



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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**WAEMU
REGION**

OCTOBER TO
DECEMBER
2025



Table of contents



- 3 Editorial**
- 4 News**
- 6 3 Questions for...**
- 8 Impact story**
- 9 Partner Voice**
- 11 Digital Spotlight**
- 12 Behind the scenes**
- 13 The Foundation Around the World**
- 14 Looking Back at 2025 Highlights**



EDITORIAL



Rica Rwigamba,

Interim Director for the WAEMU Region

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Accelerating Our Impact, Together

Dear Partners,

I would like to warmly thank you for your presence and active participation at the Partner Convening in Dakar. These two days were marked by the richness of your contributions, the sincerity of your exchanges, and the collective energy you brought. Once again, you reminded us that the impact we seek can only be achieved by moving forward together, with intention, active listening, and conviction.

The discussions we had on inclusion, youth employment, scaling, and the quality of our programs, were remarkably deep and extremely useful in shaping our future actions.

In 2025, we crossed an important milestone. Thanks to your commitment, your efforts in the field, and the quality of our collaboration, we exceeded our annual targets and collectively demonstrated that deep and lasting change is possible. We are delighted by the progress we have made together and proud to see that our partnerships are having a real impact on young people, especially young women.

This positive momentum is a direct result of the sustained work of each and every one of you.

Looking ahead to 2026, our ambition continues to grow. We aim to reach the target of 500,000 Youth in Work by end of September 2026. We are entering a phase where our responsibility is twofold: to accelerate impact and to accelerate delivery. This means scaling programs that demonstrate strong results, and designing every new initiative with a clear perspective on sustainability and scalability.

Our priority remains unchanged: to give access to more dignified and fulfilling job opportunities for young people, especially young women, and to strengthen the ecosystems that support them.

To build on the momentum created during these two days, I invite you to continue the conversation on Partner Connect, our dedicated collaborative platform. It was designed for you: a space to share experiences, ask questions, find resources, identify synergies, and engage directly with our teams and your peers.

Together, let's use it to keep the spirit of the Convening alive throughout the year, strengthen our cohesion, and anchor our impact even more deeply in local realities. Thank you once again for your commitment, your trust, and your determination.

I wish you all a wonderful holiday season and a well-deserved period of rest with your loved ones.

Warm regards,
Rica Rwigamba



NEWS



Partner Convening 2025

Partner Convening 2025: Two Days to Accelerate Impact Together

On November 18 and 19, Dakar hosted nearly one hundred partners and around twenty young people from Mastercard Foundation programs for the Partner Convening, held under the theme "Accelerating Impact Together." Over two days, participants shared their experiences, questioned their practices, engaged in dialogue with Foundation teams, and reiterated the need for collective action that is faster, more ambitious, and more inclusive.

- **An Opening Centered on Young Women and Dignity**

From the very beginning, the voice of Ndioba Mbaye, a young ambassador of the Foundation, set the tone. In a powerful letter, she reminded everyone that "the future of rural areas is the future of the continent." She emphasized that "by supporting a young rural woman, we are transforming an entire system," underlining that impact is not measured only in numbers but also in dignity: "Our true measure of impact is restored dignity." She concluded by paying tribute to the partners, whom she described as "architects of dignity, not just partners."

- **Youth Voices: Inclusion, Creativity, and Leadership**

Young people were at the heart of these two days. Seven of them presented a play illustrating the challenges they face in their daily lives: lack of information, barriers to inclusion, and the complexity of pathways to employment. Their testimonies resonated strongly with the partners. At the end of each day, Khadim Fall, a Foundation ambassador, offered a humorous, vibrant, and inspiring recap of the key moments, bringing a young and grounded perspective to the discussions. "We don't want to be consulted, we want to be given responsibility," said Khadim Fall.

- **A Shared Vision and a Clear Direction**

In her remarks, Rica Rwigamba, Acting Director for the WAEMU region, emphasized the strength of the region: "The potential of WAEMU is not abstract; it is alive and vibrant." She stressed the need to deepen the quality of our collective work: "Accelerating impact means learning, listening, and co-creating with our young people." She also clarified that acceleration does not mean rushing: "This is not about going fast for the sake of going fast. Accelerating means understanding better, targeting better, listening better, with a multi-stakeholder and multi-country approach." She also took the time to thank partners, reminding everyone that "they are the driving force behind everything we do."

