LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS: THE COLLABORATIVE CREATION OF A MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION SCHOLARS PROGRAM

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Abstract: The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program is a secondary and university scholarship and support Program for economically disadvantaged but academically promising youth with a demonstrated commitment to social change. The Program is a $500 million, 10-year initiative to educate an estimated 15,000 young people, primarily in Africa. The Scholars Program is being implemented by a network of education institutions and non-profit organizations. The core Program interventions include comprehensive scholarships, leadership development and life skills training, academic and psychosocial support, mentorship, internships, and support for students transitioning from school to work.

Evaluating a program with this wide variety of activities and partners presents a compelling case study of challenges commonly faced by program evaluators and implementers. How do evaluators ensure objectivity and independence while working closely enough with implementers to address their concerns and to efficiently leverage existing processes for data collection? How can a program-wide evaluation assess the impacts of activities that are carried out differently in each implementation context and adjusted over time to best serve the needs of participants?

During the development of a monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework for the Program, Mathematica and The MasterCard Foundation addressed these challenges through an approach that strived to be collaborative and inclusive, while maintaining objectivity and rigor. The process encouraged partners to engage in every stage of the MEL development, distinguishes between Program- and partner-level measurement activities, and sought to ensure that data collection and measurement strategies would remain objective. This paper will describe the final evaluation design, critically assess the challenges and the approach taken, and will share lessons learned from the framework development process.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, developing nations achieved remarkable expansion in educational enrollments, but these gains are hampered by low graduation rates and concerns over educational quality and equity (UNESCO 2010; UNESCO 2011). For example, from 2000 to 2008, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the net enrollment rate of children in primary schooling increased by 28 percent and enrollment in secondary and tertiary education grew more than 60 percent (UNESCO 2011; World Bank 2013). Despite these gains, enrollment in secondary and tertiary education remains low. To illustrate, in 2012, more than 80 percent of children were enrolled in primary education in Ghana, while only 49 percent were enrolled in secondary and 12 percent in tertiary programs of study (UNESCO 2013). In Rwanda and Uganda, where more than 90 percent of children enrolled in primary education in 2011, fewer than 10 percent pursued postsecondary studies (UNESCO 2013). Sub-Saharan Africa in general has experienced limited improvements in tertiary education, as it has a 6 percent enrollment rate compared to a global average of 26 percent, with female and rural youth particularly underrepresented (UNESCO 2010).

In addition, potential employers and international organizations have expressed concern over the quality and relevance of the education that youth receive, as many graduates appear underprepared for the workplace, even as demand for an educated workforce increases (Materu 2007; World Bank 2009; African Development Bank 2012). Research also shows that educated workers in developing countries migrate to higher-income countries in search of better remuneration and working conditions (Dovlo 2003; Hagopian et al. 2004; Khawas 2004; Mullan 2005; Muula 2005; UNESCO 2009, 2010). To achieve sustainable economic growth, African countries need citizens with the higher-order skills and expertise that will enable them to add value to existing economic activities and enter new industries and services (World Bank 2009).

To address these challenges, The MasterCard Foundation (The Foundation) has created a new program that, through a partnership with universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), provides secondary and tertiary scholarships combined with a comprehensive array of support, enrichment, and career-related opportunities to academically promising, economically disadvantaged students in developing nations, particularly in Africa. This program—the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program (Scholars Program)—seeks to use scholarships and support services as levers for broader social transformation by building a new generation of leaders committed to improving their societies.

The Foundation wants to ensure that the Scholars Program includes a strong monitoring, evaluation and learning component. To this end, The Foundation engaged Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica) as the learning partner for the Scholars Program to guide monitoring and evaluation activities. Mathematica is responsible for developing and executing an overall monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approach that can be used to guide efforts to monitor progress, make mid-course corrections, and evaluate outcomes of the Scholars Program. Accordingly, we have developed a MEL framework, which consists of the Program logic model as well as key learning questions that will be addressed as part of the Scholars Program evaluation.

This paper provides an overview of the MEL framework and how it will be used to facilitate the overall evaluation of the Scholars Program. We start with an overview of the Scholars Program. We then describe our approach to developing this MEL framework and our approach to capturing the complex interactions of the various Scholars Program elements and activities. We highlight the opportunities the framework provides, the challenges we encountered as we developed the MEL framework for this complex effort, and share lessons learned.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE MASTERCARD FOUNDATION SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Scholars Program aims to expand access to education for academically talented, economically disadvantaged youth in developing countries, particularly in Africa. This Program seeks to use the initiative—anchored in scholarships and complemented by a wide range of student support and enrichment services—as a lever for broader social transformation by preparing and empowering a new generation of leaders committed to fostering change and economic growth in their countries or regions of origin. Several of The Foundation's youth learning programs focus on preparing and connecting young people to the job market. The Scholars Program expands this effort to include two earlier and critical educational transitions—from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to tertiary institutions—while maintaining a focus on career opportunities in

Scholars' home countries or continents, and cultivating a commitment to giving back to their regions of origin.

