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Scholars Program

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda

NEWSLETTER

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“ I learned that pitching isn't just about explaining your project. You must fall in love with it first, so others can see it through your eyes. ”

La Tasha Muganga Uwase

Team member of the top-winning project, Legacy of Rwanda, at the Scholars Entrepreneurship Fund (SEF) 2.0 Hatana Innovation Competition

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Scholars Entrepreneurship Fund (SEF) 2.0: Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda awards top student projects



During the competitions, participants presented projects designed to turn entrepreneurial concepts into practical, real-world solutions.

Twenty top performing student projects were awarded \$5,000 grants, while other eight projects received \$2,000 each at the “Hatana Innovation Competitions” held at the University of Rwanda, implemented through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Entrepreneurship Fund (SEF) 2.0.

The competition took place from February 1st to 3rd, 2025, under the theme “Fostering Innovation for Market-Ready Graduates.”

The event began with a bootcamp that brought together over 120 students from the University of Rwanda organized into groups of three to five members, each group including at least a Mastercard Foundation Scholar. The bootcamp was organized to build the capacity of participants in developing and implementing innovative ideas.

During the competitions, participants presented projects aimed at transforming entrepreneurial concepts into practical, real-world solutions. The projects spanned various sectors, including IT for agriculture transformation, energy, healthcare, digital education, waste management, AI-powered innovations, virtual reality applications for historical exploration, and environmental conservation, among others.

Legacy of Rwanda was selected as a top project in the competition for its innovative approach to preserving and promoting Rwandan culture and history through immersive technologies. The project integrates virtual reality experiences, computer and mobile games, and children’s history books to engage and educate a wide range of audiences.

"It's a project we've been working on for so long. To get the recognition on this project is such an honor," said La Tasha Muganga Uwase, a student part of the winning team that worked on Legacy of Rwanda project, while expressing her excitement and pride in the achievement.

"We aim to help young people, and anyone interested, learn about Rwanda's history in its purest form. Now, our work is going to accelerate. We're starting by making the Legacy of Rwanda Virtual Reality Museum accessible in museums and educational institutions, from primary schools to universities," she added.

"I learned that pitching isn't just about explaining your project. You must fall in love with it first, so others can see it through your eyes." She added, reflecting on the skills gained during the bootcamp.

Clement Mugisha and his team were among the winners with their project 'Katisha Online', a digital solution aimed at transforming how people purchase bus travel tickets. "The idea addresses challenges faced by travelers, especially those

who have to go to different bus stations just to buy tickets," Mugisha explained.

Katisha Online allows users to purchase tickets conveniently via a simple code service or through an internet-based application.

Associate Professor Anne-Marie Kagwesage, the Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, highlighted the diversity and potential impact of the projects submitted, and appreciated the students' creativity and commitment.

"We received a range of projects covering medicine, agriculture, economics, and job creation. These are critical areas that need to be addressed, and each project has the potential to make a meaningful impact on society," she said.



While officially opening the bootcamp, the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Strategic Planning and Administration Dr. Raymond Ndikumana congratulated students on their innovative projects. He encouraged them to continue innovating solutions to address challenges, starting with their surrounding communities.

Dr. Raymond Ndikumana, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Strategic Planning and Administration at UR, urged students to create innovative solutions that address challenges starting from their own communities.



Dr. Joseph Nkurunziza, Acting Principal of the College of Business and Economics, who represented the Vice Chancellor at the awarding ceremony.

Dr. Joseph Nkurunziza, Acting Principal of the College of Business and Economics (CBE) at the University of Rwanda, who also represented the Vice Chancellor at the awarding ceremony, emphasized the university's commitment to nurturing student innovation.

He also underlined the role of partnerships in the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, noting that the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda provides seed funding to support winning projects and help transform ideas into tangible ventures.

“The university is training two groups of people: job seekers and job creators. The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program targets job creators, many of whom previously faced the barrier of lacking initial funding. Now, that challenge is being addressed,” he explained.

Dr. Nkurunziza stressed the importance of encouraging students to begin thinking about entrepreneurship before graduation, giving them a head start in securing funding, mentorship, and even access to potential bank loans. This was the first time the Hatana Innovation Competition was held, and it is planned to take place every year to further support youth development and innovation.

VC Reception for New Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda: A great opportunity to meet and connect



On March 7, 2025, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda officiated the ceremony to officially welcome 196 new Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda including 160 undergraduates and 36 postgraduates, at a ceremony held at the Kigali Conference and Exhibition Village.

The ceremony brought together Mastercard Foundation Scholars, partners and other stakeholders as an opportunity to celebrate

academic excellence and resilience for new Mastercard Foundation Scholars. It also provided a platform for new Mastercard Foundation Scholars to interact with university leadership, Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program partners, and fellow peers, laying the foundation for a strong support network throughout their academic journey.



Assoc. Prof. Anne Marie Kagwesage, Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.

The Program Director of Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, Assoc. Prof. Anne Marie Kagwesage highlighted that the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program provides leadership training, mentoring, and business guidance to prepare them for global competitiveness. “Beyond academics, we are equipping Mastercard Foundation Scholars with tools to become visionary leaders and problem solvers in an ever-changing world,” she said.



The Mastercard Foundation Country Director for Rwanda, Mr. Elisee Kamanzi, underscored the Foundation's dedication to empowering youth through education.

The Mastercard Foundation Country Director, Rwanda, Mr. Elisee Kamanzi emphasized the Foundation's commitment to youth empowerment through education. **Our partnership with the University of Rwanda began with co-creation, grew through collaboration, and now we are co-succeeding.** He said.



Eng. Pascal Gatabazi, Chief Technical Advisor at the Ministry of Education.

Eng. Pascal Gatabazi, Chief Technical Advisor at the Ministry of Education, who represented the Minister of Education at the ceremony, commended the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program for creating pathways to world-class education and fostering community development.



The Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda Assoc. Prof. Didas Kayihura Muganga reaffirmed the university's dedication to fostering leadership aligned with Rwanda's knowledge-based economy goals.

“The Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2) is based on a knowledge-based economy, in which Mastercard Foundation Scholars must play a role. The Mastercard Foundation is providing the necessary resources to help achieve that” the Vice Chancellor said.

Assoc. Prof. Didas Kayihura Muganga, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Rwanda while officiating the event.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars also shared their gratitude and ambitions, including those with disabilities and international students, underscoring the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's impact on their academic and personal growth.



