Scholars Program

THE IMPRINT OF EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT ON TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

June 2022

This Spotlight report series summarizes the preliminary findings from *The Imprint of Education*, a five-year longitudinal cohort study of African alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program (from selected countries and cohorts) carried out by the Human Sciences Research Council. The findings presented here should be interpreted as a reflection of what has been found so far and is a work in progress. It is important to interpret these findings not as representative of the whole Scholar population, but rather of the specific study population.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is a network of universities and non-governmental organizations with a commitment to inclusive and relevant education. The Program provides young African leaders, especially those from under-resourced communities, with the knowledge and skills they need to transition into dignified and fulfilling livelihoods and contribute to the social and economic transformation of the African continent. A key outcome of the Scholars Program is to develop a cohort of socially conscious, transformative leaders who both can and want to make a difference in their worlds. The Scholars Program seeks to make this a reality for secondary and tertiary students from marginalized communities whose academic talent exceeds their financial resources. By asking alumni to make their education count not only for themselves, but also to benefit their communities and wider society, the Scholars Program aims to develop a new generation of African leaders.

KEY STATISTICS

99% of secondary and 87% of tertiary alumni self-identify as leaders.

Between **70% of secondary alumni and 80% of tertiary alumni** had heard of the Mastercard Foundation definition of transformative leadership.

Almost all alumni felt that the Mastercard Foundation definition represented their understanding of transformative leadership.

The social justice outcome of transformative leadership is **not widely spoken of by alumni** or implementing partners.

71% of tertiary and 75% secondary of alumni wanted to learn how to use policy to bring about systemic change.

58% of tertiary and 66% of secondary alumni want to increase their ability to address issues of inequality — another area of systemic change.

DEFINITIONS OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

The Foundation's definition of transformative leadership is: "Engaging others in an ethical manner to generate positive and lasting change." In the Alumni Tracer Study survey respondents were asked whether they had heard this definition and to what extent it represented their view of leadership. Most had heard of the definition, and of these almost all said it either completely or mostly represented their understanding of transformative leadership. In interviews, tertiary alumni understandings of transformative leadership focused on the outcomes (bringing solutions, giving back, bringing about change in people's lives) and processes (empowering, consulting, and collaborating with others, and putting yourself in the shoes of others) of leadership.

The literature on leadership, which was discussed at a recent symposium held in Tanzania as part of *The Imprint of Education* study, offers broader insights. Both African and global scholars distinguish (albeit not systematically) transactional, transformational, and transformative leadership. Transactional styles

of leadership, such as authoritarian and servant leadership, describe how leaders' actions direct others. In contrast, transformational leadership aims to bring about change in organizations and institutions. The outcome of transformational leadership is not set, and thus could be to maximize profit or to bring about efficiency or equality. Transformative leadership goes a step further. It aims at social change in the political, social, and economic spheres with the clear intention to bring about social justice. It is this moral aim that distinguishes transformative leadership from other conceptions of leadership.

Ngoni Mugwisi, Mastercard Foundation Scholar alum from Arizona State University and a Rhodes Scholar interacts with Social Venture Challenge finalists at the 2017 Baobab Summit.

Credit: Intersect

DEFINITIONS OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

When asked in the survey whether they considered themselves to be leaders, the majority of secondary school and tertiary institution alumni considered themselves to be leaders, although more tertiary alumni agreed strongly with the statement (Table 1).

Table 1: Level of agreement with the statement: "I consider myself to be a leader"

Level of Agreement	Secondary N=8,650	Tertiary n=413
Strongly agree	30%	53%
Agree	69%	44%
Disagree	1%	3%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%

Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

In interviews with tertiary alumni, most identified themselves as leaders, although only around one quarter spoke of transformative leadership as leadership with the clear goal of bringing about social justice. Instead, most spoke of leadership in transactional terms, as a style and a process, rather than as having a clear outcome of bringing about social change, and they referred to it in generic and nonspecific terms, such as this participant from the South African cohort:

I think I'm trying to be [a leader]. I still have a lot of things that I see in myself that are not really effective with regards to transformative leadership, but I'm hoping that someday I will be the version of a leader that I want to be led by. *(Participant 2, female, age 29, South Africa, 2017 Scholar)*

Definitions of leadership and differences between kinds of leadership are important for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program since they challenge conceptions of leadership and invite questions around not only whether alumni consider themselves to be leaders, but what leadership means to them.

Quinter Faith, a Scholars Program alum from McGill University at the Scholars Convention in Canada.

