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DISCRIMINATION, REPRESENTATION, EMPLOYMENT, EXPECTATIONS AND LEADERSHIP

This brief summarises findings from the first three years of *The Imprint of Education*, a five-year longitudinal cohort study of Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni of African descent (from selected countries and cohorts) conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council. The findings presented here should be interpreted as indicative of what has been found so far and are a work in progress. It is important to interpret these findings not as representative of the whole Mastercard Foundation Scholar population but rather of the study population. The study population and methodology are described at the end of this brief.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is a global initiative designed to develop the next generation of transformative leaders by enabling highly talented, service-oriented young people, primarily young Africans, to pursue their higher education and cultivate their leadership potential. The Program works with educational institutions, ecosystem actors, and Mastercard Foundation Scholars to create the conditions that will enable young people to attain inclusive and relevant education, transition smoothly into dignified and fulfilling work, and lead transformative lives. The Program places a particular emphasis on reaching young women, forcibly displaced youth, and young people living with disabilities who face the highest social and economic barriers to opportunity.

Accordingly, *The Imprint of Education* has sampled more women than men and foregrounded issues relating to women's experiences and gender in its research questions and theoretical framework. In particular, the study has focused on the ways in which Alumni perceptions and opportunities are shaped by the intersectional nature of their social identities. The study has sought to understand how Alumni experience discrimination and/or privilege at the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age (as young people) and disability, among other identities.

The application of a gendered framing and an intersectional lens enables a recognition of the power imbalances and hierarchies at work in African contexts.

It promotes an understanding of how Alumni, in their efforts to adopt leadership roles, may experience privilege and discrimination at the points where marginalised identities meet and consider how the Alumni's social identities and circumstances affect the extent to which they can access the material and social resources required for success.

This Spotlight brief presents an overview of the findings on gender and intersectionality as they relate to discrimination, representation, employment, expectations and leadership. The findings are largely based on qualitative interviews with tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni and a quantitative survey of secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni and tertiary Alumni, called the Alumni Tracer Study (ATS).

KEY STATISTICS

While the largest share of tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni (40 percent) in the study viewed "gender" as their most important identity; **more females (54 percent), than males (13 percent) reported this.**

All interviewed **female tertiary Alumni** reported experiencing harassment/ discrimination.

The gender split of **secondary school** Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni business owners in 2022 were **75 percent female, 25 percent male. Tertiary Alumni** business owners in 2022 were **54 percent male, 46 percent female.**

In 2022, **28 percent of males and 20 percent of females** felt they had the skills to use government policies to solve problems in their community.

57 percent of females and 53 percent of males wanted to develop systemic justice skills.

There was growth in the proportion of **male tertiary Alumni** who saw themselves "game changers," **11 percent (2020) to 30 percent (2022).**

Female tertiary Alumni who described themselves as "game changers" also grew from **18 percent (2020) to 24 percent (2022).**

Of the interviewed Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, more **females (53 percent) than males (39 percent)** reported mental health challenges. **More females (30 percent) than males (18 percent)** sought professional mental health help.

In 2022 **85 percent of the secondary school Alumni** without internet access were female.

Weighting the study by gender

In keeping with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's objectives of focusing on the trajectories of female participants, the sample for the present study included more females than males. A total of 69 percent of the secondary school Alumni participating in the study were female; 52 percent of the tertiary Alumni in the Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) sample were female; and 55 percent of tertiary Alumni in the Research-as-Intervention Qualitative Study sample were female.

GENDER INEQUALITY

The study is located on the African continent which faces challenges around issues of resources and marginalised identities. Not only does the Continent have the highest number of countries in the “low human development” category of the United Nations Development Program, but it also has a poor track record of gender equality and human rights abuses around sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability¹. Correspondingly, in *The Imprint of Education* study all of the female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni who were interviewed qualitatively said they had encountered sexual harassment in their education spaces, workplaces or communities – with the sexual harassment being exacerbated for women with disabilities.

