



# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

*WAEMU REGION*

**APRIL TO JUNE 2024**

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# A word from the Director



**Serge-Auguste Kouakou,  
WAEMU Director of the Foundation**

## **Dear friends and partners of the Foundation,**

I am delighted to invite you to take the time to browse this second edition of our quarterly newsletter, in which we highlight exciting initiatives and significant advances that fall under the banner of our common mission to support the youth and promote economic inclusion in the WAEMU region.

Let's start with an excellent piece of news. We are proud to announce the official launch of the RIZAO programme, an ambitious initiative which was designed to transform the rice value chains in West Africa. Women, who represent between 50% and 70% of the workforce in this critical sector, face a number of challenges despite their central role. To overcome these obstacles, RIZAO aims to create equitable access to decent jobs for financially disadvantaged young people – in particular, young women from Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Togo and Benin. Through Rizao, we aim to reach **2,205,000 people** and to create **441,000 jobs** – 70% of which for young women – by 2028.

When it comes to discussion of innovation and transformation, we cannot ignore the increasing importance of the digital economy within our mission. At the Mastercard Foundation, we support digital initiatives, which reach beyond supporting existing programmes. Our team is determined to exploit in full the potential of all things digital to serve as potent leverage for economic and social development in the heart of the WAEMU region.

**I invite you to continue reading this second issue of our quarterly newsletter, and to join us in this ambitious enterprise, which has the goal of promoting the academic and professional flourishing of young people and women within the WAEMU region.**



# News

## The key role of digital economy in the creation of jobs in Africa

### The vision of the Mastercard Foundation for WAEMU

Our mission is to develop human capital by investing in the skills, knowledge, and well-being of young people to support the economic development of our countries. We align skills with market needs, strengthen individual and institutional capacities in agro-industrial value chains, and aim to create 6.2 million meaningful jobs for young people in the WAEMU region by 2030, 70% of which will be for young women. Digital technology plays a key role in facilitating the growth of our main pillars: human capital development, agricultural value chains, entrepreneurship, favorable policies and systems, and educational capacity building

### Digital fare as a catalyst for employment

The digital economy plays an increasingly crucial role in job creation and acceleration in Africa. It is therefore essential to integrate digital technology at the core of all our programs. This approach supports existing initiatives and allows for the development of new programs focused exclusively on digital, thereby facilitating the execution of all our projects.

The digital economy has seen exponential growth in Africa, and it offers multiple job creation opportunities. Technology companies, be they local or international, represent an active contribution to the economy and to the employment market, with the development of software, data analysis, product management and helping to ensure quality customer service. It is also the case that the registration rate of technological startups is increasing rapidly – they too are part of the transformation of the economic landscape of the region.

In parallel, e-commerce and digital platforms play a crucial role in the economic transformation of the African continent, with the WAEMU estimating that the mobile internet usage rate will increase from 45% in 2020 to 75% by 2027. The rise of these new devices allows entrepreneurs and small businesses to access even greater markets; ones beyond local frontiers. By allowing otherwise marginalised populations to participate directly in the digital economy, the realm of digital fare opens up new perspectives and helps to promote broader economic inclusion among the youth of Africa. For example, in 2021, the number of electronic money accounts within the WAEMU increased by 151% between 2019 and 2023, rising from 76.96 million to 193.55 million, according to the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).



As a player out to change Africa, the Foundation is convinced that the digital economy constitutes a powerful driving force for both creating and accelerating job opportunities.

### The importance of digital fare throughout the agri-food value chains and in the development of entrepreneurship

Digital technology emerges as a central force capable of significantly enhancing the efficiency of our agro-food systems and driving entrepreneurship development. Whether it is optimizing farm management, transportation systems, or meeting consumer needs, digital technologies have become omnipresent in boosting productivity and refining decision-making processes at every stage of food production. From precise weather forecasts and yield mapping to inventory management, these agritech tools will promote the emergence of sustainable agro-food systems and encourage the growth of entrepreneurship in the sector. By integrating digital technology into these areas, we can not only improve agro-food value chains but also create an environment conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship, thus providing new economic opportunities for youth and women.



# 3 questions to



**Ahmed Ndoye, Head of Innovation and Digital Economy**

## **Can you talk to us about the importance of digital training and education in your programmes?**

One of our Foundation's objectives is to support the development of training programs that align with labor market needs. We leverage digital technology to enhance accessibility to education and develop digital skills, thereby increasing and boosting youth employability.

For example: programmes such as FORCE-N (with the goals of promotion of the digital economy and building skills in the digital sectors) in Senegal, which we support, has the goal of creating at least 70,000 jobs – 70% of which destined to young women. The programme has also been organising various training courses on coding and artificial intelligence. Online courses and MOOCs offer youths opportunities for development of accessible and affordable skills.