Rica reiterated that the Foundation's ambition now calls for us to "do more, faster, and with quality." The roadmap for the coming months is built around rigorous implementation of existing programs, scaling initiatives that demonstrate effectiveness, and integrating scalability considerations from the design phase of new projects.

- **Tangible Results: 2025, a Year of Acceleration**

- ☒ **102% of the 2025 target achieved**
- ☒ **7.2 million people** engaged in activities that support access to work
- ☒ **140,000 jobs opportunities**, 61% of which for women (compared to 51% last year), a direct result of intentional program design
- ☒ **29 partner organizations** mobilized

NEWS



Partner Convening 2025



Partner Convening 2025

The Foundation also shared the main learnings from the year: the repositioning and redesign of several programs, the revision of the partner selection process, strengthened capacity-building, integration of a young women-centered approach, greater inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the mobilization of a reinforced research team.

- **Thematic Panels: Inclusion, Innovation, Multi-Country Models, and Safeguarding**

Several panels showcased innovative practices implemented by partners such as EDC, PFPI, and Force-N to better reach young people. A dedicated panel brought together experts around inclusion challenges, while another explored the implementation of multi-country programs, such as the RIZAO consortium. The second day featured a key session on safeguarding, led by Oluranti Adetoye, Head of Safeguarding. His message was crystal clear: "If there is no safety, there is no impact."

- **Two Days Rich in Learning and Sharing**

The contribution from World Data Lab provided valuable insight into the region's macroeconomic dynamics, highlighting the importance of formalizing largely informal economies and the need to transform gender dynamics across all sectors. Partners then raised structural questions around the Foundation's positioning in high-risk contexts, such as the Sahel region, risk management strategies, African market integration, and responses to climate change. These exchanges helped reaffirm the Foundation's impact vision, structured around three complementary levels: individual, institutional, and ecosystem.

Group work sessions also enabled partners to reflect together on key issues such as digitalization, inclusion, and inter-program synergies. Several organizations made strong commitments, including the Batonga Foundation, which pledged to identify persons with disabilities within 120 days and adapt its programs to ensure their full participation. ESP, a member of the consortium implementing the E4Y program, announced a mapping initiative in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal to identify associations of persons with disabilities and better connect them with E4Y opportunities. A call was issued to all partners to formalize their own concrete commitments to inclusivity.

These two days confirmed a shared conviction: it is through collaboration, trust, listening, and intentionality that impact can be accelerated and strengthened. As Rosemary Nduhiu, Executive Director, Country Programs, reminded us: "Together, we can make a significant difference. This year is just a start—we have all the ingredients to succeed. We need to accelerate impact."

The objective remains the same, but the ambition is growing: to go further, faster, and above all better, to help build a future where every young person and especially every young woman can access dignified, sustainable, and transformative opportunities.



3 QUESTIONS FOR...



NDEYE SEYNABOU DIOUF

Research and Learning- Program & Strategic Research

« Producing reliable and representative data in rural and underserved areas remains a major challenge in order to better understand and respond to the needs of young people. »

In your view, what are the main methodological challenges in producing reliable and representative data in rural and underserved areas?

Producing reliable and representative data in rural and underserved areas remains a major challenge in better understanding and addressing the needs of young people, who are at the heart of the Mastercard Foundation's mission. Difficult access to certain localities, particularly during the rainy season, leads to high logistical costs and a risk of excluding isolated communities.

Furthermore, young people, especially young women are often underrepresented when data collection approaches do not take into account local languages, social norms, or mobility constraints. While digital tools hold promise, their use remains limited by poor connectivity in rural areas, excluding a significant share of youth.

On top of this, trust and social desirability bias are common in contexts where research is not widely understood or familiar. Finally, the high prevalence of informal economic activity in the WAEMU region makes it difficult to accurately measure employment, income, and working time for young people.

In the face of these challenges, it is essential to adopt locally grounded, inclusive, and collaborative methodological approaches in order to generate evidence that can truly be used to inform fairer and more effective interventions aligned with the objective of creating dignified jobs for young people.

