

# FACTSHEET

The Mawazo Institute is a women-led African organisation supporting early-career women researchers across the African continent as they work to find solutions to local and global development challenges.

## BACKGROUND

The *Status of African Women in Research Report (2025)* offers an in-depth look at the experiences of African women pursuing doctoral studies. It highlights the systemic barriers they face – including limited funding, mentorship, mobility, and institutional support – and calls for actionable steps to transform the future of African research.

The *report* is based on data from two main sources. In 2022, an open call for the Mawazo Fellowship, a non-residential programme for African women PhD students, resulted in **927 submitted applications**. An 'Academic Needs' survey was conducted to better understand the needs of women researchers in Africa and was embedded within the Mawazo Fellowship application process, with **1445 applicants completing the survey by the end of the open call**.

To enable African women to successfully complete their PhDs, it is imperative to sustain meaningful conversations at every level regarding their experiences within the research ecosystem, higher education institutions and universities, the media and funding bodies. The following recommendations are derived from this report:

## FOSTERING A STRONG NETWORK OF SUPPORT

**African women** in the research and higher education ecosystem must prioritise and foster a strong network of support, mentorship, and guidance amongst themselves. This can be achieved by defining mentorship on their own terms, engaging in both short-term mentorship (structured within a defined timeframe) and long-term mentorship (unstructured and evolving over years) to support the new generation of African women in research.

## IMPLEMENTING CONTINUITY MECHANISMS

**Higher education institutions and universities** must implement policies that establish and promote continuity mechanisms for women and girls. This includes creating an environment that supports their academic progression and mitigates factors that could lead to discontinuation. Such mechanisms include mentorship programmes, academic support services and policies that address specific challenges faced by women in academia.

## ADOPTING GENDER-SENSITIVE POLICIES

**Higher education institutions and universities** should fully adapt their gender-sensitive policies, making a concerted effort to increase the representation of women academics. This will be achieved by reviewing and implementing policies that promote gender equality such as equal pay, unbiased recruitment processes and opportunities (like capacity training) for career progression and creating a work environment that is conducive to the needs of women, such as flexible working arrangements and support for work-life balance.

## PRIORITISING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP WITHIN ACADEMIC JOURNALS

**Publishers** should prioritise the promotion of women to leadership positions within academic journals by actively seeking and promoting women to editorial roles, including editors-in-chief, associate editors, and editorial board members. This can be achieved by publishers implementing policies requiring a certain percentage of editorial positions to be held by women or seeking out female researchers to fill vacant positions and provide mentorship programmes to support women in developing leadership skills.

## INCREASING CITATIONS FOR OF AFRICAN WOMEN RESEARCHERS

**Publishers** should encourage authors to cite the work of African women researchers when relevant in the papers and books they publish, recognising their contributions and enhancing their visibility in the academic community. Publishers can provide authors with tools or resources to identify relevant research by African women, such as curated lists of publications or search filters, and also implement editorial guidelines that encourage authors to consider diverse sources.



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## STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS AFRICA

The African Union, government institutions, and the appropriate authorities already possess existing policies and frameworks designed to promote the advancement of African women in research. However, there is a greater need for the prioritisation, initiation and strengthening of implementation plans aimed at enhancing and supporting policy enforcement within African Union Member States.

## THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN ADVANCING WOMEN IN RESEARCH

The media has a critical responsibility to assess reporting on gender equity and equality, ensuring accuracy and accountability in presenting data on gender parity across the continent. Media outlets possess the ability to establish dedicated programmes or sections that consistently highlight the work and experiences of African women researchers.

## INCLUSIVE FUNDING PROGRAMMES

Funders should move beyond simply providing resources and develop inclusive funding programmes that are mindful of the unique challenges and circumstances facing African women in research. These programmes should also include capacity-building initiatives such as training, grant writing, budgeting, and public and policy engagement.

## GENDER-DISAGGREGATED DATA TO INFORM SOLUTIONS

All stakeholders, including universities, research institutions, funding bodies and policymakers, must actively engage with gender-disaggregated data to understand the specific challenges faced by African women researchers. This includes collecting and analysing data on attrition rates, access to resources and career progression. Furthermore, they need to keenly listen to and amplify the voices and experiences of African women researchers and collaboratively address these systemic challenges!



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