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Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda

NEWSLETTER

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"Excellence is not defined by credentials alone, but by character, discipline, and purpose"

Associate Professor Kayihura Muganga Didas, Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda addressing Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program graduates and newly admitted Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda

"360º Knowledge Accelerator towards dignifying work for young Africans"



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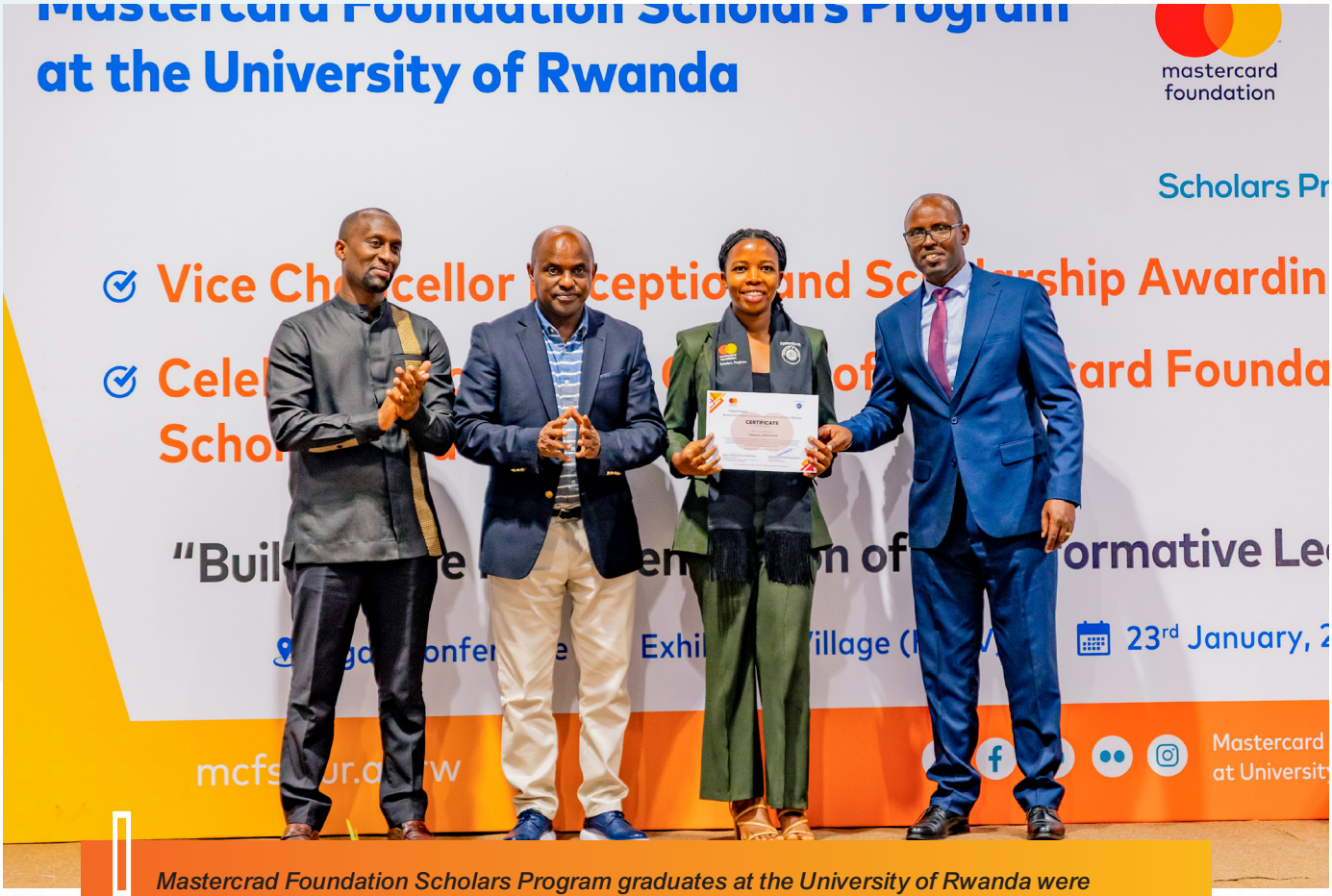
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University of Rwanda Welcomes 422 New Mastercard Foundation Scholars and Celebrates First Cohort of Graduates



Mastercrad Foundation Scholars Program graduates at the University of Rwanda were recognized for their commitment to excellence, ethical leadership, service, and responsibility

The University of Rwanda (UR) has welcomed 422 new Mastercard Foundation Scholars and celebrated the graduation of 38 Mastercard Foundation Scholars from the first cohort, marking key milestones in developing the next generation of transformative leaders.

