



In partnership with



## Scholars Program

---

# THE IMPRINT OF EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT ON THE PROFILE AND PATHWAYS OF ALUMNI

June 2022

This Spotlight report series summarizes the preliminary findings from *The Imprint of Education*, a five-year longitudinal cohort study of African alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program (from selected countries and cohorts) carried out by the Human Sciences Research Council. The findings presented here should be interpreted as a reflection of what has been found so far and is a work in progress. It is important to interpret these findings not as representative of the whole Scholar population, but rather of the specific study population.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is a network of universities and non-governmental organizations with a commitment to inclusive and relevant education. The Program provides young African leaders, especially those from under-resourced communities, with the knowledge and skills they need to transition into dignified and fulfilling livelihoods and contribute to the social and economic transformation of the African continent. A key outcome of the Scholars Program is to develop a

cohort of socially conscious, transformative leaders who both can and want to make a difference in their worlds. The Scholars Program seeks to make this a reality for secondary and tertiary students from marginalized communities whose academic talent exceeds their financial resources. By asking alumni to make their education count not only for themselves, but also to benefit their communities and wider society, the Scholars Program aims to develop a new generation of African leaders.

# KEY STATISTICS

<b>Fewer secondary alumni</b> were unemployed in 2021 (13%) compared to 2020 (27%).	<b>More tertiary alumni</b> were employed in 2021 (71%) than 2020 (58%).	<b>9% of secondary school alumni</b> had obtained a post-school qualification.
<b>70% of secondary school alumni and 51% of tertiary institution alumni</b> in the study are female.	<b>80% of tertiary alumni</b> who were employed reported alignment between their current job and their intended career path compared to only 32% of secondary alumni who did so.	<b>Almost all secondary school alumni and 85% of tertiary institution alumni</b> live in Africa.

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL PATHWAYS

A key focus of *The Imprint of Education* study is to determine individual, structural, and contextual characteristics that influence the length, direction, and nature of alumni's journeys. These factors are used to understand the multi-dimensional, non-

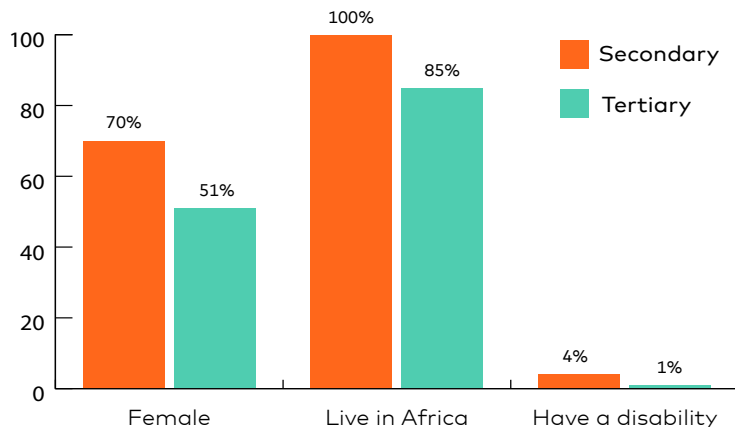
linear pathways and obstacles that graduates navigate to cultivate dignified and fulfilling livelihoods that include salaried employment, further studies, entrepreneurial ventures, and informal economic activities.

## INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program alumni who form part of this study are largely female, and from socioeconomically under-resourced backgrounds. In 2020 the average age of secondary school alumni was 21, and 27 for tertiary institution alumni. Few alumni in the study reported having a disability: four percent of secondary alumni and one percent of tertiary alumni. The key demographic indicators, which focus on gender, age, geography, and disability are presented in Figure 1.

Most alumni surveyed live in Africa, although some have moved from their countries of birth to other African countries. Ninety-four percent of secondary school alumni reside in three countries: Kenya (36%), Ghana (34%), and Uganda (24%). Fifty-nine percent of tertiary institution alumni reside in the same three

countries (16% in Kenya, 24% in Ghana, and 19% in Uganda) but may have studied elsewhere. Of the remaining tertiary participants, 27% live in countries across Africa and 15% outside Africa.



