

EPISODE 08

00:00:06

Dr. Martha Muhwezi

Executive Director | FAWE

If you're in a position where you're able to advocate for the rights of the girls, voice it out.

00:00:12

Reeta Roy

Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation

We're just gonna have to double down and remove barriers, which are especially impeding opportunities for young girls.

00:00:21

Mary Wanjiru Mbugua

Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya

Only at 17 years old, I was torn between raising the kid and pursuing education. School, dreams, and myself worth vanished.

00:00:31

Yvonne Chari

Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe

The need to prove my society to say, okay, even a girl child can make her father proud was the very thing that made me keep going.

00:00:40

Angeline Murimirwa

CEO | CAMFED

There are so many myths about girls' education, even now in 2025.

00:00:46

Angelique Kidjo

Founder | Batonga Foundation

This world that you're living in is an ever-changing moment. But if you're not educated, how do you see the changes as an opportunity, not a threat to you?

0:01:14

(VO)

Across the African continent, the story of girls' education isn't just about access anymore. It's about what happens when people, policy and purpose come together to make lasting change. For the MasterCard Foundation, that's meant rethinking how opportunity reaches young women and how it can go further.

0:01:39

(Reeta Roy Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation)

There are so many reasons why the MasterCard Foundation set out a bold target within Young Africa Works that 70% of the young people we reach, at least 70% of the young people we reach through Young Africa Works would be young women.

This is not about young women versus young men, young men versus young women. It's about recognizing that many young women face inordinate barriers to access education, to access basic opportunities.

0:02:27

(VO)

Turning this vision into action starts with understanding the scale of the challenge. And the numbers show just how far we still have to go.

0:02:37

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)

Globally, 244 million children are out of school and 50 million of those are girls. And when you come to sub-Saharan Africa, 9 million are girls that are out of school and 6 million of those are boys. And that shows you the gender gap of about 3 million. And 3 million of a population is a big percentage.

0:03:01

(VO)

The numbers tell one side of the story, but behind them are lives still unfolding, and voices that remind us what those statistics really mean.

0:03:11

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)

As just one of the few survivors of a system stacked against us, I appreciate and celebrate the opportunity that I got, because when I was 10, I was about to drop out of school, because my parents could not afford the cost of keeping me in school.

So I personally have an understanding of what it takes for a girl from the most marginalized backgrounds to enroll, to stay in school, to participate alongside other children, and to grow up to be where I am right now. And every day I witness millions of children get their chance and also millions of children not get their chance.

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(VO)

This is one story among many. Each girl finding her own way through the same struggle to learn, to belong, to move forward.

0:04:03

(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)

Growing up, my parents did their best to support us to go to school. I wanted to change home, I wanted to change the situation at home, help my parents and everyone in my family. But I was always being sent home because of lack of school fees, lack of stationery, and I had no hope to finish secondary school.

0:04:27

(Mary Wanjiru Mbugua Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya)
Before I re-enrolled back to school, and that is when I learned that I was pregnant only at 17 years old, I saw that my life has ended. I don't know where to start. School, dreams, and my self-worth was vanished.

0:04:45

(Anastacia Ahuze Alumna | Batonga Foundation, Benin)(DIFF LANGUAGE)
Before joining the Batonga Foundation, I was in the sixth grade. I really loved school and I wanted to succeed. But my parents didn't have enough money to support me. Also in my village, girls' education was not really a priority. Many think that it was not necessary for a girl to go to school.

0:05:08

(VO)

We've heard stories like these across the continent. Different girls, similar obstacles. And for many, the struggle begins long before the classroom.

0:05:18

(Prof. Mary Okwako Exec. Director | National Higher Education Council, Uganda)
In most of our communities, parents can't afford to take their children to school. Or if they do, they are not able to sustain them in school. So the children end up dropping out.

0:05:37

(Icyezumutima Divine Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE)
My mom passed away. I remained behind with me and my two siblings. And we had no any other financial support from anyone else. I couldn't get any school fees, I had no money for school uniform, for books, like I didn't see any way forward.

0:06:02

(VO)

This is a struggle too many girls know well. And it's why giving every one of them a real chance matters for all of us.

0:06:11

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)
The population of Africa, the bigger percentage is women and girls are like that. And the population should be able or should be in a position to contribute to development. And if some sector of the population is left out, if it's not given equal opportunity, then it affects the development of Africa as a continent.

0:06:37

(Reeta Roy Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation)
And yet we know from the stories we have heard across Africa, so many young people, when you ask them, who's had an impact on you? Nearly all of them speak about the Imams and creating opportunities for them, for being right there beside them, for the sacrifices she has undertaken to enable a better life.