“This is an incredible opportunity. Before the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, I had no hope of continuing my studies. During the summer camp, we've been trained in public speaking, innovation, and more. I hope to go far and aspire to make a transformative life,” said Grace Mukamwezi, pursuing a bachelor's degree in education at the University of Rwanda, the College of Education, Rukara Campus.

The VC reception has also been a time for connection, bringing new Mastercard Foundation Scholars together to exchange experiences, ideas, and inspiration.

Maiden Cohort of Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda Enters Clinical Practice After receiving their White Coats



The act of receiving white coats symbolizes the responsibility entrusted to medical students as future healthcare professionals.

Thirty-one Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda pursuing General Medicine and Surgery, Clinical Psychology, and Pharmacy under the College of Medicine and Health Sciences have entered in clinical education after they received their white coats in February 2025, marking their transition from pre-clinical studies to clinical practice.

Receiving white coats is a transformative moment in the journey of medical and health sciences students, signifying their commitment to professionalism, ethical practice, and compassionate care as they step into the next phase of their education, working directly with patients and gaining hands-on clinical experience.

While joining the Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the ceremony, the Program Director of Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda Associate Professor Anne Marie Kagwesage said that receiving white coats is not just a ceremony. "It is a symbol of responsibility, dedication, and the trust that patients will place in you. As you step

into clinical practice, remember that excellence, integrity, and compassion should guide every decision you make".

"We are incredibly proud of your achievements and have no doubt that you will contribute meaningfully to strengthening healthcare in Rwanda and beyond," she added.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda highlighted the significance of the white coats and reaffirmed their commitment to excellence and making a positive impact in the healthcare sector.

"Receiving our white coats is a reminder of the great responsibility we carry as future healthcare professionals. This signifies our commitment to serving with compassion, integrity, and excellence. We are deeply grateful to the University of Rwanda and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program for equipping us with the knowledge and opportunities to make a difference." said Collette Ganza Utetanase, pursuing Clinical Psychology and one of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars who received the white coats.

Capitalizing on Rwanda's Status as a Premier Conference Hub: Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR attend Global AI Summit Africa 2025 and 8th Africa Congress of Accountants (ACOA)



The Global AI Summit showed Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda that AI is not a threat to jobs, but a catalyst for job creation.

As Rwanda continues to emerge as a top conference destination in Africa, with MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) as a strategic focus, Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda are supported to actively participating in key global and continental forums hosted in Kigali to engage, access information, enhance connections, and gain exposure to platforms that nurture their transformative leadership and innovation across Africa.

From April 3 to 4, 2025, Mastercard Foundation Scholars attended the Global AI Summit on Africa, joining over 2,000 delegates from across the continent to explore the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in advancing Africa's development agenda. Held under the theme "AI and Africa's Demographic Dividend: Reimagining Economic Opportunities for Africa's Workforce," the summit convened policymakers, tech experts, academics, and youth innovators to explore inclusive, ethical, and sustainable AI solutions.

Organized by the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR Rwanda) and the Ministry of ICT and Innovation, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, the summit focused on ensuring that AI is harnessed responsibly to drive productivity, innovation, and equitable growth across the continent. The participation of Mastercard Foundation Scholars showcased the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's broader mission to empower young Africans with the skills and platforms needed to shape the future of technology and leadership in Africa.

Throughout the summit, Mastercard Foundation Scholars engaged in discussions on AI applications in agriculture, healthcare, entrepreneurship, data governance, and responsible innovation. For many, the experience was a major milestone in their academic and professional growth:

“It enhanced my sense of responsibility and inspired me to contribute meaningfully to technological development in my community,” shared Mary Suzane, a first-year Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering student.

“Participating in the Global AI Summit was an eye-opening experience that helped me see AI not as a threat to jobs, but as a powerful engine for job creation,” added Akaliza Kelia Raissa, a first-year Applied Physics student.

In addition to the AI Summit, Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda also attended the 8th Africa Congress of Accountants (ACOA) held in Kigali under the theme “Driving Sustainable Growth: The Future of Accountancy in Africa.” The congress brought together over 1,500 professionals, including regulators, financial experts, educators, and students to examine how accountancy can contribute to Africa’s transformation through transparency, sustainability, and innovation.



Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda at the 8th Africa Congress of Accountants.

Through the conference, Mastercard Foundation Scholars gained insight into the evolving role of accountants in shaping ethical governance, financial inclusion, and sustainable economic development. By participating in these high-level events hosted in Rwanda, Mastercard Foundation

Scholars at the University of Rwanda are not only benefiting from transformative experiences but also contributing to shaping the future of Africa and the world as the next generation of transformative leaders.

Elevate HER Campaign: Female Students at UR Called to Embrace Leadership



The ElevateHer campaign aimed to empower female students with skills for transformative leadership.

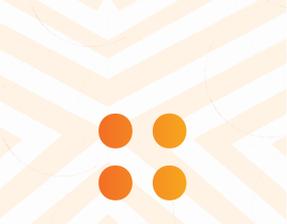
Female students at the University of Rwanda have been called to embrace leadership, drive change, and contribute to transformation both on campus and in the broader community.

The call was made during the official closing of the ElevateHER campaign, which ran for two weeks across all University of Rwanda campuses in March 2025.

The campaign, organized by the UR Students' Association and the Ministry of Gender and Protocol, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, aimed to equip female students with the skills and capabilities needed to effectively engage in transformative leadership.

It was also part of the University's celebration of Women's Month, in line with the commemoration of International Women's Day, normally observed on March 8.

The ElevateHER campaign encouraged students to engage in hands-on activities and gain real-world experience. Over the course of the two-week campaign, students participated in community work, including planting trees and supporting vulnerable groups by providing community health insurance. These activities highlighted the students' ability to lead tangible change, showcasing the transformative power of leadership in action.



