

#### INSTITUTE FOR AFRICAN WOMEN IN LAW

FLAGSHIP REPORTS



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Prof. J. Jarpa Dawuni founder and executive director

On October 24th, 2020, the Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) held a webinar event in partnership with Diverse Law called 'Mentorship and Career Growth Opportunities in Law'. The event was moderated by Adejoke Babington-Ashaye, a Senior Counsel at the World Bank Group and an experienced mentor. The panelists include; Mrs. Funke Agbor, SAN currently a partner in the shipping and Litigation Group of ASAC-LAW, Nigeria, with more than thirty years of legal experience. Ms. Linda Kasonde, a lawyer and civil rights activist, who is the founder and Executive Director of Chapter One Foundation, a foundation that promotes and protects human rights, human rights defenders, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and social justice in Zambia. Judge Monica Mugenyi, a judge of the Ugandan Court of Appeal and former Presiding Judge at the East African Court of Justice. Dr. Pierre Sob, the founder and Director of Horizon Consulting International as well as the President of Africa 21, with more than twenty years of experience as a senior official in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The event was held as a forum to discuss career growth opportunities in the legal profession, and the benefits of mentorship. During this event, we sent out a survey aimed at learning about the views law students have towards mentoring programs. The survey asked a series of questions about a number of topics, including the professional development opportunities and career support that respondents received from their law institutions. The overall goal of the survey was to see if there was demand for an IAWL mentoring program, and whether respondents understood what it took to be part of a successful mentoring partnership. The survey was well-received, and was filled out by attendees of the webinar as well as others that were sent a link. We received responses over the course of one month.

# PRESENTERS



Mrs Funke Agbor Partner, ACAS-LAW



Ms Linda Kasonde Founder of LCK Chambers



Judge Monica Mugenyi Former Principal Judge, EACJ



Dr. Pierre Sob UN Diplomat and Consultant

### INTRODUCTION

Mentoring programs are known for generating success stories. Some of the world's most successful and influential individuals received mentorship themselves. In line with the IAWL's mission to nurture leadership, create opportunities and enhance potential, we decided to design a mentoring program that would lend professional support to law students and early career professionals, whilst enabling mentors to grow as leaders and advisors. There is a wealth of research that states that the benefits of mentoring programs are numerous for both mentors and mentees. Eby et al. (2008) conducted research on the correlation between mentoring and protégé behavior and outcomes. Their research found that mentoring has positive effects on recipients' behavior, attitude, health, motivation and career outcomes, though this varies according to the type of mentorship. Academic and workplace mentoring have larger effects on recipients compared to youth mentoring.

In addition, <u>Prof. W. Brad Johnson</u> stated that mentees perform better in and out of school than students without mentors. These students are exposed to their mentor's network, are more involved in professional work, and develop a "stronger sense of professional identity". In addition, mentors benefit from <u>improving their communication and leadership skills</u>, expanding their network, and giving back to those who need their support the most. Though research highlighting the benefits of mentoring would result in there being a demand for a mentoring program, the IAWL wanted to be sure of this demand, and that the program would be taken seriously. Hence why we sent out a survey on law student's views on mentorship. Results found that there is a demand, that respondents take their professional development very seriously, and that they consider a mentoring program an important tool in helping them achieve their career development goals.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Hill and Ragland (1995, p72) defined a mentor as an individual whose duty is to "guide, train, and support a less skilled or experienced person called a novice, mentee, or protégé". This definition of a mentor is what we tend to think of when trying to define the role. According to Warfield-Coppock (1992), the act of guiding the youth was prominent in ancient Africa, when rites of passage initiations were used to teach the youth the ways of their culture and how to navigate the society that they were entering. Nowadays, mentoring is used anytime an inexperienced individual requires guidance from an individual considered an expert in their field. This can apply to academia, sports, music, and one's professional life. As mentioned, mentoring has a number of benefits for both mentees and mentors. However, we decided to look at the specific benefits of mentorship on female African law students, given that they would be the focus of the IAWL's mentoring program.

