

THE IMPRINT OF EDUCATION (TIE):

A LONGITUDINAL COHORT STUDY OF AFRICAN ALUMNI OF THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION SCHOLARS PROGRAM

A collaborative proposal from the Human Sciences Research Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rationale

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program operates from the premise that supporting academically gifted but socio-economically disadvantaged students through secondary and tertiary education can make a difference, at multiple levels, in the world. This proposed longitudinal cohort study comprises a tracer study, a central participatory qualitative study and smaller collaborative enquiries to investigate this idea. Through the use of these research activities, recent graduates of the Scholars Program will be tracked over five years. During this time, we will also take the opportunity for contextual learning on topics such as ethical and transformative leadership, giving back, livelihoods, identity, mentoring and transitions with the view to understand what needs to be in place for young African graduates to have a real influence in their communities, institutions, and societies. It is a study concerned with understanding success in ethical and transformative leadership, and how this is affected by context and education.

Research aims and influence goals

The research aims of the study can be described as an attempt to understand the impact of the Scholars Program on scholarship recipients over time (by measuring the impact of Scholars on their worlds - families, educational institutions, communities, organisations, and societies;). It also aims to understand what works and why, as well as what might be done to improve the Scholars Program and maximise the impact of Scholars as agents in the social and economic transformation of the African continent (by considering their social networks, support and training received, the way in which institutions contributed to their success, and their employment and employment creation trajectories). The overall objective is to provide evidence at multiple levels on the individual, structural, contextual and programmatic factors that mediate Scholars' outcomes especially with regards to "return", "giving back", "transformative and ethical leadership" and to examine the links between socio-economic inclusion, education and development.

On a macro level it is critical to assess the imprint of education on the lives of individuals, communities and societies in contexts such as those on the African continent in which Mastercard Foundation provides scholarships. Also of concern are the ways in which the Foundation improve their contribution through their Scholars Program, in keeping with their strategic focus to 2030 on young people and work in Africa.

Specifically, the agreed key influence goals will be to see evidence of the following:

1. Higher education institutions, particularly in Africa, are more equitable and inclusive and actively recruit, support and facilitate transitions of young people from diverse backgrounds.
2. Pathways from university to dignified and fulfilling work – particularly for young women - are created, strengthened and scaled/multiplied.

3. African youth, particularly young women, are inspired to pursue their aspirations, give back, and drive and lead socio-economic transformation.
4. Higher education institutions advance innovations and collaborations that contribute to inclusive and equitable socio-economic transformation in Africa.
5. Governments, private sector actors, and funders embrace and invest in approaches advanced through the Scholars Program (including investment in wrap-around supports, and a holistic model, to facilitate student success).

Through the programme of research we have described in this proposal we plan to achieve these outcomes, as part of a learning partnership with the Foundation, by targeting the following audiences in the knowledge that is produced:

1. Mastercard Foundation and its Scholars Program so that the programme may be improved as it is expanded. Learnings will however also be applicable to scholarship programmes in general;
2. Scholars Program Alumni since they are the ones who will potentially drive much of the transformation on the continent, alongside other young graduates;
3. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who have been partners and who will be partners of the Scholars Program, alongside other HEIs who will be offered evidence to expand their recruitment and support programmes for prospective scholars who may not ordinarily have had access to their institutions;
4. Partner NGOs as well as NGOs working in the field of education and youth development in general;
5. National governments in selected African countries, especially those responsible for access to education, support for those in education, and those responsible for curricula and policies on career guidance and mentorship; and
6. Academics in general, and African scholars and scholarship in particular, so that a growing body of contextually relevant evidence is available on which to build future interventions and strategies.