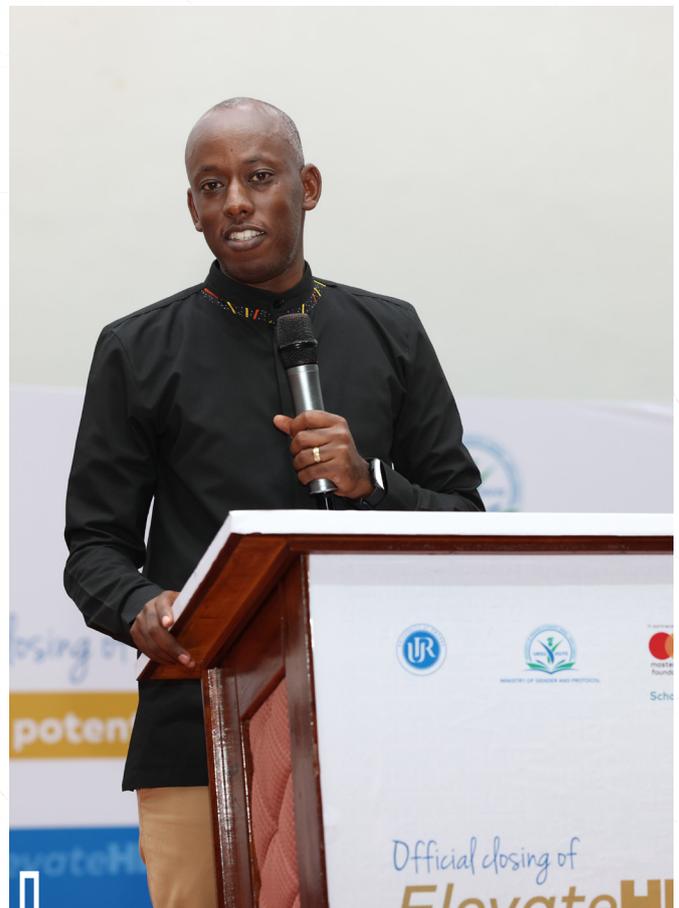
ElevateHer campaign participants during an inspiring session on leadership and empowerment for young women.

The ElevateHER campaign followed the She Decides campaign, which also aimed at strengthening women’s capacities and leadership for societal change. Building on the momentum of She Decides, ElevateHER continued to empower female students to take leadership roles and drive positive change at the campuses and within communities.

“By empowering women to lead, we are fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, unlocking the full potential of our community,” said Dr. Mulefu Alphonse, Acting Principal of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, while addressing participants at the closing ceremony “Together, we’re building a future where women lead with confidence,” he added.



“Empowering women to lead fosters diversity and unlocks our community’s full potential” Dr. Mulefu Alphonse, Acting Principal of the College of Arts and Social Sciences at UR.



The Mayor of Huye District, Mr. Ange Sebutege, emphasized that gender equality is a fundamental principle enshrined in Rwanda’s Constitution.

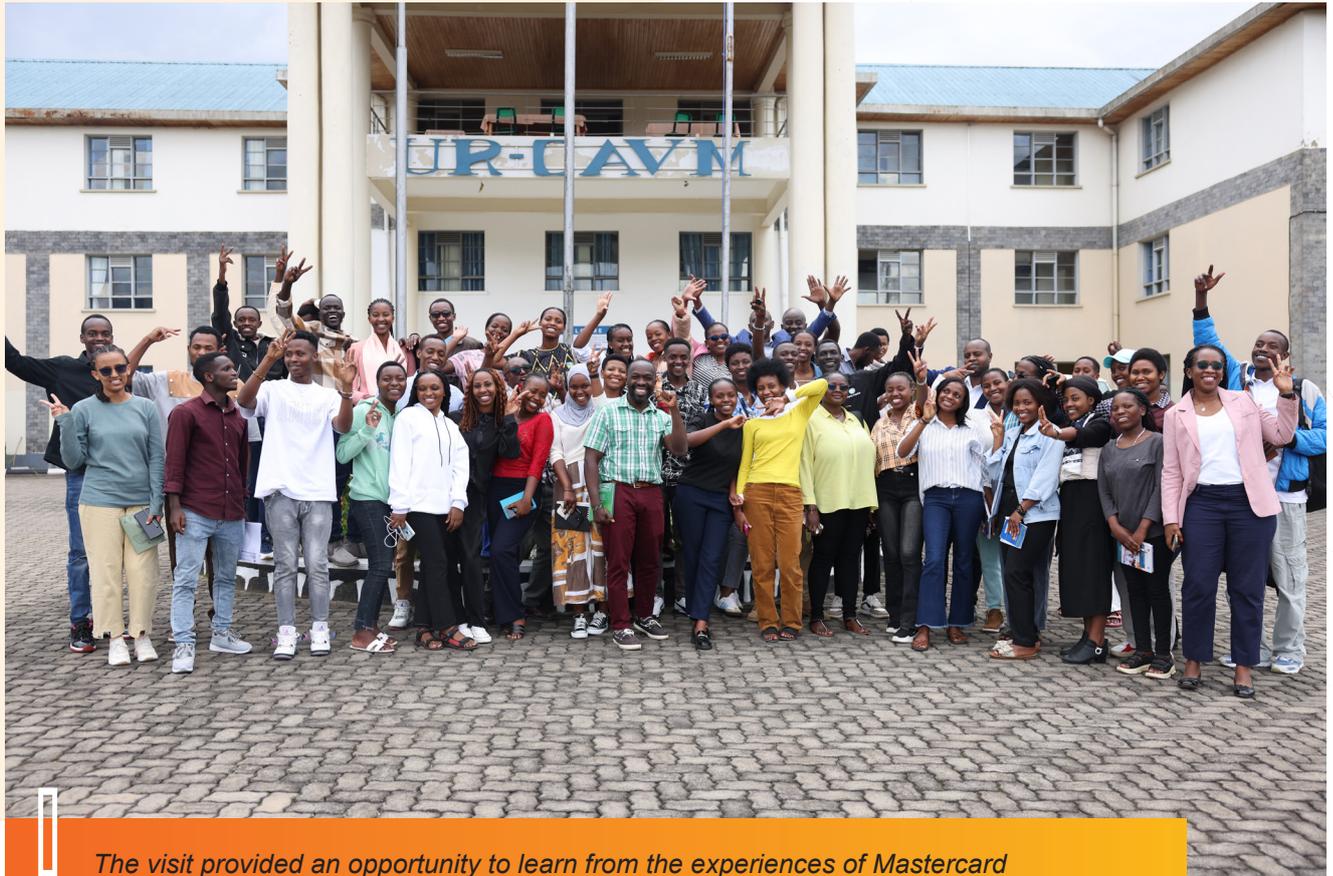
Addressing the students and participants, Dr. Jennifer Batamuliza, Program Lead in charge of Girls Empowerment at the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, reminded the girls that they are capable of succeeding in leadership roles and urged them to always strive for excellence. “Be an innovator, not just a consumer, and you have all the support around you to enhance your creativity,” she added.