The Scholars Program targets students who face economic barriers to accessing educational opportunities, recruiting students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Further, in line with its aim of contributing to social transformation, The Foundation also seeks to recruit students who exhibit leadership potential and a commitment to giving back to society ("give back"). The Scholars Program thus takes a holistic approach by providing financial support (scholarship covering tuition and other educational costs) and an array of support and enrichment services (including tutoring, mentoring, transition support, leadership training, and networking, among others), primarily in Africa but also in Latin America and the Middle East.

Other scholarship programs have been created for talented, disadvantaged students from developing nations and have offered similar services. What sets this effort apart is its strong and targeted focus on social commitment and giving back, as well as its intentional use of networks to create a community of Scholars and alumni and to connect Scholars to opportunities. The Scholars Program consists of several key activities:

- *Comprehensive scholarships*. Students receive financial support for fees, uniforms, books and supplies, transportation, accommodation, and stipends.

- *21st century skill building*. Students benefit from enrichment in skills areas relevant to employment success, such as critical thinking, communications, and entrepreneurship.

- *Transition support*. Students will receive support during their transition into secondary school, university or the workforce with mentoring, career counseling, internships, leadership development, and other life skills coaching.

- *Give-back component*. An integral component of the Scholars Program is the commitment from the Scholars to give back to their communities and countries of origin. Students will demonstrate this commitment through volunteerism and community service, as well as other forms of experiential learning.

- *Scholar and alumni community*. All Scholars—whether they are at the secondary or university level—will join the Scholars Community and will be connected through a variety of means including a social network that offers information, resources, and opportunities to consult with other graduates. The overall purpose of the Community is to continue to foster a life-long commitment of service to others.

The Scholars Program seeks to serve 15,000 students and is being implemented by a partnership of 19 institutions from across the globe. While the partnership shares a common vision and works towards the common goal, the partners are diverse in several ways. At present, the Scholars Program includes 15 universities located in Canada (McGill University, University of Toronto, and University of British Columbia), in Costa Rica (EARTH University), in Ghana (Ashesi University, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology), in Lebanon (American University of Beirut), in South Africa (University of Pretoria), in Uganda (Makerere University), and in the United States (Arizona State University, Duke University, Michigan State University, Stanford University, the University of California Berkeley, and Wellesley College). In addition, it includes

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three NGOs that recruit and place students in secondary schools (BRAC in Uganda) or in secondary or tertiary institutions (the Campaign for Female Education in Ghana, Forum for African Women Educationalists in Ethiopia and Rwanda). Finally, the partnership includes the African Leadership Academy (ALA) in South Africa, which provides internship and career opportunities for in Africa Scholars. The partnership with ALA also involves the development of a university matching and placement service, which links a small cohort of Scholars to degree opportunities within its own network of tertiary institutions. In the future, the Scholars Program may expand to expand to include other university and secondary school partners.

III. Overview of the Evaluation Approach

A Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework

To ensure a strong monitoring and evaluation component, we sought to develop a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework to guide efforts to monitor progress, make mid-course corrections if necessary, and evaluate outcomes of the Scholars Program. In particular, the MEL framework guides the system-wide measurement and evaluation approaches used to answer key evaluation questions and provide a common thread to capture the range of activities conducted by Program partners.

Figure 1 shows how a MEL process can be used systematically over a program's lifecycle to generate credible evidence and be used for program improvement. The right side of the figure depicts the process through which the MEL plan is created, and the left side shows how the information generated from the execution of the plan can be used for program improvement, policy and advocacy, and strategic planning.

The development of a MEL plan begins with the creation of a results framework (**Step 1**), which includes creating a clear program logic model based on the underlying program theory of change. A closely related component of the results framework is a core set of indicators that can be used to measure progress toward the achievement of expected outcomes. This results framework and the assumptions that underlie the program theory of change are used to identify key outcomes for measurement as well as a broad set of initial learning and evaluation questions.

Step 2 involves prioritization of key learning and evaluation questions by tying questions to the purposes of measurement. Ideally, questions addressed by the evaluation should be actionable so that measurement results can be used to inform program improvement and decision making, as well as to support advocacy and advance knowledge. Typically, most programs offer a range of activities and a wide set of questions that potentially can be addressed by a MEL plan. However, because this measurement is costly, it is important to ensure that it yields meaningful and actionable information. Having clearly articulated questions that address a program's key measurement needs and will provide actionable information should be an integral component of developing a MEL plan.

After identifying a prioritized set of learning and evaluation questions, the next step in the MEL process (**Step 3**) is to identify evaluation approaches to answering those questions. This step includes considering various design options and selecting a design approach and measurement parameters appropriate for each learning question, keeping in mind the context of program

implementation and realities. The selection of the evaluation approach to answer each learning question then guides the measurement efforts for the program (**Step 4**).