A Gender Equity Index developed by the African Development Bank (Figure 1) shows significant gender inequality in relation to economic opportunities; human development; and the law and institutions. According to the index, with a score of 100 representing

true gender equality, the continental average for this measure is 54. Among the African countries represented in *The Imprint of Education* study, Ethiopia was the most unequal and South Africa was the least unequal (see Figure 1).

Women are still underrepresented in policy-formulation, representation, and in peacebuilding and mediation efforts on the Continent, even though countries like Rwanda and Ethiopia have made considerable progress in women’s representation in parliament for instance². Nevertheless, more needs to be done to advocate for gender equality in Africa. One of the key influence goals in *The Imprint of Education* study is to provide evidence for how young women can and are leading transformation, including understanding what resources and opportunities need to be in place to support them.

Young women are more likely than young men to be unemployed, with Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and, particularly, South Africa, displaying quite high differences in employment rates by sex³.

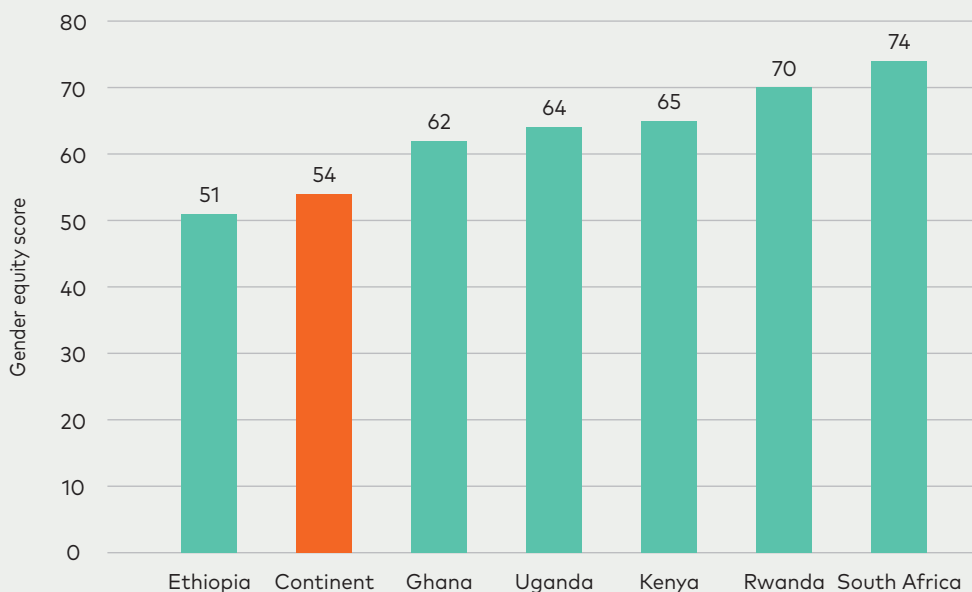


Figure 1: Gender Equality Index for African sites in the present study

Source: African Development Bank, 2015

- 1 African Development Bank (2015). Africa Gender Equality Index 2015. African Development Bank: Gender and Social Development Monitory Division, Quality Assurance and results Department.
- 2 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2021). Women’s Political Participation - Africa Barometer 2021. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Sweden. Available at <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2021.pdf>
- 3 International Labour Organisation (2022) modelled estimates and projections database

ALUMNI GENDERED IDENTITIES AND CHALLENGES

In *The Imprint of Education*, gender was named as an important identity marker. Among secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, more females than males emphasized "my gender" when describing their own identities. In the qualitative study, a large share of tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni as their most important identity, with more females (54 percent) than males (13 percent) doing so. Intersecting with gender, "being African" was also an identity emphasised by Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni. More males (32 percent of secondary school Alumni and 67 percent tertiary Alumni) than females (27 percent of secondary school Alumni and 47 percent of tertiary Alumni) placed the emphasis on "being African."

In 2021 interviews, almost all the male Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni conceptualised their male identity in relation to whether they were a provider; a decision-maker; a husband or father; or a successful professional. As a male Alumnus in Uganda said:

"What society or my family expects of me, the roles I'm supposed to play [are] ... supporting my father's construction project; pay school fees for my younger siblings and offering my siblings advice; [and] engage in some form of property accumulation."

This may mean that, for the young men, they are expected to straddle both professional and socio-cultural interpretations of success.