The closing ceremony also featured the Mayor of Huye District, Mr. Ange Sebutege, who recalled that gender equality is a fundamental principle in our constitution, which removes all barriers that once hindered women from contributing to leadership. “Let’s embrace it for change, as leadership is all about transformation,” he noted.

While officially closing the campaign, Dr. Nkurunziza Joseph, Acting Principal of the College of Business and Economics, who was representing the Vice Chancellor, reiterated that leadership isn’t about titles; it’s about taking action to foster positive change.

“As we close this campaign, let us remember that true transformation starts with each one of us. Let’s continue to be the drivers of progress for our campus, our communities, our country, and beyond,” he added

● ● The Mastercard Foundation Team in charge of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Network Visits UR, Busogo Campus



The visit provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the UR, Busogo Campus.

The Mastercard Foundation team in charge of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Network has, on 5th May 2025, visited the University of Rwanda's College of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Sciences (CAFF) at Busogo Campus. The visit has been a great moment for engagement with Mastercard Foundation Scholars and campus leaders to foster co-creation for empowering young Africans to become agents of change and transformation.

The College of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Sciences (CAFF) currently has 44 Mastercard Foundation Scholars pursuing undergraduate studies in Crop Production, Food Science and Technology, Horticulture, and Eco-Tourism.

“The visit is a time to hear from Mastercard Foundation Scholars experiences and to collaboratively explore ideas for further strengthening the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program's impact in Rwanda, across Africa, and globally. It is a great moment to keep co-creating on ways of continuously strengthening the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program to drive change and transformation in Africa and beyond.” said Daniel Mundeve, Lead, Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Network, Mastercard Foundation.



Daniel Mundeve, Lead of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Network at the Mastercard Foundation, addressing Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR's Busogo Campus.

“We are proud to host this important visit. This is a great moment for reflection, engagement, and listening to the Mastercard Foundation Scholars, which energizes us to strengthen the capacity of our students to become true agents of change and transformation.” said Dr. Guillaume Nyagatare, Principal of the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Sciences (CAFF).

As the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program continues to grow, such visits and dialogues play a vital role in shaping a collective vision for Africa’s future led by empowered, well-equipped, and purpose-driven youth.

“With the visits, we feel seen and heard. The engagements motivate us to keep striving for excellence,” said Borah Bankundiye, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar representative at CAFF.

Assoc. Prof. Anne Marie Kagwesage, Program Director of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, expressed her appreciation for the visit, highlighting its importance in advancing the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program’s objectives.

“Our Mastercard Foundation Scholars are at the heart of what we do. This visit reinforces our shared commitment to listening, learning, and improving together, as we are building a legacy of excellence, resilience, and leadership.” She added.

● ● Shaping Tomorrow Through Resilience and Excellence: The Journey of Diane Uwamariya



"I challenge myself beyond my comfort zone and keep the bigger picture in mind" Diane Uwamariya.

At the University of Rwanda, every Mastercard Foundation Scholar carries a story of courage, ambition, and transformation. In this spotlight section, meet Diane Uwamariya, 21, a second-year student and Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, College of Science and Technology, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Information Technology (IT).

Diane's journey is a remarkable blend of hard work, resilience, and purpose. Last year, she emerged as the top performer in the IT department at the College of Science and Technology, a testament of high dedication and academic excellence.

When you speak with Diane, you quickly realize that her success is more than just academic. It reflects her character, her vision for change.

"To me, academic success is more than just grades; it's a door to being responsible, personal growth, and an affirmation that girls can achieve incredible things as well," Diane says. "It makes me dream of a better future and reminds me that achievement is never gender-based."

Her study routine is grounded in discipline and structure. She begins each day with set targets, attends all lectures, and reviews content at night using active recall and additional reading. "Rather than merely memorizing, I focus on truly understanding the content. I challenge myself beyond my comfort zone and keep the bigger picture in mind," she adds. She also participates in group discussions, as she believes learning collaboratively builds confidence.



With multiple commitments, time management is her secret to balance responsibilities.

Diane attributes her growth to the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda. “The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is more than a scholarship; it’s a family and a constant source of inspiration,” she says. “It’s shaping me into a bold, values-driven leader while supporting me emotionally, mentally, and intellectually. With leadership training, wellness support, academic competitions, and access to valuable online resources, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has given me the confidence to pursue her ambitions with courage” she adds.

Like any student, Diane faces challenges including the pressure of maintaining high grades while managing personal responsibilities. But she tackles these hurdles with a growth mindset. “I stay active, do more research, talk to classmates, and seek the help of mentors. I also take care of my mental health by sleeping well, exercising, and staying organized.”

Her sources of inspiration are rooted in family and mentorship. “My parents are my first mentors. The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program also connects us with coaches and learning platforms like Education First (EF) that supports us in English proficiency and Solid Minds Counseling Clinic for mental health, which develop us both academically and personally.”

What keeps her going, especially in difficult times, is her deep sense of gratitude and purpose. “I remind myself every day that many other people wanted this opportunity. I don’t take it for granted,” she says.



Diane's Leadership Beyond the Classroom

Outside the classroom, Diane has participated in meaningful initiatives like the HATANAINnovation competitions organized by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda under the Scholars Entrepreneurship Fund 2.0, and the Jenga Hackathon at Carnegie Mellon University Africa. "These experiences helped me build creative thinking and problem-solving skills while expanding my network. They opened new doors and helped me grow beyond the classroom," she says.

Diane also embraced informal leadership, including organizing group works, mentoring peers, and guiding collaborative efforts. Explaining ideas to others not only helps them but reinforces my own understanding. Each of these little roles brings me closer to becoming the changemaker I've been called to be." She notes.

With multiple commitments, time management is her secret to balance responsibilities. She carefully plans her day to prioritize academic responsibilities, while

securing time for leadership and extracurricular involvement. "Doing things at the right time keeps me on track and level-headed," she says. Through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, Diane has grown into a purposeful and confident young leader. "I've gained the confidence that I can lead and make a difference. Leadership is not about titles or positions, but about service and impact, and that's the kind of leader I want to be."

A message to fellow students at the University of Rwanda

As she reflects on her journey and growth as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, Diane Uwamariya offers a message of encouragement and hope to her fellow students.

"Your current situation doesn't determine your future. Don't let fear get the best of you. Work hard, manage your time well, collaborate with others, and never be afraid to seek help. Step outside your comfort zone and have faith in your capabilities. God has something unique planned for each of us, and your history is just the opening of your beautiful narrative."