There is not a lot of literature on law students and mentoring in the African context. However, support is needed for African students and early career professionals who will likely face difficulties entering or establishing themselves in the workforce. Statistics from the <u>International Labour Organization</u> (ILO) show that youth unemployment in all of Africa was at 10.8% in 2019, with North Africa exhibiting rates of over 30% and Sub-Saharan Africa exhibiting rates of 8.7%. <u>Interventions</u> made to tackle this issue include the use of mentorships to support young professionals, proving that mentorships are considered a reliable way of promoting professional growth and increasing professional opportunities for young adults.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the dearth of research on mentoring and law students in Africa, there was more literature available on law students and mentoring in the African American context. Allison Sinanan (2016) highlighted that mentorships provide mentees with the opportunities to focus on specific goals that they set for themselves, making them easier to achieve. Lori D. Patton and Shaun R. Harper (2003) highlighted research from a study about mentoring relationships amongst African American women in graduate and professional schools. Participants in the study came from multiple disciplinary backgrounds, including business, education, and law, and some reported having a mentor of the same sex and race as them. African American students with mentors of the same racial background felt that their relationships mirrored that of a 'mother-daughter' relationship, but with the added benefits of learning how to have a professional relationship, dress professionally, and reject stereotypes that would be projected onto them as African American women.

Participants also noted that African American staff at their schools were in the perfect position to comment on the internal and external politics of a department or school. This is similar to how we would assume African female lawyers would be in the perfect decision to comment on the legal work environment from an African woman's point of view. In a separate study, Patton (2009) found that black women prefer the idea of being mentored by someone who looks like them and who they can identify with. Black women have a specific and unique set of challenges that they face as a result of being both black and female, and these challenges can emerge in the workplace. Having a female mentor can be beneficial because you have someone who can help you deal with these issues.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

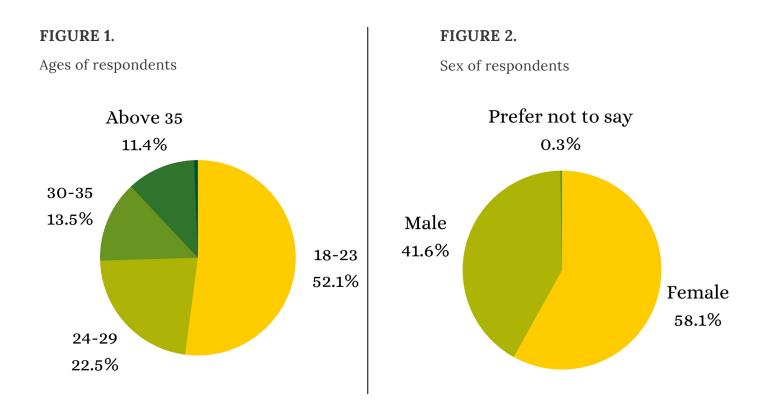
This literature further informed us of the specific benefits mentoring can have for African and African American women, especially if they are mentored by other African and African American women. These are our intended participants for our mentoring program, and we were able to receive thoughts on mentorship from a few of them through our survey.

#### **Methodology**

The survey was divided into four sections: demographics, legal education, professional development, and mentorship. The first section sought to gain information on the age, sex, nationality, and year of study of respondents, whilst the second sought to gain information on the kind of career support their legal institutions offered and whether this was sufficient in helping respondents reach their career goals. Respondents were also asked what kind of support they would like to receive, and what area of law they were interested in specializing in. The third section sought to find out what kind of professional development opportunities respondents wanted, and whether they were aware of their professional strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the fourth section questioned whether respondents had a sound understanding of what a professional mentoring relationship is, whether they found mentorships helpful and whether they understood what the responsibilities of a mentee are.

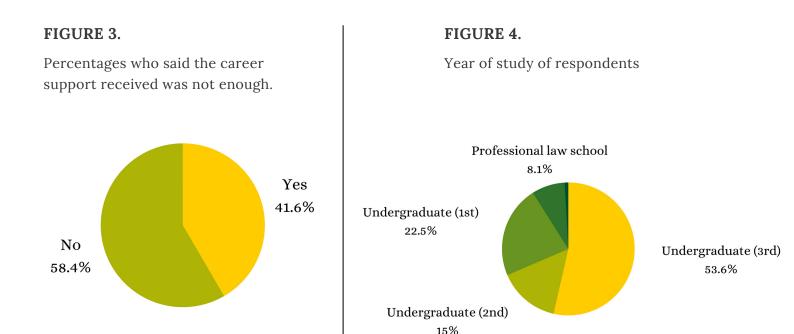
#### Section 1

The survey was completed by respondents aged 17-40, with the predominant age bracket being individuals aged 18-23. 58.1% of respondents were female and 53.6% of respondents were in their third year of undergraduate study. Though most respondents were undergraduates, the survey received responses from individuals in Masters and Professional (law school) study as well. Out of the 334 respondents, most were Nigerian (115), Kenyan (91), and Ghanaian (80), although there were also respondents from Namibia, Malawi, South Sudan and America, to name a few.