How can research more effectively guide decision-making and real-time adaptation of programs?

At the Mastercard Foundation, research plays a central role in ensuring that our programs remain relevant, adaptive, and genuinely youth-centered. To better support decision-making and real-time program adjustment, it is crucial to combine rigorous data with more agile learning mechanisms.

Tools such as evidence syntheses, ecosystem mappings (landscape mapping) and lessons learned from existing research, dynamic dashboards, as well as direct feedback from young people and partners, make it possible to quickly capture evolving needs, labor market conditions, and local contexts.

Research must also be fully integrated into program design and implementation cycles through continuous dialogue between Impact teams, Program teams, and partners. It is with this in mind that an internal reflection process was conducted, leading to a major organizational shift: repositioning research toward the production of evidence and learning insights that are directly usable.



3 QUESTIONS FOR...

This new dynamic, supported by closer integration of research teams within program teams, aims to ensure better use of findings and more systematic translation of evidence into concrete decisions, serving durable impact for young people, especially the most vulnerable.

During the Partner Convening, partners expressed a strong need for disaggregated data and evidence of impact, particularly concerning young women and marginalized groups. How does the Foundation plan to strengthen the generation and use of such data in the field?

At the Mastercard Foundation, we fully recognize the importance of disaggregated data and impact evidence to better understand the realities of young women and marginalized groups. To address this need, the Foundation relies on strong strategic partnerships to enhance the generation and use of evidence on the ground.

For instance, collaboration with World Data Lab (WDL) has led to the creation of the Africa Youth Employment Clock (AYEC), a key tool that tracks youth employment dynamics with data disaggregated by gender and other characteristics. Similarly, our partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to develop country briefs allows for deeper analysis of public policies and the availability of disaggregated employment data, including for persons with disabilities.

Beyond quantitative data, the Foundation also supports initiatives that aim to better understand the aspirations of young people, young women, and marginalized populations through qualitative and participatory approaches. This evidence is actively used during dialogues (e.g., co-creation workshops) with partners, program reviews, and sensemaking workshops to adjust targeting, refine approaches, and maximize the impact of interventions in the field.



IMPACT STORY



Mama Sabaly, Batonga program participant

Mama Sabaly : When Inclusion Transforms a Life

At 24, Mama Sabaly, a young woman living in Saré Simali in the Kolda region, embodies the strength, resilience, and dignity of thousands of rural young women supported by the Batonga program, funded by the Mastercard Foundation.

Born sighted, Mama lost her vision at the age of one due to illness. Married and mother to a young boy, she organizes each day around essential tasks: caring for her child, managing the household, fetching water, pounding millet.

Her daily life changes when she discovers the Batonga program and joins a women's circle. This circle becomes a space for socialization, learning, and recognition. Previously often alone, she finally finds a place where she can share, be heard, learn—and above all, contribute.

Through the training sessions, Mama acquires a new skillset: making soap and household products, a major shift in her economic autonomy.

She speaks about it with pride: "Before, I had no income. Now, I know how to earn one. Today, we produce everything ourselves."

But the impact goes far beyond economics. Mama becomes a pillar of the group. When a participant forgets her notebook, she is the one who reminds everyone of the tasks. During workshops, she guides others step by step through the soap-making process, without even needing to refer to notes.

In her words: "Before, I didn't think I could do it. Today, I am able to guide others." This transformation illustrates the power of the Batonga program: creating safe and inclusive spaces where young women, including those living with disabilities, can build confidence, leadership, and independence.

Mama now carries an essential message: "I encourage all persons with disabilities to make the effort to go out and meet others, to better understand life."

Her story is a clear reminder that inclusion is not just a principle; it is a lived, concrete change that opens the way to greater autonomy and unexpected leadership.



PARTNER VOICE



Mamadou Mbodj

Senior Data Scientist, World Data Lab

To begin, can you briefly explain what the Youth Employment Clock is and why this tool is such a major innovation for tracking young people's access to dignified work in Africa?

Born from collaboration between World Data Lab and the Mastercard Foundation, the Africa Youth Employment Clock (AYEC) is an innovative platform that provides disaggregated and projected data on youth employment in Africa. This tool supports the Foundation's ambitious Young Africa Works program, which aims to help 30 million young people access dignified work. The platform covers all 54 African countries at the national level, and also provides sub-national data for seven priority countries for the Foundation: Senegal, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia.

