

# Status of African Women in Research

Event report  
25 June 2024



On 25 June 2024, the [Mawazo Institute](#) and [INASP](#) held a joint roundtable event focusing on the perspectives and experiences of African women researchers. The event drew on and presented findings from:

- The Mawazo Institute's upcoming Status of African Women in Research report drawing together data from almost 2,400 respondents to their 2023 Academic Needs survey and Mawazo Fellowship application
- INASP's [Voices of Early Career Researchers survey](#) of almost 8,000 early career researchers from the Global South [1] and an accompanying gender report: [An equitable knowledge ecosystem must include the voices of women and men](#).

Globally only 33.3% of researchers are women. This is mirrored on the African continent where only 33.5% of researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa are women (Bello et al., 2021). Both the Mawazo Institute and INASP work with early career researchers to strengthen their research capabilities and develop their careers – with a specific focus on making research and knowledge systems more equitable through supporting women researchers.

While developing and establishing a career is challenging for all researchers – particularly for researchers in the Global South – women researchers face additional difficulties and obstacles. Our event focused on four sub-themes emerging from our surveys and what can be done to better support women researchers to overcome obstacles related to these.

[1] 70% of the respondents were from Sub-Saharan Africa and 42% of the respondents were women.



## Access to funding

Many early career researchers struggle to access sufficient funding for their research. However, women researchers often have weaker social capital and less access to influential networks than men (Liani et al., 2020). This can present women with additional obstacles to accessing funding:

Only 34% of the women researchers represented in the Mawazo Institute's fellowship application data were successful in securing funding or scholarships; and 66% did not receive any further financial assistance for their PhD research.

***“Many collaboration networks are made up mainly of men, and it’s often relatively easy for [men] to penetrate this ‘boys club’ to be part of existing collaborations and funding opportunities.”***  
***(Woman, Kenya)***

## Research mobility

Women researchers tend to be less mobile than their men colleagues. This has an impact on career development e.g., in terms of collaboration:

- Women researchers are more likely to believe that they will ‘probably remain in their present country’ and not work abroad; and fewer women believe that they have sufficient opportunities to collaborate (INASP’s survey).
- 79% of the women researchers who applied to Mawazo Institute’s fellowship programme are undertaking their PhD in their home country; 21% are undertaking their PhD in another African country (Mawazo Fellowship application data).
- 35% thought that their lack of mobility had a high impact on their ability to collaborate. (Mawazo Institute’s survey)

## Academic support

Both women and men early career researchers feel that they need more training and support to progress in their careers, but women experience fewer opportunities than men and fewer women than men have published their research in the last year (INASP's survey):

- While more than a quarter of all respondents to INASP's survey believed that women in research get fewer opportunities than men in similar positions; women were more than twice as likely to believe this. Fewer women also believed that they have sufficient opportunities to present and promote their research.
- 38% of the women represented in the Mawazo Institute's survey indicated that they were highly impacted by a lack of access to mentorship and career guidance; and 35% reported that they struggled to prepare a research paper for publication. Older women, particularly those 50 years and above, were significantly more affected and encountered greater challenges in accessing mentorship and career guidance.

## Gendered experiences

Domestic and caring responsibility often means that women are more 'time poor' than men (Dhar, 2020):

- Women are more likely to experience 'lack of time and resources' as an obstacle to doing collaborative research than men (INASP's survey)
- 20% of the women researchers represented in Mawazo Institute's survey struggled to find time for research due to family commitments

In addition, male-dominated academic cultures and institutions can make women feel overlooked and excluded from opportunities (Kraemer-Mbula, 2020):

- Fewer women than men researchers like the organizational culture at their workplace and women researchers are less likely to feel that their work is recognised and rewarded by both institutions and colleagues (INASP's survey)

***“The leadership in the structure is highly male dominated, legislations, regulations and guidelines are developed by men with male gender lenses and with male implementers, the systems as well as the physical environment are not gender sensitive. Lack of information and institutional supports provide less opportunities for most of us.” (Woman, Ethiopia)***

## **Recommendations from the roundtable**

Based on the findings presented and discussed at the event, the participants made the following overall recommendations for institutions, programmes and funders supporting women early career researchers

- Build support for women researchers to travel with their family into funding opportunities to increase their mobility
- Remove age requirements from funding opportunities for early career researchers as ‘early career’ is not tied to a specific age group
- Expand mentorship opportunities for early career women researchers
- Share information and support available across intermediate organisations such as the Mawazo Institute and INASP to widen access to the communities and the opportunities they provide

## References

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