

STRATEGIC BRIEFING NOTE

EDUCATION, SKILLING, AND TRANSITIONS



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ABOUT THIS NOTE

01.

This Strategic Briefing Note is a practical guide for understanding the Mastercard Foundation's renewed approach to Education, Skilling, and Transitions. It is designed to help partners create context-responsive, impact-driven, and strategically aligned programs that contribute meaningfully to our vision for inclusive, African-led transformation.

This note serves as a starting point for deeper conversations with current and prospective partners on how our work has evolved, where we see critical opportunities for collaboration, and how we can co-create programs that are impactful and scalable. It is the result of a year-long strategic review process that included extensive consultations with

young people, education institutions, government stakeholders, and implementing partners. These insights allowed us to reflect on lessons learned, understand evolving needs and challenges, and reframe our work to go beyond individual impact to achieve institutional and systems transformation.



OUR STRATEGIC VISION

02.



OUR VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is a world where all young people in Africa and Indigenous communities in Canada have access to quality and relevant education, skilling, and lifelong learning opportunities to drive inclusive and equitable transformation in their communities and beyond.



OUR GOALS

Our efforts are guided by two overarching goals:

01 Access

Enabling all young people to access equitable and inclusive opportunities to enter, continue, and complete secondary and post-secondary education and skilling pathways.

02 Success

Enabling these pathways to lead to meaningful transitions to further education or dignified and fulfilling work.



CONTEXT

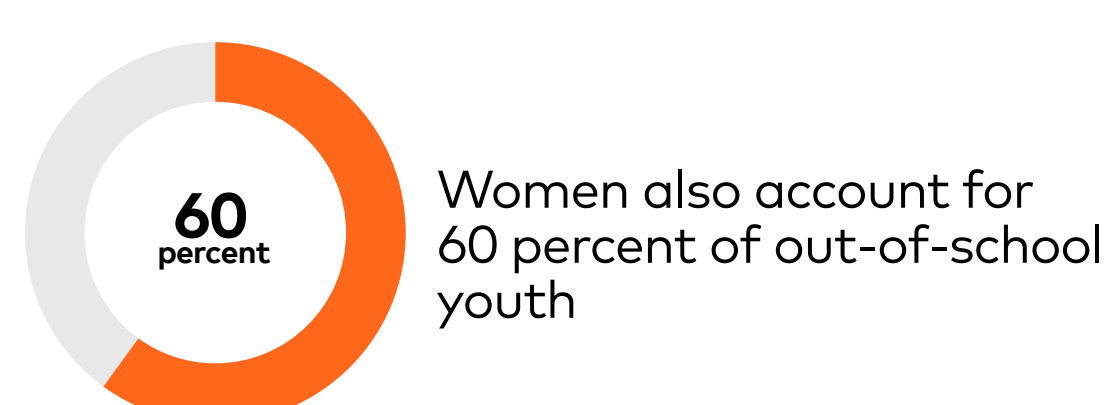
03.

Africa is poised to shape the future of the global workforce. As the youngest and fastest-growing population in the world, the continent will be home to nearly half of the world's young people by 2100. Realizing this demographic dividend, however, requires strategic investments in education, skilling, and transitions. **Today, 210 million Africans are not engaged in education, employment or training, two-thirds of whom are women.** Africa also has the lowest Human Capital Index score at 0.40, indicating that children born today will reach only 40 percent of their potential productivity. To unlock this potential, we must close persistent gaps in access, quality, and relevance across the education and skilling continuum.

While primary education has seen significant improvements, gaps in access and success remain in secondary and post-secondary education. For every 100 young people who begin primary school in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 70 progress to lower-secondary school, 45 reach upper-secondary school, and just 9 percent transition to tertiary education. These challenges are even greater for vulnerable groups:

Girls and young women

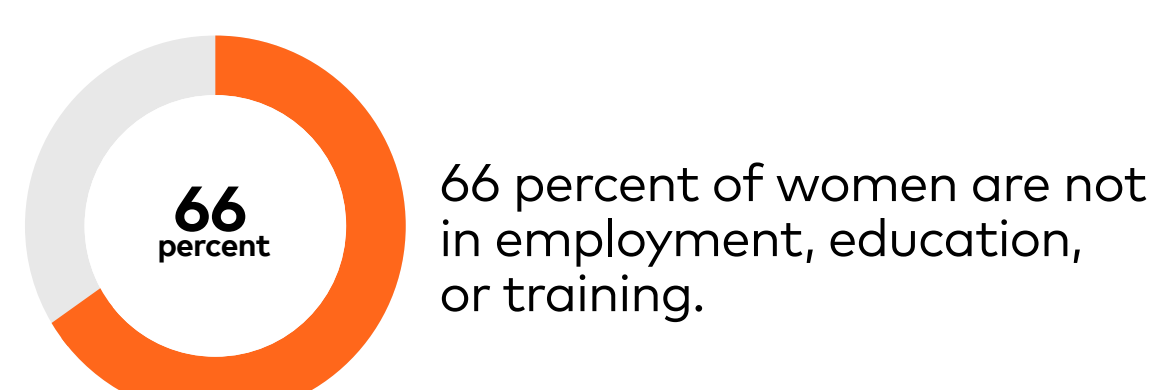
34 million adolescent girls across Africa remain out of school



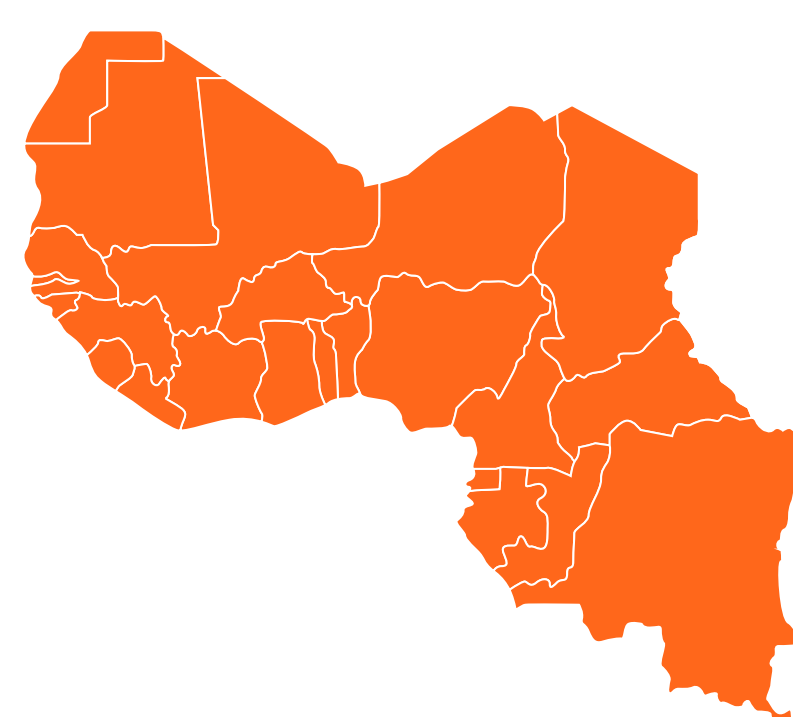
Young women are less likely to complete upper-secondary education



Young women are less likely to enroll in tertiary education



Refugees and displaced youth



In West & Central Africa, refugee enrollment drops to **28 percent** at the secondary level and just **4 percent** at the tertiary level.

Legal restrictions and poor learning outcomes further constrain their opportunities.

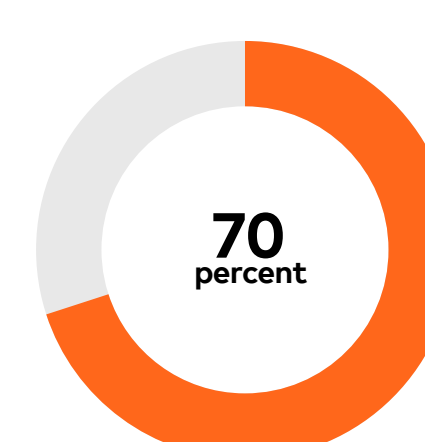
Young people with disabilities and rural youth



Only **48 percent** of children with disabilities complete primary education



80 percent of children with disabilities face unemployment



Similarly, rural youth, who comprise **70 percent** of Africa's out-of-school population, face teacher shortages and high student-teacher ratios (40:1 in rural areas vs. 25:1 in urban areas).

At the same time, global and regional trends – including digitization, automation, climate change, and urbanization – are reshaping the future of work. With 83 percent of employment currently in the informal sector, young Africans must be equipped with the skills to adapt, innovate, and thrive in both formal and informal labour markets.

With more learners completing primary school than ever before, Africa faces an urgent and critical window of opportunity. Scaling access to quality and relevant secondary and post-secondary education and skilling programs is essential to prepare young people for the future of work and to fully harness the continent's demographic potential.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

04.