The double celebration, combining the Vice Chancellor's reception for newly admitted Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda and a graduation ceremony was held on January 23 at the Kigali Conference and Exhibition Village (KCEV).

The annual event brought together Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda, University leadership, representatives from the Mastercard Foundation, and partners of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, which offered a platform to exchange views on its strengths, stakeholder roles and expectations, as well as to foster connections within the growing Mastercard Foundation Scholars' community.

The University of Rwanda is implementing the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program under a 10-year partnership (2021–2031), aligned with Rwanda's National Transformation Strategy. Through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, the university will recruit 1,400 academically talented young people facing socio-economic barriers from Rwanda and across Africa, drawn from three priority categories: young women (70 per cent), youth with disabilities (10 per cent) and refugees (25 per cent).



Associate Professor Kayihura Muganga Didas, Acting Vice Chancellor at the University of Rwanda, welcoming new Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda

Addressing the Mastercard Foundation Scholars, the Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda Associate Professor Kayihura Muganga Didas urged the new cohort to pursue excellence defined not only by academic credentials but also by character and purpose.

"Excellence is not defined by credentials alone, but by character, discipline, and purpose. Cultivate intellectual curiosity, ethical integrity, and a deep sense of public responsibility. Align your personal ambitions with Rwanda's collective aspirations, because knowledge that does not serve society remains incomplete." Professor Kayihura said

He described the graduates as proof that targeted investment in talent delivers tangible results, noting that graduation marks a transition into service rather than an end point.





Associate Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage, Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, addressing participants at the ceremony

Associate Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage, Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at University of Rwanda, said 970 Mastercard Foundation Scholars are currently enrolled across all colleges and campuses of the university.

"The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is on track to train 1,400 Mastercard Foundation Scholars, including 200 under the national 44 programme aimed at accelerating the production of health professionals over the next four years," she said, noting that the investment aligns with Rwanda's human capital and health systems priorities.

She added that the impact is already evident, with Mastercard Foundation Scholars demonstrating strong academic performance and many graduates progressing to competitive master's and PhD programmes, securing international scholarships or gaining employment soon after graduation.



Ivan Ntwali, Country Director of the Mastercard Foundation in Rwanda



Pascal Gatabazi, Chief Technical Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Guest of Honor at the event

Ivan Ntwali, Country Director of the Mastercard Foundation in Rwanda, said the Foundation has worked in the country since 2009 and has supported more than 150,000 young people to access work opportunities through partnerships with government and other institutions.

He noted that globally, the Foundation has awarded over 57,000 scholarships in partnership with more than 66 organisations, with 71 per cent benefiting young women. "Our partnership with the University of Rwanda reflects what is possible when institutions share a commitment to equity, excellence and impact," Ntwali said.

Speaking on behalf of the graduates, Dieudonné Dushimirimana, a finance graduate and Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, thanked the Foundation for investing not only in education but also in personal growth. "You saw potential where others saw need," he said. "Your support, mentorship and training strengthened our abilities and taught us how to lift others as transformative leaders."

Pascal Gatabazi, Chief Technical Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Guest of Honor at the event, commended the Mastercard Foundation's work in Rwanda and its partnership with the University of Rwanda in supporting young people to pursue higher education and unlock their leadership potential.

"The University of Rwanda is at the heart of Rwanda's development and transformation. I urge Mastercard Foundation Scholars to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire to contribute meaningfully to the country's sustainable development."

Voices of Gratitude by Graduates of the 1st Cohort of Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda



Some Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program graduates at the University of Rwanda pose for a group photo at the graduation ceremony

The first cohort of 38 Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda (UR) completed their studies and graduated during the institution's 11th Graduation Ceremony in October 2025. This cohort comprised 18 undergraduate Mastercard Foundation Scholars and 20 at the Master's level. Below are some of their reflections on the day of their graduation.