0:07:08

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)
I grew up in a household where there were a lot of people and the thing that is really striking is to

see the dedication of my mom and dad to education. Anyone that comes to that house, my father would say, are you going to school? When you say no, he's going to say, why? Do you have the money? You don't have the uniform? If I can provide, you have to go to school.

0:07:34

(VO)

And in those homes, where parents carried the hope for a better life, girls learned early what it means to make a family proud.

0:07:42

(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)

My father used to be, should I say, ashamed by some of his colleagues because we are only two girls and my brother is also disabled. So they took him as someone who doesn't have a son. So if a girl could do anything that would make their family proud, maybe it's getting married and getting your bride price paid for, but apart from that maybe you'll elope. So the need to prove my society, to say, okay, even a girl child can make a father proud, can make a family proud, was the most very thing that made me keep going.

0:08:19

(Mary Wanjiru Mbugua Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya)

I needed the desire to give my child the best life ever. I wanted to become the best mum. I wanted to pursue my goals and my dreams. I knew that I still had dreams that I needed to pursue. The other thing that kept me motivated is my family. They were very supportive throughout my academic journey and also in taking care of my kid.

0:08:39

(VO)

You hear it in every story. That drive to do better, not just for themselves, but for the people they love. And it's that same spirit that pushes institutions to open doors wider for everyone.

0:08:56

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)

In FAWE and many other institutions, we really preach the gospel of gender equity because we believe in fairness. We believe in equal opportunity to all, not only for Africa, but globally. It's good to give equal opportunity to each and every person. Every human is entitled to the rights, and education is one of those rights.

0:09:26

(Reeta Roy Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation)

And so when the MasterCard Foundation set that target, that goal of 70%, what we were signaling first and foremost to ourselves is that we're just going to have to double down and remove barriers which are especially impeding opportunities for young girls and for young women.

Because we knew once we could remove them, it's not just only great for them, it's great for everyone. It's great for everyone. Removing these barriers takes people who listen, who act, and who keep showing up for the girls

0:10:00

(VO)

Removing these barriers takes people who listen, who act, and who keep showing up for the girls who might otherwise be left behind.

0:10:08

(Angeline Murimirwa CEO | CAMFED)
It starts from even just what does it take for the most marginalized girl to go through school. We listen to those that have gone through that. And what does it take for a government to work with a civil society organization?

We listen to people that do that every single day. So I think about Barbara Chilanga, for example, a former permanent secretary in education. It's her who shared how CAMFED works with governments. We listen to teachers in the classroom. What does it mean for you to work with a child from the most marginalized background for the very first time. And I mean that, for the very first time.

We believe, live and breathe lived experiences as an organization. We know that there is no substitute for lived experience. You can read about it, you can study it, you can listen to people that have lived through it, but the person who has lived it, it's a whole different program.

0:11:09

(VO)

For some, that understanding comes from experience. For others, it began in a single moment, one that changed everything.

0:11:18

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)
I grew up with one of my best girlfriends that lived across the street, and I asked my father to go find out what happened and my father said they sent her away to get married. I remember me screaming out of my head, you're going to tell me that you can't do nothing? Uh-uh, I got to do this. So somebody introduced me to Marie Louise Cohen and John Phillips.

They are lawyer from Washington DC. So when we met in New York, they said, how can we help you? I say, I want to put girls in secondary school. And I don't want to be in cities. I want to walk the dirt road. The girls that no one cares about, I want to go there. I want my kids to be able to go to school with no problem at all, and no teacher abuse.

0:12:12

(VO)

In partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, Batonga Foundation supports girls in Benin and across West Africa to thrive beyond secondary education.

0:12:22

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)
From the get-go for me, it was empower the community to take care of the girls. And it's from starting that Batonga thing, on that moment of pain, of losing my friends, I wanted to do something for all the girls around my continent, around the world, for them to see their own worth. We owe ourselves, women, that are in position of power not only to talk but to walk the talk into it.

0:12:54

(VO)

Every movement needs that kind of courage. The kind that turns a single act into a lifetime of leading and listening.

0:13:03

(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)

Being a leader, you have to be strong enough. You have to advocate for others. You have to lead others and not just leading them. It's just, are you understanding whatever they are going through? Are you in that position to listen to them? Are you in that position to help them?

Are you in that position to help them overcome the challenges that they are going through? Being in a position that you are once there, going through the same challenges. How are you helping them?

0:13:36

(Angeline Murimirwa CEO | CAMFED)

What we did in Malawi for example as an organization, we supported girls from the most marginalized families to get places at national schools in a manner that they were not able to do before.

And thanks to our partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, we were able to support those particular girls to get places to go into those schools. And just engaging with the teachers, with the school administration, with other children, we had not seen girls like this in the classroom was priceless.

It would be surprising how at times entire systems are unaware of those marginalized within them.