Credit: Pawel Dwulit

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

To deepen understandings of transformative leadership, alumni were asked which leadership skills they currently had, needed, or did not need (Table 2). In the 2020 survey, between two thirds and three quarters of alumni reported possessing skills such as the ability to transform good ideas into action and being able to motivate people to work toward a common goal. Far fewer, however, were able to say they had the skills to bring about systemic change. The survey found that 19% of secondary alumni and 22% of tertiary alumni believed they had "the skill to use government policies to solve problems in my community,"

while only a third had "the skill to show people how all forms of injustice are related e.g., racism, sexism, and prejudice against those living with disabilities or who were immigrants." But 71% and 75% of tertiary and secondary alumni respectively wanted to learn how to use policy to bring about systemic changes, and 58% of tertiary and 66% of secondary alumni wanted to increase their ability to address issues of inequality: another area of systemic change. This is not surprising given that the average age of these alumni in 2020 was 21 for secondary alumni and 27 for tertiary alumni.

Table 2: Alumni self-evaluation of leadership skills

Skill	Alumni	Have Skill	Want Skill	Don't Need Skill
Motivate people to work toward a common goal	Secondary	70%	30%	1%
	Tertiary	69%	31%	0%
Transform good ideas into action	Secondary	64%	36%	0%
	Tertiary	63%	37%	0%
Describe the small steps needed to solve big problems	Secondary	46%	53%	1%
	Tertiary	63%	38%	0%
Recognize people's strengths and put them into an effective team to solve problems	Secondary	40%	59%	1%
	Tertiary	50%	48%	2%
Use disagreements/conflict in a group to find new ways of solving problems	Secondary	41%	55%	5%
	Tertiary	43%	54%	3%
Use government policies to solve problems in my community	Secondary	19%	75%	6%
	Tertiary	22%	71%	7%
Show people how all forms of injustice are related	Secondary	32%	66%	2%
	Tertiary	36%	58%	6%

Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

In interviews, tertiary alumni distinguished between "large" and "small" or everyday actions of leadership and spoke at length of what characterized ethical and poor leadership especially in relation to corruption, nepotism, greed, and self-interest on the African continent. A number spoke of their Scholars Program-inspired give-back projects as examples of "large" leadership actions.
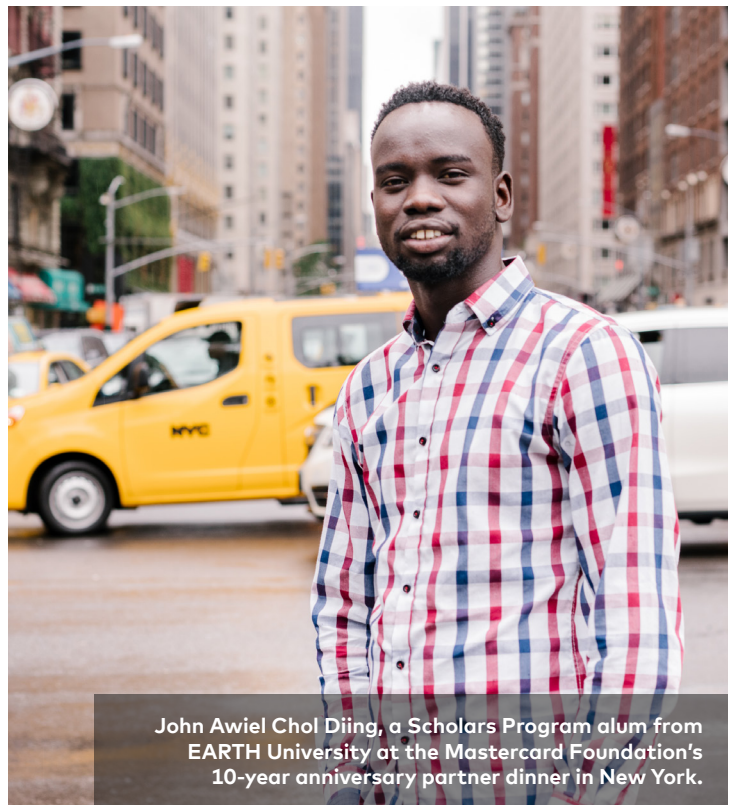
While understanding people's contexts and needs was a starting point, most participants continued to explain that it should never stop there. Transformative leaders, they said, solve problems and leave things better than how they found them:

It doesn't just stop at understanding. You actually … provide some sense of solution to their needs and to their problems … Tangible value that … provides the capability to solve our problems and now we actually can lead better lives *(Participant 6, male, age 32, Kenya, 2019 Scholar).*

Very few alumni expressed their thoughts on issues of gender and leadership in African contexts, with those who did arguing for greater diversity in leadership and more rapid change on the African continent.

