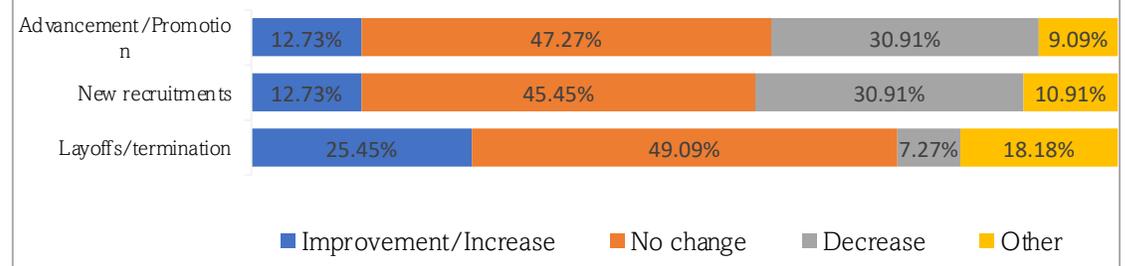


Fig. 9-B: UCC | COVID-19 and research career progression



***Recruitment depends on our needs and funding. If we have the need to recruit, we do. I don't think the COVID has affected that much."* Dean, UCC**

- Regarding advancement, new recruitment and layoffs, most survey respondents from the HEIs considered reported no changes compared to before the pandemic
- A possible explanation for this observation is the type of institutions we considered in these case studies

COVID-19 and career progression and recruitment

At UFHB and UCC, 64% and 51% of respondents, respectively, indicated a decrease in their career progression opportunities

Fig. 12-A: UFHB | Impact of COVID-19 on chances of career progression or other career opportunities

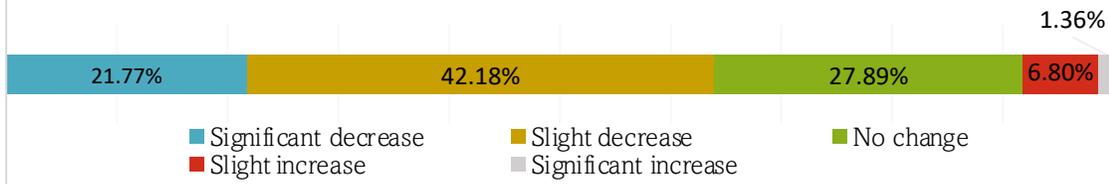
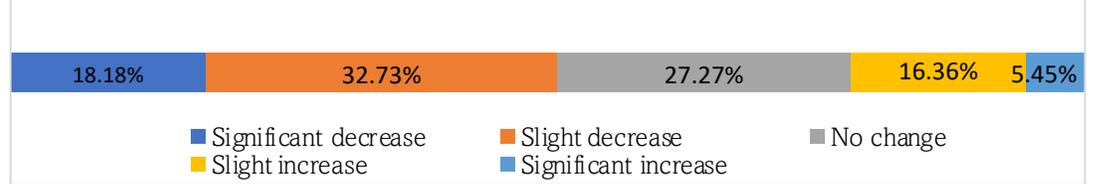


Fig. 12-B: UCC | Impact of COVID-19 on chances of career progression or other career opportunities



“For me, a positive one. During the COVID peak, I was able to publish three good papers, which has helped to augment the number of articles that I had to push me to the next level.” (Faculty member, UCC)

“Yes, a negative impact. In our group, for example, losing a year delays graduation and therefore reduces our chances of being recruited into academia.” (PhD student, UFHB)