Figure 1. A Framework for Understanding the MEL Process
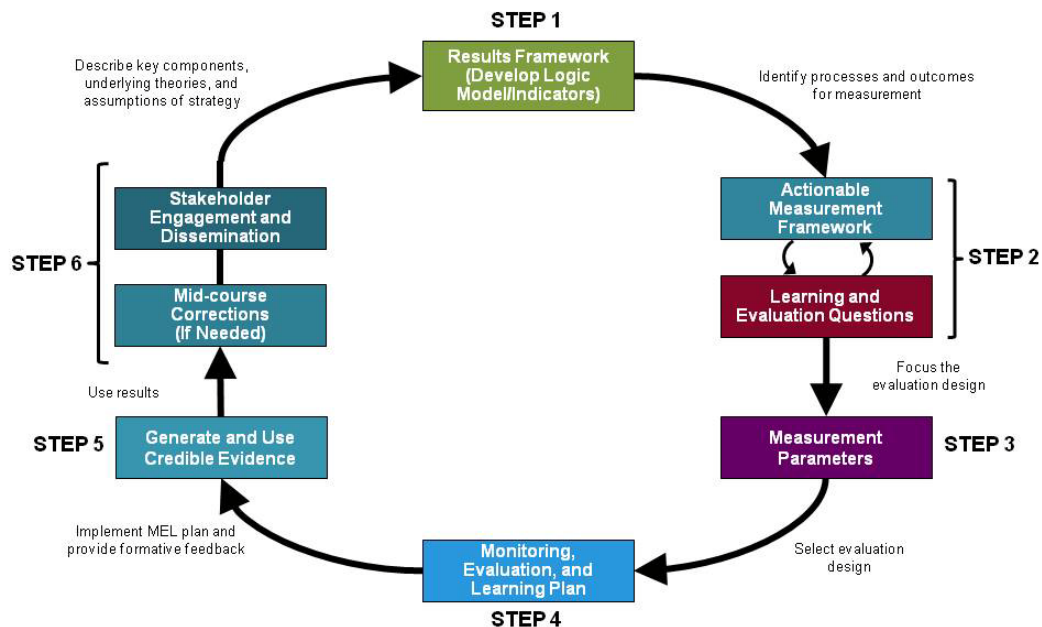
Source: Rangarajan et al. 2011

The execution of the MEL plan generates rigorous and credible evidence that can be used to assess whether the assumptions of the theory of change hold and if any changes should be made, and to document the implementation and effectiveness of the Program (**Step 5**). This information can be used by a variety of internal and external stakeholders for decision-making purposes (**Step 6**). For example, the evidence can be used by the implementers to assess progress toward goals and to make mid-course corrections or to advocate for replication and scale up of effective practices.

Scholar's Program Theory of Change

The first step in developing the MEL framework for the Scholars Program was to refine a theory of change that identified the ultimate aims of the Scholars Program and the changes that needed to occur in order to achieve them (see Figure 2). Explicitly developing a theory of change is a critical exercise that provides a road map for change, as it describes how a series of events leads to a desired outcome; how the change will occur; and what assumptions, processes, and belief systems underpin that change process (Organizational Research Services 2004; Anderson 2005; Mackinnon et al. 2006; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2011; Vogel 2012). The theory of change articulates the long-term goal of the Scholars Program. It then uses a backward mapping technique that connects the long-term goal to changes that have to take place at different stages to realize that goal. The theory of change also describes the key assumptions that are implicit in each stage.

Figure 2. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program Theory of Change

MASTERCARD FOUNDATION SCHOLARS PROGRAM
THEORY OF CHANGE

The Challenge:
The economic growth and social development prospects of developing nations, particularly in Africa, are impaired by a lack of access to high quality education and job training. Too many academically promising youth have limited access to high quality secondary and tertiary education. As a result, they lack opportunities to participate fully in economic growth and social transformation.

