



SOLID MINDS PARTNERS LEARNING CONVENING

2024 Report

■ Acknowledgements:

The Solid Minds Partners' Learning Convening 2024, held in Kigali from March 5th to 8th, 2024, thrived into a vibrant gathering, made possible by the enthusiastic participation of mental health advocates from diverse backgrounds across Africa and beyond. We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants, including partners, technical partners, scholars under the Mastercard Foundation Scholar Program, alumni, clinical staff from the Solid Minds Counselling Clinic, and our esteemed collaborators from Rwanda's health sector, notably the Rwanda Biomedical Centre. Our gratitude also extends to the Rwanda Ministry of Youth and Arts for gracing our gathering and delivering warm opening remarks at the convening by the Minister of State, Honorable Sandrine Umutoni.

This inaugural convening was a resounding success, made achievable through the generous financial support of the Mastercard Foundation. Their commitment to advancing mental health and wellness across the African continent has been instrumental in fostering such collaborative initiatives.

We express heartfelt appreciation to everyone who actively engaged in discussions, bringing forth enthusiasm and a willingness to contribute. Your presence underscored the importance of collaboration and peer learning in our collective pursuit of mental health service delivery and advocacy, and professional development.

We are confident that the insights gained and connections forged during the convening will leave a lasting impact, enriching both personal and professional endeavours. Once again, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your invaluable contributions and unwavering commitment to advancing mental health initiatives within our communities across African higher learning institutions and in the diaspora.



Thank you for your participation

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| 1. African Institute of Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) - Rwanda | 13. University of Cape Town - South Africa |
| 2. University of Rwanda | 14. University of Western Cape - South Africa |
| 3. Carnegie Mellon University - Africa - Rwanda | 15. University of Pretoria - South Africa |
| 4. African Leadership University (ALU) - Rwanda | 16. African Leadership Academy (ALA) - South Africa |
| 5. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology - Ghana | 17. 2iE - Burkina Faso |
| 6. Ashesi University - Ghana | 18. University of Gaston Berger - Senegal |
| 7. Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) - Ghana | 19. University of Gondar - Ethiopia |
| 8. United State International University - Africa (USIU-A)-Kenya | 20. University of Edinburgh - UK |
| 9. World University Service of Canada (WUSC) Technical Partner based in Kenya | 21. Mastercard Foundation Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx) - UK |
| 10. University of Abomey Calavi - Benin | 22. University of Cambridge - UK |
| 11. Makerere University - Uganda | 23. Sciences Po - France |
| 12. Light for the World - Technical Partner based in Uganda | |

■ Background:

Solid Minds is a private mental health clinic based in Kigali and in collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, we work closely with African-based higher education institutions to support student wellness, and amplify and strengthen the capacity of students and staff to address mental health concerns in their communities.

In recent years, Solid Minds has been dedicated to bringing attention to the wellness needs of the students we serve by building strong relationships in our communities, organising wellness workshops, and facilitating the exchange of valuable information for students and staff. These efforts have focused on recognising the strengths and needs of our partners, while emphasising the importance of sustainability and well-being.

To foster peer learning, collaboration, and innovative solutions for mental health challenges, Solid Minds organised the inaugural Partners Learning Convening at the Sheraton Hotel in Kigali, held from March 5th to 8th, 2024. This event provided a safe platform for partners to exchange best practices, engage in discussions on challenges and emerging trends, and establish new collaboration methods. The overarching goal is to fortify Africa's mental health support network, both domestically and within the diaspora, to address the mental health needs and well-being of students.

Looking ahead, Solid Minds is committed to organising more events of this kind to further bolster the support network, facilitate sustainable interventions, and promote continuous peer learning among mental health professionals and the student communities they serve. Additionally, these efforts extend to alumni as they transition into the professional world.



■ Executive Summary:

Solid Minds invited seventeen African and four European-based partners and two technical partners to convene in Kigali for a collaborative learning event. Organised under the theme: “Empower, Collaborate, Thrive: Shaping the Future of Mental Health Support in African Universities”, the convening aimed to stimulate active participation, foster meaningful connections, and facilitate in-depth discussions on partners’ experiences. The overarching goal was to inspire one another and reinforce dedication to their vital work within their respective higher education institutions.