In 2021 and 2022, the female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni reported a range of gender-biased socio-cultural expectations including pressure to marry, have children, take care of family members and become a "housewife." This extended to giving back where male Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni were more likely to make financial and material contributions to the family compared with their female counterparts who were more likely to

contribute in the form of emotional support, time and household chores. Such gender-biased socio-cultural expectations have been known to often professionally disadvantage women who decide to meet them, if they are not supported in the workplace. Many female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni reported misogyny in their workplaces which could impact their experiences of dignified and fulfilling work. Like their male counterparts, they spoke of the double burden of race and gender that encompassed being "underpaid" in the workplace such as Relebohile who shared:

"Being a black woman in South Africa is not easy ... When it actually impacts you, you start to be more forceful about making sure that you're being treated fairly in the workplace ... making sure that I am conscious of situations where I'm being treated unfairly and ... advocating for myself in a way that I didn't previously."

Alumni working or studying in science fields reported facing sexism and a widespread denial that women were able to pursue careers in the sciences.

Many of the young women who were interviewed had experienced some form of gender discrimination. However, even as they spoke of "patriarchy," they remained quite optimistic about their status in the world. These outlooks may be a product of their education; the increasing prevalence of female role models; and the experience of living in a time when gender equality policies have been enacted in many African countries. As a female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumnus from Uganda said:

"It's an opportunity to be alive [because] so many organisations are pushing for feminism in work and everything ... I feel like I'm privileged."

AGENCY AND ASPIRATION – HOW THE ALUMNI SAW THEMSELVES

Over the first three years of the study, the tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni who were interviewed were asked to choose from among eight ways of describing their past and present

selves (their own levels of agency), as well as their aspirations for their future selves. Figure 2 sets out the descriptions of these typologies.



Figure 2: Typologies of action and ambition

There was a steady growth in the proportion of male Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni who described themselves as “game changers,” from 11 percent in 2020 to 30 percent in 2022 (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the proportion of females who said they were “game changers” also grew, albeit less so although starting from a higher base, from 18 percent in 2020 to

24 percent in 2022. Overall, it was found that the largest proportion of the female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni saw themselves as having significant agency and high aspirations, identifying themselves as “game changers.” In this way they demonstrated the navigational capacity to develop individual agency, aspiring to challenge societal norms and striving for positive change in their lives and communities.