"The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda gave me confidence, mentorship, and a clear sense of purpose. It helped me discover my potential, strengthen my leadership skills, and inspired me to use my education to impact the community." said Urukundo Adeline, a Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni from the University of Rwanda who pursued the Bachelor of Science in Business Information Technology.

Nsanzabandi Gasasira Steven, who also graduated with a Master's degree in Internet of Things and Embedded Computer Systems, said the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is both empowering and very transformative.

"The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program supported me in a way I never imagined possible. I am a refugee living in Rwanda, and accessing education is extremely difficult for refugees. Through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, I was supported to pursue higher education and complete my Master's studies." he said.

Congratulating the graduates, the Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, Associate Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage encouraged them to carry forward the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's values into their professional lives.



Urukundo Adeline, a Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program graduate at the University of Rwanda

"The Mastercard Foundation Scholars have demonstrated resilience, excellence, and leadership throughout their academic journey. As they step into the world beyond the University, we are confident that they will apply their skills and values to serve their communities and contribute meaningfully to the transformation of their countries and Africa at large," said the Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.

Currently, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda has 857 continuing Mastercard Foundation Scholars. Over a 10-year period, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program aims to support 1,400 Mastercard Foundation Scholars, including 200 Mastercard Foundation Scholars under the 44 Initiative, a Rwanda's national strategy that aims to increase the number of health professionals over the next four years.

Baobab Summit 2025 Watch Party at the University of Rwanda:
Reflections and Key Takeaways from Mastercard Foundation Scholars



Mastercard Foundation Scholars from various Mastercard Foundation partner universities in Rwanda during a panel discussion at the Baobab Summit watch party

From 17th–19th October 2025, the University of Rwanda, through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, hosted the Mastercard Foundation Baobab Summit 2025 Watch Party, which served as one of the extension sites of the main Baobab Summit 2025 that took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Mastercard Foundation Baobab Summit is an annual gathering that brings together Mastercard Foundation Scholars and Alumni from across the continent to share ideas, celebrate achievements, and explore solutions for Africa's transformation.

The Baobab Summit 2025 Watch Party at the University of Rwanda featured engaging discussions, the screening of the video "We are Here" produced by Mastercard Foundation and panel discussions on how resilience, leadership, and innovation resonate with Mastercard Foundation Scholars' personal journeys. All the discussions were held in line with the Baobab Summit theme, "*Baobab Rising: Nurturing the Future through Africa's Youth.*"

"It's my first time attending the Baobab Summit. I found it very important and inspiring. I'm the first in my family to attend university. The discussions made me realize that I have a responsibility to drive change in my community and create a positive impact where I come from." said Clemence Ikitegetse, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda pursuing a Bachelor of Pharmacy, year two.

Evans Wakesa, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the African Leadership University who also attended the Baobab Summit Watch Party at the University of Rwanda said that it was a privilege to meet Mastercard Foundation Scholars from other universities. "My biggest takeaway is that your network is your net worth. Our stories may differ, but together we can make our communities better." he said.



The Baobab Summit 2025 Watch Party at University of Rwanda has been an opportunity for Mastercard Foundation Scholars to connect and share inspiration

According to Kizere Rwibutso Sandrine, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Global Health Equity, the movie that was screened "*We are here*" was extremely interesting. "It showed me how far one can go. Yes, we may face challenges, but the opportunities ahead are even greater. What matters most is focusing on what we can achieve," she noted.

According to Associate Professor Celestin Ntivuguruzwa, Deputy Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, the Baobab Summit helps Mastercard Foundation Scholars to meet, network, share experiences and reflect on their journeys together.

"The 2025 Baobab Summit has been a great platform and opportunity for Mastercard Foundation Scholars to also foster deeper connections and reflect together on their shared purpose of being agents of change for transformation wherever they are." Prof. Ntivuguruzwa added.

The watch party at the University of Rwanda was attended by 400 Mastercard Foundation Scholars from the University of Rwanda and other Mastercard Foundation partner universities in Rwanda, including Carnegie Mellon University Africa, African Leadership University, Kepler College, and the University of Global Health Equity.

Additionally, a number of Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda also attended the Baobab Summit 2025 physically in Nairobi, and their participation offered a unique platform to learn from global experts, connect with peers from across Africa, and showcase their innovative projects.