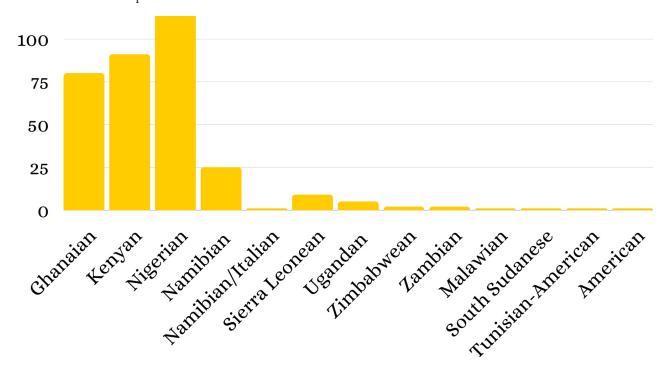
#### Section 2

When asked what form of career support respondents were offered by their university/law school, most said speeches and presentations by guest speakers, seminars, research opportunities and career counseling sessions. When asked whether the career support they received was enough, 58.4% said that it was not.



We asked our respondents what kind of additional support they would like to receive, and a number said that they would like to be provided more practical teachings of legal practice, more internship and research opportunities, more moot court experience, and more financial support. Responses that appeared more frequently were those suggesting more networking events, career counseling and mentoring opportunities. The advantage of running a mentoring program is that the benefits would touch on some of these suggestions. Mentees can go to mentors for some of the support that they expressed interest in receiving in the survey.

**FIGURE 5.**Nationalities of respondents.

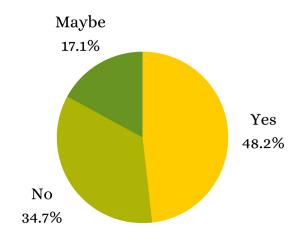


#### Section 3

In this section, we sought to see how many respondents were already aware of their professional strengths and weaknesses. Rachel Bitte, Chief People Officer at Jobvite, told Business News Daily that mentors want mentees who are "proactive about their career". If individuals are interested in their areas of professional strength and weakness, it shows they have an interest in their career progression. This survey showed that 48.2% of respondents were aware of their professional strengths, whilst 34.7% said that they were not and 17.1% said that they might be. Similarly, 48.8% of respondents said that they were aware of their professional weaknesses, whilst 35.9% said that they were not and 15.3% said that they might be. Since most respondents were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, this gave us confidence that our potential mentees would take a mentoring program, and their subsequent professional development, seriously.

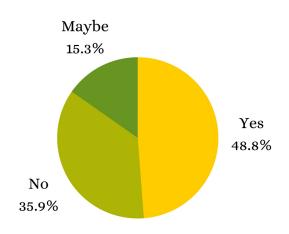
#### FIGURE 6.

Percentage of respondents aware of their professional strengths.



#### FIGURE 7.

Percentage of respondents aware of their professional weaknesses.



#### Section 4

Following along those lines, we also wanted to see if respondents had a sound understanding of what a professional mentoring relationship looks like. When asked, most respondents suggested that it is a professional relationship in which a skilled and highly experienced individual offers "guidance" to a less skilled individual. However, respondents had varying ideas of the exact role that the mentor plays in the relationship. For example, Respondent A said a professional mentoring relationship is "one where an experienced professional gives me tips and advice and connects me to job opportunities", whilst Respondent B said a mentor "is a motivator for a student". Similarly, Respondent C said a mentor is "someone whom you can rely on [to]help you choose the right path", whilst Respondent D emphasized that the mentor is someone who "lets you do most of the work but guides the process and allows

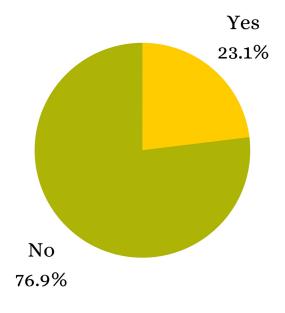
you to fail in the process and makes you learn from your mistakes". These varying ideas of a mentor's role reflected the different roles the respondents hoped a mentor would play in their own professional development. Few responses said a professional mentoring relationship was something that benefited both the mentor and mentee.