Additionally, the event provided a distinctive platform for mental health advocates from various sectors, including technical partners, university support staff and administrators, Rwanda’s Ministry of Health and Ministry of Youth and Arts, Rwanda Biomedical Centre, and Solid Minds clinical staff, to exchange insights, share experiences, and identify new opportunities for collaboration. The collective efforts are meant to shape the Future of Mental Health Support in African Universities and the diaspora.



■ Pre-Convening Networking Event

The convening commenced with a networking event held on the evening of March 5th, 2024, where participants gathered for dinner and traditional dances. The ambiance was curated to facilitate networking among participants, enabling them to familiarise themselves with one another before engaging in the substantive discussions and breakout sessions scheduled for the following three days.

Also, the evening provided an opportunity for Mr. Sam Munderere, Co-Founder and CEO of Solid Minds, to deliver a warm welcome address and extend gratitude to all participants for their active engagement in the convening.

Welcome Remarks

“Distinguished partners and esteemed guests, a very warm welcome to the convening on mental health support to African University Students here in the beautiful city of Kigali, Rwanda. As the CEO of Solid Minds Counselling Clinic, I am truly honoured to stand before you, united in our shared commitment to addressing mental health challenges faced by African university students. Thank you for responding positively to our invitation. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to the Mastercard Foundation for financially supporting our work. Our continent, with its rich cultures and potential, is home to countless young minds seeking knowledge, growth and a brighter future. Yet, in this pursuit, our students encounter challenges that can significantly impact their mental well-being. From academic pressures and financial constraints to societal expectations and the ongoing global uncertainties, the burdens on students are both diverse and profound.

I hope and anticipate this convening to serve as a crucial platform for dialogue, collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter future for African university students, where mental health is not a silent struggle but a shared concern addressed with compassion and understanding.”

Sam MUNDERERE
Co- Founder & CEO, Solid Minds

A woman with dark skin and braided hair is speaking into a black microphone. She is wearing a white top under a colorful patterned shawl with red, yellow, and black designs. She has a small earring and a bracelet on her left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

Opening Remarks

“ In reflecting on the essence of mental health support in higher education institutions, we must embrace both the personal and institutional dimensions in our diverse African settings. We must ask ourselves what mindful practices must be promoted to create the kind of resilience which honors what we are going through, while building in us the ability to imagine a brighter future, and work towards it.

Indeed, by acknowledging what our bodies and minds need, we shift our perspective to not just provide services in moments of crises, but foster an environment where each individual feels seen, heard, and supported throughout their unique academic journey. It is about nurturing a culture of compassion and understanding, to create environments where the well-being of every member is central to decision-making processes. ”

Hon. Sandrine UMUTONI

*Minister of State for Youth and Arts,
Rwanda*

Convening Proceedings

Over the course of three days, from March 6th to 8th, 2024, the convening provided a platform for in-depth discussions centred on the sharing of experiences and best practices among represented partners. Structured around panel discussions, the convening delved into a wide array of mental health topics, ranging from the complexities of student support services to prioritising staff wellbeing'.

Additionally, the role of non-clinical staff in fostering student success was explored, alongside strategies for nurturing Scholars into successful alumni who contribute meaningfully to their communities. Of particular importance were discussions on fostering a healthy campus environment through Afro-centric approaches.

The convening prioritised peer learning and the strengthening of support networks among participants, a theme built-in into all discussions. Leveraging technology, a hybrid conferencing system allowed for both in-person and online participation, with approximately 100 participants physically present and an additional thirty engaging remotely.

Each day concluded with a wellness activity, such as TRE (Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises), or a guided tour of campuses hosting scholars under the Mastercard Foundation Scholar Program in Kigali. On the final day, participants visited the offices of Solid Minds Counselling Clinic in Kacyiru-Kigali, followed by a visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, a poignant site of remembrance and learning where they paid tribute to the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, more than 250,000 of whom are buried there.