Career Summit at the University of Rwanda: Working Together to Bridge Academia and the World of Work



The Career Summit at University of Rwanda contributes to preparing graduates for the demands of the world of work

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda (UR) continues to support initiatives that strengthen the link between academic learning and the world of work. One of the supported initiatives is the Career Summit, that was hosted for the third consecutive year at the University of Rwanda's Huye Campus on December 16, 2025.

The summit brought together students, employers, industry leaders, and development partners. It provided University of Rwanda students with a valuable platform not only to connect with potential employers but also to showcase innovative ideas and gain insights into industry expectations. It also equipped young people with the skills, mindset, and professional networks needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving labor market.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Raymond Ndikumana, Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Strategic Planning and Administration at the University of Rwanda, highlighted the critical role of the Career Summit in preparing graduates for the demands of the professional world.

"The University of Rwanda does not only provide quality education but also prepares students to thrive in the world of work. The Career Summit thus supports students to go beyond academics. It provides a platform where students meet potential employers, explore career opportunities, and provides a platform to engage in discussions about key employability challenges," he said.

The Career Summit was organized in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.



During the Career Summit, Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda showcased their innovative projects

According to Associate Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage, the Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, the Career Summit is a platform that also supports students and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars in particular to showcase their innovative projects, helping to transform their ideas into viable solutions.

"We support the Career Summit because it is one of the key activities that empower Mastercard Foundation Scholars. Beyond preparing them for the labor market, it also helps to showcase their innovative ideas that can grow into sustainable businesses and can also generate employment for others," she said.

During the summit, partnership agreements were signed with five institutions to promote innovation, mentorship, internship placements, and research opportunities, further enhancing students' career readiness. The agreements will also support Mastercard Foundation Scholars in their transition through internships, coaching, and other capacity-building opportunities.

Mastercard Foundation Team Visits University of Rwanda Colleges



Mastercard Foundation Scholars pose for a group photo at Huye Campus, University of Rwanda

In October 2025, the Mastercard Foundation team visited the University of Rwanda colleges and engaged with university leadership, staff, and Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda.

The visits aimed to deepen collaboration, assess progress, and explore ways to enhance the learning environment and overall Mastercard Foundation Scholar support across campuses, particularly supporting students living with disabilities.

The visits were conducted at different University of Rwanda colleges, including Huye Campus, which houses the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS), College of Business and Economics (CBE), and College of Medicine and Health Sciences (CMHS). The team also visited the College of Science and Technology (CST) at Nyarugenge Campus, the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food Sciences (CAFF) at Busogo Campus, the College of Education, as well as the College of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences (CVAS) at Nyagatare Campus.

During the visit, Mr. Daniel Mundeva, Head, Program Design at the Mastercard Foundation, said that the visit aimed to understand Mastercard Foundation Scholars' experiences, see progress in supporting students living with disabilities, and explore opportunities to strengthen the support for them. "The visits also help to reflect on how best to strengthen Mastercard Foundation Scholars network across all campuses," he added.

The team also visited the projects under implementation, including the multimedia studio, designed for both audio and video content creation. The studio will serve as a central hub for developing high-quality, interactive digital teaching and learning content; and will be accessible to both academic staff and students to foster innovation in teaching and enhance the University's ability to deliver flexible, inclusive, and engaging e-learning experiences.



The team also visited projects under implementation in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, including the multimedia studio established for creation of high-quality digital learning content

Other visited projects include incubation hubs to support student innovation, resource rooms equipped to assist students living with disabilities across different campuses, and girls' rooms established at campuses to enable student-mothers to study without obstacles.

Dr. Emmanuel Nkurunziza, Principal of University of Rwanda's Huye Campus, expressed appreciation for the visits and the partnership with Mastercard Foundation in general. "The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has opened doors for students who would otherwise face significant barriers to continue their education," he said.

"As a university, we remain committed to ensuring that every Mastercard Foundation Scholar is supported and empowered throughout their academic journey." He added.

Apart from college leadership, the delegation also met with Mastercard Foundation Scholars across the colleges, many of whom shared powerful testimonies about how the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has shaped their academic paths, personal growth, and future ambitions.

Inclusion is not a Favor, it is a Right: A look Back at the Celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at the University of Rwanda



The celebration was organized in collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda

The University of Rwanda on December 12, 2025 marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which brought together students with disabilities and student representatives from all University of Rwanda campuses.