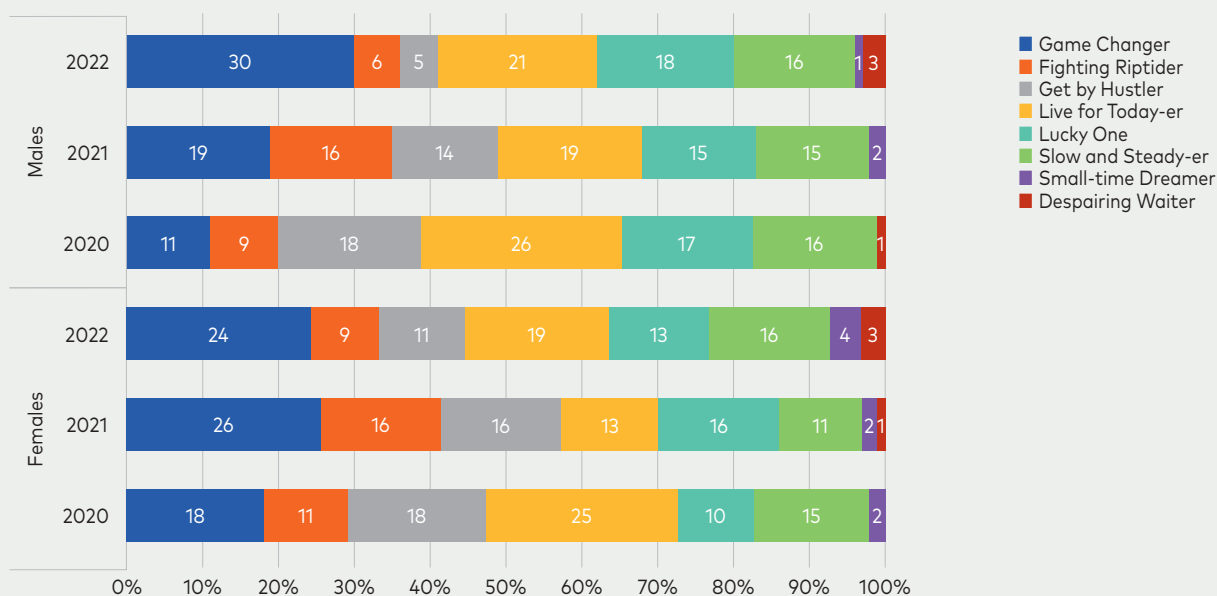


Figure 3: Self-identified typologies of Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni's present selves disaggregated by gender (2020 n=97; 2021 n=94; 2022 n=84) Source: Biographies of interviewed Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, 2020, 2021, 2022

Following COVID-19 stabilisation, employment status was a significant factor in typology choices, with employed Mastercard Foundation Scholar

Alumni more likely than their not-employed peers to identify with high-agency typologies such as “game changer” and “get by hustler.”

LIVELIHOOD PATHWAYS

In 2022, among the secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, the females were happier about their working conditions than the males, and more of them felt that their current job was in line with their intended careers (Table 1). This shifted among the tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar

Alumni, where more males felt that there was opportunity for career growth; and that their jobs were fulfilling and in line with their career paths than females. Similar to secondary Alumni, female tertiary Alumni were more likely than their male peers to be happy with their working conditions.

Table 1: Indicators of dignified and fulfilling work among the Alumni who reported being employed by gender (percent Alumni who strongly agree and agree.)

Indicator	Secondary School Alumni (n=1663)		Tertiary Alumni (n=625)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
There is opportunity for career growth	81	83	91	83
My job is dignified	77	76	95	95
My job is fulfilling for me	49	56	88	77
I earn a fair wage or salary	44	39	69	71
I am happy with my working conditions	54	62	76	85
My job is in line with my intended career path	40	43	87	80

Source: 2022 data from the Alumni Tracer Study (ATS)

In 2022, there was a difference in business ownership by gender, among secondary school and tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni. More female (75 percent) than male (25 percent) secondary school Alumni and more male (54 percent) than female

(46 percent) tertiary Alumni had businesses in that year. Understanding this difference may be important for targeted business resourcing and support for Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni at different points of their livelihood pathways.

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS – TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AND GIVING BACK

Social consciousness refers to the extent to which individuals and groups are aware of and concerned about social issues and the impacts these have on society. Individuals who are socially conscious are typically aware of issues such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination, and are committed to working towards social justice. The overarching concept of “social consciousness” encompasses the two key concepts of “give back” and “transformative leadership” which the Mastercard Foundation defines as “the act of engaging others, in an ethical manner, to generate positive and lasting change” and which entails “a desire to give back.”

As part of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, young men and women are anticipated to participate in initiatives that give back to their communities. Among both secondary school and tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, more females than males spoke of directing their interventions at the individual level; and more males said they directed their initiatives at the community level, compared to females. It is anticipated that to effect systemic level changes, more community level action from young women is needed.

Male tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni were twice as likely as their female counterparts to report having created jobs for others. However, when

speaking about the challenges faced in giving back, female tertiary Alumni were twice as likely as the males to select (lack of) money as a barrier to involvement in giving back.

In 2022 more male tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni (28 percent) than females (20 percent) said they had the skills to use government policies to solve problems in their community; while more females (57 percent) than males (53 percent) said they wanted to develop systemic justice skills; these are the skills necessary to understand how all forms of social injustice are related. An ability to understand systemic injustice and therefore contribute to systemic change, is a crucial component of transformative leadership. The majority of Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni’s understanding of leadership remains transactional with a limited understanding of transformative leadership. From engagements with institutional partners, it became clear that many conflated social justice action or systemic change with “politics” and as such, partners have shied away from speaking about systemic change. However, this is a complicated tension since much change required to ensure the social and economic transformation of the African continent is political in nature, for example, gender equity, inclusion, dignified employment and eliminating corruption.