Our strategy is grounded in **four core priorities**, which define the thematic areas of focus for our work. We invite proposals that align with and advance one or more of the following:

Equitable access to and success in education

We provide integrated support – academic, financial, psychosocial, and social – to enable young people to access and thrive in secondary and post-secondary education and skilling.

Demand-driven skilling and job training

We equip young people with skills aligned to labour market demand and future trends, preparing them to thrive in evolving job markets.

Quality and relevant teaching and learning journeys

We improve the quality of teaching and learning by strengthening teacher training, leadership, curricular innovation, and pedagogical approaches at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Transformative and resilient education institutions and systems

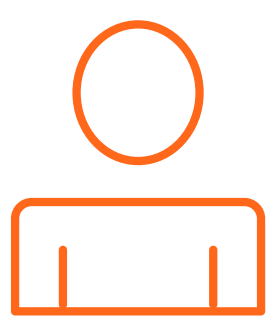
We seek to catalyze systemic change in secondary and post-secondary institutions, creating diverse opportunities and pathways for a broader range of young people.



IMPACT

05.

The four strategic priorities articulate our vision for transformation. We will realize this vision by centring young people and catalyzing impact at three interconnected levels:



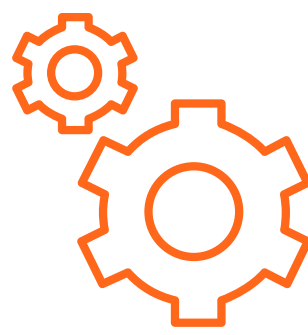
Individual

Empowering young people to access, persist, and complete their education and training.



Institutional

Strengthening education institutions to deliver quality, inclusive, and relevant learning.



Systems

Driving ecosystem-wide transformation for sustained and inclusive access and quality learning.



PROGRAMMATIC PRINCIPLES

06.

Our programming is guided by six cross-cutting programmatic principles that reflect our values and approach to Education, Skilling, and Transitions programming for young people. All proposals must demonstrate how they address each of the following.

Principle

What we're looking for

Guiding questions

1 Transformative Leadership

Young people are empowered and equipped with leadership skills and opportunities to drive positive change in their communities and institutions.

- › How does the program foster and support leadership development among young people, especially those from underserved communities?
- › How does the program support youth leadership development is sustained beyond the duration of the program, such as through mentorship or alumni networks?
- › Is youth leadership cultivated and practiced within the program or institution?

2 Youth Agency

Young people are co-creators, convenors, decision-makers, and evaluators – not just program recipients or participants

- › How are young people empowered to shape their own futures?
- › How are young people involved in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the program?
- › What mechanisms are in place to gather, respond to, or amplify youth voices?
- › Are young people better prepared to advocate for themselves and others?

3 Inclusion

Intentional strategies to reach and support underserved young people, including young women, people with disabilities, and refugees and displaced persons

- › How does the program identify and address barriers faced by young women, people with disabilities, and refugees and displaced persons?
- › What specific strategies are in place to reach and support underserved young people?
- › How is data collected and used to close inclusion gaps?
- › Are program resources allocated to accessibility and reasonable accommodation?

4 Digital Enablement

Use of digital tools and technology to expand access and inclusion, improve delivery, and enhance learning outcomes

- › How does the program leverage digital tools or platforms to enhance education, skilling, or training?
- › What steps are in place to ensure digital access and literacy among all participants?
- › How does the program ensure inclusive access to digital tools, including for those with disabilities?
- › Are connectivity or access risks considered and mitigated?

5 Entrepreneurial Skills and Mindsets

Fostering creativity, critical thinking, resilience, problem-solving, innovation, and entrepreneurial thinking as key outcomes for youth

- › How does the program develop critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and initiative among young people?
- › Are young people supported to test ideas, solve real problems, or start or build ventures?
- › Does the program link participants to resources or ecosystems that support entrepreneurship?

6 Safeguarding

Strong measures are in place to protect the physical, emotional, and digital safety of all participants

- › What policies and procedures are in place to prevent and respond to harm?
- › To what extent are the policies and procedures inclusive of all young people, including women, people with disabilities, and refugees and displaced persons?
- › How are staff and partners trained on safeguarding?
- › How are young people informed of their rights and protections?

FOCUS GROUPS

07.

We prioritize programming that actively addresses barriers faced by underserved groups, including:



Young women



Youth in rural areas



Young people with disabilities



Out-of-school youth



Young refugees and displaced persons

Proposals must demonstrate how the program is tailored to meet the specific needs of these groups.