The benefits of a longitudinal study

A longitudinal cohort study has the benefit of tracking and interacting with participants over an extended period of time (in this initial study for 5 years) and therefore can take advantage of a perspective not available to snapshot investigations. Furthermore, a well-resourced study allows for conventional components such as a quantitative survey administered repeatedly over time as well as deeper qualitative interviews that ask about lived experiences and meanings. In addition, we are able to add in-depth (and creative, participant-engaging) inquiries into leadership, mentorship and livelihoods, all important topics for Mastercard Foundation as they embark on their *Young Africa Works* strategy. Helping to prepare future Mastercard Foundation Scholars and others pursuing educational and vocational success on the African continent is a critical aim of this study, one which we will attempt to meet through five distinct but interrelated Learning Activities. These activities will be supported by regular reflective meetings comprising all members of the research team, the Foundation and their institutional partners, along with selected Alumni and a range of senior academic and practitioner advisers.

The sample and learning activities

In response to the call for proposals that asked that a prospective study focus on the Scholars Program Alumni from African countries with the largest numbers of Alumni, and taking into account contexts for future strategies, we have identified (in discussion with the Foundation) seven 'sites' for the study. These are Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Ethiopia and, for ease of reference, 'the Diaspora' – Alumni who now reside outside of the African continent (and who may have studied abroad or in Africa as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar). While most

Alumni originate¹ from Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, we include Ethiopia in this group since a key institutional partner in Ethiopia has a focus on disability. We also identify ‘the Diaspora’ as a distinct site since it addresses the notions of ‘return’ and ‘mobility’. These latter areas of learning are all important to the future direction of the Scholars Program. We will also ensure that the study retains a special focus on girls and young women² by oversampling women in the study and ensuring questions relating to women’s experiences and gender are intentionally foregrounded in all five activities.

Learning Activity 1 – Tertiary and Secondary School Alumni Tracer Study (ATS)

The Tertiary and Secondary School Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) forms the quantitative foundation from which the other four Learning Activities will build qualitatively and conceptually. The ATS will provide information on Alumni pathways, the factors that influence these pathways and the impact of Alumni on families, communities, organisations and societies. We propose using a pathways framework which allows for collecting information on participants’ educational and labour market transitions, as well as their efforts to impact their worlds, including through civic engagement. It is, however, important to explore beyond these pathways to determine the individual, structural, and contextual factors that influence the length and direction of Alumni’s journeys. We use the concept of “navigational capacities” (or contextual adaptive abilities) to interrogate these factors.

The proposed research design is a longitudinal cohort study which aims to survey Scholars Program Alumni from African contexts who completed their studies in 2017 and 2018. The study will sample from two distinct groups of Alumni: Secondary School Alumni and Tertiary Alumni. A census approach will be used at the tertiary level (approximately 1,026 Alumni). This category will include both African Alumni who studied abroad as well as African Alumni who studied on the Africa continent. The 2017/2018 secondary Scholar population includes large numbers of Secondary School Alumni (10,511 alumni) and hence a stratified random sample of approximately 1,043 Alumni will be traced for this group. Through this methodology, specific information on programmatic inputs, transformative leadership, career mobility, social mobility and give-back will be collected.

Generally, data collection will be conducted in the year after graduation, and then three and five years after graduation among two cohorts of Tertiary and Secondary School Alumni. The years in between the main data collection points will be used as ‘contact’ years to ensure that the contact database is up to date. The data generated from this Learning Activity will contribute towards strengthening the evidence base relating to capacities, challenges, opportunities, experiences, and impact of socioeconomically disadvantaged young people exposed to high-quality secondary and tertiary education.

Learning Activity 2 – Research As Intervention Qualitative Study (RAIQS)

Learning Activity 2 comprises the central qualitative component of the Longitudinal Cohort Study. Fifteen Tertiary Alumni who now reside³ in each of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South

¹ The current management information system has some discrepancies with regard to Scholar’s place of study, citizenship, and place of recruitment.

² Currently, approximately sixty-five percent of enrolled Scholars are female.