Although the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is globally observed on December 3, each year, the University of Rwanda scheduled its celebration on a different day to ensure participation of students from across the campuses and to allow for meaningful engagement with students, staff, and partners.

The celebration aimed to promote inclusion, raise awareness about the rights of young people with disabilities among the university community, and reinforce the university's commitment to creating a supportive and accessible learning environment for all.

Mr. Lucien Niyigena, Minister in charge of Students with Disabilities under the Students' Union at the University of Rwanda Huye Campus, thanked the University of Rwanda for making inclusion a priority, which enables students with disabilities to thrive academically.

The event was organized in collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, in line with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's mission to support inclusivity.

As per the admission criteria, 10% of Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda must be young people living with disabilities, reflecting the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's commitment to inclusive education and equal access to learning opportunities.

While addressing participants, the Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, Associate



Mr. Lucien Niyigena, Minister in charge of Students with Disabilities under the Students' Union at the University of Rwanda, while addressing participants

Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage, said that true progress is impossible when anyone is excluded from opportunities.

"The celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities calls on us to move beyond awareness and demonstrate our commitment to inclusion through concrete and sustained actions." she added.

Participants also gained insights from an address by Mr. Edwin Kimani, Global Operations Director of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation, who joined the celebration while he was at the University of Rwanda on a partnership work visit. He also took the opportunity to encourage students to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program as a valuable platform for leadership development, community service, and personal growth.

University of Rwanda's Achievements in Promoting Inclusion

The University of Rwanda (UR) has made significant strides in fostering inclusion of persons living with disabilities across its campuses.

University of Rwanda has invested in inclusive infrastructure. In partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, three campuses, namely Huye, Rukara, and Nyagatare, are equipped with resource rooms with equipment that support students living with disabilities. Resource rooms on other campuses are being upgraded.

University of Rwanda has also adopted disability inclusion policy guidelines, which have been in place since 2015. The University of Rwanda has further demonstrated leadership through training and capacity-building programs in this field. Since 2000, University of Rwanda has offered short courses in disability inclusion through its College of Medicine and Health Sciences (formerly KHI) and the College of Education (formerly KIE).

Currently, University of Rwanda offers undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs in Special Needs Education at the College of Education, as well as programs in Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences (CMHS).

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda Inspire Younger Peers to Seize Opportunities in Higher Education



University of Rwanda Students and Mastercard Foundation Scholars showcasing a wide range of opportunities available at University of Rwanda to support students in building impactful careers

The University of Rwanda (UR) through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program participated in an exhibition organized by Imbuto Foundation for beneficiaries of the Edified Generation Program.

The Imbuto Foundation is a Rwandan non-profit organization, established by the First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda, H.E. Mrs. Jeannette Kagame, to empower communities facing economic and social barriers to opportunity in Rwanda through programs in health, education, youth, and economic empowerment.

Through the exhibition, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars showcased University of Rwanda's diverse academic programmes, vibrant campus life, and the wide range of opportunities available to support students in building impactful careers.

During the exhibition, students of the University of Rwanda and Mastercard Foundation Scholars highlighted the university's excellence in quality education, research, innovation, and comprehensive student support services, with the aim of empowering young people to realize their full potential.



University of Rwanda students and Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the exhibition organized by the Imbuto Foundation

"Sharing opportunities with younger peers is part of our leadership journey as Mastercard Foundation Scholars. We were supported when we needed it most, and it is our responsibility to pass that support forward by guiding others toward higher education and the opportunities it offers" said Josette Tuyishimire, Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, College of Education, year three.

Imbuto Foundation's Edified Generation Program supports bright students from families facing financial barriers to continue their education. Imbuto Foundation shares a common mission with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program , which supports highly talented, service-oriented young people who face social and economic barriers to accessing higher education, enabling them to lead transformative lives.

> ***Sharing opportunities with younger peers is part of our leadership journey as Mastercard Foundation Scholars.***
>
> **Josette Tuyishimire** Mastercard Foundation Scholar at University of Rwanda, College of Education

Healing Through Friendship: A Focus on the Last Celebration of World Mental Health Day 2025 at the University of Rwanda



The discussions at the Celebration of World Mental Health Day emphasized how supportive friendships can help students navigate academic pressures.

