

## **The Power of Community; Connecting Scholars/Alumni to form an Identity and Partake in Transformative Projects/ Roles within their Communities.**

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The Mastercard Foundation (MCF) Scholars program network is built on a foundation of shared values in ethics, empathy and courage that allow Scholars to connect as the next generation of transformative leaders of Africa. Its virtual and physical community continues to expose Scholars to professional growth and mentoring opportunities that are preparing them for the job market. The benefit of being a part of a strong community is in the way it facilitates building strong long-lasting bonds and beautiful relationship to feel a sense of belonging and identity. The Scholars' community is building the connections between the next generations of Transformative Leaders who are poised to make monumental change in Africa.

Given my experience in the MCF Scholars Program, I think networks are important because it creates connections, relationships and opportunities. The network connects both Scholars and alumni through both in person and a digital community.

When I joined the Scholars program, I was introduced to the Baobab platform which is a virtual community of all Mastercard Foundation Scholars. Through virtual interactions with the wider Scholar community, I found a family that;

- Nurtured the potential of young people.
- Connected and empower Scholars who are studying all around the globe.
- Offered numerous opportunities for growth through an array of transformative leadership courses and lessons that develops and enhances our leadership skills and interpersonal skills. Examples include: Building Relationships, Questions to Ask before Starting an NGO and How to give back.

The platform encourages participation in workgroups where Scholars are able to discuss amongst themselves, various challenges in their communities and together brain storm to find solutions to these challenges. Often, we engage in 'Ask Me Anything' (AMA) sessions hosted by mentors and experts in specific fields of study on the platform. In addition to that, we have internship opportunities that are shared to support Scholars in their transition into the world of work and also, professional programs which are valuable in improving the professional skill of Scholars and increase their employability after school. These sessions provide a space for Scholars to ask professional questions which go a long way to inspire and provide guidance in their chosen field of study.

In addition to this, the Global Give Back Circle-Mastercard Foundation Scholars Community Platform has commenced a one-year mentorship pilot program that connects Scholars to exclusive access to a mentor suited in their field of study or academic interests. This would in a long run improve communication, ethical skills, and diversity while helping them make informed decisions in any aspects of their lives. Two years ago, my communication skills remarkably improved after

several engagements with my mentor Elizabeth MacDonald who is a Career Preparedness Coach. Through the many offerings of this digital community platform, I am able to better communicate my ideas with greater self-confidence.

Whether for personal or professional growth, the Scholars community promotes a sense of belonging by connecting with others from similar challenging backgrounds without the feeling of inferiority or isolation. This creates a mutual environment for discussing relevant issues and sharing ideas whilst boosting self esteem and confidence. Through this connection to a greater community, Scholars know and believe they have a voice and are motivated to partake in give back and transformative activities everywhere they find themselves in order to make an impact.

For instance, M. K, a Scholar, researching on waste water management in African societies overcame difficulties finding information after her online colleagues gave insightful suggestions and perspectives that helped in tailoring the research design to suit the needs of different African regions.

Another Scholar, J. C benefited from this network after discussing potential businesses that are viable within the African environment. Through various contributions from Scholars, he was able to find practical solutions concerning how best to make small scale farmers in his country become more profitable and was awarded funding to run a pilot program.

The Scholars Program is also providing seed funding to finance Scholars' social ventures in their communities as a way of creating change and nurturing a sense of give back amongst young people. Through this funding by the Scholars Program, I would be able to acquire the resources for my social venture which seeks to empower marginalized youth, especially young women and people with disabilities to gain employable acquirable entrepreneurial skills that would enable them gain a sustainable income for their families. It is these initiatives that gear us and motivate us to become more; creating a sense of belonging that empowers Scholars to take actions and effect change in our communities irrespective of how small thus creating a rippling effect for a greater good.

Even with self improvement activities and grooming programs that gradually transition Scholars successfully into the professional environment, some Scholars are unable to find suitable job opportunities due to the huge unemployment gap and this is one big challenge after they leave school. Another challenge due to lack of personal managerial skills arises when Scholars who provide opportunities for others need to merge their new transition roles with give back and change making activities. Other challenges include not being able to gain admission successfully into post graduate school therefore restricting their ability to learn more and develop their expertise even if they desire to do so. However, MCF networks continue to support Scholars as they graduate through the alumni network.

While the network provides great support, it still remains challenging in many countries to transition to work. The role alumni network plays is supporting its members by promoting engagement and fostering an environment for active participation and developing relevant relationship through alumni meet-ups and regular virtual interactions. Even though we are young alums and have not realized the full impact of this unique society, we leverage its potential by

providing a space for supporting each other in low moments whilst encouraging, celebrating and inspiring one another.

The alumni network has a 10 year vision and a mission that seeks to connect all Alumni to the private and public sector, mentorship and other postgraduate opportunities. The use of social media and the Scholars' virtual network bridges the gap between distances as communication and collaboration between parties are not hindered.

The network supports alumni in their efforts to be transformative leaders by ensuring that members are prepared to transition from one stage of their lives to another. They instill in them transformative leadership values and groom them with the needed soft skills that equip them to stand out in any job market. The network also supports alumni by actively searching for employment opportunities and then gaining them interviews which land them jobs. They go further by organizing meetings between prospective employers in various industries and alumni in order to connect and secure fulfilling jobs that would help them in making and maximizing their impact.

Mastercard Foundation believes in young people, especially Scholars/Alumni, and their ability to drive and lead change in Africa. A community built on the foundations of trust, ethics and intertwined futures. The value of being a part of this larger community is in the way it facilitates continuous growth of members whilst empowering them with self-developmental tools and first hand information that other non-members may not have access to. The community seeks to spearhead a stronger alumni network that is united to work for a brighter future whilst being a hub for collective support and empowerment. A community of transformative leaders irrespective of their geographical location, ready to the network is poised to unite young people with a compelling vision and a hunger to change the narrative of Africa and create monumental change on the continent.