COVID-19 and research culture and output

Impact of COVID-19 and research collaboration

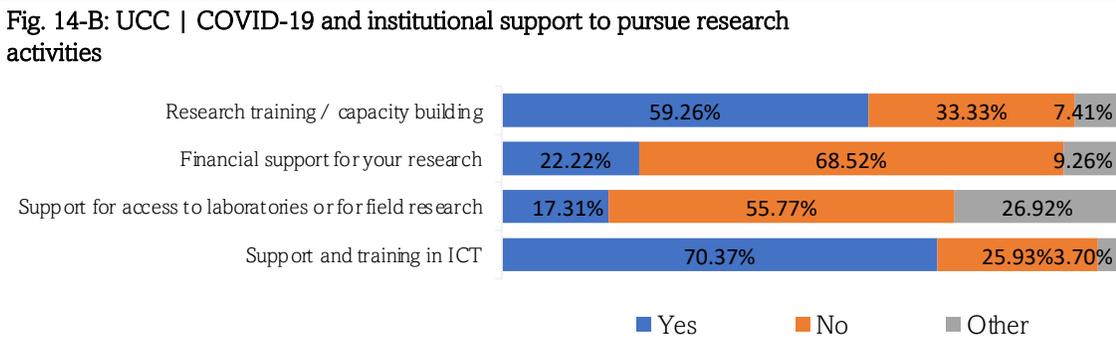
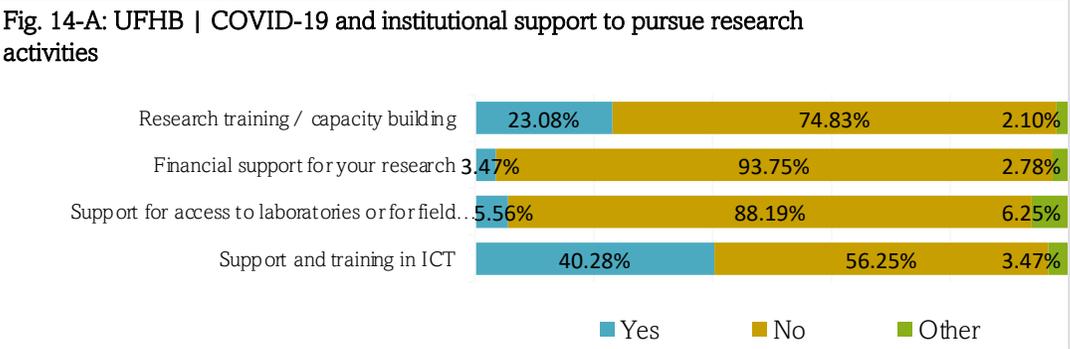
For many respondents - 77% of UFHB and 45% of UCC academics, the pandemic has deteriorated their research collaborations

"I was even supposed to go to Germany to meet up with some other researchers to discuss some collaborations, but it never happened." (Dean, UCC)

Impact of COVID-19 and output

At UFHB: the share of researchers with one publication per year has increased since the pandemic begun.
At UCC: a continuous decline has been observed in research publications since the pandemic begun.

Impact of COVID-19 and institutional support



"To be honest, we really adapted to the situation. Institutional support has been announced, we haven't seen it." (Faculty member, UFHB).

COVID-19 and gender inequalities

Do you think that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced differently by male and female academics/researchers in your institution?

Fig. 16-A: UFHB | Do you think that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced differently by male and female academics?