AYEC offers a level of granularity that is rarely available on the continent: young people's employment status, sectors of employment (disaggregated into 21 sub-sectors using the ILO's ISIC Rev. 4 classification), degree of formality, type of employment (wage-employed or self-employed), and income level. All of this information is available by age, gender, and level of education, with projections extending to 2040.

Thanks to this unique combination of data granularity, geographic coverage, and forecasting capacity, AYEC is a major innovation. It enables the Foundation and public or private decision-makers to rely on robust evidence to design more targeted, effective, and context-appropriate programs and policies for young people in Africa.

During the Partner Convening, several partners highlighted the need for more precise data, especially on young women and rural areas. How does the Youth Employment Clock address these expectations, and what key trends are you currently observing for these segments?

AYEC was specifically designed to address the growing need for more granular and precise data. All indicators available on the platform are disaggregated by gender and age group, and employment status information is also broken down by place of residence (urban vs. rural). Users can easily activate filters to explore data by gender, age, location, and other key dimensions.

In terms of current trends, young women represent roughly half of the continent's youth population, but nearly two-thirds of NEETs (around 66%). This highlights a persistent gender gap in access to employment, education, and training, an issue that AYEC helps measure with precision.



PARTNER VOICE

Regarding rural–urban dynamics, we see a growing concentration of youth employment in urban areas, where most opportunities in industry and services are located. In West Africa, some countries, such as Mali, Guinea-Bissau, and Burkina Faso, have experienced some of the most marked shifts over the last decade, with a 12–20 percentage point increase in the share of youth employment in urban areas.

These findings clearly demonstrate how AYEC helps partners identify, track, and compare the specific challenges facing young women, particularly in rural areas, so they can design more targeted and effective interventions.

The collaboration between World Data Lab and the Mastercard Foundation aims to strengthen the use of data to guide decisions and accelerate impact. In your view, what are the next priorities to maximize the contribution of the Youth Employment Clock within Young Africa Works?

First, to maximize the contribution of the Africa Youth Employment Clock within Young Africa Works, the priority is to expand its rollout and strengthen its strategic use. By the end of 2026, we plan to extend AYEC to the remaining WAEMU countries, with data available at the sub-national level and launch events involving governments, youth organizations, and key partners. The goal is to build synergies and encourage active uptake of the tool.

The second priority is to evolve the Clock from a reference dashboard into a true decision-support tool used to guide investment choices, adjust strategies, and target interventions. This will require deeper engagement with Ministries of Youth and Employment, as well as National Statistics Offices, to integrate AYEC into national strategies and planning cycles.

Within the Foundation, the Clock should play an increasingly central role in program design, priority setting, and results monitoring. Finally, to amplify its impact, we will develop tailored products for different audiences: country briefs for decision-makers, sector snapshots for partners, simplified media outputs, and datasets for researchers.

This will help make the Clock a central lever for improving decision-making and transforming the trajectory of youth employment in Africa.





DIGITAL SPOTLIGHT



Second edition of EdTech Mondays Partners' Convening

EdTech Mondays: Shifting Mindsets and Deepening Impact Across Africa

The Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning (The Centre) hosted the second EdTech Mondays Partners' Convening in Addis Ababa, bringing together partners from all eight editions of the program, including the WAEMU region. Under the theme "Shifting Mindsets, Deepening Impact," the convening highlighted the evolution of EdTech Mondays from a simple dialogue series to a pan-African platform influencing national EdTech strategies, now reaching a cumulative audience of 39.6 million people.

Wariko Waita, Director of the Centre, emphasized that EdTech Mondays has become "a critical pathway to achieving dignified and fulfilling work for young Africans." Discussions underscored the need for human-centered, inclusive EdTech that ensures no young person is left behind, especially young women and marginalized groups.

A key message emerged: Africa does not lack innovation; what determines impact is an ecosystem capable of listening, collaborating, and acting with purpose. Partners shared meaningful progress, from smart classrooms in Rwanda to teacher-led innovations in Kenya and EdTech programming tailored to refugee communities in Uganda.

