



# MAWAZO INSTITUTE

WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

**PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release**

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**Announcing a New Online Learning Community for African Researchers**  
***Meeting challenges in Africa's higher education sector through virtual learning***

Nairobi, Kenya (Oct 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020) - This year, we witnessed academic and research institutions grapple to adapt in real-time to the global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For those on the African continent, this experience [laid bare some of the infrastructural problems in the region's higher education sector](#).<sup>1</sup> At the time of this press release, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a large contingent of university and college students on the continent remain locked out of classrooms as governments struggle to resume learning safely, and virtual learning is still inaccessible to many.

[A survey<sup>2</sup>, by the Mawazo Institute](#), of 501 individuals affiliated with higher education and research institutions across the continent found that 83% of respondents reported experiencing disruptions to their ongoing learning – yet only 39% reported being enrolled in institutions offering e-learning options. Of note, female respondents in the study reported higher rates of disruption across all survey areas, showing the need for gender-sensitive solutions to the challenges ailing Africa's higher education systems.

At Mawazo, we believe that academia can be a tool for the empowerment of women—and that women are key to unlocking its underutilized potential on the continent by infusing new talent, energy, and perspectives into research, policy making, and public discourse. To this end, we've created [The Mawazo Learning Exchange](#) (MLEx), a new e-learning platform for African researchers designed to address some of the challenges faced by female scholars. Developed with our core beneficiaries in mind; young, African women at the start of their research careers who often face competing needs for their time as academics, employees, caregivers in the home, and more, MLEx provides an online learning community for them to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.africaportal.org/features/surveying-impact-covid-19-africas-higher-education-and-research-sectors/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57d0650220099eacd505d3fc/t/5eb2ced6d9b0e76c64e29834/1588776690884/6\\_5\\_COVID-19+Survey+Report+Final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57d0650220099eacd505d3fc/t/5eb2ced6d9b0e76c64e29834/1588776690884/6_5_COVID-19+Survey+Report+Final.pdf)

develop their professional skills. MLEx also offers a library of resources and opportunities tailored to the African context, and freely available to scholars everywhere.

The MLEx curriculum is designed with empathy and flexibility to provide a unique liberal arts style approach to professional development through short, intensive, online courses that build core research skills. By supporting the professional development of African women in the knowledge sector in this way, the Mawazo Learning Exchange hopes to amplify the voices and contributions of women to the continent's development.

As we roll out the Mawazo Learning Exchange curriculum in 2021, we will invite up to 40 Fellows from universities across Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda to take part in the programme's pilot year. Selection of the Fellows is already underway, with finalists due to be announced in January 2021. Our 40 Mawazo Learning Exchange Fellows, as with [our PhD Scholars](#), will represent a group of innovative, young African women, aged under 40, who are engaged in compelling and interesting research at the PhD level. With the right support, we believe that we can help these young women turn their ideas into solutions for the continent's pressing needs.

We look forward to introducing you to our Fellows. Please embark on this journey with us at: <http://www.mawazolearningexchange.org>.

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### **About the Mawazo Institute**

Founded in 2017, the Mawazo Institute is a non-profit research institute based in Nairobi, Kenya. Our mission is to support the next generation of female scientists and thought leaders in East Africa, and to get policymakers and the general public engaged with their work. Our programmes equip young African women to conduct high quality research on issues affecting the continent's development, prepare them to launch successful careers in their field, and position them to be thought leaders with influence both within and outside academia.

From our institution's home base in Nairobi, we also provide training and platforms for local experts to spark important conversations, and support the professional development of a broad audience of African researchers and practitioners through our digital platforms.

For enquiries about the Mawazo Learning Exchange, please contact us at [info.mlex@mawazoinstitute.org](mailto:info.mlex@mawazoinstitute.org). For general media enquiries about the Mawazo Institute, please contact [kari.mugo@mawazoinstitute.org](mailto:kari.mugo@mawazoinstitute.org).

### **F.A.Q**

**Who is the Mawazo Learning Exchange (MLEx) for?** The MLEx platform is freely accessible to researchers, students, and learners anywhere in the world, regardless of their gender or nationality. To enroll in MLEx courses, you must first receive an invitation from the Mawazo Institute and be an African woman conducting research on the continent. At this time, the program is closed to a small group of 40 Fellows, but we look forward to making our training materials available to a larger audience.

**How much does it cost to enroll in the Mawazo Learning Exchange?** All courses and resources on the platform are provided free-of-charge. To enroll in MLEx course work, you must first be enrolled as a Mawazo Learning Exchange Fellow. Funding for MLEx is made possible by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Fondation L'Oréal, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and individual donors.

**What is the Mawazo Learning Exchange Fellowship Programme?** This is a one-year virtual training programme, paired with mentorship and networking. The programme uses professional development courses designed by the Mawazo Institute to develop and nurture skills in our Fellows that are applicable across a variety of academic disciplines.

**How can I apply for the Mawazo Learning Exchange Fellowship?** Applications for our 2021 pilot year are currently closed. To get updates on our next application cycle, sign up for our newsletter [here](#).

**Who funds the Mawazo Learning Exchange?** MLEx is funded through the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Fondation L'Oréal, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and individual donors.