HOW PARTNER INSTITUTIONS DEVELOP ALUMNI LEADERSHIP ABILITIES

When representatives from implementing partners of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program were interviewed for the study, about two-thirds shared concrete plans for leadership development of the Scholars at their institutions. Topics included gender equity, inclusivity, presentation skills, and business leadership. These leadership inputs were delivered through various activities including seminars, workshops, talks, group discussions, residential camps, commemoration events, information sessions, mentorship activities, individual counselling, as well as opportunities for practicing transformative leadership through internship opportunities and actively encouraging give-back projects. What was clear was that few partners had a systematic curriculum dealing with leadership, nor did they distinguish between kinds of leadership, or use a definition of transformative leadership that addressed systemic change.

John Awiel Chol Diing, a Scholars Program alum from EARTH University at the Mastercard Foundation's 10-year anniversary partner dinner in New York.

Credit: Jake Naughton

THE LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM IN TANZANIA

Held in early 2022, the leadership symposium brought together tertiary alumni who had worked on a documentary on leadership as well as scholars writing about transformative leadership in African contexts. The key takeaway from the conference was an agreement that transformative leadership must ultimately be concerned with bringing about just change and must seek to change structures and systems that keep the majority of people on the African continent from thriving. The words of the late Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, resonated with delegates too: "There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river and find out why they are falling in." However, changing systems often comes with a heavy cost. In many places, individuals who speak out on systemic issues put their lives at risk. "Is this what we are expecting of young people?" was a key question, repeatedly asked by delegates.

Delegates also acknowledged that transformative leadership is a large burden to place on young people and should not be expected without preparation and clear training. There should be a recognition that transformative leadership can be seen as existing on a spectrum, with actions at a community level later being turned into more powerful actions that address issues at a societal and even global level. One tertiary alumna, from the diaspora cohort, challenged those working with young people to not only ensure adequate training in transformative leadership, but they also spoke of the need to "find ways of caring for young leaders." Other speakers spoke of the necessity of incorporating African outlooks and practices such as Ubuntu (an African ethic of shared humanity) and Harambee (which means "all pull together" in Kiswahili) that both speak to turning collective action into transformative leadership efforts. Similarly, Western-based leadership concepts should be made visible and interrogated, and discarded where they are not useful or relevant.

DIGGING DEEPER IN NEXT ROUNDS OF RESEARCH

In future waves of data collection, it will be useful to see how alumni understandings of transformative leadership continue to evolve, along with their own evaluation of their leadership contributions. It will also be important to further probe alumni's understandings of the ethical, social justice, and collaborative objectives of transformative leadership. Moral motivations need to be asked about, including the meaning and role of ethics in leadership practices, and the potential dangers of attempting to change unjust systems. Especially significant is the stark deficit approach in response to questions about leadership and ethics, with a focus on how to overcome unethical

practices of leadership on the African continent. Alumni seldom cited justice as a motivation for starting community projects or choosing entrepreneurship as a career pathway, and yet social justice is at the core of transformative leadership. More will be done to better understand what it will take to shift toward an understanding of leadership that is more informed by social justice in ways that resonate with alumni. This will be critical as the way tertiary alumni express their desire to give back is also inextricable from the notion of transformative leadership that underpins the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program.

NOTES ON THE STUDY

The Imprint of Education longitudinal cohort study has a number of goals, one of which is to understand how Scholars Program alumni understand and practice entrepreneurship, using data gathered from three sources. The first is through a quantitative survey of alumni of both the secondary school and tertiary institution Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program from Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Uganda who completed their studies between 2017 and 2020. Also included were tertiary scholars who studied abroad. A total of 1289 secondary school alumni (weighted to the population of 8,650 and represented by N) and 413 tertiary institution alumni (of a possible 839 for which records were available, represented by n) participated in the first round of the survey in 2020. In 2021 these same alumni were contacted to confirm details and update some questions regarding their current pathways (N=8,381, and n=602). The second source of data comprises qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in 2020 and 2021 with 122 tertiary institution scholars who graduated between 2014 and 2020 with undergraduate or graduate degrees and who were recipients of Mastercard Foundation scholarships. These participants were drawn from the same six countries as is the case for the quantitative component of the study, as well as from those who studied abroad at partner institutions from anywhere on the continent (a group the study calls 'the Diaspora'). The third source of data was obtained through qualitative interviews with key informants from institutions and organizations that implemented the Scholars Program conducted in 2020.

THIS SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATION IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING REPORTS:

Mahali, A., Swartz, S., Juan, A. and The Imprint of Education Research Team. The Imprint of Education Study: A Longitudinal Cohort Study of African Alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program — Year 1 Research Report. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2021.

Swartz, S., Mahali, A., Juan, A., and The Imprint of Education Research Team. The Imprint of Education Study: A Longitudinal Cohort Study of African Alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program — Year 2 Research Report. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2022.