KEY PROGRAM AREAS

08.

Our Education, Skilling, and Transitions programs are being implemented in 25 countries in Africa, and six countries globally. Our work spans continental, regional, and country levels and supports young people across the following transition points toward accessing dignified and fulfilling work:

Secondary education

Technical and vocational skills development (TVSD)

Higher education

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Key focus areas and current programs are detailed below. Proposals should reflect an understanding of where young people are in their journey and design support that meets them at these critical transition points.

Secondary Education & TVSD

We provide access to quality and relevant secondary education and skills development for young people in Africa. Examples of programs include:

Leaders in Teaching

Improves the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools across Africa to enable young people to access the skills and competencies to succeed in the 21st century.

Girls' education programs

Partner with FAWE and CAMFED to support access, success, and transitions for underserved young women in secondary education.

Country-level education and skilling programs

Facilitate country-level education and skilling programming in the Mastercard Foundation's seven focus countries – Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and WAEMU.

Higher Education

We leverage the unique position and expertise of higher education in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and entrepreneurship to reach young people at scale. As drivers of public good services, higher education is well positioned to drive local and national transformation for the development of Africa. Examples of programs include:

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program

Identifies talented young people facing the highest social and economic barriers to opportunity and those in hard-to-reach communities and supports their higher education and leadership development. **The network includes over 50 institutions across Africa, North America, Europe, South America, and the Middle East.**

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program E-learning Initiative

Strengthens the capacity of partner universities to deliver online instruction and provide critical virtual supports to Mastercard Foundation Scholars and students. **The network includes 10 higher education institutions from the Scholars Program network.**

Mastercard Foundation Scholars Entrepreneurship Fund

Provides funding and wrap-around support for ventures started by Mastercard Foundation Scholar and Alumni entrepreneurs.

Higher Education Collaboratives

Bring university partners together to collectively accelerate transformation of a particular sector or area of work where there is a critical need for advanced human capital development. The Mastercard Foundation currently supports Higher Education Collaboratives in pandemic science, primary health, climate resilience and sustainability, education, e-learning, digital transformation, and nutrition and agriculture, with more than 20 partners reaching over 300 universities.

The Mastercard Foundation Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning

The Mastercard Foundation Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning focuses on policies that drive the innovative use of technology to improve access to quality secondary education, particularly for the most underserved communities. Examples of programs include:

Mastercard Foundation EdTech Fellowship

Scales EdTech models to improve teaching and learning in secondary education in Africa.

EdTech Mondays

Raises awareness on the power of technology in teaching and learning.

World Bank EdTech Policy Academy Training

Strengthens the capacity of education systems for resilient hybrid learning systems and to identify and develop digital skills that match local labour demand.

ADEA Partnership: Data for Policy

Supports 30 African countries to collect, analyze, and publish quality education and skills data for more data-informed policy, planning, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Transitions

We facilitate the transition of young people from education to dignified and fulfilling work and entrepreneurship opportunities. Examples of programs include:

Mastercard Foundation Fund for Alumni Start-ups in Transition

Helps young entrepreneurs to establish or grow their businesses by providing access to funding and structured support, including mentorship by experts, business advisory and workshops, and networking opportunities.

Mastercard Foundation Associates Program

Provides young people with one-year high-quality work experience, equipping them with the competencies and capabilities required to thrive in their careers.

Corps Africa

Engages and trains young Africans to collaborate with rural communities to alleviate poverty, enhance livelihoods, and increase resilience.



BUILDING TRANSFORMATIVE PARTNERSHIPS 09.

At the Mastercard Foundation, we believe that partnerships grounded in mutual respect, shared values, and collective ambition are key to delivering sustainable, large-scale change. Our approach to partnership is guided by our values of humility, listening, kindness and respect, co-creation, and impact, which enable thoughtful and intentional collaboration. The way we work with partners is critical to advancing our work.

We work with partner organizations to implement programs in Africa, Canada, and are fully committed to partnering with African-led organizations and Indigenous institutions to unlock their full capacity and potential. We also partner with legally registered, youth-led organizations that are majority youth-governed and equipped to design and scale innovative, community-driven programs.

We recognize and deeply value the expertise, experience, and contextual knowledge that partners bring. As such, we see ourselves as curators, facilitators, and connectors, working alongside our partners to unlock solutions that are locally led, youth-centred, and impactful.



CO-CREATION PROCESS

10.

Co-creation is the cornerstone of how we build and implement partnerships. It allows us to listen and build trust, where programs are designed not only for impact, but also for ownership, relevance, and sustainability.