³ Diaspora tertiary Alumni are defined as ‘living outside of the African continent’ at the time of recruitment for the study (where they studied does not matter) e.g. a Rwandan Scholar who studied in the US and has remained in the US forms part of ‘the Diaspora’. If that Scholar has since returned to Rwanda, they form a part of the Rwanda group for LA2. Our reasoning for this is to create a temporary community of Alumni which is best done through current residence, especially for the purposes of LA2. We will disaggregate in multiple ways for LA1 (origin, place of study, current residence).

Africa, Uganda and abroad ('the Diaspora') will be recruited from older (2014/2015) and more recent (2017/2018) Tertiary Alumni cohorts for a total of 105 participants. The main objectives of Learning Activity 2 are to better understand the programmatic and partner inputs that influence Tertiary Alumni outcomes; to understand how Tertiary Alumni are leveraging social networks in and out of the Scholars Program; and to examine Tertiary Alumni impact on their individual (family and peers), organisational (work across sectors), community (of origin and of current residence) and societal (local, regional and national) worlds. Qualitative studies of this nature are important because they demonstrate how students derive meaning from various aspects of their scholarship experiences and beyond.

This sub-study also has the aim of promoting practices of give-back, transformative leadership and network engagement amongst Tertiary Alumni. It does so through transparent 'nudges' and scaffolding (or instructional supports). To achieve these intervention outcomes, research activities include: 1) A TIE Network Conference intended to introduce the study and its various activities so that Tertiary Alumni get to know one another, build rapport with researchers, hold initial Focus Group Discussions that bring Tertiary Alumni together to reflect on their Scholars Program experiences as a group, engage Alumni in collaborative inquiries and critical reflection about the change they are trying to bring about and the supports that are helpful to them; 2) Key Informant Interviews which involve researchers interviewing Scholars Program institutional and NGO partners about the resources and programmatic inputs that form Scholar wraparound support; 3) Social Network Interviews led by Tertiary Alumni related to the world of work. Social network interviewing (Swartz and Bhana, 2009) is an experimental research and interventionist instrument intended to provide a template for young people to engage with community members on issues relevant to both parties; 4) 'Keeping in Touch' profiles that enable us to hear directly from Tertiary Alumni about challenges and opportunities they face, offering intimate windows into their experiences in everyday life between formal study contacts; 5) Individual In-depth Interviews (in conversation with the 'Keeping in Touch' profile) designed with scaffolds to support and accelerate Tertiary Alumni efforts, track changing understandings of success, transformative leadership and give-back; 6) A digital interactive alumni link (DIAL) that showcases participants' work, creates a structured network for collaboration and can be shared with potential funders and future collaborators/employers. Overall, this learning activity aims to promote interactions which value, scaffold and accelerate the cultural and social capital of Tertiary Alumni in the context in which they find themselves.

Learning Activity 3-5 – Contextual Continental Learning

Because a central feature of this learning study includes understandings of success, transformative leadership and reciprocity, alongside notions of dignified and fulfilling work, it is important that these meanings be contextually grounded. cursory reviews of literature show a preponderance of Northern scholarship on these topics, and while these are important, this study affords us the opportunity to deepen and widen our knowledge in these areas from a Global South and Africa-centric perspective. In ensuring that this study is continually relevant and learns from others in order to inform the Scholars Program in the future, a series of three sub-studies that complement and that run alongside Learning Activity 1 and 2 are envisaged. These take advantage of the longitudinal nature of the overall study and are informed by LA1 and LA2 over time, and in turn feed back into them. Learning Activity 3-5 thus comprises a series of three reports, namely academic and organic insights on transformative leadership in African contexts (that includes resource constraints, identities and geography as key themes); a hindsight report that focuses on learning from institutional leaders about two specific topics (mentoring and transitions, specifically career guidance); and a foresight report dealing with future structural challenges that graduates are likely to face and that have not yet received sufficient attention (in the meantime identified as being on livelihoods in the future, activism and mental health).

