

MAWAZO IDEAS DIGEST
VOLUME 1

DECEMBER 2023



MAWAZO
INSTITUTE
WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

IDEAS DIGEST

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

SIT DOWN & DIG IN

"FOSTERING A COMMUNITY WHERE WOMEN RESEARCHERS CAN FLOURISH AND THRIVE." !

Welcome to our first edition of the Mawazo Voices Digest- a collection of articles and interviews that chronicles the remarkable stories and groundbreaking achievements of our talented network of African women researchers. The Digest provides you with an unfiltered view into the programmes and the incredible people that makes Mawazo what it is today.

The Digest is essentially a sneak peek into the four components of our Voices Programme and how it complements our flagship Fellowship Programme, besides providing important insights into the Institute itself - who we are, what we do, what we believe in, and how we are impacting Africa's education and research ecosystem.

Mawazo, meaning "ideas" in Swahili, is a beacon of inspiration, fostering a community where women researchers can flourish and thrive. In this carefully curated compilation, we aim to showcase the brilliance, resilience, and creativity that define the Mawazo community - which embodies our mantra: Women Leading Research in Africa. As we celebrate the unique and exceptional African women researchers we work with, we invite you to join us in recognising the transformative power of their ideas and the profound impact they have in shaping a brighter future for the continent.

DR. FIONA MOEJES

Chief Executive Officer



BEHIND THE SCENES @MAWAZO WITH

SHIRLEY IRUNGU

Data Insight
Associate



ABOUT ME

I'm Shirley Irungu, and I work as a Data Insights Associate at the Mawazo Institute.

WHAT INSPIRED ME TO JOIN MAWAZO

I started at Mawazo in June 2021, so it's been approximately two years. I initially joined as an Information Technology Intern. What motivated me to join Mawazo was its focus on women's research and their pursuit of careers and education. The women-led organisation and the research aspects were particularly compelling to me.

ONE THING THAT STANDS OUT ABOUT MAWAZO

The standout aspect is the culture at Mawazo. It's a place where you work with a team that feels like friends and family. The level of humanity and support is exceptional. It's something that has been especially valuable to me as I've navigated personal challenges. The institute provides a supportive community and resources to address these issues, making me feel grateful, happy, and humbled. This culture fosters growth, understanding, and support, contributing to my overall well-being and job satisfaction.

WHAT I ENJOY MOST ABOUT MY WORK

For me, it's all about the people. I find interacting with people to be the most enjoyable aspect of my job. In the past, I struggled with public speaking and being confident in presenting ideas. Working with

people allows me to better understand their problems, which, in turn, helps me design more effective solutions that genuinely cater to those needs. It levels me and ensures I'm not just building things in isolation but creating solutions that truly benefit people.

A TYPICAL DAY FOR ME AT THE MAWAZO INSTITUTE

My day starts with checking the status of the Mawazo Learning Exchange platform (MLEx) and other tech-related matters. I also go through my emails and Slack. In the morning, I focus on creative tasks like drafting documents. Afternoons are usually reserved for more mechanical tasks, such as analysing surveys and visualising data. I often have meetings in the afternoon as well. Throughout the day, I stay available to address tech-related issues and assist where needed.

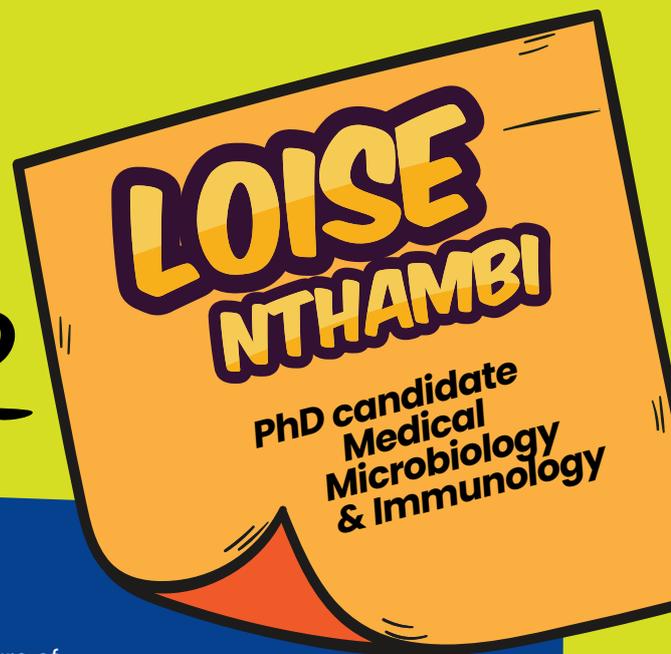
SOMETHING INTERESTING ABOUT ME AND WHAT I ENJOY

I'm a bit of a TikTok fan. I love curating my feed to include a variety of content, even geopolitics! It's a fun way to stay informed in a relaxed manner. On the hobby front, I collect stones, and I've got this little quirk where I sometimes wonder if I'm actually funny.

I enjoy making nutritious shakes. You know, blending up bananas, berries, sunflower seeds, and chia seeds. It's a small, healthy ritual that keeps me energised and happy.