At the University of Rwanda, World Mental Health Day 2025 was celebrated under the theme "Healing Through Friendship." The celebration took place across all University of Rwanda campuses and was organized by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, in collaboration with Solid Mind Mental Health Clinic, a Mastercard Foundation partner supporting mental health initiatives in partner universities.

To observe the day, a series of public lectures were organized across all University of Rwanda campuses. The discussions highlighted the power of true friendship, connection, empathy, and open dialogue as essential pillars of mental health within the university community.

During the public lectures, participants actively engaged in discussions that encouraged mutual support and peer connection as key elements in successfully navigating university life.

The sessions emphasized how supportive friendships and honest conversations can help students navigate academic pressures and personal challenges within the university environment.

The celebration also recognized the contribution of student-led initiatives, particularly Sanga Inshuti and the Dream-Led Youth Fellowship mental health clubs, operating at the University of Rwanda and led by Mastercard Foundation Scholars.

"I realized that talking openly with friends about my challenges makes me feel less alone and more understood. Being part of the Sanga Inshuti Initiative has taught me that mental health is a shared responsibility, we all have a role in supporting each other." said Collete Ganza Utetanase a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Clinical Psychology, and President of the Sanga Inshuti Initiative.

MASTERCARD FOUNDATION SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

When Hope Was All I Had



By Austine Odiwuor

I was born on a Sunday, July 4th, 2004, in a humble family in the rural landscapes of Kisaku village, Kenya. I am the second-born in a family of five children. My parents, though hardworking and deeply loving, never had the privilege of formal education due to limited financial capability. But from a young age, I could feel their silent hope: that through their children, the dreams they once buried might one day rise.

In 2009, I began my journey in education; a journey that would shape not only my future, but that of my entire family. I attended Magunga Primary School, and in 2018, I completed my primary education as the top student, breaking the record for the highest marks ever scored at the school. I was also among the highest scorers in Suba South Constituency. This opened the door for me to join Maranda School, a prestigious national school in the Nyanza Region of Kenya. I joined Maranda in 2019, full of promise and determination.

But life, as I would come to learn, doesn't always follow a straight path. In 2021, disaster struck when the school was burned down twice within a single month amid student strikes against the administration.

The financial burden that followed was too heavy for my family to bear. With a broken heart and an uncertain future, I dropped out of school. For a moment, it felt like my dreams were slipping through my fingers.

But I refused to give up. Later that year, I enrolled at Tonga Boys Secondary School, closer to home. There, I found renewed hope and purpose. In 2022, I sat my Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams, emerging as the top student at Tonga and, once again, in the entire Suba South Constituency. This success earned me an internship opportunity with Equity Bank (Kenya) Limited, which I undertook from February to August 2023. It was a life-changing experience; one that taught me professionalism, responsibility, and the power of financial literacy.



Austine Odiwuor (center) while engaging in a give-back activity for renovation of houses for needy families in Huye District, Southern Province

In September 2023, I joined Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Pharmacy. But while I was stepping forward, my family was facing ongoing financial pressures. My elder sister, the firstborn, had completed high school in 2021 but couldn't join college due to financial constraints. Using part of my internship savings, I helped her enroll in college in October 2023; one of the most fulfilling decisions I've ever made.

Just two months later, tragedy struck again. My younger sister experienced a traumatic incident that required urgent medical care and disrupted our family's stability. My remaining savings went towards her hospital bills. My mother had to shut down her small vegetable business to care for the baby as my sister returned to finish her exams.

By early 2024, our family's financial situation worsened. My younger sister's school fees were due, and the basic needs at home were barely being met. I used my government loan stipend to pay her school fees so she could join secondary school, while also helping my mother keep things afloat at home. She was now a full-time caregiver to my niece, while still trying to support two younger siblings in primary school.

At that time, I was attending sessions at Equity College Counseling, determined to secure a scholarship abroad. But things weren't going my way. I faced rejection after rejection; twenty U.S. universities all said no. Even my dream program, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at ALU, turned me down. Each rejection felt like a door slamming in my face, and eventually, I had to drop out of university in March 2024.