Learning Activity 3 will result in three outputs: A review of existing scholarship on leadership and giving back in African contexts, and its relationship to culture, gender and other social markers. A series of video essays and a documentary undertaken by Tertiary Alumni that showcase African contributions to the topic and highlight challenges faced by young people with regard to current practices. Finally, an Africa-wide symposium on the topic hosted by CODESRIA scholars that includes partner institutions, academics, researchers and invited Tertiary Alumni that will result in an edited book on the topic.

Learning Activity 4, hindsight reports on Mentoring and Transitions, involve senior members of the research team interviewing key institutional leaders and NGOs working in higher education and youth development. We anticipate that this will produce new knowledge due to the seniority and expertise of both informants and researchers. Our key research aim here is to develop a series of reports that allow institutions and organisations to showcase best practices and potential strategies in these two important areas of higher education development and transformative leadership, as well as critically reflect on failures and challenges unique to transitioning societies. While there has been much work done on transitions (including by the Foundation), we will focus specifically on mentoring and career guidance and how it might need to adapt to the changing world of work.

Learning Activity 5 focuses on the structural impediments that young graduates may face in their pursuit of embodying transformative leadership. By engaging seven Young Africa post-Masters Fellows, we will embark on a research study that places these graduates in conversation with experts on topics such as understanding how people in specific countries generate livelihoods including how work is changing, the role of technology and how people gain incomes through sources other than waged/salaried labour. Other topics include how social membership, exclusion, geography and new forms of politics and social activism interact with livelihood strategies. Also central are the role of marginalised and affirmed identities (such as gender, disability and ethnicity), and the challenge of mental health and well-being in African contexts. These fellows will be recruited from amongst Scholars Program Tertiary Alumni and will be based at the HSRC for a two-year fellowship. They will conduct reviews and interviews on topics related to structural barriers to transformative leadership and social change, and be helped to curate the outcomes as a digital museum to generate further discussion and dialogue amongst students, academics and the public on these topics.

Key Outputs

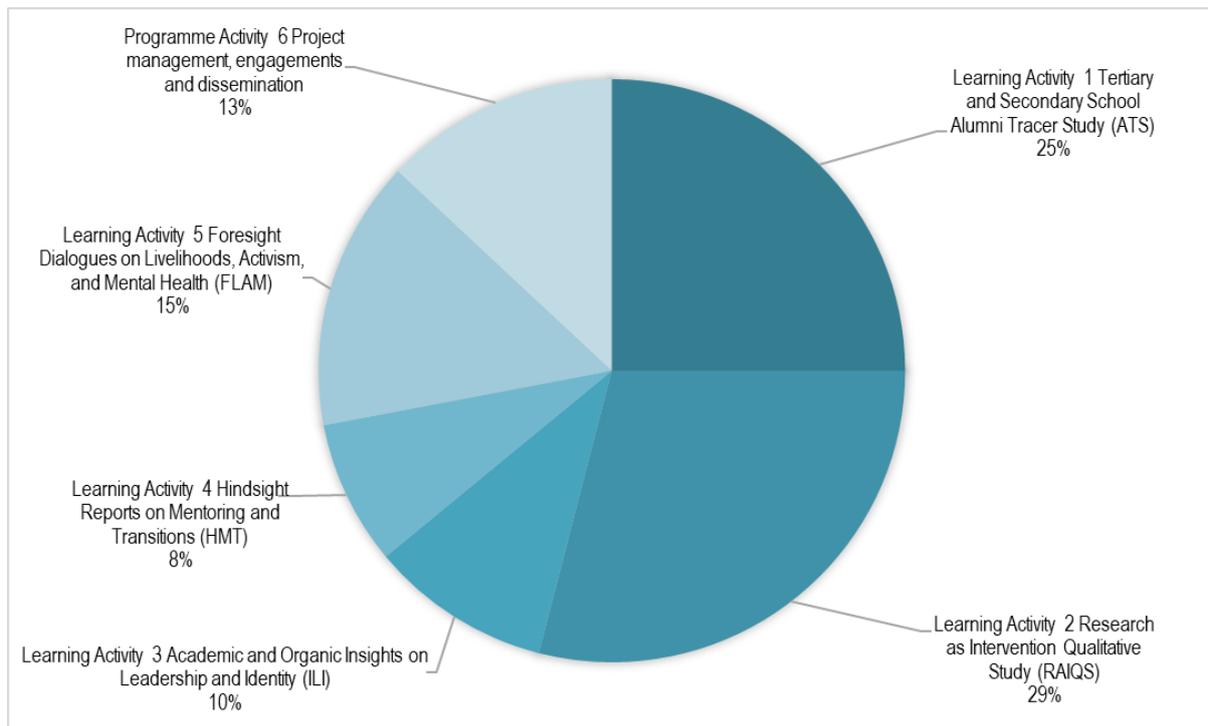
It is envisaged that the key outputs and events from these learning activities will include:

1. A *TIE Network Conference* to engage participants in the study and ensure it begins well;
2. A monograph entitled *Becoming Mountains In The World* that documents Alumni's trajectories since graduation and their efforts to imprint their worlds;
3. An edited book on *Leadership and Identity* in African contexts;
4. A documentary on *Contextual Learning about Leadership* made by participants in association with a professional filmmaker;
5. A high-level panel and report of institutional leaders on mentorship, transitions and career guidance;
6. The appointment of 7 *Young Africa Fellows* who have completed their Master's degree through the Scholars Program on a two-year fellowship;
7. A *virtual museum* with podcasts to promote dialogues on the structural barriers to give-back and the changing nature of livelihoods for young people in African countries; and
8. A series of research reports and journal articles.

Conceptual Framework

We have noted the Foundation’s principles of learning and its policy on Research and Evaluation, which resonates with our own approach of ensuring deep listening, centring participants’ voices and leveraging local knowledge in a learning partnership. We have done a preliminary review of the literature on key elements of the study’s focus especially on transformative leadership and reciprocity (both the concept of giving and giving back), and we have done so cognisant of the roles of gender and context on young people’s ability to leave an imprint on their worlds.

Our approach to this proposed research study is one of participation, emancipation and contextualisation for those who will, in conventional research terms, be its key subjects. We are also committed, as African scholars, to foregrounding the multitude of Southern and African understandings of concepts (not always well documented or readily accessible) around which this study is centred. The two substantive areas of study, namely *transformative leadership and reciprocity* (including give-back and giving), will be interrogated in detail, with a view to allowing its many meanings and potential contributions to guide and shape our study. Furthermore, because of the study’s location on the African continent, we address issues of poverty and gender. This will be couched in terms of capitals and the intersections between various identity markers that foregrounds gender, but also includes disability, geography (including mobility, displacement and rural/urban location), class and race, that operate simultaneously in the lives of these African graduates. We use the metaphor of navigational capacities to aid us in connecting each element of our conceptual framework together, and show its potential for guiding how we articulate the outcomes of our study to inform education and international development, improve existing programmes, understand leadership and promote reflection.



Budget and timelines

The study is envisaged to begin in the second quarter of 2019 and continue until 31 December 2024, running for five years – with the final year being an extended period in order to allow for finalisation of knowledge products and dissemination of findings. The overall budget for this study is US\$5,010,207. Of this it is envisaged that US\$4,785,945 be paid for by the Mastercard

Foundation while the remaining US\$224,261 be paid for by Camfed in Ghana (to whom the Foundation has already paid a grant to cover the costs of research). From both a budget and effort perspective the six⁴ components of the study are distributed as shown in the diagram above.

The study will be conducted, as a collaborative learning partnership with the Foundation and partner institutions of the Scholars Program, by a team of researchers from the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa. The HSRC will work alongside researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). In each of the target sites (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and 'the Diaspora') we will collaborate with locally-based researchers as partners.

⁴ The Learning Activities 1 to 5 plus the sixth component that allows for learning partnership engagements during the study and dissemination of findings upon its conclusion.