The convening concluded in the afternoon of March 8th, 2024, with an engaging team-building activity that encouraged participants to share insights and exchange appreciation messages. Dr. Darius Gishoma, Mental Health Division Manager of the Rwanda Biomedical Centre, delivered the concluding remarks, commending all participants for their active engagement and advocating for continued collaboration beyond the convening.

■ Introduction

Solid Minds Partners Learning Convening was organised with the aim to foster spaces where partners can centralise, highlight and prioritise an African-centred approach to addressing the wellness needs of students and their respective institutions as a whole. Through these spaces, partners were invited to share their knowledge and expertise, create a wellness resource network and inspire each other as we shape the future of mental health support on the continent.

Among the objectives of this convening included:

01 Build a Stronger Support and Resource Network

By intentionally bringing together a diverse group of participants, the aim was to strengthen the support network within the African mental health community.

02 Develop a Database of African Expertise in the Mental Health and Wellness Space

with the hope to initiate the creation of a comprehensive database for African expertise in the field of mental health, with a specific focus on students, scholars and alumni.

03 Inspire Collaboration and Innovation:

By sharing experiences and best practices, the convening aspired to inspire one another to build, amplify and refine mental health support strategies.

04 Promote Sustainability

the intention was to create sustainability through the establishment of robust networks and support systems

05 Enhance Staff Well-being

the plan was to incorporate staff support and wellness activities, recognising the importance of well-being for all involved.

06 Discuss Expectations for the Next Steps

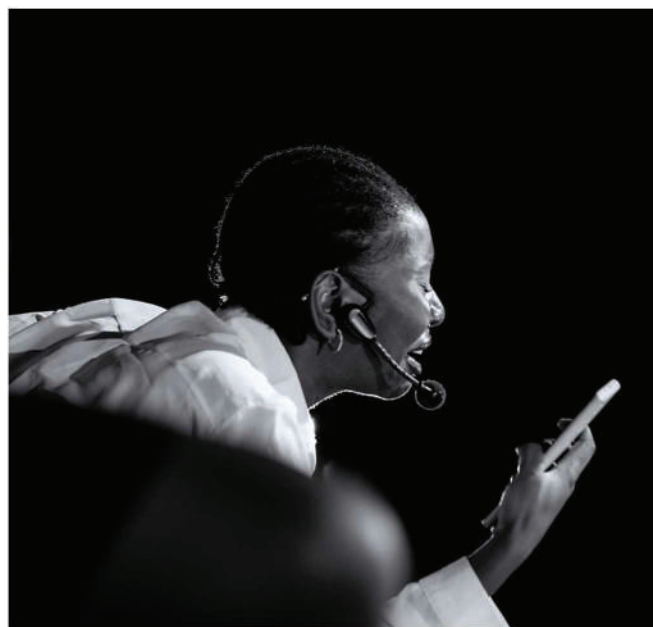
The convening had to provide a platform for participants to voice their expectations and suggestions for the future, guiding the next phase of our collective efforts.

For three days, the convening participants collaboratively worked together to achieve the above objectives.

To elicit the discussions, the inviting session into the convening proceedings was about an artistic performance play about mental health and wellness entitled “ring ring”. The play was performed by **Mashirika** (a performing arts and media corporation mostly known across Africa and beyond for using theatre for social development) and it intimately explored the complexities of mental health in a digital age.

The play suggested the protagonist through a journey of self-discovery with the chorus backing him/her in a collective plea for understanding. The play challenged societal norms and advocated for empathy, compassion, and genuine human connection faced with the reality of growing mental health challenges in our communities.

“Ring-Ring” called for self-examination and prompted the convening participants to confront their own perceptions of mental illness. It urged solidarity and support for those who silently suffer, and require communities to respond to their call, however silent.



Mashirika Artist performing at the convening

■ Introductory Presentation: Key Insights from Solid Minds

Exploring the Complexities of Student Support Services



1. Stigma Reduction:

Recognizing stigma as a significant barrier to seeking help, we initially focused on mental health awareness workshops.



