



MAWAZO  
INSTITUTE  
WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

An artistic illustration in a warm, golden-brown color palette. It depicts a close-up of a person's head from the back, showing their dark, curly hair being braided by two hands. The hands are rendered with detailed line work and shading, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The person's ear is visible, adorned with a large, circular gold hoop earring. The background is softly blurred, showing hints of a window with wooden frames and green foliage outside, suggesting a bright, indoor setting.

*Annual*  
**2025** *Report*



# Letter

## FROM THE CEO



### Dear Friend of Mawazo,

If you are an African woman, there is a good chance that you know the experience of sitting down to have your hair braided. And if you are not, there is a good chance that someone you love does.

The process often begins long before the first braid. There is preparation. An assessment of what is already there. Is the hair clean? How long is it? What style are we creating? How much time do we have?

Then comes the work itself.

*Patient. Deliberate. Skilled.*

**Strand by strand, something begins to take shape.**

In many ways, this is the work of Mawazo.

Across Africa, women researchers begin their PhD journeys with extraordinary potential. They are driven, analytical, creative, and deeply committed to solving some of the continent's most pressing challenges. Yet too often they must navigate those journeys while facing barriers that are rarely acknowledged: limited funding, isolation, caregiving responsibilities, restricted access to networks, and systems that were not designed with their realities in mind.

Like the braider preparing hair before beginning, Mawazo starts by listening.

In 2025, we released the **Status of African Women in Research report**, drawing on data from **over a thousand women researchers** across the continent. The findings reinforced what we have long believed: talent is abundant in Africa, but **opportunity is not always equally distributed**. The report also challenged us to think more deeply about how we can respond to the realities women researchers face and how we can continue to evolve our support.

The result was one of the most significant years in Mawazo's history.

In 2025, we welcomed **our largest Fellowship cohort to date**, expanding **from 40 to 60 women researchers** from **28 African countries**. This time, we were more intentional about including Francophone Fellows, delivering our learning programmes in both English and French and taking important steps toward becoming a more representative pan-African organisation.

We strengthened our Fellowship funding, expanded mentorship support, invested in wellbeing and flexible funding, and continued to grow the Mawazo Learning Exchange courses. We established a dedicated Policy department to help researchers translate evidence into influence. We expanded opportunities for alumni through the Connects Fund and launched Communities of Practice that brought researchers together across disciplines, countries, and career stages. We also welcomed six new team members who are helping us build the systems, culture, and capacity needed for our next phase of growth.

These achievements matter.

But they are not the most important part of the story.

**The most important part is what happened next.**

Research supported through Mawazo helped strengthen **maternal healthcare services for pregnant women in Rwanda**. Women **farmers in Ethiopia gained access** to more sustainable livelihood opportunities. **Pastoral communities in Kenya** received training on antimicrobial resistance and **safer livestock practices**. Researchers worked with communities to advance **climate-resilient agriculture**, strengthen conversations around femicide prevention, and support **more integrated approaches** to water, energy, and food security.

Across the continent, African women researchers were not simply producing knowledge. They were applying it.

And perhaps that is what gives me the greatest sense of hope.

Again and again, we see that when women researchers are supported, the benefits extend far beyond the individual researcher. They reach families. Communities. Institutions. Policy processes. Entire sectors.

The impact multiplies.

This was also reflected in a milestone we are especially proud of. In 2025, **24 Fellows and alumni completed their PhDs**, bringing the total number of doctoral graduates within the Mawazo network to 55.

Behind each graduation is **a story of perseverance**.

A researcher **balancing caregiving responsibilities with fieldwork**. A Fellow **navigating funding gaps**. A woman **continuing** despite setbacks, delays, self-doubt, or loss.

Every graduation represents a personal achievement. But it is also something more. It is a new expert. A new leader. A new voice helping shape Africa's future.

As I reflect on the year, I am struck by how much of Mawazo's work resembles the braiding process itself.

No single strand creates the final result.

**It takes** mentors, peers, family members, staff, funders, partners, institutions, and **communities**. Most importantly, it takes the determination and brilliance of the women themselves.

Each contributes something essential.

And while there is satisfaction in looking back on what we achieved in 2025, I find myself **even more excited about what lies ahead**.

Over the past year, Mawazo has undertaken a deep process of reflection, listening, and strategy development. We have asked ourselves difficult questions. We have celebrated what has worked. We have learned from what has not. And we have spent time imagining what the next chapter could look like.

What emerged was not a desire to do less.

It was **a conviction to do more**.

*More support*  
for African women researchers.

*More opportunities*  
for leadership, policy engagement, innovation, and public influence.

*More investment*  
in community, collaboration, and care.

*More belief*  
in the transformative power of African women's ideas.

The braid is not complete.

In many ways, we are only just beginning to see the pattern emerge.

*Thank you for being part of this journey with us.*

I look forward to sharing what comes next.

With gratitude,

Fiona





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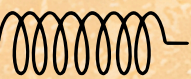
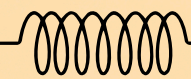
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# About Mawazo





**Mawazo believes that (1) African women conducting PhDs are driven, creative, analytical and critical thinkers, and (2) as African women they bring a unique (and often forgotten) perspective and voice to research and development.**

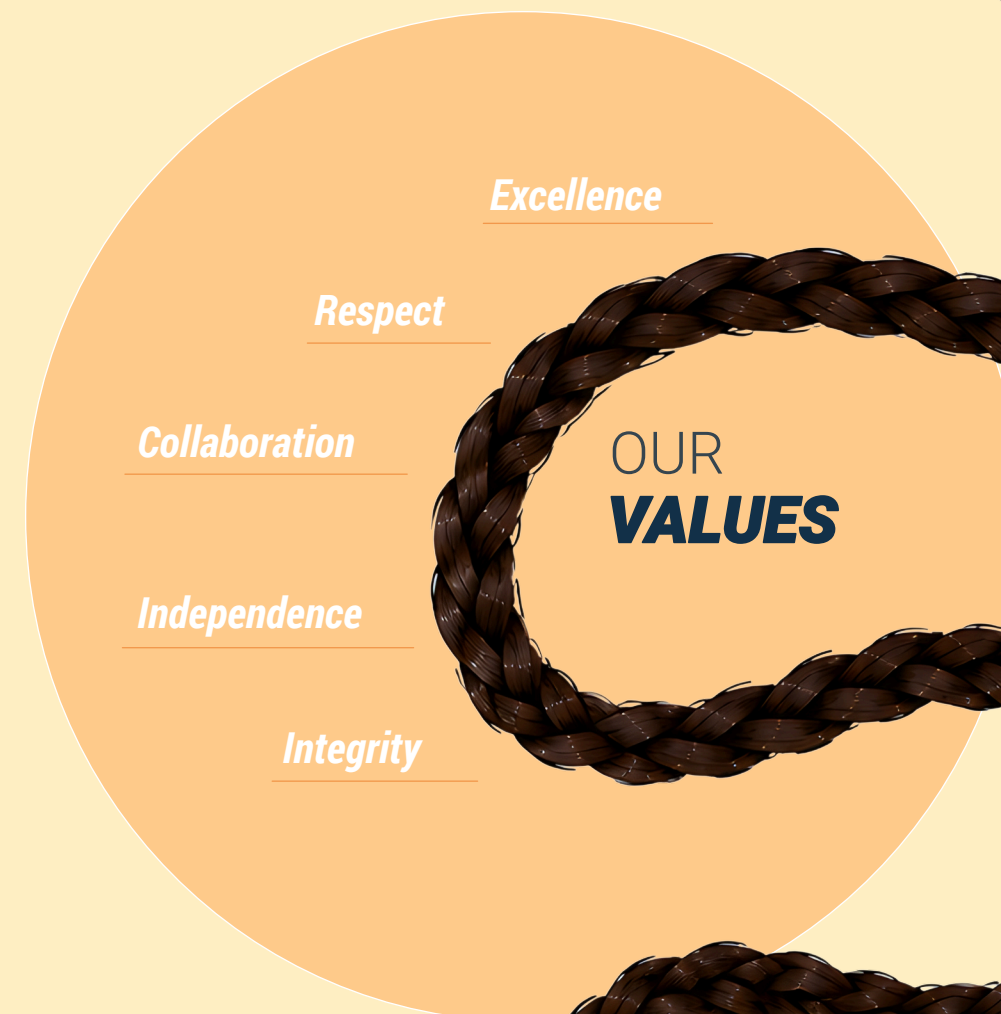


We believe that they hold the key to driving innovative, holistic, sustainable development on the continent and beyond.

By equipping early-career African women researchers with essential non-technical skills, mentorship, and funding support through the **Mawazo Fellowship Programme**, and using public engagement as well as strategic communications and partnerships with both academic and non-academic partners through the **Mawazo Voices Programme**, we create and facilitate opportunities for them to become thought-leaders and change-makers in critical fields and sectors.

## OUR MISSION

To support the big ideas of **early-career women researchers** and thought leaders in Africa to strengthen their research, public engagement, and influence on the development of the continent.





# MEET THE

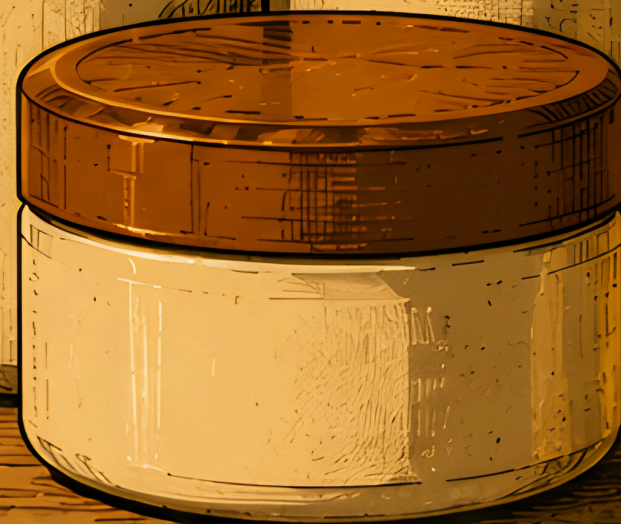
## 2025

### MAWAZO FELLOWS

**We are proud to introduce the 2025 Mawazo Fellows, our fourth and largest cohort yet.**

In May 2025, we welcomed 60 exceptional women PhD candidates representing 28 countries across Africa, reflecting our continued commitment to supporting a truly pan-African network of emerging researchers.

Their research tackles some of the most pressing challenges on the continent today, across fields such as: Agriculture and Food Security; Business, Trade, and the Economy; Climate Change, Natural Resources, and the Environment; Education and Pedagogy; Energy and Engineering; Gender, Rights, and Governance; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Information and Technology; Life and Health Sciences; and Mathematical and Physical Sciences.