The Approach:
With support from the MasterCard Foundation, a global network of educational institutions and NGOs has partnered to educate and provide meaningful opportunities for 15,000 talented, socially conscious youth from developing countries. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars would form a cohort of next-generation leaders, equipped and motivated to transform their societies.
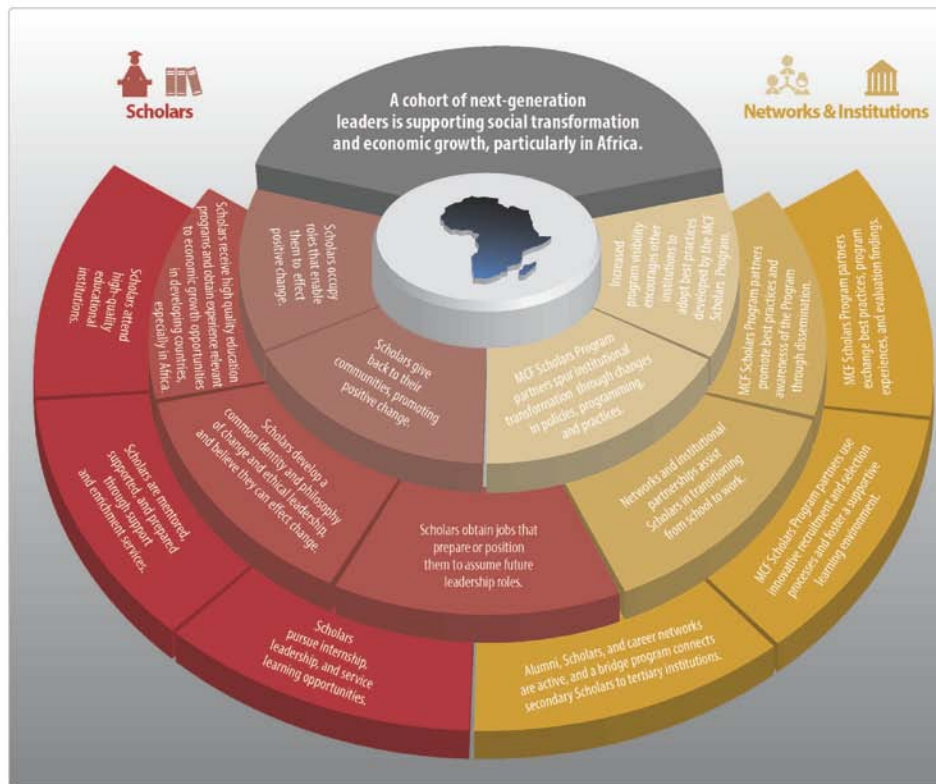
Figure 2 shows the refined Scholars Program theory of change. The long-term goal of the Scholars Program is described at the top of the exhibit. Listed underneath and signaled as levels of change are the outcomes, processes, and activities required to ensure that the goal can be attained. Changes at any particular level are essential to (or are a precondition of) facilitating success at the next higher level. Further, the exhibit shows the anticipated changes at both the Scholar and institutional level. At the Scholar level, The Foundation expects to build a new generation of leaders who will be instrumental in transforming their countries and regions of origin. At the institutional level, it anticipates the Program will be a catalyst for transforming partner institutions (in particular building on synergies resulting from the collaboration) and that through dissemination of impacts

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and lessons learned, it will influence other institutions and stakeholders in ways that will spread and sustain change over time.

Scholars Program's Logic Model

The theory of change helps generate the Scholars Program's logic model, depicted in Figure 3. The logic model provides a broad overview of the Scholars Program approach including the inputs, activities, outputs, and associated outcomes. It also depicts the impacts or ultimate goals the Scholars Program aims to achieve. Unlike the theory of change, which begins from these ultimate impacts and then maps the events and assumptions needed to meet those goals, the logic model begins at the level of actual inputs and activities and then describes the expected outputs and outcomes leading to ultimate impacts. In so doing, the logic model provides a road map for stakeholders to gather and use information about program interventions, see progress towards change, learn continuously and improve their interventions, document outcomes, and share knowledge about what works and why (Kellogg Foundation 2004).

The logic model documents Program activities designed to serve Scholars and the services set up at the participating institutions to implement their projects successfully. Activities focused on Scholars include recruitment and selection; financial support in the form of scholarships to cover tuition and fees, as well as living, travel, uniform, and other expenses; support and academic enrichment services including leadership training, volunteering or service activities, and tutoring, among others; and education, service learning, internships and employment connections (for example, through Scholar, alumni, and career networks). Implementation activities at partner institutions include adapting recruitment policies or practices to reach the target population; implementing new or revised services to support Scholars (such as support activities for incoming students); and actively participating in a partner network to share best practices and support partners.

The activities implemented by partners, both individually and as part of the partnership, are expected to result in concrete outputs. These include the number of qualified students recruited and scholarships awarded, as well as Scholars using the services provided, participating in enrichment activities, and joining networks. At the institutional level, outputs may include adopting revised policies or procedures to support project activities and establishing networks and collaborations. If the underlying theory of change and the assumptions of the Scholars Program are valid, the outputs from the activities should result in improved outcomes at the individual and institutional levels, both of which will result in longer-term impacts. Specifically, these include:

- **Individual-level outcomes.** These focus on the Scholars and include increased academic attainment and performance, satisfaction with support and enrichment services, ability to influence change, commitment to change and ethical leadership, and engagement in give-back activities. Expected outcomes also include remaining in, or returning to, home countries or regions to assume positions that will enable Scholars to implement change or gain the experience necessary to assume future leadership positions.

- **Institutional-level outcomes.** These focus on the partner institutions or the institutions with which partners are working to provide services (such as secondary schools).

Outcomes include the adoption of new or revised policies, practices, or programming to maintain the Program focus on underserved, disadvantaged students from developing countries. Outcomes also include contributions to knowledge through dissemination of experiences and best practices, and increased visibility and reputation of the Scholars Program.