Reaching youth in remote areas was a central theme. Participants stressed the importance of:

- localized content,
- strong community engagement,
- amplifying youth voices and real-life stories,
- and building communities of practice rather than isolated interventions.

On day two, the Impact team reminded partners that success in EdTech is not measured by devices or reach, but by real change in young people's lives: improved income and economic resilience, digital readiness, stronger social capital, and institutional adoption of inclusive digital practices with equity at the core.

Partners also outlined the next priorities needed to accelerate system-level change:

- increased investment in offline and community-based engagement,
- stronger data systems and analytics,
- multi-year planning for sustainability,
- content tailored to youth media habits (TikTok, short-form formats),
- and a commitment to not only use AI but create African AI.

The convening made it clear that Africa is no longer in an experimental phase: a collective movement is taking shape, with EdTech Mondays emerging as a continental catalyst for reimagining how Africa learns, teaches, and prepares its young people for a digital future.



BEHIND THE SCENES



Celebration of International Rural Women's Day at the Foundation's offices in Dakar

International Day of Rural Women: Revealing Opportunities Where Others See Obstacles

On October 15, the Batonga Foundation, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, celebrated the International Day of Rural Women at the Foundation's offices in Dakar, under the theme: "Where others see obstacles, Batonga reveals opportunities: rural women as agents of change."

In her opening remarks, Rica Rwigamba, Acting Director for the WAEMU region at the Mastercard Foundation, highlighted the importance of this day: "Too often overlooked, the contribution of rural women is nonetheless essential. To maximize our impact, we need to go out to meet them, understand their realities, and build solutions tailored to their lives."

Sharing the Batonga Model and Its Lessons

The first session brought together Batonga Foundation teams, program participants, and several partners, including UNHCK (Université Cheikh Hamidou Kane), Teranga Capital, CJS (Consortium Jeunesse Sénégal), EDC (Education Development Center), as well as microfinance actors operating in Senegal. The objective of this session was to present the Batonga methodology, share lessons learned from the field, and encourage other actors to invest in empowering rural young women.

The session concluded with a call to action inviting partners to adapt and scale the Batonga methodology in other rural areas. Several collaboration avenues and concrete commitments emerged:

- Strengthening synergies between Batonga programs and those of Université Cheikh Hamidou Kane (UNHCK) and EDC, especially in vocational and digital training, to support participants' skills development. Facilitating connections between different actors engaged in the empowerment of rural young women.
- Accelerating women's entrepreneurship by enabling Batonga participants to access the PFPI (EDC) seed fund.
- Increasing the value of savings from business circles, with Caurie Microfinance committing to remunerate Batonga group funds at 4%.
- Supporting Foundation partners in rolling out initiatives dedicated to rural women.

Giving the Floor to Young Women: Perspectives and Data

Ndèye Seynabou Diouf, Research Lead at the Mastercard Foundation, presented key findings from the report, including the decline in young African women's contribution to GDP, from 18% in 2000 to 11% in 2022, highlighting the urgency of action. She also showed that investing in rural young women could generate an additional 5% of African GDP by 2030, equivalent to nearly 287 billion dollars and 23 million additional jobs.

A Day to Inspire, Connect, and Act

Beyond the exchanges, this event sent a strong message: it is possible to take concrete action, transform obstacles into opportunities, and equip rural women to be true agents of change. By sustaining this collective momentum, partners and media alike have a key role to play in amplifying this model and inspiring similar initiatives across the region.



THE FOUNDATION AROUND THE WORLD



Baobab Summit 2025

Baobab Summit 2025: African Youth at the Heart of Transformation

From October 17 to 19, Nairobi hosted the Baobab Summit 2025, one of the largest gatherings of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program community.

Held under the theme "Baobab Rising: Nurturing the Future through Africa's Youth," this edition brought together scholars, alumni, partners, and committed leaders to celebrate the leadership, innovation, and impact of African youth.

Over three days, participants took part in immersive workshops, sharing circles, inspiring panels, and cultural moments that highlighted the spirit of Ubuntu.

At the heart of the discussions were the importance of mentorship, collaboration, and civic engagement in building an inclusive and sustainable future.

Organized in person for the first time in three years, this gathering strengthened the bonds of a community of more than 57,000 young people and reaffirmed the central role of the program in preparing the next generation of African leaders.