We are increasing our investment in the co-creation process to allow for deeper engagement from the outset. We take the time to explore the impact we want to achieve together and work collectively to design programs and activities that will enable us to get there. This includes, for example:

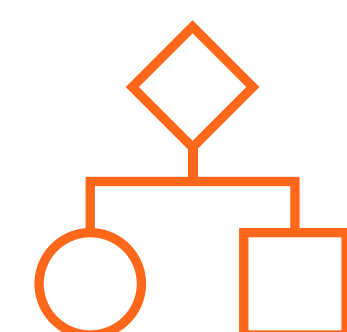
- **Introductory conversations to understand each other's values, interests, and ambitions**
- **Collaborative design workshops to shape the vision, theory of change, and components of the program**
- **Joint identification of impact metrics and learning goals**
- **Ongoing feedback loops and adaptive design throughout implementation**

Key elements of co-creation include:



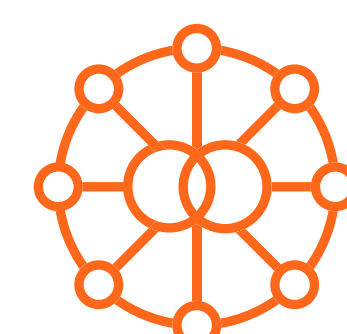
Elevating youth voice and leadership

We are committed to elevating young people's visibility and voice, engaging them not just as program participants, but as designers, implementers, and evaluators. This includes conducting needs assessments informed by youth perspectives, forming youth advisory committees, and giving young people formal roles in program governance and steering committees.



Mapping institutional strengths and ecosystem contributions

Every partner brings their own strengths and assets to the program, whether that be academic expertise, community reach, sectoral influence, or innovative models. We seek to identify and amplify these strengths, ensure complementary roles within our broader partner networks, and build peer learning and capacity exchange between partners.



Leveraging the Foundation's role

We aim to serve as curators, facilitators, and connectors across institutions, sectors, and geographies. We identify how we are best placed to support your vision and goals and align with our country and regional programming to increase opportunities and accelerate progress toward our strategic outcomes.



GUIDANCE FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS

11.

We invite all prospective partners to use this briefing note as a foundational guide and resource for program design. To move forward, we encourage you to:



Reflect and align

Assess how your organizational vision and programming align with our strategic priorities, principles, and focus areas.



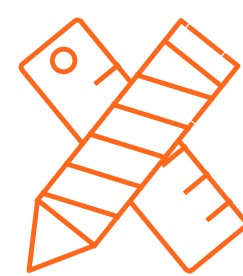
Engage early

Reach out to your Mastercard Foundation contact for early conversations to explore mutual priorities and fit.



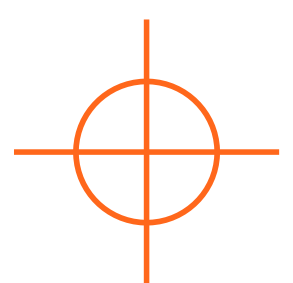
Prepare to co-create

Be ready to participate in collaborative co-design processes with the Mastercard Foundation, young people, and other stakeholders throughout the program development life cycle.



Design with intention

Ensure your proposal is youth-centred, contextually grounded, and informed by evidence and experience.

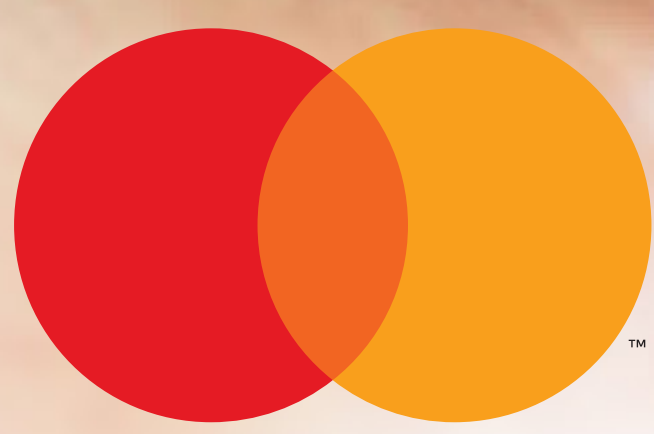


Demonstrate impact

Clearly articulate how your approach will deliver meaningful and measurable outcomes across individual, institutional, and system levels.

Further guidance – including proposal templates, timelines, and eligibility – will be provided through formal Mastercard Foundation communication channels.





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