If the Scholars Program's theory and resulting logic model hold, and the Program is implemented successfully, outcomes should lead to the ultimate goal of the Program: creating leaders committed to and actively engaged in transforming their societies, and fostering economic growth. Over time, as partners engage in the dissemination of outcomes, lessons learned, and best practices—and as Scholars themselves contribute to the visibility and reputation of the Program—it may inspire the spread of similar efforts to educate leaders among youths in developing nations as a way to foster social transformation and economic growth. These longer-term outcomes can be expected to emerge in about 10 or 15 years.

Figure 3. The MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program Logic Model

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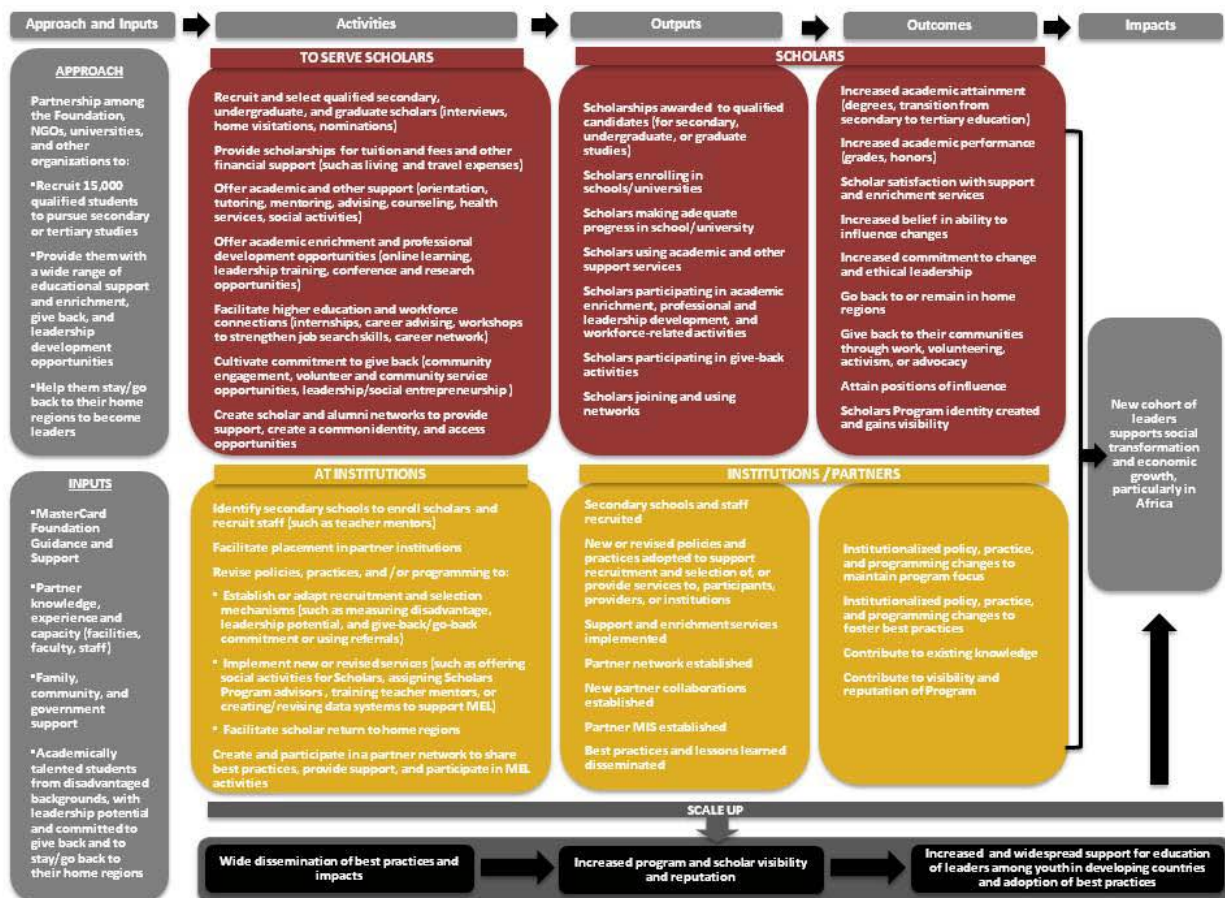
Learning Questions

Based on the theory of change and the logic model, we identified three broad learning questions for the Scholars Program. Answering the learning and evaluation questions proposed will require a mixed-methods approach, which requires collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, and takes into account the nature of each question, the differing contexts of implementation, and the data available or collected.