**Dr. Adijat Ozohu Jimoh**

**Institution:** University of Cape Town

*Title of PhD: Interaction of the vaginal viral and bacterial communities in South African Women*



**Dr. Angela Ayimbire**

**Institution:** University of South Africa

*Title of PhD: Exploring Media Malaise and political communication in Ghana*



**Angelica Jossefa**

**Institution:** Sokoine University of Agriculture

*Title of PhD: Evaluation of microbiological contamination of vegetables grown in aquaponic system with Nile tilapia (Oreochromis niloticus) infected by pathogenic bacteria*



**Anna Zgambo**

**Institution:** University of Zambia

*Title of PhD: The Poetics of the Lyric Figure: Analyzing Structures of Tension, Fantasy and Sensation in Poetry Collections*



**Anu Itansanmi-Ogundayomi**

**Institution:** Federal University of Technology Akure

*Title of PhD: Socio-economic impact of Onchocerciasis and Lymphatic Filariasis on women and children from two endemic areas of Ondo State Nigeria*



**Dr. Ariane Houetohossou**

**Institution:** University of Abomey-Calavi

*Title of PhD: Optimisation of Machine Learning Techniques performance for tomato yield prediction and Disease Detection under Simulated Climate and Infection Conditions.*



**Ayalnesh Alayu**

**Institution:** Addis Ababa University

*Title of PhD: Policy Based Realization of the Right to Adequate Housing in Ethiopia: Analysis of the Implementation of post 1995 Housing Policy in Addis Ababa*



**Baba Lamfe**

**Institution:** University of Bamenda

*Title of PhD: Farmer's knowledge, diversity of fungi pathogens of wheat (triticum aestivum l) and biocontrol with extracts of mushroom in the northwest region of Cameroon*



**Beenzu Siamalube**

**nstitution:** Pan African University for Basic Sciences, Tech and Innovation

*Title of PhD: Development of an edible vaccine carrier in Irish potato (Solanum tubersom L.) for control of cholera in Sub-Saharan Africa*



**Binta Niome**

**nstitution:** Felix Houphouet-Boigny National Polytechnic Institute (Ivory Coast), Thiès Polytechnic School (Senegal)

*Title of PhD: Energy recovery from rice biomass after pretreatment by solar drying*



**Brenda Mndolwa**

**nstitution:** Sokoine University of Agriculture

*Title of PhD: The renewability of groundwater withdrawal under the influence of climate and land cover changes in dryland areas of Dodoma Tanzania*



**Brou Akouassi Henriette Kouadio**

**Institution:** Felix Houphouet-Boigny University

*Title of PhD: Genetic mapping of root-knot nematode resistance genes in eggplant cultivars for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture in Côte d'Ivoire*



**Catherine Kaku**

**Institution:** Makerere University

*Title of PhD: Elucidating genetics of resistance to early blight disease in tomato germplasm assembled for breeding in Uganda*



**Charity Kanyika-Mbewe**

**Institution:** Mzuzu University

*Title of PhD: Ecotoxicology of synthetic pesticides in rice growing areas of Karonga district in Malawi*



**Cidia Amelia Albino Francisco**

**Institution:** Eduardo Mondlane University, Faculty of Science

*Title of PhD: Factors Associated with Food Stress and Nutritional Deficiency in Women and Children Resettled After Extreme Weather Events in Sofala Province.*

## Spotlight



**Dr. Imen Ayouni**

**Institution:** University of Cape Town

*"Vaccination in Pregnancy: Characterizing vaccine confidence among pregnant women and its association with uptake of recommended vaccines in pregnancy of early childhood routine vaccination."*

### What Mawazo means to me:

The Mawazo Fellowship Programme is more than just a fellowship, it is a community, a family, and a source of inspiration. Over the past year, Mawazo has supported me not only as a researcher but also as a person. Firstly, Mawazo has provided opportunities that have significantly strengthened my academic development. Through funding, I have been able to attend conferences, participate in professional development courses, and build skills that have enhanced both my research and career.

But the programme is unique because it recognizes that successful researchers need more than funding; they need mentorship, encouragement, opportunities, and a strong support system. The holistic support has made an enormous difference. It has helped me navigate the challenges of pursuing a PhD while maintaining my well-being. Knowing that I have a community that genuinely cares about my success has given me confidence and resilience throughout my journey. Mawazo has empowered me to believe in myself and my potential, and for that I will always be grateful.

### An Early Memory with my hair:

One of my earliest memories involving hair is watching my mother gently brush and braid my hair before school. It became our special time together, filled with conversation, laughter, and little life lessons. As I grew older, I realized those moments were about much more than hair, they were expressions of love, care, and connection. Looking back, it's a memory that reminds me of the strength and nurturing spirit of the women who have shaped my life.





**Dellilah Masayi**  
Institution: Maseno University

*Title of PhD: Influence of multisensory teaching strategy in acquisition of pre-numeracy skills among learners with deaf-blindness in special school and units in Kenya*



**Dr. Diddi Hamadjoda Djamilatou**  
Institution: University of Maroua

*Title of PhD: Petrology and geochemistry of volcanic formations of Rounsou and surroundings (Kapsiki Plateau, Far-North Cameroon): implications on the geodynamic context of the Cameroon Volcanic Line*



**Dorcas Nyamanya**  
Institution: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

*Title of PhD: Capacity building practices enhancing performance of women empowerment Community-based Organizations in selected informal settlements in Kenya*



**Dr. Esther Josiane Masengesho**  
Institution: Babcock University

*Title of PhD: Monetary Policy and Foreign Financial Inflows in East African Countries*



**Eunice Wamucii**  
Institution: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

*Title of PhD: Developing an Optimized Food Literacy Intervention for the Kenyan Adolescents: A Factorial Design Experiment*



**Fauzia Argentina Guibunda**  
Institution: University of Nairobi

*Title of PhD: Design, performance analysis and optimization of a PV-integrated solar-powered drying technology for biomass briquettes under Mozambique weather conditions*



**Francisca John**  
Institution: The Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology

*Title of PhD: Investigating and optimizing of the selectivity of Ni/Fe catalyst supported on mesoporous silica (SBA – 15) functionalized with sulfonic acid (-SO3H) for cracking non-edible vegetable oils to produce aviation fuel*



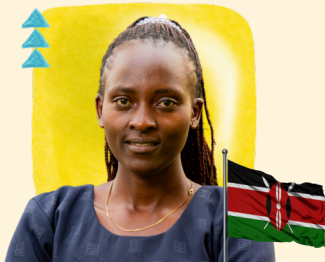
**Furaha Kazinguvu**  
Institution: Universite du Burundi

*Title of PhD: Crowdfunding and the growth of SMEs around South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*



**Gloria Ceasar Mutwala**  
Institution: KCMC University

*Title of PhD: Mosquito-based viral surveillance using sequencing technologies in hospital settings and ports on entry in Zanzibar*



**Glory Kawira Mutua**  
Institution: University of Embu

*Title of PhD: Mathematical modeling of gastric ulcers and its implications to gastric cancer with incorporation of selected control strategies.*



**Dr. Imen Ayouni**  
Institution: University of Cape Town

*Title of PhD: Vaccination in Pregnancy: Characterizing vaccine confidence among pregnant women and its association with uptake of recommended vaccines in pregnancy of early childhood routine vaccination.*



**Isabelle Erhudice Tachégnon Tokannou**  
Institution: Felix Houphouet Boigny University

*Title of PhD: Smart Fertilization Technology for Enhancing Fruit Tree Resilience to climate variabilities in Benin's Agroforestry Systems: A Case Study on Cola nitida (Vent)*



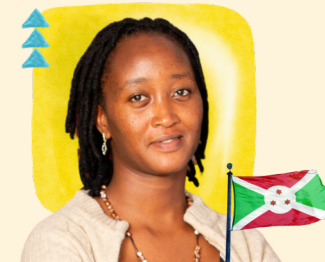
**Jessie Mzati Kanyerere-Amaechi**  
Institution: University of Western Cape

*Title of PhD: Understanding the occurrence and distribution of selected micropollutants along the land-to-sea continuum*



**Julien Ngum Che**  
Institution: University of Buea

*Title of PhD: Gender Based Violence in Crisis Situations: An Exploration of Experiences among Internally Displaced People in Tiko Sub-Division, Cameroon*



**Kelly Garina Mugisha**  
Institution: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

*Title of PhD: The molecular epidemiology of the zoonotic Wesselsbron virus in Kenya.*

## Spotlight



**Dr. Angela Ayimbire**  
Institution: University of South Africa

*"Exploring Media Malaise and political communication in Ghana"*

### What the Fellowship means to me:

The Mawazo Fellowship represents opportunity, community, and belief in African women researchers. My experience with Mawazo has been empowering and deeply supportive. From joining the fellowship while pregnant to receiving encouragement through motherhood and my PhD journey, I have felt genuinely valued. It has shown me that excellence and motherhood can coexist when the right support is available. Beyond funding, it has given me confidence, mentorship, and a network of sisterhood that continues to inspire my academic and professional journey. Mawazo has created an environment where I could thrive academically without having to choose between my family and my ambitions.

### An Early memory with my hair:

As I grew older, my long, thick hair was constantly mistaken for a wig. Everyone wanted to run their fingers through it to check if it was real. I tolerated it until one day a boy wouldn't stop, and I punched him in the face. After that, everyone finally got the message, my hair was real, and they stopped touching it!





**Kidist Fikre Worku**

**Institution:** Hawassa University

*Title of PhD: Isolation of multi drug resistant bacterial strains from poultry and evaluate their sensitivity to herbal extracts and molecular profile in Southern Ethiopia.*



**Loide Ndelimona Ndapandula Shipingana**

**Institution:** Stellenbosch University

*Title of PhD: Evaluation of immunomodulatory properties of short-chain fatty acids produced by the gut microbiome on immune cell functions in TB patients*



**Marie - Cécile Ngono Embwang**

**Institution:** National Higher Polytechnic School of Douala

*Title of PhD: Development of a High-performance Composite Activated Carbon from plastic waste (PET) and Biomass for Pollutant Removal in Aqueous Solutions.*



**Nomusa Merlyn Nkomo**

**Institution:** University of Cape Town

*Title of PhD: The Movement Ecology of Jackal Buzzards in Relation to Wind Farms in South Africa.*



**Meti Desalegn Tadesse**

**Institution:** Adama Science and Technology University

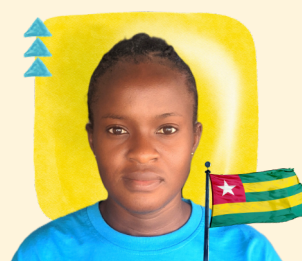
*Title of PhD: Functionalized Graphene Oxide/SiO2 with Metal Oxide Nanocomposite for Anode Materials in Lithium-Ion Battery Application*



**Mick Nsabimana**

**Institution:** Universite du Burundi

*Title of PhD: Combating cardiovascular diseases: epidemiological bases and strategies.*



**Moustakimou Sibabi**

**Institution:** University of Kara

*Title of PhD: Farm management and analysis of the genetic and nutritional diversity of Macrotyloma geocarpum accessions grown in Togo.*