**Figure 1: Key demographic indicators (N=8,650 secondary school alumni, n=413 tertiary institution alumni)**  
Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

# HISTORICAL AND CURRENT SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILES OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Household assets are a proxy for socioeconomic status. In the Alumni Tracer Study survey, we asked alumni to state whether they had any of a list of 25 assets in their household. Here a household was defined as the people who mostly sleep in the same dwelling and eat together at least three times a week. Generally, more tertiary alumni had the assets listed than secondary alumni, except for "working radio," "livestock," and "bicycle." The largest differences favouring tertiary alumni were found for "computer or laptop," "flush toilet inside the dwelling," and "built-in kitchen sink."

Food security is also considered a socioeconomic asset. Bearing in mind that data was collected during the COVID-19 lockdown, in 2020 we asked alumni: "In the past year, how many times have you or anyone in your household missed meals because of a lack of food?" Forty-four percent of secondary alumni and 73% of tertiary alumni had not missed a meal. On the other hand, 17% of secondary alumni and six percent of tertiary alumni had missed more than 10 meals due to a lack of food.

In interviews, most tertiary alumni spoke of financial hardships and the effect that poverty had on accessing education. For those who experienced interrupted school pathways – dropping in and out of education – these social and economic hardships were seen as contributing factors. Very few interviewees identified themselves as "middle class" or economically "well off" while growing up. For those who did, it was the death of a parent or caregiver that contributed to a slide into poverty. Despite the general financial hardships faced by alumni, the majority did not feel a sense of shame for being viewed as a financially needy student. Furthermore, alumni experiences of familial support for education varied. While some reported that their families saw the value of education, others had to defy family wishes to further their education.

In the survey, alumni were asked about their main source of income (Table 1). Secondary alumni relied mostly on parental support for income, whereas most of tertiary alumni relied on their own paid employment.

*Table 1: Alumni's main source of income*

Source	Secondary (N=8,650)	Tertiary (n=413)
My parents	35%	4%
My job	17%	59%
Other family members/partner	12%	6%
Educational scholarship	10%	14%
My own business	6%	7%
Government/social grant	3%	1%
My partner (spouse, husband, wife, fiancé(e), girlfriend, boyfriend)	2%	4%
From a charity/religious group/NGO	1%	2%
Other	13%	2%

Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

## ALUMNI PATHWAYS: POSITIVE CHANGES, MULTIPLE POSITIONS AND DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING WORK

So far in the study, alumni's transitions have been mapped at two points, a year apart, examining whether they are engaged in further study, employment, entrepreneurship, or whether unemployed. Table 2 details the percentage of alumni in each labour market position in 2020 and 2021. Between the years, while the overall proportions of alumni in each position remained

fairly similar, where most secondary alumni were pursuing further studies and most tertiary alumni were in paid employment, there were some notable shifts. Fewer secondary and tertiary alumni were unemployed in 2021 compared to 2020; more secondary alumni were studying in 2021 than in 2020; and more tertiary alumni were employed in 2021 than 2020.

*Table 2: Current alumni labour market positions*

Labour Market position	Alumni/ Year	Secondary		Tertiary	
		2020 (N=8,650)	2021 (N=413)	2020 (n=413)	2021 (n=602)
<b>Studying</b>		60%	↑ 75%	27%	↑ 29%
<b>Employed</b>		9%	↔ 9%	58%	↑ 71%
<b>Unemployed</b>		27%	↓ 13%	21%	↓ 7%
<b>Entrepreneurs</b>		18%	↔ 18%	38%	↓ 35%

*Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset and 2021 Alumni Tracer Study wave 2 dataset*

In 2021, 14% of secondary alumni and 31% of tertiary alumni occupied two positions (working and studying, working and entrepreneurship, etc.). In addition, 20% of tertiary alumni supplemented their paid employment with entrepreneurial ventures. The pathways are therefore not mutually exclusive, a phenomenon that will be further explored in later rounds of data collection.

Among secondary school alumni who were studying, a large majority (73% in 2020 and 70% in 2021) were pursuing a bachelor's degree rather than

diplomas (19% in 2020 and 18% in 2021) or postgraduate degrees and certificates (one percent in 2020, four percent in 2021).

Most of the tertiary alumni who were studying were completing master's or doctoral degrees (78% in 2020 and 83% in 2021). Other qualifications being pursued were postgraduate certificates (seven percent in 2020 and five percent in 2021), short courses (nine percent in 2020 and eight percent in 2021) and second undergraduate degrees (three percent in 2020 and 2021).