1. **How was the Scholars Program implemented? How were strategies implemented, how did implementation vary across partners, and what factors facilitated or inhibited Program implementation?**

This first learning question focuses on program implementation—on what was done, how it was done, and who was served. To accurately describe the "intervention," it will be critical to identify who is being served and how. The evaluation will look at the characteristics of student applicants and Scholars to understand if the Program is succeeding both in recruiting and in selecting students from the target populations (for example, students from disadvantaged backgrounds or traditionally underserved populations, such as girls or students from rural and remote areas). In addition, we will study the strategies employed and activities offered to implement the Program. For example, partners are implementing various strategies to recruit, select, serve, and facilitate transitions of Scholars. In so doing, they will encounter factors that either help or inhibit implementation and will likely seek to leverage the facilitators and overcome the barriers. A study of this process will help us define the characteristics of the Program, enhance our knowledge of effective practices, and help us identify factors that enable or prevent successful implementation of the strategies used.

The study of implementation should also document the context in which the interventions are being applied, including the roles and activities of all partners, the extent of collaboration and synergies among partners, and the diversity of environments. For example, Scholars Program partners will be working across geographically and culturally diverse environments, and at different educational levels. It will be important to study outcomes in different contexts to capture potential differences in findings.

To study implementation, we will use a mixed-methods approach, relying on qualitative and quantitative methods. The goals of this study will be to (1) collect site-specific qualitative data to build an in-depth understanding of Program implementation, (2) produce detailed analyses of how the Program has been implemented in different settings to help contextualize and interpret observed impacts, and (3) identify factors that facilitated or inhibited implementation and inform replication and scalability strategies.

Findings from the implementation analysis will serve several purposes. From a formative standpoint, the findings will help guide Program improvements and midcourse corrections as well as enhance learning, as partners share their lessons learned and best practices within (and eventually beyond) the partnership. Indeed, in the medium and long term, the findings should contribute to the knowledge base through dissemination of best practices in the wider community. The findings will also inform the interpretation of results from the analysis of student and institutional outcomes

associated with the Program. In addition, generated evidence should provide an important contribution to the literature, which generally lacks rigorous evidence of effectiveness on this topic.

2. **Did the Scholars Program lead to developing a new cohort of leaders? In particular, what is the impact of the Program on educational, employment, go-back, and give-back outcomes?**

The second learning question centers on assessing the impact of the Scholars Program on different outcomes—namely, educational, workforce, and give-back outcomes. This assessment of Program effectiveness requires that a causal relationship between the Program's activities and youth outcomes be established to generate credible evidence of effectiveness. This evidence will be crucial to (1) supporting attempts to institutionalize this effort among partners, (2) gather support to expand or scale up the Program, and (3) disseminate to other stakeholders and serve as a catalyst for broader change.

To assess the impacts of the Program—whether educational, employment, go back, or give back—we will need to employ a quasi-experimental, comparison-group design. This design is critical to establish a causal link between observed outcomes and Program implementation—that is, to establish whether observed outcomes can be attributed to the Program. More specifically, the key question the impact analysis will address is the contribution of the Scholar's Program to changes in youth outcomes that can be directly attributed to the Program. To address this question, we need to understand the difference the Scholar's Program makes in the lives of these youth compared with what the situation would have been (and what outcomes these youth would have experienced) if they had not participated in the Program (that is, the counterfactual). Comparable groups could be formed in a number of ways. Random selection could be used to select the students from a pool of qualified applicants, forming the basis for a randomized control trial, the most credible design. Alternate approaches include selecting students according to a scoring mechanism, forming the basis for regression discontinuity, or through some other method such as matching.

Findings related to this set of learning questions will first and foremost provide The Foundation and partners with information on the validity of the TOC and on the effectiveness of the overall initiative. Findings will also contribute to the literature on effective practices to encourage learning and degree completion, going back, and giving back. Specifically, this MEL component can provide evidence on the efficacy of the Program in terms of educational outcomes, such as the impact on student attainment. It will also contribute evidence on the effectiveness of strategies to encourage students to return home, and on the efficacy of strategies to nurture Scholars' leadership skills and give-back commitment (for example, through workforce, volunteering, and advocacy outcomes). The rigorous evidence produced as part of this study will contribute to efforts to scale up and fill gaps in the existing literature.

3. **Did the Scholars Program become a catalyst for broader change within and beyond implementing institutions to foster the education of leaders among disadvantaged youth in developing countries?**

The third learning question focuses on scale up, replicability, and broader change. The theory of change guiding the Scholars Program suggests that, in some cases, partners may need to transform their institutions or those with which they partner to promote the education of academically talented

students with disadvantaged backgrounds, and prepare them to return to their communities and assume leadership positions. Others may apply their experience working with minority and disadvantaged populations in their own countries and extend these experiences (as well as services) to international students. We will study the ways in which this process of adaptation or institutional transformation unfolded and potentially contributed to Program goals. Areas of focus will include institutional policies (such as recruitment and selection), programs (such as the availability of support services to facilitate student integration, academic achievement, and return home), and practices to implement policies and deliver programs. In particular, this set of questions will seek to enhance our understanding of the ways in which institutional offerings were revised to accommodate (1) the needs of Scholars—for example, were new academic or support services offered or new ways to deliver or access services established?—and (2) the goals of the Program, such as developing a common identity and philosophy of social change among Scholars. In addition, this MEL component will also consider efforts to institutionalize these changes so they continue beyond the life of the current partnership, focusing on factors that may have facilitated or impeded these efforts. Findings will be important to sustain this effort among partners and, as discussed below, to extend the reach of the Program beyond the partnership.