**Dr. Nachizya Edith Namukanga**

**Institution:** University of Zambia

*Title of PhD: Prevalence of Primary Dysmenorrhea and its Effects on Quality of Life among Adolescent girls in Lusaka District, Zambia.*



**Dr. Navitha Singh Sewpersadh**

**Institution:** University of South Africa

*Title of PhD: Conceptualizing Fraud Risk Signaling in External Audit Engagements.*



**Dr. Neltah Tshepiso Mokgware-Monos**

**Institution:** University of Witwatersand

*Title of PhD: The Cause and Effect of the Persistence of Gender Norms Leading to Gender Inequality in the Real Estate Industry: Examining its Impact on Female Participation in Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia*



**Dr. Rebecca Nuwematsiko**

**Institution:** Makerere University

*Title of PhD: Effect and implementation factors of a contextually adapted short message service or phone call intervention to reduce loss to follow-up among presumptive TB patients in Central Uganda.*



**Refilwe Matlou**

**Institution:** University of Johannesburg

*Title of PhD: Optimal Control and Modelling the Potential Impact of Botswana's Policy Change on HIV/ AIDS Treatment for Immigrants*



**Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi**

**Institution:** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

*Title of PhD: Comparative analysis of spatial and non-spatial factors influencing residential location choices in selected urban fringe communities in Northern Ghana*



**Ruth Oyier**

**Institution:** Maseno University

*Title of PhD: Influence of Early Intervention on Emergent reading Achievement of Grade three pre-Lingual deaf learners in Kenya*



**Sarah Mulaji**

**Institution:** University of Cape Town

*Title of PhD: Strategizing Digital Transformation Programmes in Public Management: The Case of National Digital Identity Ecosystem Implementation in South Africa.*

*Spotlight*



**Dr. Nachizya Edith Namukanga**

**Institution:** University of Zambia

*"Prevalence of Primary Dysmenorrhea and its Effects on Quality of Life among Adolescent girls in Lusaka District, Zambia."*

**What Mawazo Means to me:**

The Mawazo Fellowship is sisterhood. It is women holding hands, lifting one another and reminding each other that we do not have to navigate the PhD journey alone. It is a community of encouragement, shared growth and collective success, where every milestone feels celebrated by people who genuinely want you to thrive. The many courses and training opportunities have equipped me with practical skills beyond my PhD, from research leadership to science communication. Mawazo has also connected me to an inspiring network of mentors and peers who continue to encourage, challenge and support my growth. My experience with Mawazo has been inspiring and empowering.

**An Early memory with my hair:**

One of my earliest hair memories is my mum using cotton to stretch my hair after washing it. It was her gentle alternative to relaxers and I loved seeing how long my hair looked afterward. Looking back, it was a simple act of care that celebrated my natural hair.





**Dr. Selma Shiyoka**

**Institution:** Stellenbosch University

*Title of PhD: Toxic Colonialism and Resilience: An Ecofeminist Reading of the African Child in Fiction by Contemporary Women Writers*



**Sharon Mukhola**

**Institution:** Tshwane University of Technology

*Title of PhD: A framework for the implementation and management of hospitality learnerships in South Africa.*



**Dr. Sidibé Maimouna**

**Institution:** Université Norbert Zongo

*Title of PhD: Évaluation de l'enseignement-apprentissage des sciences selon l'Approche Pédagogique Intégratrice (API) dans les écoles primaires bilingues au Burkina Faso*



**Tashie Evangeline Ngwanguong**

**Institution:** The University of Bamenda

*Title of PhD: New typhoid drug development through anti-salmonella potentials of Syzygium guineense Var guineense: An In silico, in vitro, and in vivo bio-guided exploratory approach.*



**Dr. Tété Pérugine Akoton**

**Institution:** University of Parakou

*Title of PhD: Geospatial Assessment of the Mangrove Ecosystems on the Benin Coast: Spatio-Temporal Dynamics, pressures, and Ecological Sustainability Indicators.*



**Tharcille Dukuzemariya**

**Institution:** Ardhi University

*Title of PhD: State-led Resettlement Housing and Livelihoods of Female-headed Households in Kigali, Rwanda*



**Tigist Mateos Husen**

**Institution:** Addis Ababa University

*Title of PhD: Exploration of diagnostic serum biomarkers, metabolic profiles, and molecular pathogenesis of thyroid cancer*



**Dr. Victoria Kadet**

**Institution:** Felix Houphouët Boigny University

*Title of PhD: Multiphase Approach of Starter Yeasts' Impact on Controlled Cocoa Bean Fermentation to Obtain Marketable and Reproducible Quality at Semi-Pilot and Pilot Scales.*



**Vimbashe Christine Manyisa**

**Institution:** University of Zimbabwe

*Title of PhD: Development of nutritious sesame fortified cereal porridges from traditional grains for improved food and nutrition security in Zimbabwe.*



**Dr. Vivian Philemon Mushi**

**Institution:** University of Dar es Salaam

*Title of PhD: Burden of Onchocerciasis Associated Epilepsy and Impact of the Bi-annual Community Directed Treatment with Ivermectin on control of Onchocerciasis in Mahenge, Tanzania*



**Vuyiseka Ntsalu**

**Institution:** Nelson Mandela University

*Title of PhD: Development of nanotheranostic for antimicrobial susceptibility testing of diabetic foot infections at the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro*



**Wendpouire Leticia Nadège Nonguierma**

**Institution:** Joseph KI ZERBO University

*Title of PhD: African metropolitan cities facing challenges of climate change: the case of Greater Ouaga Metro*



**Dr. Zabibu Afazali**

**Institution:** Makerere University

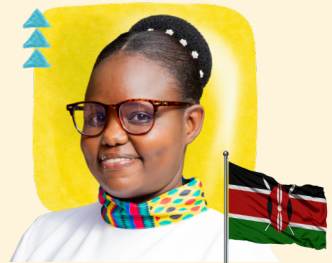
*Title of PhD: Dynamic modeling of General Insurance Risks*



**Zigju Demissie Baye**

**Institution:** Bahir Dar Institute of Technology, Bahir Dar University

*Title of PhD: Predicting Food Security in Ethiopia Based on Heterogeneous Data.*



**Zonia Nakate Mupe**

**Institution:** Pwani University

*Title of PhD: Prospecting for novel carbohydrate active enzymes (cazymes) from selected mushrooms cultivated on sisal processing wastes*

## Spotlight



**Ayalnesh Alayu**

**Institution:** Addis Ababa University

*"Policy Based Realization of the Right to Adequate Housing in Ethiopia: Analysis of the Implementation of post 1995 Housing Policy in Addis Ababa"*

### What Mawazo Means to me:

The Mawazo Fellowship Program means much more than financial support to me; it is a platform for growth, learning, and empowerment. Mawazo has strengthened my PhD journey in two important ways. First, its financial support enabled me to develop a context-specific assessment framework that was refined and validated by key stakeholders, enhancing the credibility and practical relevance of my research. Second, its mentorship helped me build quantitative research skills and overcome methodological gaps, enabling me to conduct more rigorous research. Through its resources, mentorship, and research support, Mawazo has enabled me to pursue impactful research on housing challenges in Addis Ababa, generating evidence-based recommendations that can contribute to more inclusive housing policies and budgeting.

### An Early memory with my hair:

One of my earliest memories is my aunt's daughter braiding my hair before school. Those moments were filled with care, conversation, and affection. Looking back, I realize that these small acts of kindness and encouragement shaped my confidence and reminded me of the importance of support throughout my journey.



## MEET MAWAZO'S **OPS AND TECH** TEAM

“In 2025 **75%** of the staff used the wellness fund, and **84%** of the staff used the professional development fund highlighting the impactful nature of Mawazo's additional support for employees.”



In 2025, Operations focused on **strengthening Mawazo's internal foundations** by completing the HR Manual and preparing the organisation for its rollout. This work brought together our values, people practices, and organisational policies into one shared framework, helping ensure fairness, clarity, and consistency across the team. The manual strengthens how we support staff and make decisions, providing a stronger foundation for Mawazo's continued growth and evolution. As a result, **Mawazo enters 2026 with clearer structures, stronger governance, and shared guidance that will support more consistent management and sustainable organisational growth.**

**Director of Operations | Ashley Muthaka**



In 2025, People and Culture focused on building stronger HR foundations. Working with an external consultancy, we completed a thorough review and update of the HR Manual, ensuring our policies reflect current best practices and the organisation's growth. The Job Evaluation exercise ran alongside this, giving us a clearer and more equitable basis for how roles are structured and compensated. Together, these two workstreams have resulted in a People and Culture function that is more structured, more consistent, and better placed to support Mawazo's team as the organisation continues to grow.

**People & Culture Officer | Eva Wanjiru**



A significant highlight was stepping into full ownership of the Tech department. Rather than being overwhelmed, I embraced it as an opportunity to grow – taking responsibility for all our platforms. This period strengthened my confidence in independent decision-making, technical troubleshooting, and supporting the wider team through their digital needs.

In 2025, I focused on moving from reactive troubleshooting to more proactive systems management. I began building structured internal documentation through the Tech GitBook, capturing platform processes and workflows to improve continuity and team reference. I also created simple internal processes to manage the higher volume of cross-platform requests more efficiently. These efforts improved how technical support was delivered across the organisation – making it faster, clearer, and less disruptive to programme delivery – and laid a stronger foundation for how the Tech function operates going into 2026.

**Digital Systems Officer | Rose Kairu**



A key highlight in 2025 was streamlining administrative and operational processes, including travel, event logistics, and workflows, ensuring smoother operations and stronger support for staff and fellows. A standout moment was successfully organizing the staff retreat, which strengthened team cohesion and engagement across Mawazo.

**Administrative Coordinator | Janet Kaitesi**



# The Beginning







*"Maybe it begins at the feet of your mother/aunty/sister. An early morning start, with an empty stomach, and the promise of sweet treats to be shared over the course of the day. One last conversation on what the final outcome will be, before you bend down and take a seat, on the pillow on the floor, ready and waiting for you."*



# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

## Stats on the ecosystem from the SOAWIR report

Much of Mawazo's work is based on interventions recommended from research. In 2025, Mawazo published the Status of African Women in Research report, which draws on data from the 2023 Mawazo Fellowship applications and the accompanying Academic Needs Survey.



**96%**  
of Central African applicants were from STEM fields

**4**  
On average, older applicants are taking approximately double the time to complete their PhDs as their younger counterparts.

**95%**  
of East African applicants reported difficulties in collaborating with other researchers

**66%**  
of applicants are self-funding their PhD studies

**75%**  
of applicants identified as primary caregivers

ACCESS THE FULL REPORT HERE



The report sets the stage for us to better understand what African women are experiencing before they encounter our Fellowship Programme, and the concrete ways the Programme can address the hurdles.