FELLOWS' VOICES

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



I am Loise Nthambi, a PhD student at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. I always knew I wanted a family but I had planned to start one after completing my PhD. However, after some thought, I decided to embark on the journey of motherhood while still undertaking my PhD. I was aware of the challenges this decision would bring but was ready to face them head-on.

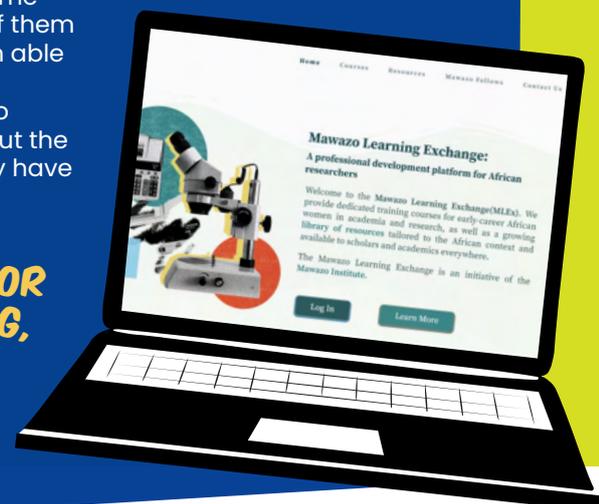
During my pregnancy, I had to work and continue with my education. Initially, I hesitated to inform my supervisors of my pregnancy, unsure what their reaction would be, but, after disclosing this news, I discovered my fears were unfounded as they were very supportive. Each stage of my pregnancy came with different experiences, including morning sickness and lethargy among others. To stay on top of my work and PhD programme, I decided to develop a weekly plan which entailed dividing the activities into small, manageable bits. I undertook light activities when I felt weak and vice-versa.

I met one of my supervisors and her collaborator, a research team I had always admired working with, seeking an opportunity to join them, though I kept worrying about their reception to my pregnancy. To my surprise, I was accepted, and we currently work together. Their consideration gave me the courage and energy to face more in life without fear. Towards the end of my pregnancy, I got the Mawazo Fellowship, which I had admittedly reluctantly applied for since the call for applications opened after I discovered I was pregnant.

Getting the Mawazo Fellowship was a golden, timely opportunity. We started the Fellowship a few weeks before delivery. I got a selfless family at Mawazo, where I could talk about my fears and challenges and share real-life experiences with fellow young career and academic women. The start-up sections of the Leadership CoreCourse addressed most of my worries and seemed purely tailored for me. Listening to peers and facilitators who are women from different countries, I realised that we were facing similar challenges. Their achievements amidst struggles taught me a life lesson of being focused and ready to face each challenge at a time, rather than compounding them.

After the delivery of my baby, continuing with the Fellowship and PhD work concurrently was an uphill task, but the Fellowship Team was accommodating. Though on maternity leave, I could take the online courses on MLEx comfortably by listening to the audio version. My small group of peers at Mawazo kept checking on me and reminding me of deadlines I needed to meet. I remember one of them asking me to apply for first-cycle funding, which I got and have been able to accomplish my project backbone activity. With my mentor from Mawazo, we could and still do discuss all aspects of life, not limited to academics. I don't know how it could have been in this journey without the support I have gotten from the Mawazo family. I can attest that I may have been slow, but nothing has been on hold.

"I HAVE LEARNED TO DO WHAT FEELS RIGHT, FOR THERE IS NO PERFECT MOMENT FOR ANYTHING, AND LIFE DOESN'T WAIT FOR OUR PLANS. WE HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE ANYWAY."





KEY LEARNINGS FROM OUR ORGANISATION-LED SURVEYS HAVE:

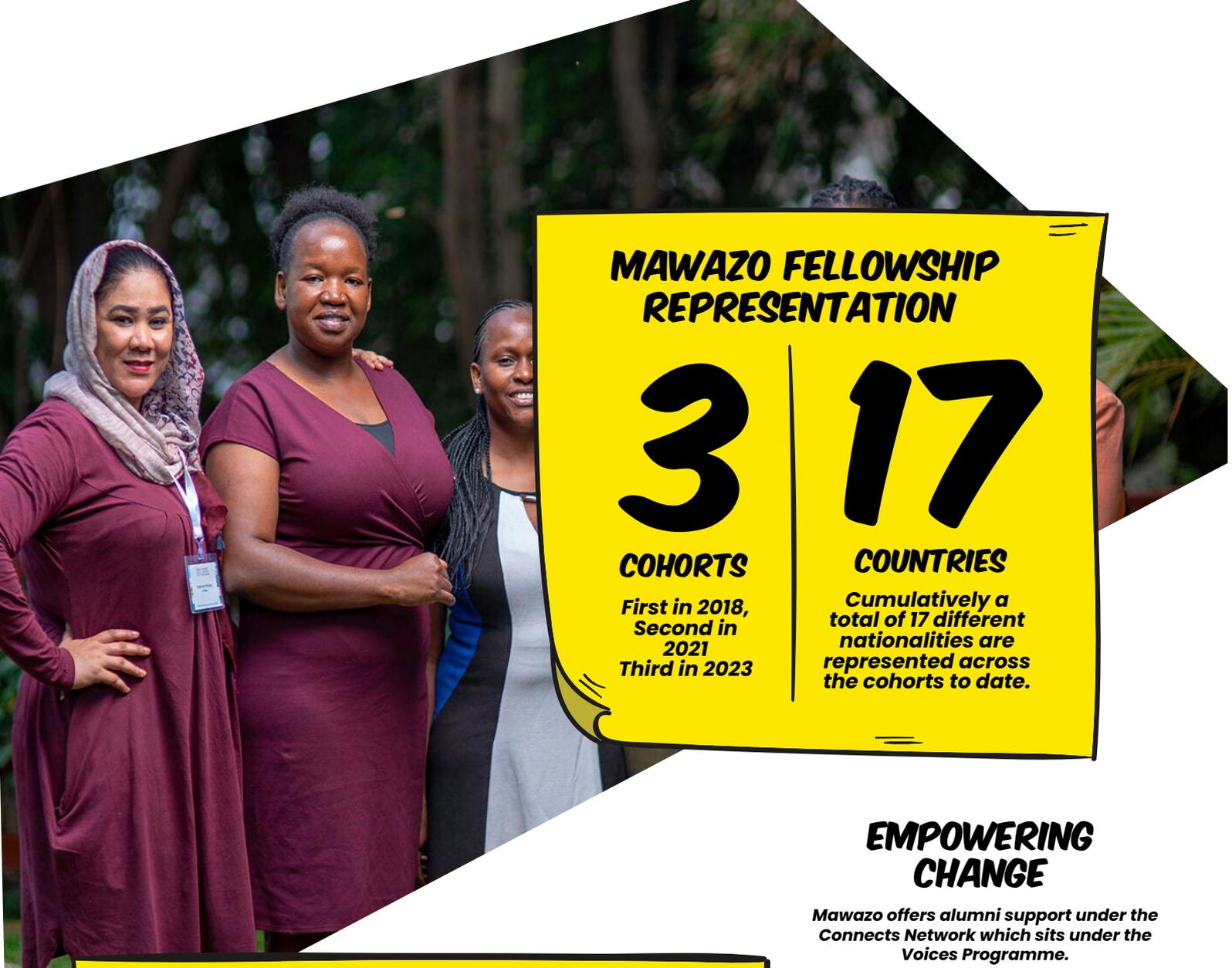
- Refined the professional training skills offered during the Fellowship period to include Intellectual Property Rights and Climate (change) Lens for researchers for the 2023 cohort, as well as mounting the Personal Leadership training as the first course at the start of the Fellowship in May 2023.
- Customised mentorship scheme - the mentorship needs assessment has been vital in the mentor-mentee pairing.
- Tracked the changes to gendered challenges over time - a baseline is established at the beginning of the Fellowship

MAWAZO INSTITUTE CONTINUES TO SET ITSELF APART AS A MEL-DRIVEN ORGANISATION THAT USES EVALUATION MECHANISMS TO TRACK THE IMPACT OF OUR INTERVENTIONS FROM THE POINT OF APPLICATION, MID-PROGRAMME, END OF THE FELLOWSHIP AND BEYOND THE FELLOWSHIP.

MAWAZO'S RESEARCH & LEARNING

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR PROGRAMMES

Information tracking plays a crucial role in our programme evaluation process, providing an organised way to collect, manage, and analyse programmatic data at intervals and periodically after the Fellowship. This data allows comparative analysis over time, across different cohort groups and different conditions in different regions where Mawazo Institute has expanded geographically.



MAWAZO FELLOWSHIP REPRESENTATION

3

COHORTS

First in 2018,
Second in 2021
Third in 2023

17

COUNTRIES

Cumulatively a total of 17 different nationalities are represented across the cohorts to date.

EMPOWERING CHANGE

Mawazo offers alumni support under the Connects Network which sits under the Voices Programme.

It is important to invest in programs that empower women in research and help them to overcome the challenges they face. Women are underrepresented in research, and they often face discrimination and biases. Programmes like the Mawazo Fellowship can help to level the playing field and create more opportunities for women to succeed in research.

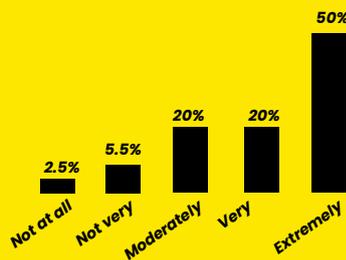


THE ROLE OF THE MAWAZO FELLOWSHIP AND CONNECTS (ALUMNI) NETWORK

ALUMNI SUPPORT PROGRAMME

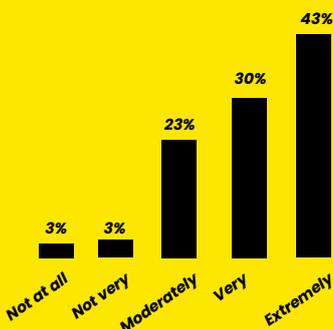
90% of our Alumni (Cohorts 1 and 2 Fellows) report that the strategic partnerships support, competitive funding for post-Fellowship projects as well as offering other opportunities amplifies their work

80% report they now feel less affected by biases against women pursuing careers in research.