In examining the types of organizations where alumni were employed in 2020, the survey showed that the largest proportions of tertiary and secondary alumni were employed in the private sector (Figure 2). The second highest proportion of tertiary alumni were employed in the non-profit sector, whereas for secondary alumni it was in the informal sector.

In Figure 3, we see that tertiary alumni were consistently more positive about their employment than secondary alumni. More tertiary alumni indicated that they found their work dignified (98%) and fulfilling (81%) compared to secondary alumni (75%, 43%). Another large difference between secondary and tertiary alumni concerned the alignment between their current job and their intended career path, with 80% of tertiary alumni reporting alignment versus only 32% for secondary alumni. About a third (34%) of secondary alumni felt that they earned a fair wage compared to two-thirds (67%) of tertiary alumni. Both groups of alumni reported opportunity for career growth in their jobs.

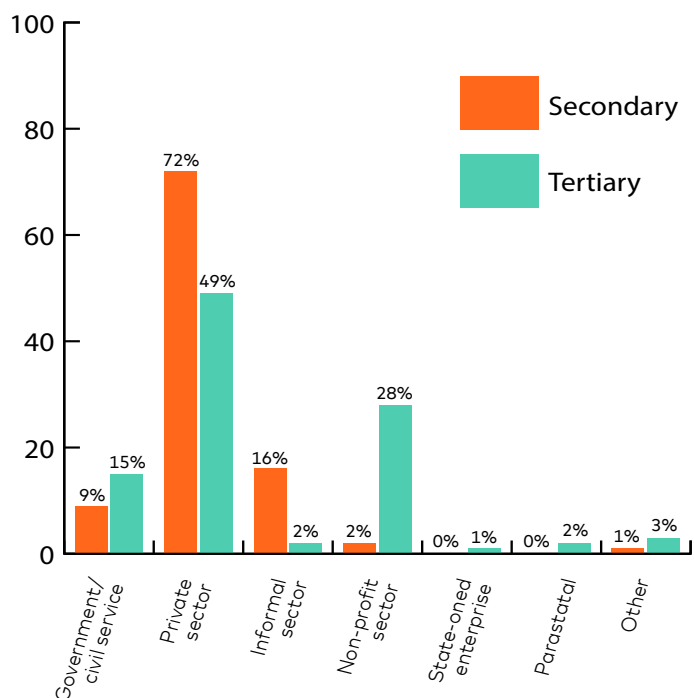


Figure 2: Types of organizations in which alumni are employed (N=786 secondary school alumni, n=240 tertiary institution alumni)

Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

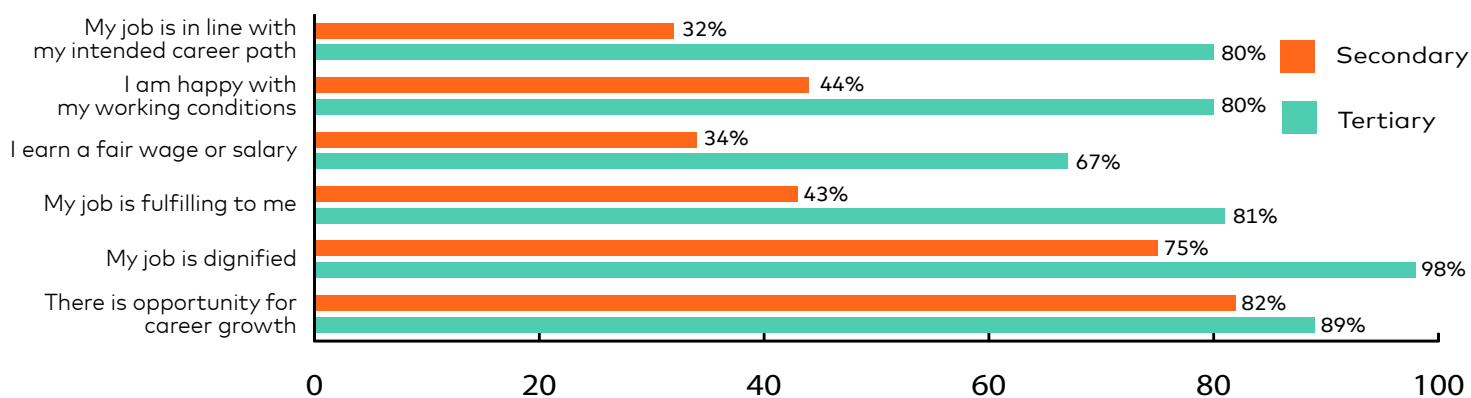


Figure 3: Indicators of dignified and fulfilling work (N=786 secondary school alumni, n=240 tertiary institution alumni)