## WHAT WE DO IN RESPONSE

Foster collaborative opportunities in peer communities, networking, and mentorship programmes

Offer research, publishing, tuition, and equipment grants to address funding gaps

Host live events and online courses that teach holistic research perspectives including climate change lens and a gender lens

Incorporate an inclusive selection framework in selecting our Fellows

Center the programming for Fellows on care, placing overall wellbeing as a priority



## MEET MAWAZO'S

### **MERL**

#### TEAM

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Team



Senior Strategy and Impact Lead | Rowena Ndakwe



In 2025, we **focused on getting the basics right**. We stepped back and clearly defined what we want to measure, why it matters, and how we will track it across programmes. We streamlined our indicators, aligned them more closely to our strategic outcomes, and improved how we collect and organise data. Instead of measuring everything, we prioritised what truly matters.

We made significant progress in harvesting data, outcomes, and success stories across our programmes and translating them into compelling narratives for donors, partners, and stakeholders. Beyond storytelling, the most powerful shift was how this evidence directly informed strategic decision-making. The insights gathered from programme data, alumni feedback, and stakeholder consultations played a central role in shaping Mawazo's draft strategic plan. This marked **a move from reporting for accountability to using evidence as a driver of organisational direction and growth**.

MERL zeroed in on foundational work in 2025. We mapped clear indicators of success and clarified how to measure progress toward our goals. This deliberate focus has allowed the team to design interim data collectors that respond to our needs while laying the groundwork for the organisational and MERL strategy.



The MERL department progressed from merely evaluating and reporting static information to a shared learning process with the internal team and actionable recommendations towards designing programmatic interventions in funding, mentorship, and course delivery. The learning briefings strengthened collective ownership of our impact as Mawazo and created a space for informed participation in the strategy planning process. A culture of accessible reflection and evidence-informed decision-making is a first step towards increased capacity and confidence of the team to communicate our work.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer | Shirley Irungu



The highlight of 2025 was getting the Status of African Women in Research report up and out into the world! It has been inspiring to not only witness how far and wide the report has gone but also to hear of the conversations, curiosity and engagement that have come from it. By setting clear goals for the team and encouraging balance to enhance our work while avoiding burnout, MERL optimised in 2025!

Research Officer | Aisha Mugo



# MAWAZO'S

## **FELLOWSHIP**

### PROGRAMME

The Mawazo Fellowship Programme offers tailored professional development, including online learning, curated resources, and mentorship. It is designed to support early-career researchers during their doctoral studies as they navigate their careers and contribute meaningfully to their fields. As such, the programme also provides funding opportunities through the Mawazo Fellowship Fund which covers data collection and analysis, lab equipment, conference attendance, journal publication fees, and general wellness.



# Preparation



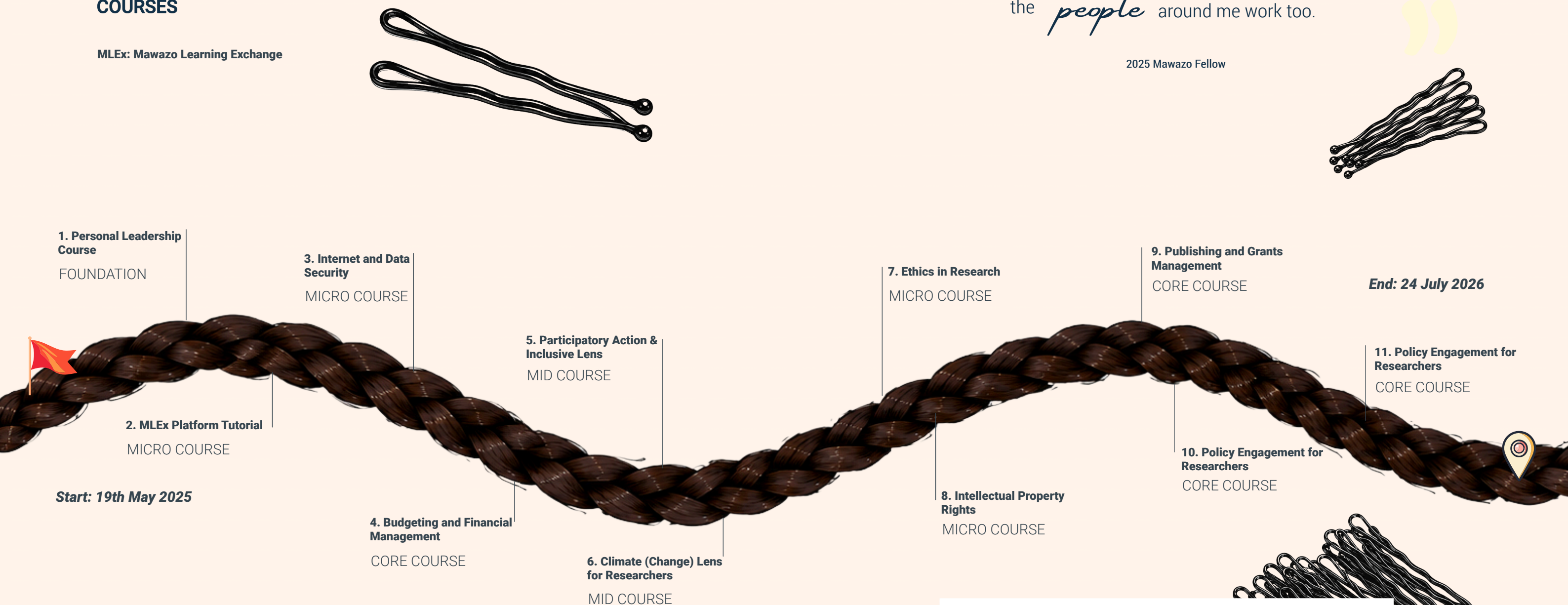


*"Preparation begins with assessment. There is the examination of what you have already. The unwrapping of a hair tie, the untangling of locks, the spraying of treatment, and then the stretching of hair. A hair dryer, set to high heat, pulls its way through your mane, across your scalp. Heating and stretching, heating and stretching."*



# UNDERSTANDING **THE MLEX** COURSES

MLEx: Mawazo Learning Exchange



In 2025, the Fellowship team offered six courses, delivered in both English and French through the Mawazo Learning Exchange (MLEx) platform specifically: Personal Leadership, Participatory Action Research, Internet and Data Security, Ethics in Research, Climate Lens in Research and Budgeting and Financial Management for Researchers. Most courses had 100% completion rates.

The Mawazo Learning Exchange (MLEx) curriculum is designed with empathy and flexibility in mind. We provide a unique liberal arts style approach to professional development through short, intensive, online courses covering a range of academic and professional skills including: budgeting and financial management, academic writing and publishing, grant writing, science communication, policy engagement, leadership and career planning.

*This isn't just changing how I work; it's changing how the people around me work too.*

2025 Mawazo Fellow

**From the 2025 Fellows:**

*"Before the course, budgeting was a mystery, I'd just copy old formats, now I can actually tailor a budget to what my project needs."*

*"The course challenged how I think about community engagement, I now involve participants from the beginning, not as an afterthought."*

*"I now think about ethics from the design stage, not just when approval is needed."*



## THE **FELLOWSHIP** FUND

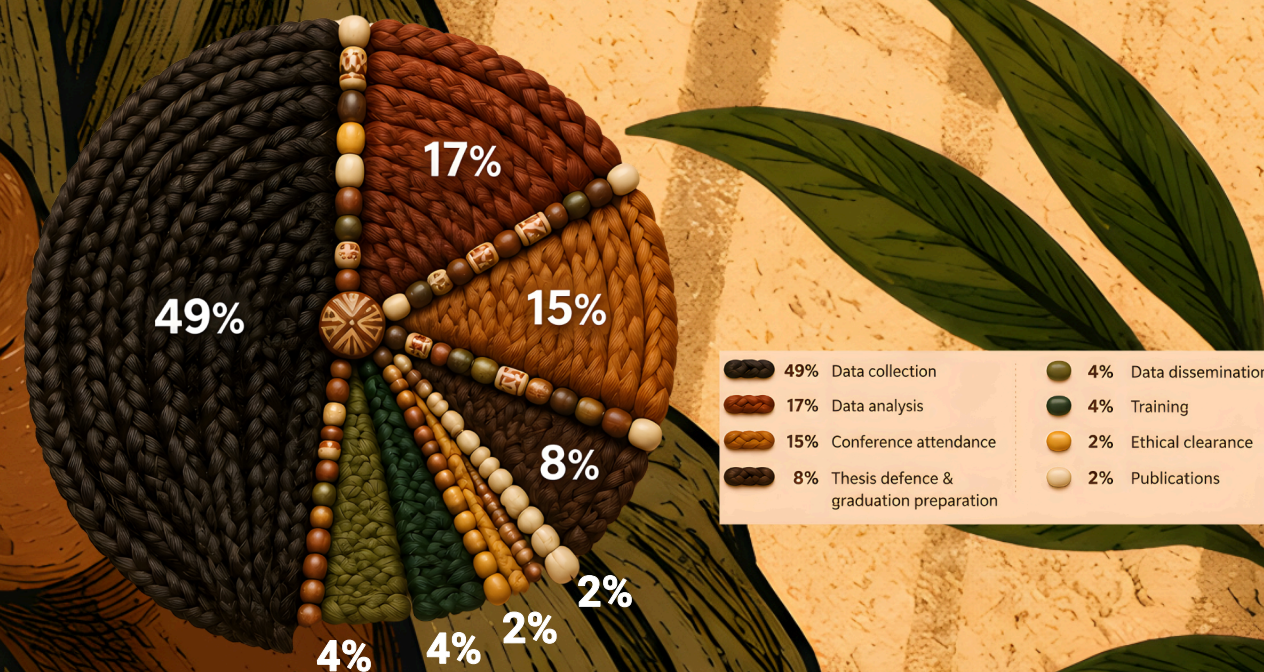
The **Mawazo Fellowship Fund** offers grants to current Mawazo Fellows to support their path-to-PhD research activities, offset University fees, and cover select ad hoc and welfare-related expenses. Mawazo Fellows are eligible to apply for the Fellowship Funds under three strands of funding:

The **Mawazo Fellows Fund**, which offers grants up to a maximum of US\$10,000 to each current Mawazo Fellow across the 15-month fellowship period to support their research activities, with a key aim being completion (or near-completion) of their PhD within the Fellowship period.

The **Mawazo Fellowship Flexible Fund**, which offers grants up to a maximum of US\$1,000 to each Fellow to address personal, emergency, and well-being-related needs that may affect their ability to stay engaged in their research and professional commitments.

Finally, the **Mawazo Fellowship Fees Fund** provides limited financial assistance to help offset university fees.