MENTORSHIP

The Mawazo mentorship scheme has also been reported to be productive by an impressive 96% of our Fellows.



THE MAWAZO DIGEST LONG READ



THE 'FUNCTIONAL' DOCTORATE: REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH-LED HOMEGROWN SOLUTIONS TO AFRICA'S CHALLENGES

DR. CAROLINE MOSE
Director of Programmes

INTRODUCTION

At Mawazo, we support early career women researchers through our two Programmes – the Mawazo Fellowship Programme which offers learning, via our online Mawazo Learning Exchange (MLEx) e-learning platform, mentorship, and grants for research activities towards achieving the PhD. Our Mawazo Voices Programme amplifies the voices of our Fellows (and alumni) through public and policy engagement, the alumni network, strategic partnerships, and research.

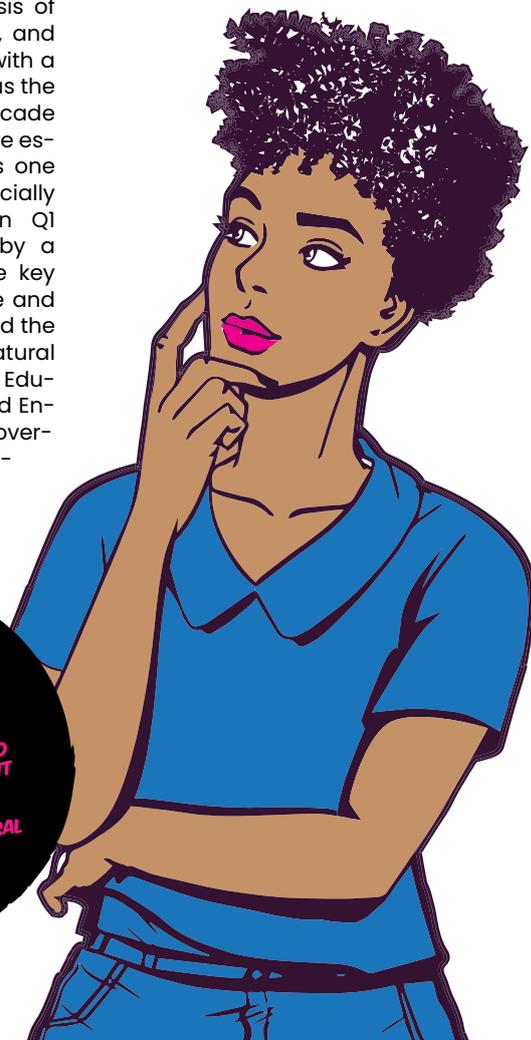
The call for applications for this third cohort attracted an astonishing response of well over two thousand applicants, which we narrowed down to 927 viable applications. By 'viable applications', we mean those that were accompanied by all required and supporting documentation, including proof of completion of a Masters degree, proof of bona-fide registration as a PhD candidate at an accredited university on the continent, and proof of successful defence of a PhD proposal, among other requirements.

Below is a reflection of the application process, as well as the nature of projects the successful forty applicants from a variety of disciplines from STEM to the social sciences are focusing on. It is a reflection on the debate about whether research projects by PhD candidates on the continent must be 'functional' or to use a more recent and much-touted term, 'innovative'.

THE 2023 MAWAZO FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION PROCESS

To whittle 927 applications down to 40 was always going to be a daunting process that would require proper procedures to ensure equity, fairness and inclusivity, while also not neglecting quality. Our application process envisioned 9 categories of general disciplines, informed by an 'Emerging Trends in Research' survey we had conducted earlier. For that survey, we performed a bibliometric analysis of topics researched on the continent, and polled 19 experts in different fields, with a view to establishing what they saw as the priority research areas in the next decade on the continent. From the findings, we established nine key areas as well as one area of interest (the report will be officially published on the Mawazo website in Q1 2024 after undergoing validation by a panel of experts and partners) The key priority areas include (1) Agriculture and Food Security, (2) Business, Trade, and the Economy, (3) Climate Change, Natural Resources, and the Environment, (4) Education and Pedagogy, (5) Energy and Engineering, (6) Gender, Rights, and Governance, (7) Information and Technology, (8) Life and Health Sciences, and (9) Mathematical and Physical Sciences. From these, we

"THE FACT IS, WE BELIEVE WE NO LONGER HAVE THE LUXURY OF DOING PHDS FOR PHDS' SAKE."



- PROOF OF COMPLETION OF A MASTERS DEGREE
 - PROOF OF BONA-FIDE REGISTRATION AS A PHD CANDIDATE AT AN ACCREDITED UNIVERSITY ON THE CONTINENT
 - PROOF OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENCE OF A PHD PROPOSAL
- among other requirements.