● ● From Rural Zimbabwe to Regional Impact: Sean Mavhima's Transformative Journey as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at UR



Raised in rural Zimbabwe, Sean and his neighborhood experienced the harsh realities of limited access to quality education, digital exclusion, and energy poverty. However, these early challenges did not discourage him; instead, they ignited a deep determination to become part of the solution.

Today, as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda, Sean is not only excelling academically but also making remarkable strides as a youth leader, mentor, and innovator both in Rwanda and the region.

His story illustrates how the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has empowered him to reimagine his future and drive positive change in his community and beyond.

Read more about his journey in an inspiring interview with Bonaventure Nsabimana, the Communications Specialist for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.

1. Can you tell us about yourself and what inspired you to apply for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda?

Sean Mavhima: I grew up in rural Zimbabwe, where I faced many challenges including a lack of electricity, quality education and little access to digital technology. These experiences pushed me to look for ways to gain the skills I needed to help bring change to my community.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda gave me that chance as it provides quality education to young people who are doing well in school and are determined to make a difference by focusing on leadership and giving back to their communities. That matched perfectly with my dream of making a positive impact in Africa.

2. What has your experience been like since joining the University of Rwanda?

Sean Mavhima: Studying at the University of Rwanda has been an eye-opening journey filled with learning and growth in all aspects. I embraced a growth mindset, which allowed me to establish meaningful connections, and develop a broader understanding of global issues. Transitioning to a new environment meant adapting to diverse perspectives, academic expectations, and social interactions. I am proud to be achieving strong academic performance while also growing as a youth leader through various mentorship and leadership opportunities.



Sean Mavhima: Passionate about leadership, innovation, and community empowerment.

3. You are known for being an active Mastercard Foundation Scholar. Can you share some of the activities, initiatives, or leadership roles you have taken?

Sean Mavhima: Throughout my academic journey, I have embraced numerous leadership roles and actively participated in initiatives that reflect my passion for development, innovation, and community empowerment.

Currently, I represent Rwanda on the African Union Students' Platform (AUSP), alongside five other students from various Rwandan universities. This platform empowers youth across the continent to raise their voices and contribute to shaping policies in Africa. I also serve in the East Africa Youth Parliament, where I participate in regional policy discussions and youth-led development initiatives within the East African Community.



Following my involvement in UNLEASH Hacks, I became an UNLEASH alumnus

and facilitator, mentoring young innovators in designing impactful solutions. UNLEASH Hacks are local innovation sprints that enable young people to address regional challenges while contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I'm also a Campus SDG Ambassador, where I advocate for the SDGs through various university-based initiatives. One of the ways I contribute is by teaching primary and high school students through the Lessons in Conservation (LiC) program, promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices.

After completing free courses in in-demand skills and core business concepts, I became an HP LIFE Ambassador, helping fellow students access externships and career-building opportunities.

At the University of Rwanda, I serve as both a Student Branch Executive Committee Member and IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) Ambassador, where I actively contribute to fostering tech-driven learning and innovation.



I am also a participant in the Sustainable Energy Accelerator (SEA) Program, working on practical solutions to address energy poverty in rural Zimbabwe, my home country. I was also selected for the prestigious Jim Leech Mastercard Foundation Fellowship at Queen's University in Canada, awarded to 180 of Africa's most innovative and entrepreneurial minds to develop scalable solutions to pressing challenges on the continent.

My passion for technology-led innovation has driven me to participate in several hackathons, including the IEEE World Coding Competition, CodeXtreme, and ICP Rwanda 2024 Blockchain Hackathon, where I tackled real-world challenges while sharpening my technical skills.

I am also part of the ALX Incubator Programme and hold fellowships with Youth for Capacity, Youth for Climate, and the Green Institute (as a 2023 Green Fellow).

In preparation for my entrepreneurial journey, I've contributed to diverse projects across sectors such as IT, renewable energy, and environmental protection. These include VoltageAfrica for accelerating the transition to renewable energy, EcoBalance to address deforestation and climate resilience as well as EcoFlow, Access Wave, HarvestHope, and EcoCare, all aimed at tackling environmental, social, and energy-related challenges.

As an Instructor and Mentor at Rwanda IT Solutions, I've demonstrated a strong commitment to teaching and guiding students, especially in the areas of Database Administration and Design.

Finally, I've had the honor of serving as a delegate at high-level international events, including World Bank Group conferences and the Global Youth Climate Summit, which focus on youth leadership, sustainability, and innovation.

4. Despite still being a student, have you earned other professional certificates?

Sean Mavhima: I learned about the value of online certifications from a Mastercard Foundation partner during the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Conference. I realized that knowledge doesn't have to come only from the classroom, and I seized the opportunity to upskill myself to remain competitive and future ready. I was driven by a desire for continuous learning and a passion to create social impact in my community.

I have earned several professional certificates, including Ethical Hacking, Python Essentials, JavaScript Essentials, Responsive Web Design, Network Support and Security, Cybersecurity Foundations, Generative AI and Cybersecurity (Microsoft and LinkedIn), Junior Cybersecurity Analyst, Data Science and Analytics, Systems Engineering, and Excel for Business Analytics.

I have also completed professional development programs such as the Aspire Leaders Program, Youth Climate Connect, Unleash Hacks Talent, ten Baobab certifications, and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI).

5. How has the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program shaped your personal and professional development so far?

Sean Mavhima: The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has played a key role in my personal and professional development. It introduced me to a community of passionate young leaders who share similar values and inspire me every day.



The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program offers mentorship, hands-on workshops, and funding for student-led projects, all aimed at empowering Mastercard Foundation Scholars to become change-makers. As an international student, the support I've received has been instrumental in helping me grow both academically and as a leader. It has enabled me to excel in my studies while also contributing to my community.

Additionally, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program partners with various organizations to provide professional mentorship, career development opportunities, entrepreneurship support, and psychosocial services, ensuring that Mastercard Foundation Scholars are holistically prepared for the future.

6. What are your future aspirations after completing your studies?

Sean Mavhima: My aspirations lie at the intersection of community development, entrepreneurship, and leadership. I seek to leverage my skills to drive impactful initiatives, particularly in renewable energy, digital innovation, and economic empowerment.

After graduation, I plan to develop sustainable energy solutions to address energy poverty in Zimbabwe and beyond, while also advocating for human rights. I intend to launch entrepreneurial ventures focused on technology and job creation, and to continue championing youth empowerment through leadership and policy engagement. I am committed to contributing to Africa's development by helping shape policies that promote sustainable growth.