## THE **FELLOWS** FUND



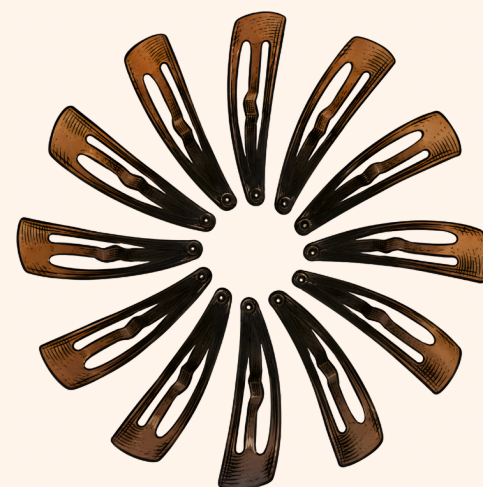
## THE **FLEXIBLE** FUND





# THE MENTORSHIP JOURNEY

for our 2025 Mawazo Fellows



All **60 Mawazo Fellows** were paired with **one-on-one mentors**, providing tailored academic, professional, and psychosocial support. Through regular virtual sessions **every 4–6 weeks**, Fellows have gained **confidence, clearer research direction, and support** along their PhD journeys.



**19%** of the Fellows reported relying on the peer groups for **emotional support**

**15%** peer support and

**13%** for advice and guidance

The majority of the Fellows found that their mentor was very helpful and aligned with their research journey



Adijat Jimoh shared that “my mentor helped me refine the manuscript on bacterial secondary metabolites and prepare the lab plan for 16S rRNA sequencing,” adding that the support came “at a time I felt overwhelmed by lab delays.”

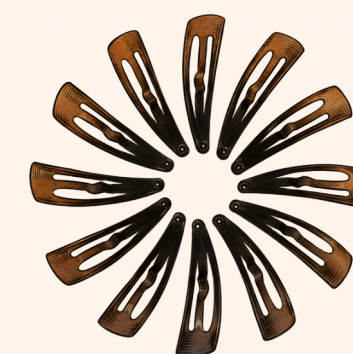


Angelica Jossefa expressed that “my mentor challenged me to rethink my research questions, which has improved the structure of my dissertation.”



Victoria Kadet credited her mentor with helping her prepare for her thesis defense, stating, “I walked into the room more prepared than I thought possible, my mentor helped anticipate the tough questions.”

Fellows were also organised into smaller **peer groups** which have been incredibly instrumental in building a support system among the Fellows.





# MEET MAWAZO'S **FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME** TEAM

“By the end of 2025 **75%** of the fellows reported that they  
**had progressed to the next stage of their PhD journey.**”



**Fellowship Programme Lead | Damaris Ndau**

In 2025, the **Fellowship Programme optimised its design and delivery** by intentionally refining both its scale and scope, using learnings from previous cohorts to build a more inclusive, structured, and impactful programme.

A major highlight was the successful design and launch of an expanded 2025 Fellowship cohort, growing from 40 Fellows in the previous cycle to 60 exceptional African women researchers. This increase in cohort size marked a significant step in scaling the programme's reach and impact.

Beyond scale, the Fellowship evolved in scope to become more inclusive and responsive to Fellows' diverse needs. The cohort included Francophone Fellows and a Fellow who is hard of hearing, which prompted key adaptations such as the delivery of MLEx courses in French and the introduction of captioning support.

We also deepened the Fellowship's offerings by redesigning core programme components. This included a substantial increase in Fellowship funding from \$2,500 to \$10,000 per Fellow and a shift from a competitive funding model to a more inclusive approach with multiple funding streams, including flexible funds and a dedicated fees fund. Additionally, we strengthened our mentorship model through the introduction of a mentorship tracker to better align Fellows' goals, progress, and funding support.

Overall, **2025 marked a pivotal year in which the Fellowship Programme not only reached more women researchers, but also supported them more holistically and effectively.**

In 2025, the fellowship programme team optimised through the development of a Mentorship Roadmap, which made the mentorship component more intentional and closely aligned with the overall programme delivery. This approach provided valuable insights into each fellow's goals and growth trajectory, enabling us to better tailor our support and guide them effectively toward achieving their objectives.

One of my biggest highlights of the year was welcoming the new cohort of fellows into the Mawazo Fellowship Programme. It was especially exciting to see the programme grow, with 60 incredible women joining us from an even wider range of African countries. There was something truly special about bringing everyone together in Nairobi for the programme launch—the energy, the connections being formed, and the shared sense of purpose were all incredibly inspiring. I particularly enjoyed witnessing the beginning of their journeys, seeing them engage with one another, and creating a space where they felt supported, seen, and empowered. It was a meaningful reminder of the impact of the programme and the importance of building a strong, connected community of African women researchers.



**Fellowship Programme Officer | Dorsila Ogala**







A detailed illustration in a warm, orange-toned style. It depicts a young woman with curly hair, her eyes closed in a state of relaxation or pain, with her hands propped up to her temples. An older woman, likely her aunt, is shown from the side, focused on styling the young woman's hair with a comb. The scene is intimate and captures a moment of traditional care. The background is a solid light orange, and there are some decorative elements like a green leaf in the top left and a coiled wire in the bottom right.

*"Elbows propped on knees, head supported by many hands, the work has now begun in earnest. Skills that have been passed down, from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, from aunty to aunty, culminate in labour that seems effortless. Tools and fingers part hair, pulling and twisting it into submission. Trust the process, the change is coming."*



# MAWAZO'S VOICES

## PROGRAMME

The Mawazo Voices Programme elevates the big ideas and public voices of African women researchers who have graduated from the Mawazo Fellowship Programme. In 2025, the alumni network numbered **91 researchers** who continued to benefit from Mawazo's support through the Mawazo Voices programme.

Mawazo Voices provides alumni with (1) platforms that amplify their work — including the **Mawazo Ideas Digest**, **Mawazo Ideas Podcast**, and **Mawazo Ideas Night**, (2) funding opportunities to turn their research into impact, (3) cross-sector partnerships with media, civil society, industry, and innovation actors to move ideas into action, and (4) ongoing community and opportunities through the **Mawazo Connects** alumni network.

In 2025 Voices launched the **Connects Database**, an online resource for Mawazo's network to connect directly with relevant stakeholders, global researchers, potential financiers, the media, and any other interested parties. The programme also introduced 2 new funding streams within the **Connects Fund**, a flexible funding strand that covers wellness needs and a funding strand for the newly formed **Communities of Practice**, that covers group, interdisciplinary projects.

# THE CONNECTS

## DATABASE

The newly launched Connects Database has 86 profiles of African women researchers, in 9 different broad fields of research, and more than 236 research publications.

Here are 3 diverse profiles:





# THE CONNECTS

## FUND

### Alumni Main Research Fund

We supported **43 alumni** from **9 African countries** through the Main Research Fund.

**87.5%**

*of alumni said it significantly boosted their research visibility and growth, and*

**100%**

*reported increased confidence to lead or influence research initiatives.*

**81%**

*completed their projects with clearly positive outcomes.*

**Alumni mentioned the practical support of the fund as transformative: "The fund strengthened my ability to translate research into actionable outputs," and "I was able to engage policymakers, that was a serious milestone."**



**Dr. Peace Uwambaye from Rwanda strengthened maternal health outcomes by equipping 138 pregnant women and 18 ANC providers in Eastern Rwanda with the skills and confidence to integrate oral health into routine care**

*The initiative sparked early behavior change, with women proactively requesting oral health checkups and even involving their spouses in learning sessions.*

*Strong collaboration with district health authorities enabled smooth integration into existing ANC services, while community-led outreach extended the impact beyond health centers*

*The approach has already attracted interest from health officials for broader adoption, signaling meaningful potential for future policy influence and scale.*



**Desta Gebeyehu, a researcher from Ethiopia explored the viability of developing sustainable farming models for female-headed households in Amhara.**

*Impacted vulnerable women by introducing improved chicken breeds and training them on poultry management. Through participatory methods, Desta ensured community buy-in and local knowledge integration.*

*Developed partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture and a local university, which have expressed interest in scaling the model.*

*For sustainability, Desta plans to link women to cooperatives and local markets while continuing follow-up through local extension officers.*



**Dr. Lillian Kong'ani from Kenya facilitated awareness creation within the camel milk value chain by training pastoral women, herders, camel owners, and cooperative representatives on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and appropriate antimicrobial use (AMU).**

*Clear knowledge gains and early shifts in attitudes, with participants expressing greater willingness to adopt safer AMU practices and share the information within their communities.*

*Collaborated with veterinary, public health, and cooperative stakeholders which improved trust and created a unified platform for continued AMR awareness. The approach has already sparked commitments from local officials and cooperatives to integrate AMR messaging into routine services*



# THE CoP FUND

## Communities of Practice

**We supported five women-led Communities of Practice (with approximately USD 15 000 each) across 7 African countries, and across cohorts to lead mentorship, policy engagement, and community-driven solutions addressing climate resilience, STEM career pathways, water-energy-food insecurity and femicide prevention.**

**The Agriculture and Food Security CoP** worked with farmers in Kitui and Makueni counties to promote adoption of cassava as a nutrient dense drought tolerant crop variety.

“Once farmers saw the possibilities, the questions changed,” one CoP member shared, noting that “they stopped seeing cassava as a crop you just boil at home and started asking about packaging, markets, and buyers.”

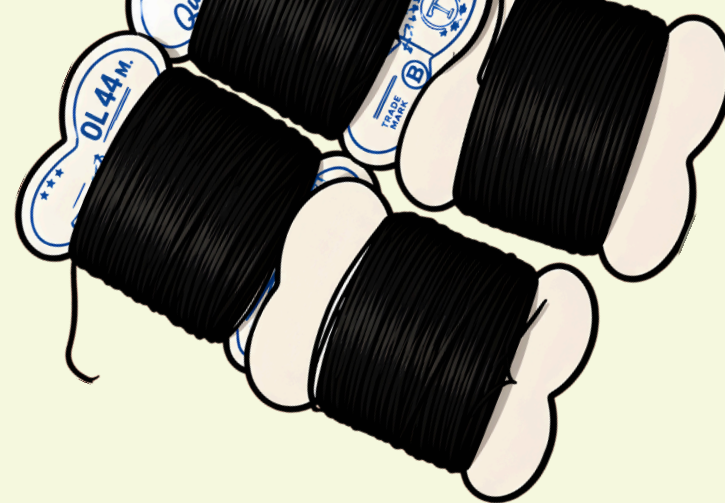
The work also opened conversations with local institutions on scaling climate-resilient crops, linking farmer experience directly to food security and agricultural policy discussions.



**The Gender, Rights and Governance CoP** worked together to examine legal gaps around femicide prevention and justice in Kenya and Tanzania.

“This work gave us language and evidence to name the injustice,” one CoP member reflected. Another noted that “working across borders helped us see how similar failures repeat themselves, and where the law can do better.”

The CoP strengthened links with legal practitioners, civil society organisations, and women’s rights advocates in both countries, aligning comparative legal research with advocacy priorities and contributing evidence that can inform policy reform and justice-sector conversations beyond individual cases.



**The Climate, Natural Resources and Engineering Mentorship CoP** led a structured mentorship programme that supported 45 African women researchers from Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Uganda navigating STEM careers and male-dominated environments.

