

# THE MAWAZO INSTITUTE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

## July 2020

The events of 2020 have forced all of us to look both inwards and outwards as we seek to understand and respond to a rapidly changing public health crisis that is impacting every sector of our society. As we mourn the tragic loss of hundreds of thousands of lives across the world, so far, we remain cognizant that the effects of the deep economic crisis created by the pandemic are only beginning to be felt; and that for both Mawazo and its beneficiaries, some tough decisions lie ahead.

Since the onset of the crisis, we have been working on innovative ways to cope with the unexpected impacts of COVID-19. Our responses are three-fold and have focused on: (i) our obligations to our staff, (ii) our commitment to our beneficiaries, and (iii) our engagement within the regional higher education ecosystem.

Today, I want to summarise the actions we are taking in each of these areas, and what our stakeholders can expect from us for the rest of 2020 calendar year:

**1 OUR TEAM:** The health and safety of our staff is a top priority; this is why we have shifted how we work at Mawazo. We have suspended all non-essential travel for our staff and adopted a work-from-home policy that will remain in place pending revised guidelines from public health experts, including the World Health Organization and Kenyan health agencies. We have also instituted weekly COVID-19 check-ins to identify areas for, and provide additional support to staff members during these unusual times.

**2 OUR BENEFICIARIES:** Mawazo's primary beneficiary group are young, African women who are early-career researchers. As [Mawazo's own survey](#) and other early studies have already shown, the COVID-19 pandemic, as with other social issues, is impacting this group disproportionately. This is why Mawazo has committed to understanding the unique impact of the pandemic on our beneficiaries, in order to best support them through the crisis and beyond. We have dedicated ourselves to identifying, and connecting beneficiaries to the additional resources they need during this time, including through our popular [Mawazo Opportunities Database](#). For our programme alumni, this also includes regular check-ins via email and WhatsApp messages.

In terms of programming, our key focus is the launch of the new Mawazo Learning Exchange later this year. An outgrowth of our former '[Training and Resources Programme](#)', the Mawazo Learning Exchange will be a virtual professional development platform for African researchers. It will include dedicated online training courses for early-career African women, covering a wide range of academic and professional skills. The Mawazo Learning Exchange will also provide a growing library of resources tailored to the African context and available to researchers everywhere, regardless of their nationality or gender. Higher education has been on the cusp of a technology-enabled revolution for some time, and COVID-19 has accelerated this transition around the world. The Mawazo Learning Exchange is our way



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to help ensure that African researchers are not left out of the digital migration to online learning.

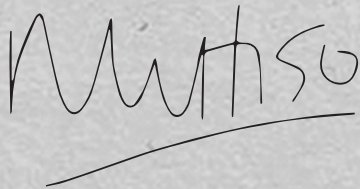
Due to the continued closure of universities across Kenya and the East African region, as well as disruptions to our fundraising pipeline, Mawazo's grantmaking and professional development programme, the [PhD Scholars Programme](#), has been put on hold. We had anticipated welcoming a new cohort of PhD Scholars in 2020, and while the programme can no longer go ahead as planned this year, we will be able to provide support to some of the promising young women who applied for the programme through a virtual training fellowship offered through the Mawazo Learning Exchange platform.

**3 OUR ECOSYSTEM AND PARTNERS:** COVID-19 is not just a short-term threat to the higher education and research ecosystem in Africa, it is also an opportunity and a challenge to build a more resilient sector for the long term. As a non-profit research institute working with early career African researchers, we are committed to playing our part. To this end, Mawazo will continue to conduct surveys with stakeholders on the continent, publish our findings in [reports](#) and [policy briefs](#), and participate in stakeholder discussions that aim to create joint sectoral responses to the pandemic.

Lastly, recognising the crucial need for locally-relevant science communication during a public health crisis such as this one, Mawazo is also committed to supporting the development and dissemination of African and woman-led, expert content that increases the public's understanding of the crisis and adds to growing discourse on Africa's responses to it. This will include working with our network of programme alumni and other local experts to produce [blogs](#), [op-eds](#), [accessible publications](#), [podcasts](#), social media engagement, and other digital content through our vibrant [Public Engagement Programme](#).

We will continue to revise our responses as events unfold, and look forward to sharing updates with you through [our newsletter](#) and social media handles. In the meantime, we wish you all continued health and positivity.

Sincerely,



Dr. Rose M. Mutiso  
CEO, Mawazo Institute