Additionally, we actively support numerous local projects that use digital technologies to address specific challenges, such as Agritech to improve agriculture, Healthtech to strengthen healthcare systems, and EdTech to facilitate access to education.

## **Can you outline the impact that Agritech has had on your initiatives?**

Agritech is a major sector for us. Agricultural technology, such as farm management apps, data analysis and market platforms for agricultural products, improves the productivity of those involved. These things help to create jobs in rural areas while making agricultural work more attractive to young people. We have been developing innovative agritech programmes aims at supporting job creation within the agricultural value chains in the WAEMU region. Such initiatives include the employment of artificial intelligence and digital platforms to maximise the efficiency and profitability of farm operations.



## **And just how might the Foundation have a systemic impact in the WAEMU region via digital fare?**

To generate systemic impact, it is essential to implement favourable policies and regulations. We need to adopt policies that foster innovation and entrepreneurship while ensuring balanced regulation that protects consumers without stifling creativity. As a Foundation, we are committed to supporting access to necessary equipment and materials, including in rural areas, to ensure inclusive development.

In parallel, it is important to integrate digital skills in school programmes from as young an age as possible, and to promote ongoing training aimed at enabling workers to adapt to technological developments.

It is essential to enhance the creation of content, use cases, and training to familiarize people with these tools, as well as to popularize this knowledge to make it accessible to a wider audience. We also support professional training initiatives aimed at developing local talent.

Ultimately, strengthening regional and international collaboration to promote the sharing of the best practices, harmonisation of digital regulations, and attracting investments and expertise, are all things primordial. By implementing such strategies, Africa just might not only create jobs and improve its economic productivity, but also ensure a structural transformation of its economy with the help of digital economy, in so doing promoting an inclusive and sustainable kind of growth.

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**For further information on the  
Force N program, please  
contact: [force.n@unchk.edu.sn](mailto:force.n@unchk.edu.sn)**



# The Foundation's Impact

The Mastercard Foundation uses a variety of verification methods to regularly measure and evaluate progress and impact: baseline studies, periodic partner reports, impact monitoring, strategic reviews, partner-specific studies, etc. **Here are the key overall figures for this quarter:**

## The global impact of the Mastercard Foundation in the WAEMU region by the end of June 2024

**230,000** jobs were created

**7,200,000** people were reached out to in the area

**61 %** of partner organisations are from the African continent

**9 %** of partner organisations are led by the youth (Youth Led Organizations)

### Focus on FORCE-N

The Force N program, which aims to transform Senegal's digital economy by promoting inclusion, skills development, professional integration, and entrepreneurship, has organized numerous science and technology promotion activities in schools. To date, this has led to the training of 8,867 students and the distribution of 1,925 computers (with a target of 4,000 computers per year).

**2011** In this quarter, 2,011 participants improved their skills, with 1,663 of them having employees ever since



# Impact Story

## School visits: inspiring the latest generation

In continuation of the SUQALI programme, there have been two visits with two participants in the programme, who returned to their former school. These visits took place across two mornings; they gave rise to enriching exchanges which were indeed all part of the schedule: outlining of their journeys, and entrepreneurial challenges and discussions with students; the goal being one of helping them to discover opportunities in the agriculture/food sector.

Armande Lo, a young entrepreneur in agriculture and founder of Mandabio, started up a passionate discussion with the students at her former school, the Sainte Jeanne d'Arc Institution, in Dakar, where her entrepreneurial journey began years ago. As she shared her history, her challenges and her successes, Armande encouraged her students to get into the agri-food industry, to never cease believing in their dreams, and following their aspirations.

This initiative highlights the necessity of promoting inspiring models aimed at encouraging young people to consider the agri-food sectors as places in which to begin rewarding and innovative careers.



Watch the video on our [website](#) and on [Youtube](#).



# Words from our partners



## Interview with Daouda Ndao, Country Manager of Heifer International



### What are the goals of Heifer – more specifically, in Africa?

Heifer International is a worldwide development organisation whose mission is to put an end to hunger and poverty with sustainable methods. We now have a presence in countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas, as we help smallholder farming households and their communities to identify, manage and invest in diversified livelihood opportunities in agricultural value chains.

### What is your approach, and what are your domains of action in the Sahel region?

Our plan of action is inspired by the SLLD method (sustainable development delivered by local actors), which was developed by Heifer; it will focus primarily on the following five key areas: water, livestock, agriculture, social inclusion and governance. Heifer International Senegal declined to employ its Sahel strategy in its national programme, with Senegal as an anchor point.