Combined virtual expert-led sessions, hands-on data analysis workshops, group mentorship, and project presentations. “Seeing African women who are leading in these fields made the path feel real,” one mentee shared. Another reflected that “for the first time, I felt confident asking questions without fear of sounding inexperienced.”

The CoP surfaced systemic gaps in career support for women in STEM, “There is so much talent, but very little structured support once women leave university,” one CoP member quoted.



**Water, Energy and Food Nexus CoP** worked closely with women and children in rural resource-insecure communities in Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia to document how water scarcity, energy access, and food availability shape everyday decisions.

Through community conversations, case documentation, and comparative analysis, captured how households manage daily trade-offs between fetching water, securing fuel, and feeding their families. “Once you hear these stories, you can’t design policy in silos anymore,” one member noted, while another reflected that “the community realities forced us to rethink how evidence is presented to policymakers.”

The CoP is consolidating the findings into policy-oriented case briefs and exploring engagement with sector actors and policymakers to inform more integrated planning across water, energy, and food systems.



**The Life and Health Sciences CoP** came together organically, driven by shared frustration with gaps they had experienced as women researchers, particularly around CV writing, cover letters, career mentoring, and access to international opportunities.

“My supervisor never taught me how to write a CV or apply for opportunities, I had to figure it out myself,” one member shared. “We realised just how many people were in need when we saw the number of applications coming in.”

Through shared sessions on research skills, career planning, and academic navigation, the CoP supported over 200 early-career researchers from at least five African countries.

“It felt like someone finally explained how the system works,” one participant said.





# MEET MAWAZO'S **VOICES PROGRAMME** TEAM

“The team's *emotional support* during a difficult time *made me feel truly seen*”

Mawazo Alumna



Being able to **roll out two new strands of funding** that support our alumni network was a key highlight of 2025. Both the Communities of Practice Fund and Flexible Support Fund were able to respond to broader needs of the alumni network, including increasing collaboration among researchers and their capacity to identify and respond to policy issues of concern to them. The Flex Fund also met researchers where they are, encouraging them to reflect on what they need to address in their personal lives in order to show up for themselves and their work. The Voices team really leaned into other departments to help us understand the needs and experiences of the alumni network, and how to design programme interventions that work for them. **Working with researchers across dozens of African countries, it's important to be able to listen and learn from them and others.**

**Voices Programme Lead | Kari Mugo**



In 2025, a highlight of the Voices department was the successful disbursement of the Connects Fund which had grown tremendously since 2024. It was fulfilling to be able to support more African women in their post-fellowship and post-phD research activities. It was also a joy to introduce the Connects Flex Fund and support our alumni in their wellness journeys as they pursue their research careers. We optimised through developing policies to govern the Connects Fund. The immense growth in the funds disbursed provided us with a unique opportunity to tighten our systems and processes thereby ensuring the needs of our grantees are met in a fair and safe manner.

**Voices Programme Officer | Silvia Mwenda**



For me, the highlight of the Voices department was expanding the grants in volume and strands. While the Connects Fund was previously offered in a single strand, we increased that by two additional strands, i.e., the Flexible Support and the Communities of Practice Strands, to provide more tailored support to Mawazo Alumni who are at different stages in their research journeys. The outcome was a greater scope and impact for Mawazo Alumni's work. The department optimised by closely collaborating with other departments like MERL, Finance, Communications, and Operations to produce the best outcomes in the awarding of grants, disbursing of said grants and analysing reports from grantees at the end of each cycle. Ultimately, the inputs from other departments helped in not only producing the best grant outcomes but also in creating better programmatic systems for 2026 and beyond.

**Voices Programme Associate | Catherine Amayi**





THE NEW  
**POLICY AND  
ADVOCACY**  
DEPARTMENT

*In 2025, the Mawazo Institute launched a new Policy and Advocacy Department,, aimed at supporting the researchers in our network who are keen to evolve their research into policy change and impact.*

*In less than six months, the fledgling department:*

Worked with

**31 WOMEN  
RESEARCHERS**

(21 alumni and 10 Fellows)

Across

**14 AFRICAN  
COUNTRIES**

and a diverse set of disciplines.

Created a

**POLICY BRIEF  
WRITING TOOLKIT**

equipping Fellows and Alumni with foundational skills for drafting impactful policy briefs

Led a

**POLICY COLAB  
LIVE SESSION**

for the network

POLICY  
**DEPARTMENT** IN ACTION



Alumni are drafting **policy briefs**, including Dr Milcah Wambua who is reviewing Kenya’s Flour Blending Bill to strengthen the integration of cassava components into the policy, by addressing policy gaps and proposing practical guidelines that support its inclusion in national food systems and value chains.

MEET MAWAZO'S  
**SENIOR POLICY  
AND ADVOCACY**  
LEAD



*The establishment of the Policy and Advocacy department stands as the absolute highlight of my 2025, and seeing the genuine enthusiasm our Fellows and alumni have for this work has been truly elating. What began as a foundational conversation between myself and the CEO regarding the need for dedicated policy leadership, led to a comprehensive strategy, enriched by thoughtful consultations with our board chair and two co-founders.*

*A pivotal moment occurred during our 2025 in-person onboarding, where ten new Fellows stepped forward, already eager to translate their research into policy. It was equally moving to see alumni from various thematic areas emerge from the sidelines, realising for the first time how important their research is to inform and influence policy. Growing this initiative to include 31 women out of 151 who are eager to translate their expertise to impact, is a reminder why this work matters and has been nothing short of inspiring!*

Carolynne Tunnen



Loise Nthambi organized a **policy engagement forum** in Makueni County, focused on expanding access to cervical cancer screening by exploring urine-based testing methods, an innovative translation of her research into public health policy.



Research by Mawazo’s alumni is shaping **policy debates** as found in the Daily Nation (Kenya), Daily Monitor (Uganda), and Kenya News Agency, which are influencing debates on maternal health, cancer pre-screening, and climate-smart agriculture respectively.



# Completion





A detailed illustration of a woman with long, dark, braided hair, wearing a yellow top and a gold hoop earring. She is sitting on a patterned rug, and another person's hands are visible, braiding her hair. The background features a patterned curtain and a red cushion with yellow flowers. The scene is warmly lit, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

*"A final, gentle, touch of your hair, lets you know the work is done. Pride and gratitude swirl in community. Well done. Thank you. We say to each other, both braider and beneficiary. Your hands reach up to feel your crown in place. Up you get, ready to re-enter the world."*



# MAWAZO IN **THE PRESS**

## **Institutional Wins**

### Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellowship

In April 2025, Mawazo Institute CEO Dr. Fiona Wanjiku Moejes was selected as a 2025 Tutu Fellow of the prestigious Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellowship. The African Leadership Institute is building a critical mass of visionary, strategic, self-aware and ethical leaders across the continent, who together become the catalysts for change and transformation of Africa.

### Do More To Help African Women In Research – March 2025

On March 20th, 2025 – Kenyan publication the Daily Nation published an OpEd written by Mawazo's Communications Lead, Carolynne Tunnen, following the launch of the Status Of African Women In Research report.

### Stepping into the spotlight: African women rewrite the narrative

On May 23, 2025, TV47 Digital featured the Mawazo Institute's 2025 Fellows event, held in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme "Stepping into Your Spotlight."

### Creating Space for Change: Mawazo's CEO Honoured in Top 40 Under 40 Women

In August 2025, Mawazo Institute CEO Dr. Fiona Wanjiku Moejes was named among the Top 40 Under 40 Women.

### How Mawazo is elevating Women in African Research

In March 2025, to mark International Women's Day, Mawazo's donor Imaginable Futures published a blog post on their website spotlighting the work that Mawazo does in supporting African women researchers

### Five UCT women selected for prestigious fellowship

On August 6th, 2025 Mawazo's Fellowship Programme was spotlighted in a piece by the University of Cape Town (UCT), which celebrated five of its PhD scholars – Adijat Ozohu Jimoh, Dr Imen Ayouni, Navitha Singh Sewpersadh, and Sarah Mulaji

### Pathways to Trust in Science Engagement – Falling Walls Science Summit.

On 24th November 2025, Mawazo's Voices Programme Officer, Silvia Mwendia, was featured in the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung following her participation in a panel discussion at the Falling Walls Science Summit on Pathways to Trust in Science Engagement.



## **Science Communication**

### Kadet Obou Victoria: An innovative thesis to improve the quality of Ivorian cocoa

On Saturday, October 20, 2025, Mawazo's youngest Fellow, Kadet Obou Victoria, was featured in Côte d'Ivoire's online publication L'HorizonInfo.Net following the successful defence of her doctoral thesis in food security.

### A Call for Inclusive Media and Digital Access

On 8th October 2025, Mawazo Fellow Ruth Oyier engaged with local media on the topic of digital inclusion, focusing on bridging the digital divide among persons with disabilities.

### Cassava: Untapped Food Security Opportunity

On October 8th 2025, the Daily Nation featured an opinion piece by Milcah Wambua, a 2021 Mawazo Fellow, titled "Cassava: Untapped Food Security Opportunity." In the article, Milcah highlights the potential of cassava in strengthening Kenya's food security and resilience.

### Can nature help solve human problems like climate change? Researchers weigh up pros and cons, February 2025

On February 4th, 2025, The Conversation Africa, an online independent newspaper source from the academic and research community, published an article co-authored by 2021 Mawazo Fellow Yvonne Githiora, exploring the potential of nature-based solutions to address environmental challenges

### Nigeria's Hadejia wetlands are a vital stopover for migrating birds

On July 1, 2025, The Conversation published an article by Mawazo alumna Nanchin Winfred highlighting new research on the Hadejia Wetlands National Park in north-western Nigeria.

## **Spotlighting Researchers**

### A highlight on Dr. Yvonne Githiora's journey with the Mawazo Fellowship

In March 2025, 2021 Mawazo Fellow – Dr. Yvonne Githiora published a post on Africa Research Hub; a continental resource for African students and researchers that she founded.

### Sharon Mukhola : How TUT's Sharon is redefining Hospitality Education

In October 2025, Tshwane University of Technology(TUT) featured Sharon Mukhola – 2025 Mawazo Fellow – sharing her remarkable journey as a TUT alumna, NGAP Academic Lecturer in Hospitality Management, and Fulbright Research Fellow.

### The Voice Celebrates Neltah Tshipiso Mokgware-Monsi: Breaking Barriers in Real Estate

On 26 September 2025, The Voice celebrated Dr. Neltah Tshipiso Mokgware-Monsi, a 2025 Mawazo Fellow and the first Motswana woman to earn a PhD in Real Estate, for her trailblazing contributions to Botswana's property sector.