0:14:14

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)

The point of going to school is to know that this world that you're living in is an ever-changing moment. What you see today might not be there tomorrow, but if you're not educated, how do you see the changes as an opportunity, not a threat to you?

And I think that this changing time, Batonga is at a special place to bring about solution to a lot of things. Because we have a method that is based on community, mentorship and respect. And people take it and share it with others. Things that we don't think about going, the girls are going by themselves. But how do we amplify the power of those girls?

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(VO)

And that's where mentorship comes in. When someone's story becomes a guide for someone else finding their way.

0:15:10

(Anastacia Ahuze Alumna | Batonga Foundation, Benin) (DIFF LANGUAGE)

Thanks to the Batonga Foundation, I was able to go very far in my studies. It not only supported me with my scholarships, but it also trained me on sexual and reproductive health, female

leadership, how to speak in public. It also allowed me to discover female models who have succeeded despite the obstacles. And all of this has allowed me to believe in my potential.

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(VO)

What this shows is that keeping girls in school takes more than covering the cost. It means breaking down everything that holds them back.

0:16:06

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)

FAWE has worked with different partners to ensure that barriers to girls' education are eliminated. The scholarship programs that we had in the past were basically tuition. But with time, we realized that giving a girl tuition alone, without looking at the barriers in a holistic manner, the girls will still drop out of school.

Because some of the questions we're asking ourselves is, we are giving the girls tuition, but they're still becoming pregnant. We are giving the girls tuition, they're still dropping out of school. And that's when we realized when we're in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation program, if we want to keep the girls in school, we need to go beyond tuition.

0:16:55

Icyezumutima Divine Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE

FAWE has been like my lifeline, if I can say, because it supported me with anything that you can imagine a student needs to be able to carry out her study life. They also did the programs, the mentorship programs, where they did the digital training skills, the leadership skills.

0:17:14

(Mary Wanjiru Mbugua Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya)

They also helped me cope up with the challenges and informing of peer groups where we could do counseling amongst ourselves, and that enabled us to talk out to whatever that we were going through.

After re-enrolling back to school, everything changed. I gained my new me. I knew that I was there to become somebody in life, whereby now I find myself with many opportunities opening up. For example, leadership opportunities where I held many leadership roles in my previous schools and also in the society.

I also got an opportunity now, not only to become a local person, not a local lady, but also an international lady. I have gone abroad, have represented Fawe in many scenarios, even in Ghana for the GMAG conference.

0:18:08

(Angeline Murimirwa CEO | CAMFED)

We have got a fastest growing network on the continent of young women supported through School by Comfort. Right now it's 318,000 young women and growing every single year. These are girls and young women who are coming from the economic quintile with less than 5% complete second response. So to have this many already is priceless. And those are the young people that shape how CAMFED responds to the most marginalised children.

0:18:40

(VO)

What began as support for a few has grown into something bigger. A community of young women lifting each other and moving forward side by side.

0:18:51

(Mercy Lini Student | CAMFED)

CAMFED came to my rescue. It provides me with stationary, sanitary work. Actually I was enrolled in the boarding facility which is near school and then the distance barrier was covered. I didn't have to worry about distance.

0:19:11

(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)

Now I had nothing to worry about, my examination fees. I knew I was rest assured I was going to complete my Form 4 with my fees being paid for and everything covered.

0:19:22

(VO)

Each time a barrier falls, it opens the way for new links, new allies, and new possibilities.

0:19:29

(Angeline Murimirwa CEO | CAMFED)

We also build peer networks for government officials that we work with. We are big on peer mentorship. We are big on peer networks. And we have a whole global sisterhood that supports young people to go to school.

We have an ecosystem of our funding partners, ecosystem of others within the sector that support women, that support girls, that support children living with disability, that support education. This problem is too big for one organization. For me, communities are the core of my being.

0:20:05

Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation

For me, communities are the core of my being. My father always used to say, when you have, you embark in an endeavor, find people that think alike and that not think alike. For you to be successful, you need both. You need to surround yourself, that have a vision close to yours, and how you do it is by trusting the ability to do it. The way the way is changing is also for me a rebirth. We need to understand that empowering locally people is the way for this world to function. As an organization we didn't choose to be in cities. We chose to be in rural areas, the dirt road, because that's where the foundation of every country and every culture is.

0:20:56

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)

It's not about just getting these girls into school, but meaningful impact is to establish what does this girl require to keep in school, to perform well, to complete the education cycle, and transition to the world of work. When they transition to the world of work, they get into leadership. They begin being part of the decision-making process, not forgetting where they came from, but

thinking of where they were, and also thinking of the other girls that have remained in that community. And they go back and provide the mentorship.

0:21:36

(VO)

The beauty of it is how it comes full circle. Those once helped becoming the ones who help others.

