

Where are all the African women researchers?

Moejes, Fiona Wanjiku¹

¹The Mawazo Institute, Riverside Square, Nairobi, Kenya

Email: Fiona.moejes@mawazoinstitute.org

ABSTRACT: Women researchers have a critical role in contributing to Africa's transformative agenda. Unfortunately, they remain significantly underrepresented in higher education, specifically in research disciplines and careers. This is partly attributed to the metaphorical 'leaky pipe' - a constant attrition of women that ends up drastically thinning their numbers higher up in the research ecosystem: they make up 31% of researchers, 27% of permanent staff at leading universities, and 10% of members in national science academies on the continent.

The lack of diversity and gender inclusion denies society creativity, innovation, productivity and a unique perspective from nearly half of the population. It is leading to the creation of unsustainable products, policies and services that are missing this critical perspective and voice. This does not only impact women - it impacts society in its entirety.

The Mawazo Institute is a women-led African organisation supporting early-career women researchers as they work to find local solutions to global development challenges. We seek to support the generation and uptake of homegrown evidence-based solutions to pressing development needs. We particularly focus on African women conducting PhDs at African institutions. Our key assumptions are 1) completing a successful PhD requires them to be driven, creative, analytical and critical thinkers, and; 2) their lived experiences as African women provide integral and unique perspectives critical to driving innovative, holistic and sustainable development on the continent.

Through Mawazo's experience working with African women researchers, this presentation will unpack the reasons why African women continue to be significantly underrepresented in higher education and research. With some reports stating that it would take 140 years for Africa to reach gender parity, this presentation will also explore crucial ways in which we can accelerate the creation of an ecosystem that supports the ideas of African women so they can inspire the solutions needed to tackle the deep socio-economic challenges facing Africa, particularly having more policy- and publicly-engaged thinkers, scholars, and experts.