### Meet Victoria Kadet: 26-year-old pursuing a PhD, on a mission to transform cocoa farming

In May 2025, TV47 profiled Victoria Kadet, the youngest scholar in the 2025 Mawazo Fellowship cohort. At just 26 years old, the Ivorian researcher is breaking barriers





## MEET MAWAZO'S **COMMS** TEAM



**Naliaka Odera | Communications Lead**

*The theme of this annual report is both personal and relatable for all of us at Mawazo. The process of getting one's hair braided is both ancestral and modern, communal and individual, meticulous and creative. As the Comms team, we hope that as you read the stories and impact statements from our network, you are able to place yourself in their stories of hard work, and overcoming, and join us in celebration and support.*

*In 2025, as the organisation optimised, the communications team grew in our storytelling abilities and coverage, increasing our social media presence and engagement across all platforms by bringing in a fantastic new Digital Comms Officer, Chiama Anita, and matured in our branding with our brilliant Graphic Designer Angela Mwangi.*

*The news of our new Fellowship cohort of 60 women from across Africa was covered by news outlets in Kenya and South Africa, our network of researchers engaged with the media a record 15 times, and Mawazo's own work was spotlighted by new and traditional media, university presses, and our partners' platforms, leading to increased partnerships, and invitations to participate in changemaking conversations in the research and higher education ecosystem.*

**Full credit goes to all the women in Mawazo's network, many of whom have stepped into roles of visibility to spotlight the research they are undertaking, and the importance of getting more African women into research. From the Comms team, we thank and appreciate them for telling their stories.**



*Looking back on 2025, I realised I spent less time trying to make things look good and more time thinking about how they could communicate better. As a communications team, we became more intentional about visual storytelling, treating design as part of the story rather than something added at the end. Building on last year's African spices theme, this year's report draws inspiration from African hair, continuing our exploration of African culture as a foundation for how we tell Mawazo's story. That shift made me appreciate how thoughtful design can make complex ideas feel more human, memorable, and accessible.*

**Angela Mwangi | Graphic Designer**

*A key highlight in 2025 was the communications team's increased presence at community events toward the end of the year. This allowed us to engage directly with community members. The on-the-ground presence also helped humanise the organisation and reinforced trust and connection with the community we serve.*



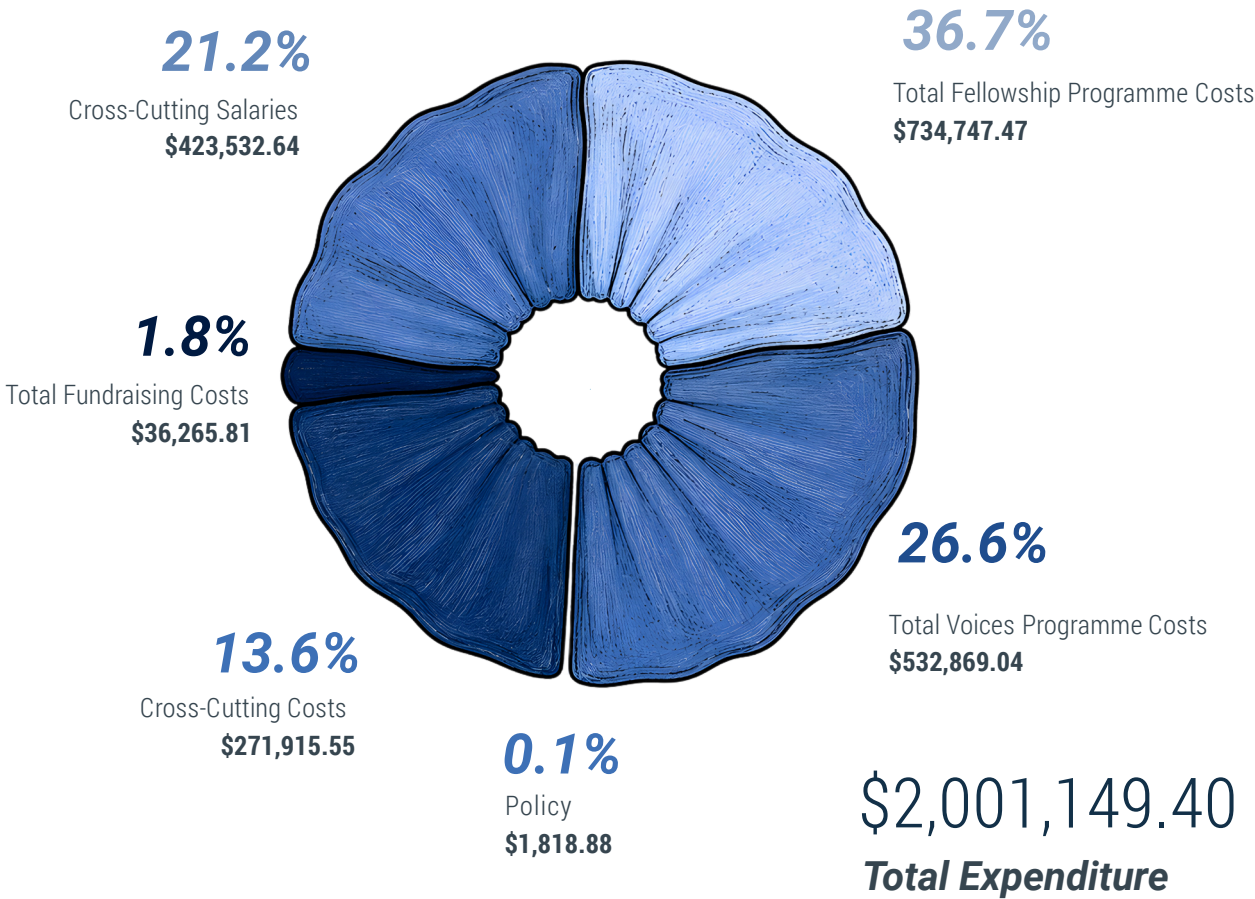
*With the guidance of our lead, we optimised by focusing on activities with the greatest impact. I particularly appreciated the prioritisation of in-person check-ins, which clarified my role and helped me find a rhythm within the comms team's planning processes. These regular touchpoints also allowed us to address challenges proactively, ensuring smoother workflows and more effective collaboration across the department.*