"I am a full-time PhD student, under a Scholarship at Strathmore University. While the scholarship really boosted me, and allowed me to complete my PhD, the many other privileges afforded me do not cover every expense. This is where the Mawazo Fellowship came in, giving me funds with which I could purchase data collection tools and commence the data collection exercise, and I am progressing well. Both forms worked in a complementary way to help me achieve not just a higher work stage, but the data collection as well, which was a critical component of my research. I am very grateful that I was awarded the Mawazo grant."

Elizabeth Mubwa Banda, MSc, 2018 Research Fellow, Computer Science, Department of Information Systems, Strathmore University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

REFLECTIONS ON THE 'MAWAZO FACTOR'

identified four cross-cutting themes, which also include the tenth (one area of interest) – these are Climate Change, Gender, IT, and Indigenous Knowledge. We have since developed Sector Briefs for the first three cross-cutting themes, and are developing a fourth brief on Indigenous Knowledge, which will also be published on the Mawazo website at the end of Q1 2024.

For the application process, we invited applicants to the nine identified areas and disciplines, in both STEM and the Social Sciences. Our only caveat was that the applicant's work, regardless of discipline or field, seeks to solve a societal problem. After whittling down the applications from 927 to 70 through peer reviews by our network of experienced PhDs in all represented fields, we used an in-house Mawazo Institute criteria which we call the Mawazo Factor based on this core question – what societal problem is this project aiming to solve? to arrive at the final forty.

'Reflections on the 'Mawazo Factor'

Perhaps the first question we all ask at this point is, must a PhD project be, of necessity, functional? Must it bend to the tenets of functionalism? And here, we are using the word in terms of concept, not as philosophy, and therefore, functionalism as the 'premise that all aspects of a society serve a purpose and that all are indispensable for the long-term survival of the society'. In that sense then, we see education, especially higher education, where there is room to theorise, experiment, create and actualize knowledge, as a site where these serve a purpose, and are indispensable for the long-term survival of Africa and Africans. There are, obviously, many theoretical discourses around functionalism, and here, we are being very brief with these definitions and discourses, but suffice it to say that as an Institute, we have reason to make this a core tenet of the projects we support.

First, Africa faces severe challenges that continue to plague our people. From persistent droughts and food insecurity, to the vagaries of climate change, poor governance, neocolonialism, poverty, disease, unstable education systems, and conflict, to say the least. As we speak in November and December 2023, Kenya is experiencing severe flooding and displacement of thousands of people from the El Nino phenomenon, while Sudan has been in constant conflict and state of war for years now. The economies of Ghana, Nigeria, and a host of other countries are in dire distress, coupled with a creeping political instability that has led to coups across West Africa.

All the while, our people continue to suffer poor nutrition, lack of access to affordable and adequate healthcare, lack of access to quality education, and a general lack of access to a decent life. According to a 2022 Institute for Security Studies (ISS) report, Africa is losing the battle against extreme poverty. About 35% of Africans live in extreme poverty, meaning, less than \$1.90 a day. These are dire statistics – from here, we can extrapolate that these 35% of Africans are unable to access good nutrition, healthcare, shelter, education, or surroundings. Indeed, a February 2023 Oxfam America report revealed that 'a fifth of the African population (278m) is undernourished, and 55 million of its children under the age of five are stunted due to severe malnutrition'.¹ A large number of these are urban poor living in deplorable conditions, some are homeless, and the rest are rural poor. Approximately 85% of Africans live on less

"PERHAPS THE FIRST QUESTION WE ALL ASK AT THIS POINT IS, MUST A PHD PROJECT BE, OF NECESSITY, FUNCTIONAL?"

than \$5.50 a day, equivalent to KES 850 per day in Kenya or 4350 Naira. We cannot overstate how these challenges have plagued the continent for decades now. Some African countries have had independence for over five decades, and yet the challenges seem to be getting worse. This is despite the existence of hundreds of volumes of research studies, the majority of which is done by global north scholars, analysing these challenges and proposing solutions that have led to the growth and proliferation of the development industry. Anthropologist James Ferguson has termed these solutions the 'anti-politics machine', and its utility as a 'development discourse fantasy'.

The United Nations Children's Fund report stated in a report issued in June 2023 that 22 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa live with disabilities, while 1 in 10 of the regions' 290 million children have functional disabilities. Such children will often be marginalised in terms of health care, access to education, and opportunities accorded to able-bodied children in sports, leisure, and extracurricular activities. UNESCO's Institute for Statistics confirms that in sub-Saharan Africa, 'over one-fifth of children between the ages of

about 6 and 11 are out of school, as are a third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14...almost 60% of youth between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school'.²