However, 98.2% of respondents said that they believed mentees had some responsibility in a professional mentoring relationship, just like the mentors do. These responsibilities included "taking the advice and criticism of [the] mentor seriously", being "willing to learn", and showing "respect to the mentor" and their time. Respondents said a mentee had to communicate well, put in the work, and know-how to take initiative.

Finally, 76.9% of respondents said that they did not have a mentor, and 90.4% of these individuals said they were interested in having one. In the additional comments section, a few respondents even expressed an interest in the IAWL connecting them with mentors. Respondent E requested that we "avail the mentorship and or internship opportunities to Namibian students", Respondent F said that they "hope [they] get a mentor soon", and Respondent G even plainly said "link me with one".

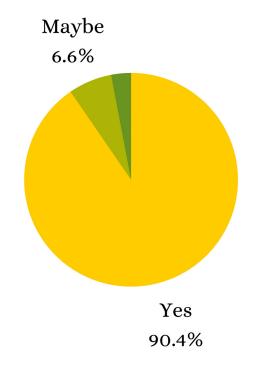
#### FIGURE 8.

Percentage of respondents who did not have a mentor.

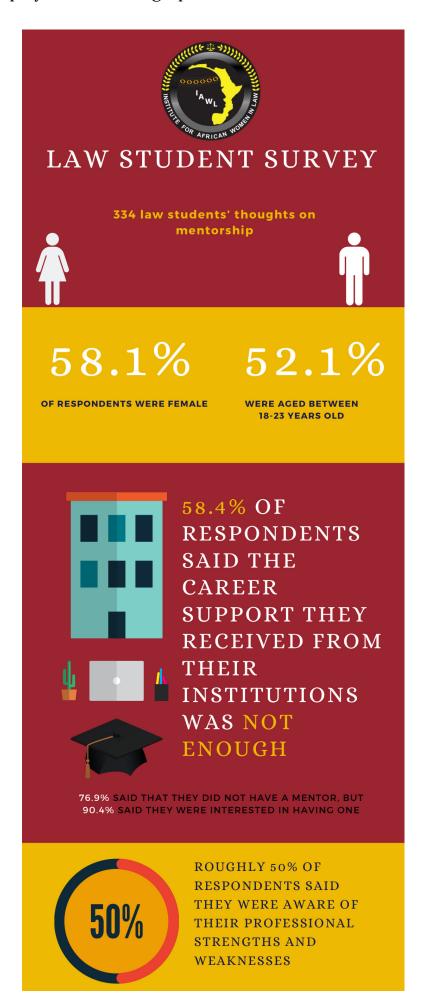


#### FIGURE 9.

Percentage of respondents interested in having a mentor.



Key results are displayed in the infographic below.



### CONCLUSION

Mentoring programs are an effective way of encouraging professional growth in mentors and mentees. As the IAWL set out to create our own mentoring program, research gathered from this survey was used to inform some of our decisions. This survey was sent out to assess whether there was much of a demand for a mentoring program amongst law students and early career professionals, and to see if they understood what went into making a successful mentoring partnership. The results of the survey showed that there is indeed a demand for a mentoring program and that respondents have some understanding of what it takes to be a part of a successful partnership. This information affirms our decision to create a mentoring program, knowing that there are young, early-career professionals who would be interested in the program and who would take it seriously.

#### Women in Law Mentoring Program

The Institute for African Women in Law is currently designing a mentoring program for female African law students and early career professionals. In line with the IAWL's mission, the Women in Law Mentoring Partnership aims to facilitate building networks between mature legal professionals and early career professionals by providing an environment through which those networks can be built. We aim to provide mentors with the opportunity to grow as leaders whilst simultaneously providing mentees with the opportunity to grow as young professionals. Our aim is for both mentors and mentees to benefit equally from this exchange. If you are interested in participating in this program, please fill out the Interest Form that you can access here.

This mentoring partnership will be open to women across all the legal professions. Mentors and mentees must be African or members of the African diaspora. They must be willing to fully commit to the partnership.

Mentors must have a minimum 10 years work experience post call to the bar. No prior mentoring experience is necessary.

Mentees must be law students or graduates with under 5 years of work experience post call to the bar.

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#### Institute for African Women in law (IAWL)

The Institute for African Women in Law is a non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to supporting the formidable works of women in law across the continent of Africa and the Diaspora. Our mission is to be a focal point for addressing issues across the legal and judicial professions.

Visit our website at https://www.africanwomeninlaw.com Email us at info@africanwomeninlaw.com

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