LOOKING BACK AT 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Launch of BeYes and Inauguration of the New D-Hub

On January 30, DER/FJ officially launched the BeYes program in Bambey, in the presence of Dr. Aissatou Mbodj, General Delegate of DER/FJ, and representatives of the Mastercard Foundation. The initiative will support 3,125 young people, including 2,500 who will receive direct financial support to develop their entrepreneurial mindset. At the same time, a new D-Hub was inaugurated: an innovation space designed to train, connect, and inspire young aspiring entrepreneurs as they develop their projects.



E4Y Open Days: Promoting Youth Employment in Agro-Industry

In January, Abidjan hosted the E4Y Program Open Days, a major event to strengthen youth inclusion in the WAEMU agro-industry. Supported by the Mastercard Foundation, E4Y aims to support nearly 50,000 women, create 70,000 jobs, and improve the incomes of 500,000 people. The event brought together public and private stakeholders and technical partners around innovative solutions to boost the agro-industrial value chain.

International Women's Rights Day: Inspiring and Empowering the Next Generation

On March 6, members of the WAEMU office, in partnership with the Senegal Youth Consortium (CJS), celebrated International Women's Rights Day at the Youth Space in Dakar. More than 60 girls from various programs took part in a day of learning, sharing, and inspiration designed to strengthen their leadership, confidence, and ability to shape their own futures.

New Offices: A Modern, Open Collaboration Space

On March 25, Foundation teams moved into their fully renovated new offices in the Ndelye Sokhna building in Point E. This relocation marks an important milestone in the growth of our activities and reinforces our ability to collaborate effectively with partners in a more welcoming, connected, and functional environment.



WAEMU Partner Impact Convening: Strengthening Regional Synergies



On April 24–25, Dakar hosted more than 100 partners and around 20 young people for the WAEMU Partner Impact Convening. Two days of strategic exchanges helped align priorities, share baseline study results, and identify concrete ways to amplify program impact in rural areas and among the most vulnerable populations.

WEECAP – A Technical Launch to Transform the Cashew Sector

From May 5 to 8, partners of the WEECAP program gathered in Abidjan for a foundational technical workshop covering Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau. Led by Winrock International, in partnership with CARE International, GIZ, and Open Capital, this program aims to open 330,000 employment opportunities in the cashew value chain over five years. Immersion visits, co-creation sessions, and strategic alignment all marked this ambitious kick-off.

SIARA 2025: Youth at the Heart of Dairy Sector Transformation

During the International Livestock Resources Exhibition (SIARA), held from May 13 to 16 in Dakar, a Youth Panel co-organized by the MELITEJI-WASU program and the Mastercard Foundation brought together nearly 200 young people from across the country. Focused on job opportunities in the dairy value chain, the event highlighted the growing determination of youth to contribute to a more innovative, sustainable, and inclusive dairy sector.



International Youth Day: A Regional Momentum for Collective Action

On August 18, the Foundation's Alumni community celebrated International Youth Day in a hybrid format, both at the Youth Space in Dakar and online.

Under the theme "From Voice to Impact," young people from across the WAEMU region discussed local action, civic engagement, and the SDGs, asserting their central role in building an inclusive and sustainable future.



Africa Food Systems Forum 2025: African Youth at the Forefront



Mastercard Foundation delegation at the AFSF

From August 31 to September 5, Dakar welcomed more than 6,000 participants from 90 countries for the Africa Food Systems Forum. Youth took center stage, with a delegation of 19 young people supported by the Mastercard Foundation. At their dedicated stand, they showcased their products and innovations, generating strong interest from pan-African and international media. It was a powerful moment that brought the voices of young African entrepreneurs to the heart of global debates.



Would you like to contribute to our next edition?
Feel free to contact Sophie Diakité and send us content for publication!

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Join us now and actively take part in conversations on the Partner Connect platform !

This online platform was designed as a borderless community to facilitate exchanges between partners, encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing, and meaningful discussions — all beyond traditional email communication. It's an opportunity to connect with other partners, collaborate on joint initiatives, and interact directly with the Foundation's teams.

See you soon on Partner Connect !

partnerconnect@mastercardfdn.org

