

Learning Tailored to Africa's Future

by Reeta Roy, President and CEO of The MasterCard Foundation



Over the last few years, I have spent time with young people from across Africa. Their experiences and perspectives inspire our work at The MasterCard Foundation. Most of them are between the ages of 12 to 25. Their families live on less than US\$2 a day, and they face significant barriers to getting a decent education. When asked what they need, I heard: “An opportunity to learn;” “A network that gives me ideas and encourages me;” “Information about jobs;” “Skills that make me employable;” “Knowledge to handle money;” “A safe place to save;” “A mentor.”

Africa is the youngest continent, home to seven of the 10 fastest-growing economies, and a movement of entrepreneurs. Yet, it also has the lowest secondary and tertiary enrollment rates in the world, and the numbers are disproportionately lower for girls. For those in school, millions are graduating without employable skills. Young people represent more than half of the total unemployed population. Our Foundation saw a gap in funding and innovation aimed at helping young people access education and employment. This has become the focus of our Youth Learning work in Africa.

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This past year, we posed a question to our Foundation's Youth Think Tank—an advisory group of young people participating in projects we support across the continent. How do we create opportunities for young people that move them towards more productive and secure futures?

Let's begin by turning traditional concepts of education inside-out. Let's refocus on learning that helps them gain confidence and knowledge to make decisions and contribute to society. We know that many young people need to be earning and learning at the same time, and hopefully, saving for their future. Education that engages young people in experiential opportunities in growth sectors will likely better prepare them for the workforce, even before they graduate.

The MasterCard Foundation has partnered with a number of organizations that illustrate these new approaches. For example, *Fundación Paraguaya* has developed a financially self-supporting secondary school model that is based on entrepreneurial education. Students create and operate agriculture-based enterprises. They earn an income, and learn how to manage and save money. We are working with *Fundación Paraguaya* on establishing this model in Tanzania, and expanding it to 20 public schools in the country.

Another novel approach is from Samasource, which uses technology and private sector partnerships to integrate unemployed youth from urban slums in Kenya into the formal economy. Samasource trains them on computer skills, and employs them in online-based work that is outsourced from organizations around the world. This work enables young people to participate in the global economy, gain market-relevant skills, and begin earning within weeks of entering the program.

Young people also tell us that acquiring skills is only the first step in their educational journey. Ongoing mentoring is important, particularly for young women. For example, in Kenya, the CAP Workforce Development Institute is retooling technical and vocational training centers to better respond to market needs. Young people are provided with a mentor network that consists of local business professionals who coach them as they transition to jobs or manage their own businesses. This support reduces the risk of them falling back into unemployment.

By their sheer numbers, Africa's 600 million youth will shape the future of the continent. We have an unprecedented opportunity to work with them to redefine education and create important linkages between education and work. Their perspectives can also help us create learning opportunities that truly connect young people to the continent's growth. **Y**

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