### What will your objectives be in the Meliteji Wasu programme, which has the goal of structuring the milk sector?

The ultimate objective is to create a sustainable system under which breeders may prosper, in so doing ensuring better availability and accessibility of local milk for the population while at the same time generating economic opportunities for young people and women in this key sector – in Senegal, Mali, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire. The livestock sector plays a key role in combating poverty and food security problems and malnutrition in Senegal and the Sahel region. This program includes several components, one of which is the "livestock development" segment, where Heifer International Senegal and Laiterie du Berger have partnered. With support from the Mastercard Foundation, we will ensure that the programme is properly implemented. The project will create 50,000 jobs for the youth and women in the livestock sector, out of a total of 130,000 jobs overall in the program

### Heifer International Senegal recently launched a competition for agritech start-ups – what does that consist of?

The AYuTe Africa Challenge Senegal competition aims to reward young innovators in the agritech sector who bring forth innovative agriculture projects in Senegal and in Africa. Launched in 2022, this project supports technological solutions adapted to the environmental, climate and socio-cultural challenges recognised in local agriculture. In 2022 and 2023, there were 11 recognised winning projects in Senegal, which were granted not only funding but also opportunities in the areas of training and the strengthening of capacity profiles, partnerships and exchanges with other young innovators throughout Africa.

Aimed at the youth (18-35 years old), the ambition of AYuTe Africa Challenge Senegal is transforming African agriculture and making it more attractive and more potent in terms of generating jobs for the youth. This competition is an answer to a real problem: only 23% of youth employed in agriculture actually use agricultural technologies.

AYuTe Africa Challenge is a very ambitious competition: that unites the creative force of African youth, together with several opportunities offered by emerging technologies. The objective is one of providing support to small-time producers and developing sustainable agricultural companies, in so doing contributing to agriculture in Africa which is modern, resilient and inclusive.





# Behind the scenes



1

## The official launch of the RIZAO programme

Between June 19th and 21st 2024, Dakar welcomed the technical launch of the RIZAO programme: an ambitious initiative with the objective of supporting all stakeholders with a role in the value chains in the rice sector. The launch workshop gathered 25 people from the Mastercard Foundation and the implementation consortium, composed of AfricaRice, MEDA and 35°Nord, with the aim of establishing the roadmap of the first 100 days and defining the essential milestones.

The objective of the programme is to reach **2,205,000 persons** and to play a role in the creation of **441,000 jobs (70% of which for young women)** in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin.

2

## Launch of the EdTech Fellowship programme

The Foundation is proud to announce the launch of the EdTech Fellowship programme, in collaboration with EtriLabs in Benin and Senegal. This ambitious programme aims to support and accelerate the course of innovating startups in the field of educational technologies in Africa.

The selected startups for the first round are as follows:

- In Benin: Logeco, Irawo, Sewema, Tama, Blemama, Esseyi
- In Senegal: Xarala, Yello App, Databeez, TooShare, Bakeli School of Technology, Neolean Academy

3

## Round table partners in a meeting in Senegal

During a visit by Rosemary Nduhiu, Executive Director of the Mastercard Foundation, a meeting of round table partners took place on Friday May 24th in Dakar. The exchanges that happened allowed for the presentation of opportunities and challenges to be recognised in connection with creating decent and rewarding jobs for young people in the WAEMU region. The partners' contributions highlighted several themes:

- The critical role of the education of young people and the promotion of alternative models to formal education.
- Opportunities of receiving inspiration from local entrepreneurial success models, such as Nana Benz and Baol Baol, with the aim of designing programmes aimed at young African entrepreneurs.
- Areas for improvement in the realm of collaboration between the various partners of the Foundation were also delved into; in particular: pooling of resources and the creation of national digital platforms in place for exchanging data.



# The Foundation across borders

## Discover the Mastercard Foundation Asset Management (MFAM) Corporation

**The Mastercard Foundation recently announced the creation of the Mastercard Foundation Asset Management (MFAM) Corporation, a new and distinct assets management company. It is an initiative with the goal of building and managing a diversified investment portfolio, aimed to give long-term succour to the Foundation's objectives.**

The creation of MFAM represents a crucial stage in ensuring the sustainability of these efforts and maximising the impact of the Foundation.

MFAM represents a strategic pillar for the Mastercard Foundation, and one which guarantees that its financial resources will continue to support projects aimed at improving education, financial inclusion, and employment opportunities for youth in Africa.

While generating solid long-term strong financial results is the main objective of MFAM, environmental and social and governance (ESG) principles will guide its investments. MFAM will adopt the values inherent in the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment in its processes marked by diligence and its investment decisions.



**You can find the press release  
[here.](#)**



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**Would you like to contribute to our next edition?  
Don't hesitate to contact Sophie Diakité and send us  
your content for publication!**

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