Looking beyond this anti-politics labelling, where technical solutions for technical challenges remain the mantra, and where the commons are not included in charting the solutions required to solve these problems, a growing number of scholars are claiming that even the SDGs themselves, a part of the UN's development goals, can be seen in the light of this anti-politics machine.³ We argue that partly, this is because solutions to Africa's challenges continue to originate from outside the continent, from research conducted by outsiders who look upon Africa from a white lens, and research funding that has had its own agenda that is not particularly aligned to the agendas and needs of those being researched – Africans themselves. We are arguing here that African-centred research must be led, conducted (and funded) by Africans first and foremost (and we say this knowing from our Emerging Trends in Research survey that African funders, be it governments, funding bodies, or philanthropies, are few and far between). We also argue that it is only through research that is ethical, communal, participatory and people-centred, that home-grown solutions can be found. Such kind of research must be also centred on African ways of being, tapping into indigenous knowledge systems, once shunned by the Europeans as 'primitive', and only now being sought after for its deep insights into history, the environment, and the human condition. Many indigenous knowledge systems around medicine for example are increasingly sought to purge the body of ailments that only seem to exacerbate with western medicine interventions. –For instance, some cancers appear to get better and disappear altogether from indigenous medicine, as opposed to getting worse with chemotherapies.⁴

This brings us back to why we support women researchers, especially those doing PhDs on the African continent. A PhD is at the top of the academic food chain when it comes to concerted research. This level opens opportunity to create new knowledge and new technologies from prior and existing knowledge and technologies that can help ameliorate some of our pressing challenges that require a paradigm shift from externally-generated research that misses nuance and context to internally-generated research that is home-grown and understands context at a personal level. We stand firmly with this assertion.

1. See that report here <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/over-20-million-more-people-hungry-africas-year-nutrition>

2. See the report here <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/education-africa>

3. Tobias Haller, professor at the University of Bern's Institute of Social Anthropology has stated in some of his work that "Because commons are not included in the 2030 Agenda, state elites and private individuals can continue to legitimize the grabbing of such resources – not least through the SDGs themselves." This means that lack of participatory processes in drafting development needs and goals means these goals become removed from those they are fashioned to "help", and in thereby become tyrannical and eventually, ineffectual. See his paper on this here <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S001671822000379>

4. See for example the Lancet research paper by Peter Bai James, John Baptist Asilimwe, Jon Wardle, Amos Deogratius Mwakwa, Osey Muganga Julius Kasilo, 'African culture, traditional medicine, and cancer care', in The Lancet Oncology, Volume 23, Issue 8, 2022, Pages 705–706, ISSN 1473–2045, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-2045\(22\)00167-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-2045(22)00167-7) that suggests deference to indigenous knowledge systems and cancer treatments and care

THE FUNCTIONAL PHD – BURDEN ON WOMEN RESEARCHERS, OR MAKING IT COUNT?

We have grappled with the questions around demanding that our women researchers' projects be ones that solve (one of) Africa's challenges, or are in line with the SDGs, which as we have noted, can become a form of externally-motivated, development-as-usual, anti-politics machine. Seeing as the language of SDGs has become ingrained into government policy for example, while it may be difficult to sidestep this language, we believe alternative approaches as alluded to in various critiques of the SDGs. For instance, a more robust participatory form of research from the grassroots may become the paradigm shift required to move the dial on some of these challenges.

Is this an extra burden to our women researchers? Some may see it in that light. The fact is, we believe we no longer have the luxury of doing PhDs for PhDs' sake. We also believe that women, doing PhDs on the continent against all odds, while juggling child-care, care of families, as well as career, need to see their PhD count. Increasingly, early career researchers are choosing lives outside of academia, finding alternative career paths in doing a PhD that do not necessarily follow the traditional trajectory that leads to the lecture hall. Many are finding fulfilling careers in policy, think tanks, research institutes and other spaces, including government. Problem-solving theses, therefore give more realistic chances for these women to bring research-centred solutions and ideas that have been academically tested into the so-called marketplace, and innovations beyond the university library into the public.

With the Mawazo Fellows who made the cut into the final forty into the 2023 cohort, there are research projects that embody ideas that are potentially innovative, and impactful. A Fellow who has lived with hearing challenges and has family members grappling with similar impairment, is researching sexual and reproductive health rights of deaf women and girls. Another is researching possibilities of turning macadamia nut shells into cellulose acetate for biodegradable plastic packaging – a potentially groundbreaking venture considering the continued pressure to ban plastics across the world to curb climate change and plastic-driven pollution. Another Fellow is assessing support systems available for children on the autism spectrum, another, strengthening rehabilitation systems for persons living with Parkinson's disease. These are but a few of the forty projects under the Fellowship Programme, and that will continue to be supported in the Voices Programme

via partnerships with other players in the wider education and research ecosystem, linking them with spaces where they can influence policy, innovation, research commercialization, building entrepreneurial ventures, working with communities, and building our communities.

We have a total of 92 women in our wider Mawazo Connects Network, where a wide variety of research is ongoing, including those by our women scholars who have completed their PhDs. A pet project we are doubly amazed by is one by Dr. Melisa Allela, a creative technologist whose creative and research work explores the convergence of experimental animation and emerging technologies in storytelling. As a Mawazo Fellow completing her PhD, she focused on how such technologies could be used to digitise works of African orature, and thus contribute to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, creating an interactive AI that is a repository of African oral literature.

Are the more theoretical projects qualified for the support that Mawazo Fellowship offers? Certainly. The ethos of any PhD is to be grounded in philosophy and theory for credibility. However, how does the more theoretical project respond to a current problem on the continent?