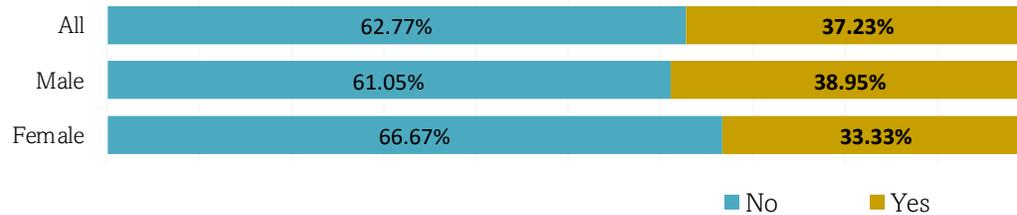
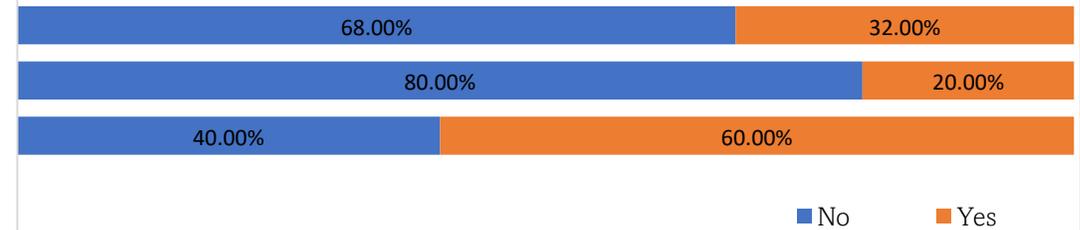


Fig. 16-B: UCC | Do you think that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced differently by male and female academics?



- *“Not really in terms of research. But at home, almost everything relating to caregiving was on me.”* (Female PhD student, UFHB)
- *“Well, I think that when you’re quarantined at home, the females have more work to do at home. Yes, I think that the focus becomes taking care of the home. A lot of the roles in the house are played by the female. I don't want to say that the males don’t do any work.”* (Male Dean, UCC)

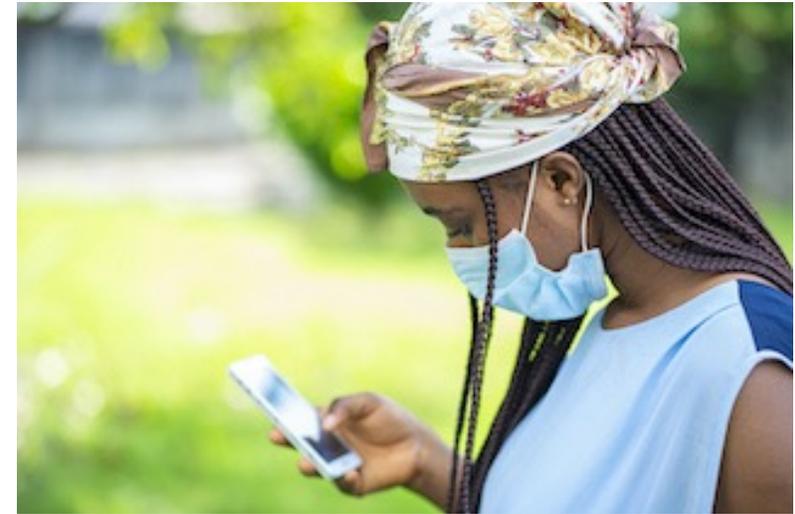
Unanimously, most researchers at UFHB and UCC reported that gender inequalities remained unchanged during the pandemic.

Conclusions and Recommendations



Conclusions

- Our analysis revealed that the COVID-9 pandemic has had an impact on research activities, mobility, funding, collaboration at both UFHB and UCC.
- Researchers reported very limited institutional support, with respect to fieldwork, capacity building, Information and Communications Technology training, and the availability of funding to conduct research.
- Regarding gender, academics from both West African universities mostly agreed that pre-existing gender inequalities remained unchanged during the pandemic.



"I was even supposed to go to Germany to meet up with some other researchers to discuss some collaborations, but it never happened." (Dean, UCC)

Recommendations

Capacity building, infrastructure, and research funding

West African University Leaders

- There is a need to increase investment in research, including for procuring research materials and laboratory equipment.

Higher Education Decision-makers

- Our case studies suggest that the decision-makers should consider introducing financial incentives to promote a research culture for contributing to world knowledge.

Funders of Research

- Local dissemination of “calls for proposals”, “less stringent requirements” for accessing research grants, and ad-hoc funding for promising research topics are needed to help West African researchers to be aware of and to understand private research project funding mechanisms.

Thank you