7. Networking and mentorship are key in professional growth. Have you had any mentors or networks that have contributed to your success? If so, how have they helped you?

Sean Mavhima: Mentorship has been a central pillar in my journey of growth and success. Through transformative programs such as the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, the Aspire Leaders Program, the Jim Leech Mastercard Foundation Fellowship, Unleash, and others, I have been fortunate to receive guidance from inspiring mentors who have generously shared their insights on leadership, career development, and entrepreneurship. Their wisdom has been instrumental in shaping my outlook, boosting my confidence to embrace global opportunities, and amplifying my impact in meaningful ways. I continue to deeply value these networks as part of my ongoing journey of growth and contribution.

By participating in events, conferences, and summits, both locally and internationally, I have built impactful networks and formed connections with professionals and like-minded youth. These relationships have broadened my perspective, offered valuable mentorship, and opened doors to new opportunities. They have played a crucial role in fostering collaborations, gaining practical insights, and driving initiatives that support sustainable development and positive change in my community and beyond.



8. If you could change one thing to improve access to education for young people in Africa, what would it?

Sean Mavhima: I would advocate for universal access to digital education and renewable energy. Many students in underdeveloped regions lack electricity, internet access, and digital devices, which limits their ability to learn. By establishing solar-powered community learning hubs and providing free digital learning resources, we can bridge the education gap, ensuring that every African child, regardless of their background, has access to quality and competency-based learning. I believe education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and unlocking Africa's full potential.

9. What message do you have for young Mastercard Foundation Scholars seeking to make a difference in their communities?

Sean Mavhima: Believe in your potential and take initiative. Making an impact goes beyond academic excellence, it also requires leadership, innovation, and a genuine commitment to community service. Embrace a growth mindset, seize every opportunity to learn, and always find ways to give back. Surround yourself with mentors and peers who inspire you and push you to grow. Most importantly, stay persistent and resilient. Your background may shape your journey, but it is your actions that define your future.



Advancing Inclusion: UR and Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Hold Sports Festival and Competitions for Students with Disabilities



Supporting inclusivity is a core value of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.

The University of Rwanda, through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, organized a Sports Festival and competitions for students with disabilities. The events took place from April 5 to 6, 2025, at the University of Rwanda's Huye Campus.

The festival aimed to promote inclusivity, raise awareness, and encourage students with disabilities to participate in sports.

Supporting inclusivity is a key value of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, as it creates a diverse environment where students can excel not only in their studies but also in sports, fostering teamwork, leadership, and a sense of community.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Dr. Shema Jean Bosco, Campus Administrator at the University of Rwanda, Huye Campus, emphasized that sports boost health, enhance performance, improve well-being, and foster teamwork, sociability, and talent.

"We thank the leadership of our country and UR for supporting inclusivity and growth through sports," he added.

The festival was also organized in partnership with the Rwanda National Paralympic Committee, which provided technical support and equipment for the competitions.

Professor Mutangana Dieudonné, Secretary General of the Rwanda National Paralympic Committee, commended the University of Rwanda's efforts in promoting inclusive sports. "This contributes to breaking barriers and empowering people with disabilities through sports," he said.



During the UR Sports Festival for students with disabilities, new games were introduced at the University of Rwanda, including wheelchair basketball.

During the UR Sports Festival for students with disabilities, students competed in Sitting Volleyball and Goalball. New games were also demonstrated, namely Badminton and Wheelchair Basketball. The demonstration aimed to promote these new inclusive games at the University of Rwanda.

After the exciting competitions, UR Nyagatare Campus won both the men's and women's Goalball titles, while in Sitting Volleyball, UR Rukara Campus won over UR Huye Campus.

Regine Umhoza, a representative of students with disabilities at UR Huye Campus and at UR

Level, commended the organization of the competition. "This competition has shown not only our abilities but our determination to break barriers. The energy, teamwork, and spirit displayed during the festival are a true testament to the strength and resilience of students with disabilities," she added.

Breaking the silence: Healing from depression is possible



By Christella Ishimwe, Psychosocial Support Officer, Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda.

The University of Rwanda and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at UR joined the world this May to observe Mental Health Awareness Month under the theme “Beyond Awareness: Empowering the Student for Action.” This serves as a vital opportunity to shed light on the often-silent struggles many university students face, including anxiety, depression, and burnout issues that affect students globally.

Depression, often misunderstood or ignored, is one of the most common mental health challenges among students. Many are dealing with academic pressure, social stress, identity struggles, family responsibilities, financial difficulties, relationship problems, and the transition to adulthood all of which can contribute to this condition.



It is important to understand that depression is more than just sadness. It is a persistent feeling of hopelessness, fatigue, and emotional disconnection that can significantly affect academic performance, relationships, and day-to-day functioning. For students, it might look like skipping classes or falling behind on assignments, losing interest in hobbies or social events, feeling tired all the time or having trouble sleeping, experiencing overwhelming anxiety, guilt, or worthlessness and having thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

From Depression to Hope: A Testimony from our Mastercard Foundation Scholar Supported Through Therapy sessions

One of our Mastercard Foundation Scholars recently opened up about her personal journey through depression and healing. Her story is a powerful reminder that recovery is not always linear, but it is possible.

“There was a season in my life when I was constantly sad and angry, and I didn’t even know why” Everything felt heavy. I could be around people, smiling and doing the ‘right’ things, but inside, I was tired of pretending. I felt frustrated and often misunderstood.

Some days, I didn’t even want to wake up. I didn’t want to eat. Even the simplest things getting out of bed, brushing my teeth, answering a message felt like mountains I didn’t have the strength to climb. Life felt like too much, and I felt like not enough.

Eventually, I gathered the courage to start therapy. It was a hard step. Trust had never come easy because of past experiences that made me question people’s intentions. Sitting in a room and being asked to open up felt unnatural. Scary, even. But I went anyway, and step by step, I began to share.

Slowly, I started seeing signs of change small victories like being able to name what I was feeling or having one good day in the middle of many bad ones. I began to believe that healing might be around the corner.

But then something hit me hard.

After some time in therapy, I went for a screening, and the results still showed I was depressed. I was crushed. It felt like all my progress was meaningless. I began to feel discouraged all over again. Thoughts of giving up crept in. What’s the point? Will I ever get better? That was one of my lowest moments. But in that deep place, something shifted. I reached out for more help. I received the right support, a combination of deeper therapy, honest conversations, and eventually, the right medication. Slowly, I began to realize I wasn’t beyond help.