Does a longitudinal study of an education system of a country or region do so for the sake of it, or, perhaps, to inform the educational policy of the said region? If such a project notes inequalities in the historiography of the said education system, does it make any attempt to suggest ways to transcend such inequalities?

Does it attempt to go down to the grassroots to give a listening ear to those on the ground, including consulting community members on possible ways of surmounting their own challenges?⁵

For a possible literary project that focuses, say, on popular culture or music, what is its ethos beyond the theoretical grounding? Does it seek to link popular culture with political movements with a view to analysing some aspects around peace-building, gender, or use of new technologies, for example? Does it attempt to link popular culture and other aspects of societal living, perhaps combating diseases or pandemics such as COVID-19, or HIV?

In short, can we move a step beyond the theorising, to considering ways we can use these theoretical approaches to solve, even in part (and it would be in part, as we cannot claim to catch lightning in bottles, and neither do we demand that

our prospective or current Fellows do so), some of the challenges plaguing our continent?

We think it might be possible. We need more homegrown research, for African researchers produce only about 1% of research in peer-reviewed journals, books, and in other academic products globally.

We need more research that has gone through the academic rigour available in policy-making, law-making, non-profit, private and public sector spaces. We need our collective leaders making research-centred and research-informed decisions that embody the voices of communities from the grassroots.

We need communities, of whatever form, to be involved in research in whatever capacity, so that all voices, even those of the marginalised, are represented in decision-making spaces.

We believe the Mawazo Institute, through our Programmes, are contributing towards this endeavour, and we remain doubly proud of our Fellows and Alumni, and look forward to seeing what the next cohort of Fellows will honour us with, in terms of their projects.

References

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United Nations Children's Fund, *Children with Disabilities in Eastern and Southern Africa: A statistical overview of their well-being*, UNICEF, New York, 2023

**THE NEXT
CALL FOR
APPLICATIONS
WILL OPEN IN Q4
2024. WE WILL
COMMUNICATE IN
DETAIL CLOSER
TO THE DATES.**

5. As part of our MEx Course content alluded to at the beginning of this paper, Mawazo offers Participatory Action Research as a course to give our Fellows knowledge on how even STEM projects can be more inclusive and community-focused, even if their main focus is laboratory research. More inclusive and participatory research projects that encompass the commons in ways that are not merely extractive are necessary to begin to shift the narratives that come out of research.

PARTNERSHIPS DESK



WANGARI'S THREE-LEGGED STOOL

The traditional African three-legged stool was an ingenious creation that was common to every homestead. Perched on these perfectly balanced stools, grandparents would often animatedly immerse themselves in storytelling with their grandchildren, occasionally stoking a fire for some extra warmth. Such was the importance of the three-legged stool in African culture, that the late Nobel laureate Prof Wangari Maathai alluded to its intentional design in her 2009 talk at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where she shared the motivations behind her book - *The Challenge for Africa*.

The stool's legs, she said, were all carefully chiselled from a single block of wood, all at the same time, to create a firm seat with a unique balance. Though Prof Maathai's analogy was on the three essential components of achieving good governance in Africa, it aptly describes Mawazo's approach to strategic partnerships today.

By definition, a strategic partnership is "an arrangement between two companies or organisations to help each other or work together, to make it easier for each of them to achieve the things they want to achieve". It is a mutually beneficial union of organisations with a shared vision and common goals. The unions are formalised through frameworks that determine scopes of work, that determine rules of conduct between the parties. So then, one might wonder where the notion of the traditional three-legged stool and Mawazo's reality converge. Over the last seven years, Mawazo's team, gifted craftswomen and craftsmen, have spent their time chiselling two important legs of the Mawazo stool; the organisation and its beneficiaries. The organisation, itself the sum of its teams, departments and programmes, has grown from a tiny three-person team with a single programme in 2017, to almost twenty now overseeing seven growing departments and two anchor programmes: the Mawazo Fellowship Programme and the Mawazo Voices Programme.

These teams, departments, and programmes have thrived alongside the second leg, the brilliant African women researchers that Mawazo supports. From a modest ten Kenyan fellows in 2017, Mawazo can proudly count more than 90 early-career women researchers in its network from across the continent, working on multidisciplinary, frontier, doctoral research that will help leapfrog African countries to developed status.

Strategic partnerships have always been part of Mawazo's operational strategy, albeit informally. When Dr. Rose Mutiso and Rachel Strohm founded the Mawazo Institute, they spent a year talking to different players in the research and academic ecosystem in Africa, planting seeds that would grow to be crucial partnerships in Mawazo's steady growth. These partnerships were instrumental in shaping the curriculum of the Fellowship Programme for example, and influenced programme design elements. While partnerships were essential in the foundational phase of the organisation, they are even more critical now for its next phase.