The Program also hopes to become a catalyst for change at other institutions and for other stakeholders to foster the education of potential leaders among disadvantaged youth in developing countries, particularly in Africa. One way to achieve this is by contributing to the knowledge base on effective interventions for educating academically promising but disadvantaged students who are committed to giving back in their communities. Another is by promoting—through dissemination, advocacy, and other efforts—similar efforts by other stakeholders. In so doing, the Program seeks to drive broader change as others adopt the same focus and strategies. For example, other institutions may use findings from this work to spur similar transformations at their own institutions. These transformations may involve better serving the students they already target for admission, shifting the institutions' focus to include the students targeted by the Scholars Program, or revising existing priorities to encourage going back and giving back. The Program may also foster replication through the visibility gained from the work and reputation of its Scholars and partners.

Similar to the first question, we will rely on a mixed-methods approach to assess the extent to which the Program contributed to broader change. The goal of this study will be to (1) describe efforts to institutionalize changes to foster the education of youth from developing countries and broaden this effort by reaching out to internal and external stakeholders and (2) produce evidence useful for diverse stakeholders, in particular those wishing to implement strategies in a similar context (such as universities in North America or schools in Africa).

IV. CHALLENGES

The Scholars Program—with its wide range of partners, its diversity in specific approaches to implementation, and the difficulty of measuring its key outcomes of interest—presented some challenges for designing a MEL framework. This section discusses those challenges and our approach to addressing them.

Designing a Unified Framework

The Scholars Program has partners operating at different educational levels. Even partners operating at the same level may be taking different implementation approaches. For example, at the secondary level, FAWE provides scholarships that cover the full term of upper secondary study, while BRAC and Camfed offer both full-term and partial-term scholarships. At the tertiary level, all partners offer scholarships for undergraduate study, while some offer graduate scholarships as well. As a result, partners may have different activities, outcomes and indicators, posing a potential problem in developing a single, unified MEL framework.

To address this challenge, we developed the MEL framework from the "ground up" and focused on cross-cutting issues. We started the process by carefully reviewing each partner's project to understand the activities they proposed and what they hope to achieve. This allowed us to capture elements of the overall Program that would "resonate" with the partners and allow them to see their vision as we described the logic model. This process also helped us to develop a clear idea of where activities overlapped across partners and where they diverged, allowing us to identify commonalities among the partnership. In addition, we kept the focus of the framework at a higher level and on the common threads that were important to The Foundation and its theory of change, allowing for some variation while maintaining the focus on commonalities. For example, partners may promote the Program objective of "go back" in different ways, such as through a formal pledge or by promoting regular connection with the region of origin. However, the MEL framework maintains the focus on the underlying commonality (promoting "go back") and accommodates different approaches to this goal.

Given the number of partners, this was a challenging exercise, but it allowed for the cross cutting elements to flow from the partners and form the basis for the logic model, which focuses on common activities, outcomes and indicators across the Program. We then shared the logic model with each partner to seek their input on output and outcome indicators to ensure there were no gaps and that the logic model as a whole resonated with them. We also anticipate that this collaborative process will help implementing partners keep their focus on the key parameters in the logic model as they implement their projects, facilitating a greater chance for overall program success.

Allowing for Different Evaluation Approaches

The Scholars Program involves a multi-site evaluation with each partner taking somewhat different approaches to implementation. For instance, there are important differences in the ways Scholars selected or in the number of Scholars served that do not allow for a common approach to evaluation. These differences make coming up with a unified design challenging.

Faced with this challenge, we took a flexible approach that relies on different evaluation approaches for different partners, particularly at the secondary level where these variations are the greatest, attempting to use the most rigorous design that the circumstances of each partner's implementation allow. For example, at the secondary level, each partner will recruit and serve large numbers of Scholars, however the target populations, the numbers served, the outreach and selection process vary substantially across these secondary partners. Our approach is to try to maximize rigor in attribution to the extent feasible and rely on slightly less rigorous methods on other instances. For example, it is likely that in some projects, we may be able to use a randomized

control trial (RCT) or a regression discontinuity design. In other areas, we are likely only to be able to employ a matched comparison design. While we could try to use a matched design in all instances, given the paucity of credible evidence on this topic, we wanted to maximize the changes of being able to say something with a greater degree of certainty about these interventions and be able to add evidence to the field. As we look at the overall effects of the Scholars Program by assessing the effects of each project we will need to factor these differences in approaches and be careful in our interpretation. We will also conduct sensitivity tests in the matched comparison designs to ensure that we are confident in those findings.