**Chiama Anita | Digital Communications Officer**

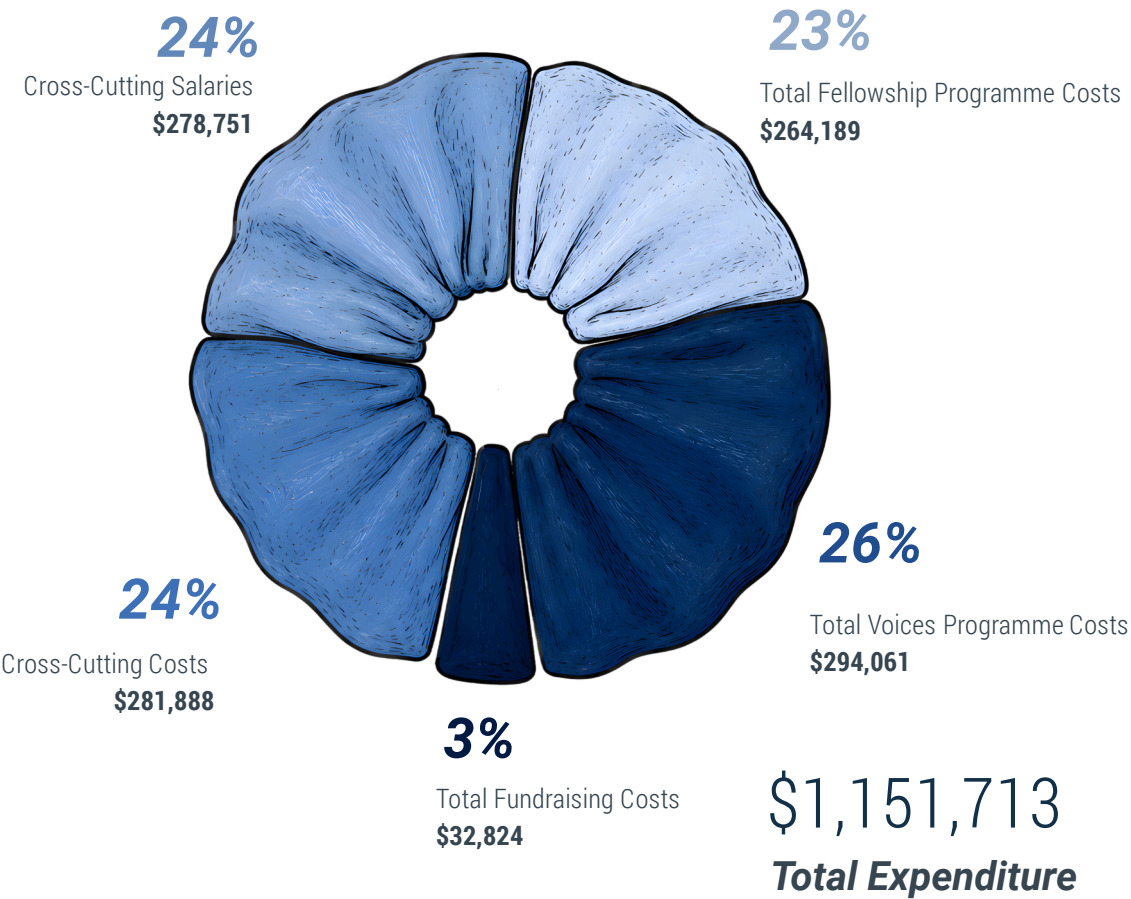


THE  
**FINANCIALS**

2025

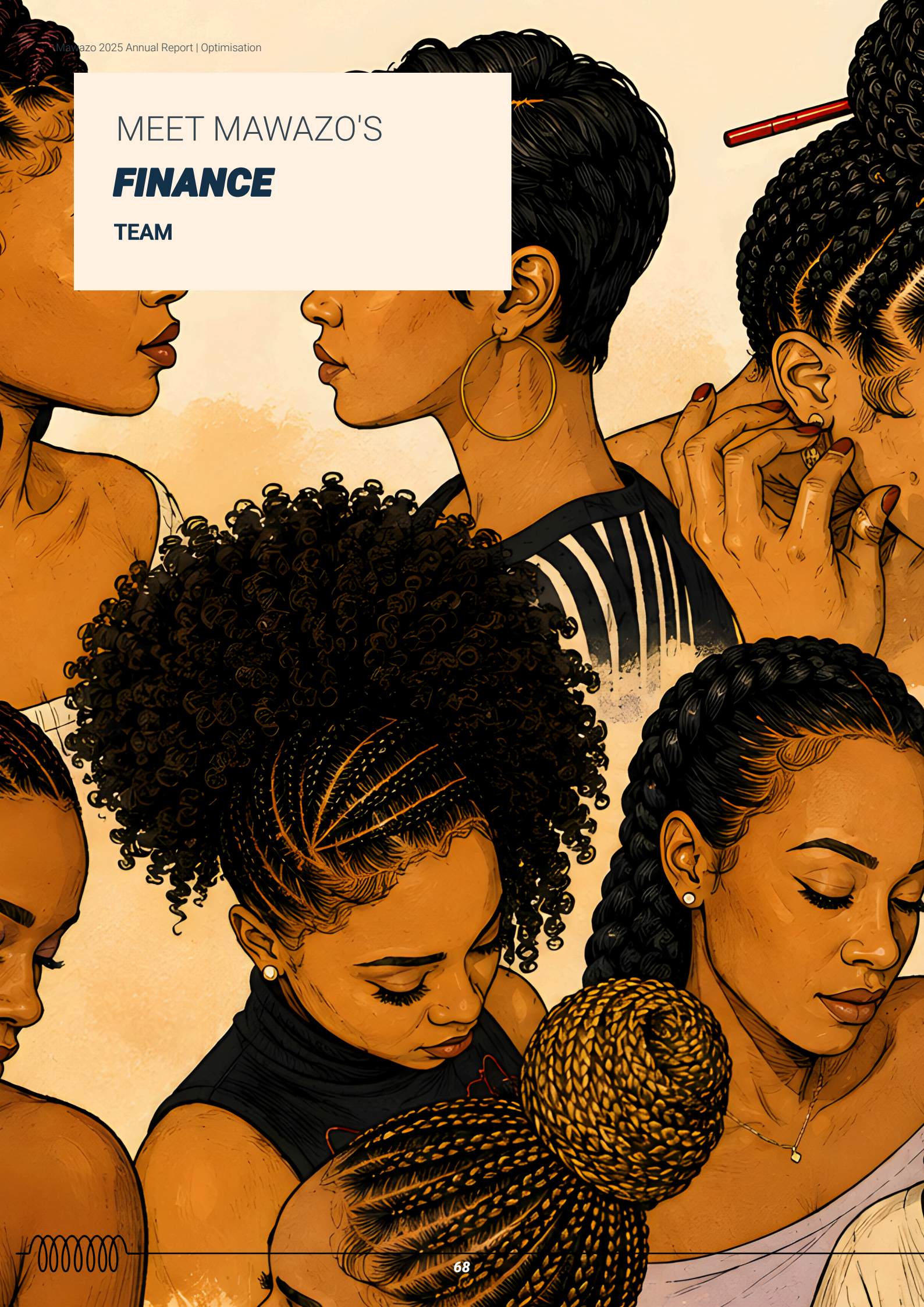


2024





# MEET MAWAZO'S *FINANCE* TEAM



Elizabeth Ngala | Director of Finance



A key highlight for the Finance Department in 2025 was **strengthening our financial governance and reporting systems to better support Mawazo's evolving strategic direction**. This enabled more informed decision-making during a period of organisational transition, ensuring that financial sustainability remained central to strategy execution. The department also successfully supported compliance requirements across multiple funders while maintaining clean and timely financial reporting.

We focused on optimisation through process refinement, stronger financial planning, and tighter cost management. We streamlined budgeting processes to improve accuracy and accountability across departments through the co-creation of the 2026 budget. We strengthened cash flow forecasting to better align expenditure with funding cycles and introduced clearer cost allocation between restricted and unrestricted funds using a refined grants tracking tool. We also enhanced internal controls and documentation to increase efficiency and reduce risk. **As a result, we improved financial visibility, reduced inefficiencies, and positioned Mawazo for stronger financial resilience heading into 2026.**



In 2025 Finance optimized our operations which was supported by the hiring of a Finance and Grants Associate. We also introduced a new USD accounting system to help us track expenditures more efficiently and retrieve timely reports. Finally, the Finance retreat was a key process for us as it enabled us to have a holistic approach to different deliverables within and outside the department hence efficiency in delivery.

Mark Kimani | Finance Officer



2025 was a strong year for the finance department, the finance retreat provided us with an opportunity to reflect on our strategic direction and align our objectives with the organization's broader goals around financial stability. During this period, we also developed a revised chart of accounts to strengthen financial management and improve grants planning, ensuring better alignment with donor budgets and overall organizational priorities. We improved budgeting accuracy through a more collaborative 2026 budget process, enhanced cash flow forecasting, and introduced clearer cost allocation with a refined grants tracking tool. Improving transparency, accountability, and financial decision-making.

Roylex Kinigi | Grants Officer



It was a personal highlight to be welcomed to the finance department this year. Our roles in the finance department are well segregated therefore ensuring best use of our time. In 2025, We also began the process of transitioning to a USD based system to align with our budgets and reporting requirements.

Njeri Wanjiku | Finance and Grants Associate



# Letter

## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



**Astrid Rosemary Ndagano Haas**

Board Chair

### Dear Friend of Mawazo,

The Mawazo Institute was founded on a simple but stubborn insight: that African women researchers hold knowledge, lived experience and leadership potential essential to the continent's future, and that realising it requires sustained, tailored support. Nearly a decade on, that insight has been tested, refined and proven. What began as a Fellowship supporting ten Kenyan PhD researchers has grown into a network of 151 women spanning 66 institutions across 28 African countries, 55 of whom held doctorates by the end of 2025. They are shaping research agendas, informing policy, innovating and, perhaps most importantly, mentoring the next generation of scholars. This is not simply institutional growth; it is systems change in motion, and systems change, once set loose, asks not just to be sustained but to be tended.

If 2024 was a year of reaching further, this Annual Report for 2025 demonstrates how this was the year we learned to hold that reach steady. We chose "Optimisation" as our word for the year: not simply to grow, but to grow well. I think of that kind of work the way I think of getting my hair braided. From the outside, very little seems to be happening for long stretches at a time, but it is precise, unhurried, section by section work, and it is that patience that determines whether the result holds its shape six months on or unravels within a week.

The year's clearest signal of this maturity was the launch of our Policy department. It is one thing to fund research, it is another to build the scaffolding that carries it into rooms where decisions are made. In its first year, the department worked alongside 23 Fellows to shape their findings into policy initiatives and produced our 2025 Status of African Women in Research report, giving the sector an evidence base it had lacked. The scale of that report is worth dwelling on: it draws on 927 completed applications and over 1,400 academic needs surveys from women researchers across East, West, Southern, Central and North Africa. Sixty per cent of respondents are self-funding their PhDs, 97 per cent say financial strain has directly affected their studies, and three in four are primary caregivers. These are not incidental hardships, rather they are the architecture within which African women are expected to produce knowledge, and where that architecture fails them, it is Africa that loses, in the questions never asked and the research never produced. Mawazo exists because that gap is not inevitable.

The 2026 to 2030 Strategic Plan that has been developed will drive the organisation to the next stage of that maturity, with an honest reckoning with what it actually takes to walk alongside a woman from the later stages of her doctorate into sustained leadership and influence. Even finished braids need tending, oiling, retouching at the roots, if they are to last, and a woman's leadership is no different. Deepening our investment in a structured Research Leadership Pathway is our answer to what the evidence demands, because the journey from PhD student to influential leader is rarely linear, particularly not for African Women.

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The work we celebrate in these pages was shaped by many hands. We are grateful to **Olivia Nzeyimana** and **Dr Caroline Mose**, who were part of the Mawazo team during 2025, for the energy, care, and expertise they brought to our work. Their contributions are part of what we achieved together this year, and we thank them for being part of Mawazo's story.



FUNDERS



As Country Technical Lead for the RISA Fund, what I found most compelling about Mawazo’s work in 2025 was its deliberate shift from supporting individual women researchers to influencing the wider research and innovation ecosystem in a sustainable way. I was particularly inspired by how Mawazo consistently tackled structural barriers facing African women in research-linking mentorship, funding access, and leadership development to institutional and policy engagement rather than treating them as standalone interventions. The growing emphasis on research translation and real-world impact resonated strongly with my work under RISA, where connecting research to innovation, policy, and socio-economic outcomes is a core priority.

Equally important was Mawazo’s adaptive, learning-oriented approach, showing a willingness to iterate based on evidence and context. Overall, Mawazo’s 2025 work stood out to me as values-driven yet deeply practical, contributing meaningfully to more inclusive, resilient, and impactful research and innovation systems in Africa. Mawazo’s engagement with its beneficiaries and stakeholders was particularly effective through its Communities of Practice (CoPs), the Connect Fund, and its growing alumni network. Together, these mechanisms reflected a thoughtful, long-term engagement approach that balances individual support with ecosystem-level influence, aligning strongly with RISA Fund’s emphasis on sustainability and systems strengthening.

**Cecil Kang’ara**  
**Country Technical Lead Kenya/Rwanda**  
**RISA Fund**

What I find most compelling about Mawazo’s work is the clear evidence of real shift: more African women entering research, more translating knowledge into innovation and tangible impact. It’s inspiring to see a growing, cross-country community delivering solutions that advance health and gender equity, all driven by a creative and exceptional team.

Mawazo effectively engaged its stakeholders through sustained efforts to strengthen its community and deepen connections across the network. Mawazo’s team consistently created spaces for partners to contribute ideas and shape the direction of projects, ensuring programs evolve in ways that are relevant and forward-looking. Throughout this engagement, Mawazo kept a strong focus on purpose and on the real needs of its target groups.

I envision Mawazo’s network continuing to grow stronger each year, with increasing cross-continental recognition as a leading platform for African women in research and higher education. It has the potential to become an essential reference point for governments, institutions, and global partners seeking evidence, insight, and leadership on education, gender, and development. As the network’s influence expands, Mawazo women researchers will not only shape academic fields, but also play a visible role in policy and public discourse, positioning the network as a powerful driver of social change on the continent and globally.

**Christina Hooge**  
**Head of Falling Walls Engage**  
**Falling Walls Foundation**

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

By supporting the Mawazo Institute, you’ll be supporting the next generation of women driving research for development in Africa. Your support will help us to provide a range of resources to the promising young women we support.

Individuals

To donate by check, please mail your contribution to: Mawazo Institute 1440 W Taylor St PMB 4094 Chicago, IL 60607 USA.

The Mawazo Institute is registered 501(c)(3) non-profit in the US. All donations are tax deductible for US donors.

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Mawazo is always looking to partner with organisations and institutions with complementary values and visions. Partners can represent any sector, including, but not limited to: (1) communication and media partners (e.g., newspapers, radio channels, science magazines); (2) civil society partners (including local and international NGOs); (3) industry partners (including impact investors); (4) research and innovation partners; (5) government and public policy actors; and (6) universities and higher education institutions.

As a partner, we shall work together to ensure that African women researchers and their big ideas are influencing a range of sectors where solutions are developed to address critical societal issues on the continent and beyond.

Donors

The Mawazo Institute has been fortunate enough to have had support from a range of international donors and philanthropic organisations. We are always looking to forge new relationships with other donors and philanthropic organisations whose strategies align with Mawazo’s mission and vision.

Please reach out to Mawazo through [contact@mawazoinstitute.org](mailto:contact@mawazoinstitute.org) to speak with a member of our team and see how you can join us and support our journey to create a sustainable and holistic future built by the big ideas of African women researchers.

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