The early-career women researchers in our network need to work with the right people, in the right places to create this wonderful world that we envision. It is therefore not enough that Mawazo supports its beneficiaries, but that it ensures that their work gets into the hands of the people who stand to benefit the most from it and make the most out of it. These "right hands" are strategic partnerships, the third leg of the Mawazo stool that we are purposely and intricately carving. They include what we call research partnerships, especially partnerships with organisations that are direct consumers of our beneficiaries' research and expertise such as training facilitators and research collaborators. It also includes partnerships with players working outside the traditional research and academic ecosystem such as venture builders and public policy actors, who stand to benefit from the applications of the research produced by our beneficiaries.

Internally, our strategic partnerships framework is similarly designed with the same three-legged stool balance approach. When we engage new partners, we ask ourselves three important questions; what, why and how. What do we intend to achieve together? Why are we best suited to achieve the intended goal together? And how will we work together to achieve the intended goal? These three simple questions guide all our partnership engagements and aid us in identifying the right people to work for us and our beneficiaries. Earlier this year, Mawazo launched its 2023 - 2026 strategic plan. The plan is the blueprint for what we fondly refer to as Mawazo 2.0, the expansion phase of the organisation. In order to achieve the dream of a women-centred - research-driven future for Africa and the world, partnerships will be a core tenet of the organisation. With a newly established strategic partnerships department, Mawazo's able craftswomen and craftsmen, are now putting the final touches to the three-legged masterpiece that is the Mawazo stool; Mawazo, its beneficiaries and its partners. Standing firmly, Mawazo is now poised to take on and transform the world through African women-led research.



**ELAINE
MUNGAI**
Strategic
Partnerships
Lead

MAWAZO'S ORIGIN STORY

MAWAZO INSTITUTE STARTED OUT AS THE BRAINCHILD OF DR ROSE MUTISO AND RACHEL STROHM OVER 5 YEARS AGO.



THE TWO WOMEN WERE STUDYING FOR THEIR PHD AND MASTERS DEGREES RESPECTIVELY IN AMERICAN IVY LEAGUE UNIVERSITIES WHEN THEY NOTICED THE SCARCITY OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM AND THE LIMITED RESOURCES THEY RECEIVED IN UNIVERSITIES BACK ON THE CONTINENT.



ROSE AND RACHEL DECIDED TO COME BACK TO KENYA AND SUPPORT WOMEN PURSUING THEIR PHDS IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES.



IT IS FROM THIS REALIZATION THAT **MAWAZO INSTITUTE** WAS BORN.



THE SUPPORT OFFERED IS IN THE FORM OF CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH SKILLS NOT OFFERED IN THE UNIVERSITY, FUNDING AND MENTORSHIP. ALL OF THIS IS PART OF THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME AND IT IS GEARED TOWARDS ENABLING THE WOMEN TO FINISH THEIR PHDS IN A TIMELY MANNER WHICH IS NOT NORMALLY THE CASE.



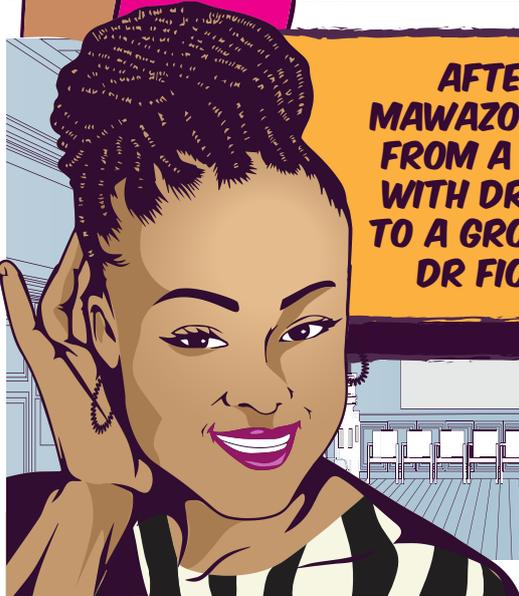
THE VOICES PROGRAMME

ANOTHER ARM THROUGH WHICH MAWAZO SUPPORTS ITS FELLOWS. THIS IS DONE BY AMPLIFYING THEIR VOICES AND WORK USING THE FOLLOWING CHANNELS: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, DIGEST, PODCASTS, ALUMNI NETWORK, RESEARCH- THIS INCLUDES OUR OWN INTERNAL RESEARCH WE CONDUCT TO BRING IN FRESH INFORMATION AND DATA INTO THE ECOSYSTEM.

MAWAZO INSTITUTE STARTED OUT WITH TWO FOUNDERS- ROSE AND RACHEL AND EARLY-DAY TEAM MEMBERS NAMELY ELAINE MUNGAI, ASHLEY MUTHAKA, LIZ NGALA, KARI MUGO AND MAINA WACHIRA.



AFTER 5 YEARS, MAWAZO TRANSITIONED FROM A FOUNDING CEO WITH DR ROSE MUTISO TO A GROWTH CEO WITH DR FIONA MOEJES.



THE ORGANISATION HAS GROWN TO ITS CURRENT 19-MEMBER TEAM.





MAWAZO
INSTITUTE
WOMEN LEADING RESEARCH IN AFRICA

MAWAZO IDEAS DIGEST
VOLUME 1
DECEMBER 2023



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