Source: 2020 Alumni Tracer Study wave 1 dataset

In 2021, interviewed tertiary alumni were asked to define "dignified and fulfilling work" and, for those who had a job, to evaluate whether their jobs were or had been dignified and fulfilling. One participant from Ghana captured many of the points raised by others when defining the concept:

**I think dignified and fulfilling work must allow a person to express their talent and potential to the fullest ... It must make use of their skills, knowledge, training, and experiences that people have gained from school ... It should also pay well enough to allow a person to live a basic life, have shelter, food, be able to afford a car. (Participant 2, male, age 28, Ghana, 2019 Scholar)**

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The first wave of data showed that the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program alumni who graduated between 2017 and 2020 are largely young women from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Program successfully enables young people from under-resourced communities in Africa to access education, and from results so far, to make positive transitions out of unemployment into paid employment or entrepreneurial ventures. Between 2020 and 2021 pathways for participants were diverse and multi-dimensional with young people frequently occupying more than one labour market position simultaneously. Secondary school alumni are faring less well than tertiary institution graduates, although many from the secondary school cohort are entering into or completing tertiary education.



Abraham T. Addy (on the right), a Scholars Program alum and co-founder of ECO Sanitation Services and Ahoite Sanitation Project, a recycling initiative with his friend Awusi Benjamin.

Credit: JH



Photo two: Scholars Program alumni Purity Kendi and Phenny Omondi, founders of Kilimo Jijini, an urban farm that teaches vertical farming techniques in Kibera, Kenya.

Credit: Intersect Productions Inc.

## DIGGING DEEPER IN FUTURE RESEARCH

In subsequent waves of data collection, the nature of the socioeconomic and demographic information that we collect will substantively remain the same so that changes can be measured and associations between various positions and factors determined. These indicators will be used to build a composite scale of socioeconomic status, which will then be mapped against rates and directions of movement between various labour market positions. Questions which measure and describe changes in alumni pathways in future waves of data collection will also remain largely constant. This will allow for the clear mapping of these pathways, despite their complexity. Attention will be paid to those who follow multiple pathways simultaneously, as well as eliciting a deeper understanding of what dignified and fulfilling livelihoods means to these alumni.

## NOTES ON THE STUDY

*The Imprint of Education* longitudinal cohort study has a number of goals, one of which is to understand how Scholars Program alumni understand and practice entrepreneurship, using data gathered from three sources. The first is through a quantitative survey of alumni of both the secondary school and tertiary institution Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program from Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Uganda who completed their studies between 2017 and 2020. Also included were tertiary scholars who studied abroad. A total of 1289 secondary school alumni (weighted to the population of 8650 and represented by N) and 413 tertiary institution alumni (of a possible 839 for which records were available, represented by n) participated in the first round of the survey in 2020. In 2021 these same alumni were contacted to confirm details and update some questions

regarding their current pathways (N=8,381, and n=602). The second source of data comprises qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in 2020 and 2021 with 122 tertiary institution scholars who graduated between 2014 and 2020 with undergraduate or graduate degrees and who were recipients of Mastercard Foundation scholarships. These participants were drawn from the same six countries as is the case for the quantitative component of the study, as well as from those who studied abroad at partner institutions from anywhere on the continent (a group the study calls 'the Diaspora'). The third source of data was obtained through qualitative interviews with key informants from institutions and organizations that implemented the Scholars Program conducted in 2020.

## THIS SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATION IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING REPORTS:

*Mahali, A., Swartz, S., Juan, A. and The Imprint of Education Research Team. (2021). The Imprint of Education Study: A longitudinal cohort study of African Alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program – Year 1 Research Report. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.*

*Swartz, S., Mahali, A., Juan, A., and The Imprint of Education Research Team. (2022). The Imprint of Education Study: A longitudinal cohort study of African Alumni of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program – Year 2 Research Report. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.*