Healing didn’t come in one dramatic moment. It came in quiet ones the days I made my bed even when I didn’t feel like it. The days I forced myself to eat. The days I kept going, even when I wanted to give up. And somewhere in that slow, painful process, I began to rise. It wasn’t perfect. It wasn’t fast. But it was real.

Today, I look back and see how far I’ve come. I’m still healing, but I’m no longer hopeless. I’ve learned that needing help doesn’t make me weak it makes me human. And I’ve learned that God’s presence isn’t based on how strong I feel. Even in the darkness, He was near.

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18). That verse carried me. That truth held me.

So, to anyone still crying behind closed doors, still struggling to get out of bed this is for you:

You are not alone. You are not a burden. You are not beyond healing.

Hold on. Keep going. There is light ahead. And you are worthy of walking toward it.”

Healing Is Possible: What Helps?

Beginning the journey toward healing involves several practical steps. First, it’s important to seek professional help by reaching out to trained counselors, psychologists, or the person responsible for psychosocial support on your campus. Remember, you don’t have to suffer in silence help is available.

Building a support network is also crucial. Talking to friends, family, or trusted mentors can help reduce feelings of isolation by sharing your thoughts and experiences. Alongside this, practicing self-care through daily habits like exercising, getting enough sleep, journaling, or setting personal boundaries can significantly boost your emotional resilience.

In some cases, medication prescribed by a medical professional, such as antidepressants, may be necessary to manage symptoms and support the healing process. The important thing to remember is that depression is treatable, and no student should ever feel alone in facing it.

Make a Step!

Mental Health Awareness Month reminds us that it’s not enough to talk about mental health, we must take action. Healing begins with honesty, support, and care. Let’s break the stigma, extend compassion, and create a campus culture where mental well-being is everyone’s responsibility.

If you or someone you know is struggling, speak to a counselor, a trusted friend, or connect with “Sanga Inshuti” your campus mental health club. Your mental health matters. Caring for your mind is not optional it’s essential. And always remember: healing is possible, support is available, and you are not alone.



To anyone still crying behind doors and still struggling, this is for you:

You are not beyond healing.

Hold on. Keep going.

There is light ahead, and you are worthy of walking toward it.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda Lead Mental Health Awareness Celebrations at UR



Mental Health Awareness Month was celebrated under the theme “Beyond Awareness: Empowering the Student for Action.”

As part of Mental Health Awareness Month, the University of Rwanda, in collaboration with Solid Minds Counselling Clinic, organized a series of mental health-focused activities across its campuses. These initiatives were coordinated through student-led mental health leadership structures and strongly supported by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program.

A key highlight was the official launch of the Dream Led Youth Fellowship, a newly established mental health club at the University of Rwanda, College of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Sciences (CAFF). This club is part of the Sanga Inshuti Initiative, a student-led mental health movement initiated under the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. The launch of this club marks a significant milestone in promoting mental well-being and peer-led support systems within the university community, especially for Mastercard Foundation Scholars.



Participants during the Mental Health Awareness Month celebration at UR Busogo Campus.

In addition to the launch, similar awareness activities were carried out at other University of Rwanda campuses, helping to create a more inclusive and supportive mental health culture across the institution. Huye Campus is hosting the main celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month on May 21st, bringing together students, Mastercard Foundation Scholars, staff, and mental health professionals for a day of learning, reflection, and open dialogue on mental health.

These efforts highlight the University's ongoing commitment to fostering a supportive academic environment where mental health is prioritized and every student feels empowered to seek help and support when needed.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda reflect on Genocide history at Ntarama Genocide Memorial



Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda honor the lives lost during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda commemorated the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi (Kwibuka31) with a visit to the Ntarama Genocide Memorial in Bugesera District on May 27.

The visit deepened the Mastercard Foundation Scholars' understanding of Rwanda's tragic history, the country's journey of resilience and hope, and their role in ensuring that genocide never happens again, as the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program nurtures them to become the next generation of transformative leaders in Africa and beyond.

The visit also offered Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda and partners an opportunity to engage with the Genocide history in Bugesera District and reflect on the atrocities committed there.

"I was in disbelief over what happened here," said Landrada Iradukunda, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar at the University of Rwanda. "I know the

Genocide took place across the country, but it's devastating to think that a place of worship became a site of horror. Seeing this with my own eyes has made me approach even my studies differently. It has also given me a deeper sense of responsibility to ensure that genocide never happens again" she added.

Assoc. Prof. Anne Marie Kagwesage, the Program Director of Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda said that visiting the Ntarama Genocide Memorial reinforces the importance of remembering Rwanda's past, fosters reflection, and equips Mastercard Foundation Scholars, as young ethical leaders, with the resilience and responsibility needed to build a peaceful Africa.



Prof. Florian Nsanganwimana, Principal of the University of Rwanda's College of Education and UR's lead representative at the event, emphasized the importance of memorial visits.

"We do this every year as part of the broader university community because the Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda are young. Teaching them the history of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi is crucial. Some of them come from outside Rwanda and may have only heard about it in passing, without a full understanding." Prof. Nsanganwimana said.

He added that Genocide is not spontaneous, but something taught and to combat it, knowledge is key. "Without accurate information, young people are vulnerable to being misled. 'Never again' must become a reality, and that starts with being informed. This visit offered a powerful opportunity to learn firsthand what happened."

Prof. Florian Nsanganwimana, Principal of the University of Rwanda's College of Education and UR's lead representative at the event.



● ● Giving Back: Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda ● ● Champion Community Impact

As part of the Giving Back to communities, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Rwanda, Mastercard Foundation Scholars from various campuses organized and participated in a range of impactful community service initiatives aimed at improving livelihoods and supporting needy families across Rwanda.

At Huye Campus, Mastercard Foundation Scholars participated in Umuganda (community service), where they planted over 200 urban trees and 170 fruit trees in Huye Town, contributing to

environmental conservation. In addition, they donated a cow to a family of a genocide survivor in need, located in Tumba Sector, Huye District. They further extended their support by donating six goats and food items to six other needy women genocide survivors in Karama Sector, Huye District.