I didn't tell my parents. I couldn't. I didn't want them to carry the guilt. Instead, I reached out to Equity Bank again and requested a temporary role in digital product marketing at one of their branches in Nakuru City. They gave me a chance, and I worked tirelessly. My earnings helped pay tuition for my sisters in college and secondary school and covered basic needs for the rest of the family. I gave everything I had; not because I was forced to, but because I believe in something bigger than myself: that if one of us makes it, all of us can rise.

I did this while silently bearing the weight of my own crumbling dreams. In a period when many young people face immense pressure, I chose to keep moving forward., I chose to remain strong. At work, I smiled and delivered results. To friends, I appeared normal. But inside, I was holding my last shred of hope.

That hope finally bore fruit. On Monday, August 19th, 2024; a day forever engraved in my heart; I received news that I had been selected as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar to pursue my undergraduate education at the University of Rwanda. After 21 rejections, one "Yes" changed everything.

That day, I cried. Not just for myself, but for my siblings, my parents, and everyone in Kisaku village who dared to believe in me. I had made it; not just to a university, but through an ocean of obstacles. From



"While I didn't choose the circumstances of my birth, I am choosing to shape my future with intention" - Austine Odiwuor

a village where many young people face serious challenges, I emerged a symbol of resilience and possibility. My story became a testament that no matter where you come from, your dreams are valid; and with courage, sacrifice, and faith, they are achievable.

I continue to use my scholarship stipend to support my siblings' education and family welfare. My goal has never been just to escape poverty; it has always been to pull others out with me. I want my parents to one day rest in a beautiful home, surrounded by the comfort they never had, knowing that their sacrifices bore fruit. I want my siblings to have choices in life that our parents never did.

While I didn't choose the circumstances of my birth, I am choosing to shape my future with intention. Every single step I've taken; through the pain, rejections, responsibilities, and sacrifice; has been driven by one burning desire: to transform not just my life, but my entire family's destiny. This is my story. And it's just the beginning.

The End Starts from the Beginning: An Open Letter to Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda



"What you become tomorrow is shaped by what you deliberately prepare for today" - Alphonse Nshimiyimana

By Alphonse NSHIMIYIMANA

In charge of Placement, Transition and Partnerships, Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda

Dear new and continuing Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda,

Happy New Year 2026. Allow me to wish you clarity of purpose, discipline of action, and courage of vision as you continue your academic and transition journey.

The end starts from the beginning, and the beginning starts from the end. This is not a slogan; it is a strategic principle. What you become tomorrow is shaped by what you deliberately prepare for today. Readiness is not accidental, it is cultivated, planned, and continuously refined.

As Mastercard Foundation Scholars, you are expected to excel academically, transition smoothly through your studies, and emerge as ethical, competent, and transformative leaders. This requires conscious preparedness: understanding academic requirements and regulations, planning your courses carefully, managing time responsibly, and aligning daily actions with long-term goals. Ask yourself: Am I studying with a clear end in mind, or am I reacting to circumstances as they arise?

Equally important is readiness beyond the classroom. How intentionally are you planning your career, further studies, or entrepreneurial ventures? Are you building relevant skills, professional networks, and practical experiences early enough? Do you anticipate the consequences of postponing decisions that should be made today? Every minute lost is difficult to recover.



Alphonse Nshimiyimana and Utetanase Ganza Collete (Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda) during a Mastercard Foundation Scholars' engagement session during the last Baobab Summit Watch Party at the University of Rwanda

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program prepares you not only for known pathways but also for uncertainty. Are you ready for the unknown? Have you considered alternative plans when circumstances change? Are you cultivating a culture of saving, prudent financial choices, and responsible risk-taking? True preparedness involves engaging in calculated risks, informed choices, and well-examined alternatives. Never blind chances.

On the other hand, community engagement and give-back projects are important pillars. How early are you projecting community initiatives and solutions that reflect your values and academic training? Leadership begins with foresight and responsibility, not at graduation, but from day one.

Do not worry! You are not expected to walk this journey alone. Seek support. Engage in peer learning. Use coaching, mentorship, and existing support programs. Asking for guidance is a sign of strategic maturity, not weakness. Re-examine how you plan, how you prioritize, how you envision tomorrow. Begin with the end clearly defined and let that vision discipline your present actions. The best preparation for tomorrow must start today.

I wish you thoughtful deliberations and purposeful actions as you embark on, and continue, your academic, career, and leadership journey.

Yours sincerely.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at
the University of Rwanda

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