WELL-BEING

Alumni well-being in general entails access to adequate material resources and support for psychosocial wellbeing, that is, mental, emotional and social health. More females than males mentioned mental health challenges (53 percent and 39 percent respectively) and sought professional

help accordingly (30 percent and 18 percent respectively). Historically, admitting to having mental health challenges has been deemed unacceptable, and this is often more pronounced for (young) men. This differentiation by gender may merit exploration in further research.

DIGITAL CAPACITIES

Although there was a significant increase in internet access between 2020 and 2022⁴, such access remained partial, particularly among female secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni.

In 2022, 85 percent of the secondary school Alumni

who could not access the internet were female. Among these female secondary school Alumni, the main reason that was given was not having access to a device, perhaps indicating cultural preferences around access that favour boys and men over girls and women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support for young African women so that they can lead transformation may be provided in a number of ways:

1. The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program and its institutional partners should prioritise providing input about the ways in which social identities contribute to inequality and exacerbate systemic challenges as an intentional part of the resources offered to Mastercard Foundation Scholars. This is especially important for those women who say they lack policy skills and see themselves as supporting and leading others.
2. Mentorship programmes should be established to connect young African women with successful female leaders who exemplify the traits of great agency and high aspiration, and who can serve as role models and provide guidance. Mentorship helps build confidence; expands networks; and provides valuable insights and support. Encouraging women in leadership positions to mentor younger generations can inspire and empower these young women to navigate their livelihood pathways more effectively.
3. Appropriate training to raise awareness around mental health issues should be established with the goal of normalising the quest for professional mental health support as required by Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni. Further research is

needed into the kind and levels of mental health care provision in Africa, so that contextually and culturally appropriate support may be provided.

DIGGING DEEPER FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research is needed to:

1. Explore how factors such as cultural norms, societal expectations and economic conditions interact with structural barriers to shape the strategies adopted by, and resources available to, young African women as they seek to navigate their environments.
2. Identify the reasons for the significant differences in the levels of entrepreneurship between the male and female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni.
3. Consider why the male and female Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni hold such different views on the issue of mental health and seeking support in relation to mental health.
4. Examine how the burden of caregiving influences the ways in which females are able to give back.
5. Capture Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni reflections on their experiences of mentorship with a view to inform current and future mentorship programmes, especially for young women.

⁴ The proportion of secondary school Alumni accessing the internet rose from 47% in 2020 to 76% in 2022. For Tertiary Alumni the proportion rose from 78% in 2020 to 85% in 2022.

NOTES ON THE STUDY

The Imprint of Education longitudinal cohort study has a number of goals – one of which is to understand how Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni transition from secondary school and tertiary educational institutions to develop fulfilling lives and livelihoods using data gathered from three sources. The first data source is a quantitative survey of Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni of both the secondary school and tertiary institution program who had completed their program in 2017, 2018 or 2019. For secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni, a cohort was recruited from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda based on *where participants had studied*. The tertiary Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni cohort was recruited from Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and what we call “the Diaspora” (African Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni that had studied in institutions outside Africa) based on *countries in which they had studied*. Data from

the survey conducted in 2020 and 2022 (with administrative data collected in 2021) was weighted to the secondary school Mastercard Foundation Scholar Alumni population (8,650) and the tertiary Alumni population (839). The second source of data comprises qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in 2020, 2021, 2022 with tertiary Alumni (122, 117 and 106, participants respectively) who had graduated between 2014 and 2020 with undergraduate or graduate degrees and who were part of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. Based on *where they were residing* in 2019, these participants were drawn from Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Kenya, and “the Diaspora”). The third source of data was obtained through qualitative interviews conducted in 2020 and 2022 with partners from institutions and organisations that implement the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. All names of research participants referred to in this brief are pseudonyms.

THIS SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATION IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING REPORT:

Swartz, S., Juan, A., Mahali, A., and The Imprint of Education Research Team. (2023). *The Imprint of Education Study: A longitudinal cohort study of African Alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program – Year 3 Research Report*. Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council.



This brief was produced in the context of *The Imprint of Education* study that is conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.