0:21:44

(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)
Getting a degree in social work, being a social worker that I am today, I never thought would be possible, but it was through the support I got from CAMFED, the support I got from CAMA Sisters, and the endurance I had.

Now I support other girls through the collective CAMFED Association Fund that we have in our district. We contribute our money, we support children to go to school. And as an individual, I also support children. On average, I support 10 children in my village to go to school with school uniform, with stationery, with menstrual pads, and with also some food hampers.

0:22:23

(Mercy Lini Student | CAMFED)

As the Child Protection Committee President, I carry out counseling sessions with my peers. I encourage them on the importance of school. I encourage them always to hold on to something that they have decided since they were little.

0:22:41

(Mary Wanjiru Mbugua Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya)

I have formed a group whereby we reach out to girls and to the interiors to the community educating them about the girls rights and their needs to be educated and to be given a chance to pursue their education.

0:23:08

Icyezumutima Divine Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE

Look at me I'm an engineer now. As you can see like I can now earn a living, support my my siblings through that and I can also encourage my future community and generation to come, showing them that this is this is possible really. You don't have to be discouraged in any way.

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(VO)

Change like this can only go so far on its own. It needs the right systems behind it to keep it moving.

0:23:25

(Angeline Murimirwa CEO | CAMFED)

For there to be lasting impact, we need policy and community initiatives to work together. Policy enactment is important, but so also is policy interpretation. Because you can have a very good policy on file, on the book, but the way it's interpreted, especially at local level or at community level, is such that it continues to create disadvantage. I think it's about time that we forced our leaders to see the role that they can play. They can play, we're gonna start showing them and they're gonna come on board.

0:23:51

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)

I think it's about time that we forced our leaders to see the role that they can play. They can play, we're gonna start showing them and they're gonna come on board. I can tell you they will come on board because we need, for me as an African person, I'm sick and tired of seeing all these young boys and girls dying at sea because there's no future.

I can't take it anymore. We can't lose life anymore. We can't afford this luxury that we as a human being we can't afford. And Mastercard Foundation has been a really crucial partner for my vision to come to life. Because it was not questioned here, it was supported, and you accompanied me every step of the way.

0:24:35

(VO)

It's a call that's hard to ignore, and one that needs everyone at the table.

0:24:40

(Reeta Roy Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation)

It's really important that we subscribe to a shared vision. Sometimes that vision is enshrined in a national strategy, a national goal. And if so, if so, it is then so we should work towards that. And in the case of education, it then means enabling young people to acquire the skills, to acquire the knowledge that's valuable.

0:25:08

(Prof. Mary Okwako Exec. Director | National Higher Education Council, Uganda)

Policymakers need to formulate policies that ensure equity in access to education for both girls and boys in retaining them in school and ensuring that they complete.

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(VO)

For policy to work, it has to listen. To what girls face and to what they need to stay in school.

0:25:42

(Mary Wanjiru Mbugua Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE, Embu University, Kenya)

To educate a girl and to educate a generation, put policies that advocate for the rights of girls, put policies that allow girls to be in school and to access their education without any form of discrimination, put policies that fund menstrual health, put policies that protect the rights of these girls, regardless of their situations, just be there to support them.

0:26:07

(Dr. Martha Muhwezi Executive Director | FAWE)

What is critical is making people understand the gender concepts. Because once people understand, then there will be a mind shift. When we do that mind shift, then it will link to policy.

When we are developing policies, whoever is developing those policies, at the back of his or her mind, will realize that we need to have provisions that address both the needs of the boys and the needs of the girls.

0:26:47

(Angelique Kidjo Founder | Batonga Foundation)
The girl and young boy we're empowering today, how can they have a job if we don't ask them what you wanna do? And if they can't go to school, where can they learn? The next step for me, for Batonga, is to have some place that profited from this philosophy of Batonga, but to create job with it.

0:27:04

(VO)

Even the biggest dreams find meaning in the people who live them out. The ones who remind us what it means to believe and to begin again.

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(Yvonne Chari Alumna | CAMFED, Zimbabwe)

To the young girls out there, there is a life. Your mistakes, your past life, your past experiences should not define you. You should be defined by the strength. Keep moving forward.

0:27:26

Icyezumutima Divine Mastercard Foundation Scholar | FAWE

Keep investing in education for girls because as we know in a saying that says educating a girl is educating a community as well as a nation. It's one thing to believe in change.

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(VO)

It's a beautiful thing to see it unfold year after year.

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(Reeta Roy Outgoing President & CEO | Mastercard Foundation)
And by the way, the data bears it out of young people who have been through many programs, including the programs of the Mastercard Foundation. We see year on year when we survey and ask young people, where are you now? We see year on year when we survey and ask young people, where are you now? Are you closer? For many people they will be able to say yes I am.