At the tertiary level each partner will serve a small number of Scholars and implementation is more likely to be uniform. Here, our approach will be to pool the sample across the partners and implement a matched comparison group design.

Measurement Challenges

Several fundamental concepts in the theory of change and logic model are difficult to measure. This may be because the concept itself is challenging, because they are difficult to observe, or because the period of time for it to manifest is great.

"Go back" is a key concept and seems deceptively easy to measure, but is in reality quite challenging. Practically speaking, the term could map to a number of actions, with the question, "Go back to where?" being the most relevant. This concept could mean remaining in or returning to one's community, country, region or continent of origin. Further, this concept lacks specificity in terms of the time frame for this action. A related concept, "give back" is equally important to the theory of change, but is hard to capture comprehensively in practice. One way to meet these challenges is to ensure that multiple dimensions of the concept are included. For example, the logic model contemplates giving back broadly as work, volunteering, activism, or advocacy within communities.

The diffuse timeframe for these measures poses similar challenges. The ultimate goal of the Scholar's Program, "A cohort of next-generation leaders is supporting social transformation and economic growth, particularly in Africa" implies an impact that will unfold across generations. In other words, the ultimate goal, and several outcomes along the path to that goal, are unlikely to manifest fully, if at all, within a short timeframe. On the contrary, these impacts may not occur for decades. It is tempting to ignore them as out of bounds for a typical evaluation. However, by identifying this challenge early, the MEL framework sets up a protocol for tracking Scholars and members of the comparison group over time and anywhere around the globe thereby mitigating the constraints inherent in a time-bound study.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The Scholars Program is a unique intervention that brings with it a unique set of evaluation challenges, from developing a unified MEL framework for a diverse set of partner projects to operationalizing strategies for measuring program outcomes and impacts of Scholars' propensity to go back and give back to their societies. From these challenges flow a certain number of lessons for evaluating programs that, like the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program, rely on a number of

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diverse partners and are interested in outcomes that are difficult to define conceptually and to measure practically.

Build a Broad Framework

Programs do not always translate into tidy MEL frameworks—particularly programs with multiple partners and diverse activities. However, for a MEL framework to be successful, all partners need to see themselves clearly reflected in the framework. When looking at the Scholars Program logic model, for example, both secondary and tertiary partners need to see their project logic represented there. The Foundation, furthermore, needs to find in the framework a faithful picture of its overarching programmatic vision.

We addressed this by building a MEL framework that is broad in its vision, but which includes specific avidities and outcomes in the description of its elements. The framework must clearly encompass the Foundation's vision as well as each partner projects' activities. The theory of change must capture a common path for achieving to program goals. The logic model must describe linkages between common components of the program and be supported by common indicators. And the learning questions must identify research of common interest. We accomplished this by grounding the framework in The Foundation's vision for the Program and in the partners' self-described activities. This allowed us to identify key, common threads that resonated across the diverse partnership while maintaining the focus on the Program as a whole.

Build Consensus

We found that the key to getting consensus and agreement is early and frequent consultation. For a MEL framework to reflect the realities of the partners project goals, it must be built on input from them. Early on, consultation aims to capture their plans and vision. In particular, we engaged early on in conversations with The Foundation about the Program's goals and the necessary steps for achieving them, the key components of the Program and how they relate to one another, to understand both the overarching Program vision and the assumptions underlying how Program activities would accomplish that vision. In addition, we also carefully reviewed individual partner proposals and related design documents, and had complementary conversations with the implementing partners to understand how each individual partner's project fits into the broader Program vision. The product of these conversations helped to create an initial draft MEL framework.

Our later conversations facilitated refining the MEL framework. This iterative process involved seeking feedback on the MEL framework, from The Foundation and its partners alike; making appropriate revisions, to better capture The Foundation's vision and better reflect each partner in it; and then seeking feedback again, to ensure the framework faithfully encompasses all partners, correctly represented the logic of the overall program, and identified relevant potential learning questions the partnership will need to prioritize for research. This both creates a shared vision and engenders stakeholder buy-in.

At each stage of the process, MEL development was both inclusive and participatory. During refinement of the theory of change, implementing partners were invited to provide feedback. To confirm that The Foundation's theory of change was internalized and matched those of its

implementing partners, Mathematica led a series of virtual meetings with key representatives from The Foundation and from implementing partners. While an immediate purpose of these meetings was to solicit partner feedback on the theory of change, we also sought to ensure a common vision shared by all partners about the Scholars Program's goals and the process for achieving them. Similarly, partners also contributed to refining the logic model, prioritizing the learning questions, and contributing to shaping the evaluation design. Through exercises and small-group sessions in a multi-day meeting on the MEL framework, we ensured implementing partners were brought onboard as equal partners in the evaluation. We hope that this highly consultative approach allows for partners having greater ownership of the evaluation as their interests are clearly reflected in the learning agenda.

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