Give-Back Activities by Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR, Huye Campus.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at Rukara and Nyagatare Campuses also engaged in meaningful community service by renovating the house of a needy woman, a mother of five, in Kayonza District, helping to improve her living conditions and restore a sense of dignity and hope



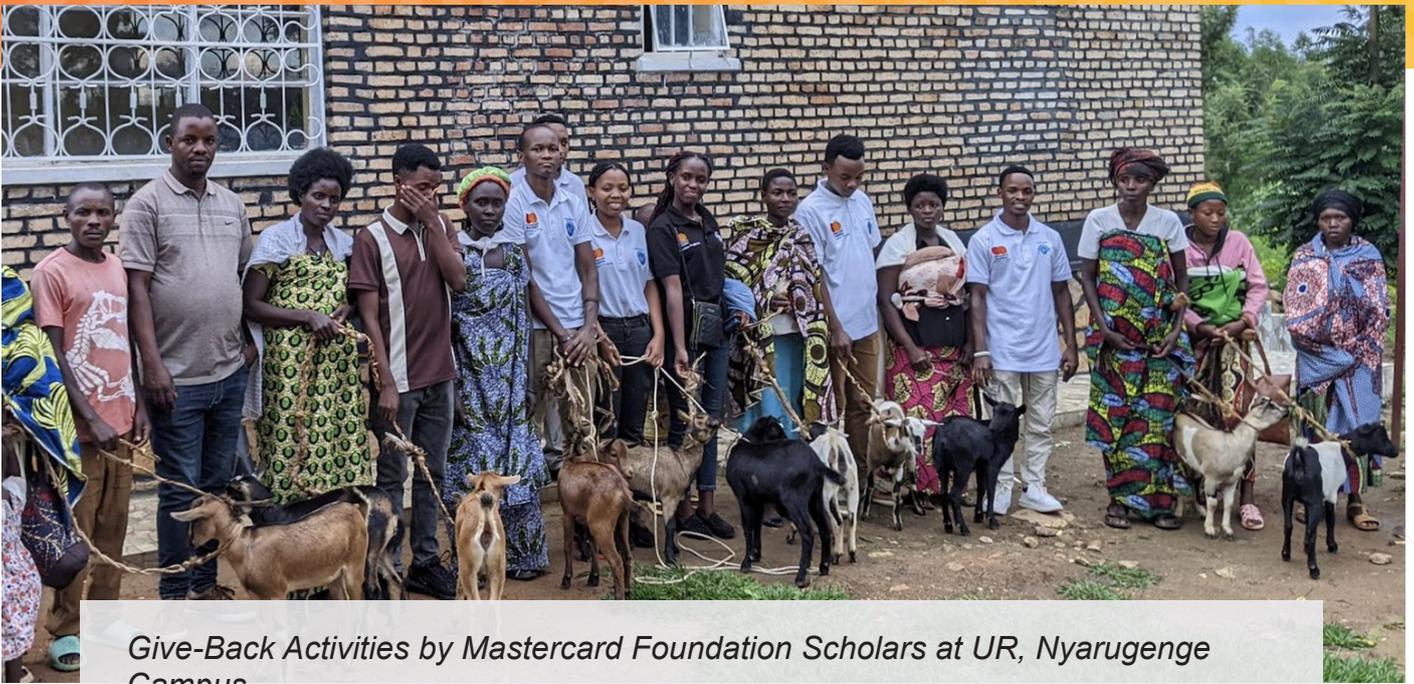
Give-Back Activities by Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR, Rukara and Nyagatare Campuses.

At Busogo Campus, Mastercard Foundation Scholars also participated to community service contributing to planting trees and cleaning the Genocide Memorial site in preparation for the 31st Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Mastercard Foundation Scholars also contributed to paying community health insurance for 41 individuals facing economic barriers, living in the community surrounding Busogo campus, demonstrating their commitment to promoting access to healthcare for all.



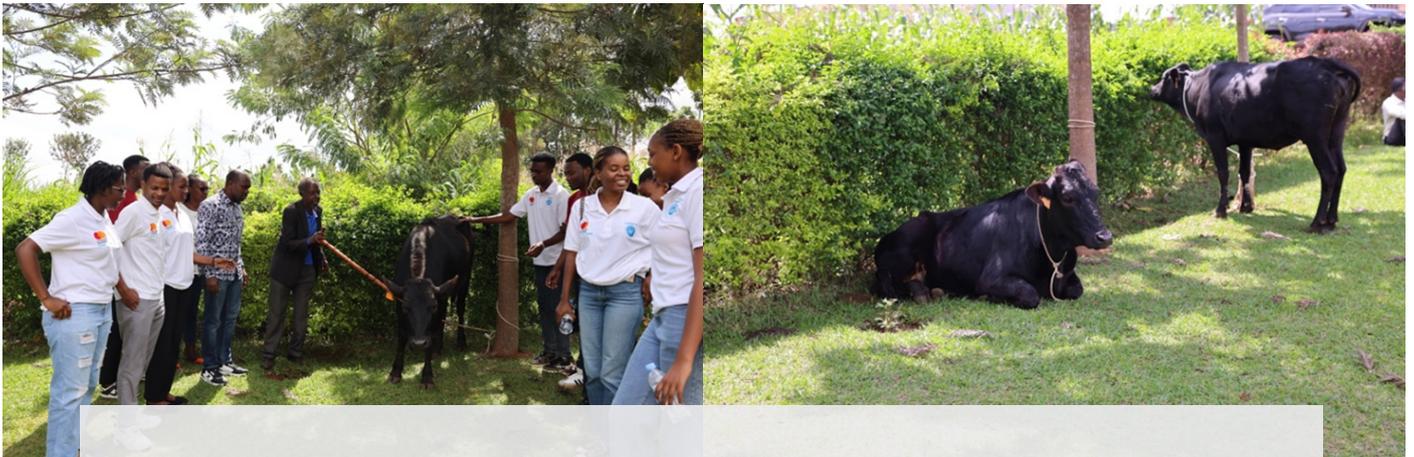
Give-Back Activities by Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR, Busogo Campuses.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the College of Science and Technology donated small livestock to 12 families in Kamonyi district to help combat malnutrition.



Give-Back Activities by Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UR, Nyarugenge Campus.

Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda also donated two cows to two families of Genocide survivors in Ntarama Sector, Bugesera District a commitment they made when they visited Ntarama Genocide Memorial.



All Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the University of Rwanda also joined efforts and donated two cows to two families of Genocide survivors in Ntarama Sector, Bugesera District.

The initiatives reflect the strong values of leadership, empathy, and social responsibility instilled in the Mastercard Foundation Scholars through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. By actively engaging with and giving back to communities, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars are playing a critical role in driving positive change across Rwanda.

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