2. Capacity Building:

Initially, our aim was to contribute to various partner organisations by supporting their staff members and enhancing their mental health care systems. The goal was to empower them to effectively support their university communities.



3. Direct Services:

Anticipating offering one-on-one counselling services for students seeking help, we initially expected a relatively small number of students at local partners in Rwanda to access these services.

These efforts have undeniably made a significant impact, providing us with the opportunity to explore available resources at each partner organisation and identify areas for collaboration.

As a result of the initial stages of our collaborations with our partners across Africa, we've built strong relationships, facilitated numerous psycho-educational workshops, and contributed to increased mental health awareness through stories and assessments with students from various university partners.

However, this journey is not devoid of challenges. While some students acknowledge the importance of seeking help, they encounter difficulties in prioritising it within their demanding schedules. There is a genuine concern that allocating time for seeking assistance might result in falling behind and worsening their struggles, thereby creating a dilemma for them.

Additionally, Solid Minds observed that certain university partners lack dedicated mental health care services, resulting in the absence or limited availability of counselling services and intentional community-based mental health support. Despite this, specific staff members, either due to their roles or the comfort students feel with them, become recipients of heavy stories about struggles. These individuals undertake substantial clinical work without formal counselling titles, and their unwavering support and care for students deserve heartfelt appreciation and acknowledgment.





On the other hand, in some universities equipped with student support services (clinical and non-clinical), students sometimes hesitate to seek help due to concerns about confidentiality. The fear revolves around how their shared information will be safeguarded, with worries that confiding in school staff members might lead to the sharing of personal stories within campus connections.

Students express concerns that this disclosure could be used against them by staff members, potentially jeopardising their scholarships and subjecting them to perceptions of weakness due to revealed mental health challenges.

Navigating these challenges in providing mental health services has underscored the importance of adapting our approaches to accommodate cultural nuances, busy student schedules, and other concerns. Yet, we can't also assume that all our scholars share identical vulnerabilities. Some carry additional layers of vulnerability, including those with disabilities, individuals holding refugee status or experiencing displacement, and those originating from dysfunctional families or lacking parental figures in their early lives.

As we continue our work in this area, we aim to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for students to seek the support they need without fear of judgement or repercussions. Deliberations from this convening should undoubtedly resolve into practical solutions to address these challenges.

Recognizing mutual learning opportunities and the potential to co-create spaces where partners can share best practices and challenges, we've shifted our focus from the concept of "**Capacity Building**" to "**Capacity Bridging.**"

In practical terms, this transition signifies our continued desire not to prescribe solutions but to engage in co-creating, co-planning, and exploring collaborative work. While we understand that this may sometimes cause confusion, with Solid Minds being perceived as the expert expected to provide solutions, we firmly believe that sustainability is more guaranteed through collaboration.



Our interactions have highlighted how much staff members, not necessarily mental health professionals, contribute to healing and prevention within the university community. This emphasizes the importance of engaging from an equal level, with everyone bringing their perspectives and experiences to shape the work we do in supporting university communities.

This sentiment was the essence of why Solid Minds organized this convening, and we anticipated positive deliberations, which could be translated into viable solutions to improve the mental health and wellness of students and alumni in various communities represented.





Insights from Panel Discussions and Parallel Sessions

■ How they happened:

Substantive and engaging discussions unfolded across various formats during the event. Panel discussions served as a platform for representatives from diverse partner organisations to impart insights and best practices regarding the support of students' mental health and well-being. This format facilitated interactive engagement, allowing the audience to ask questions and offer commentary on the panellists' presentations.

Additionally, participants engaged in smaller, more focused discussions within parallel sessions. These sessions revolved around specific thematic areas, requiring participants to select groups aligned with their interests. Each parallel session featured discussions exploring various topics pertinent to students' mental health and wellness considerations.

Both panel discussions and parallel sessions aimed to foster the exchange of experiences, encompassing best practices and effective strategies, and challenges encountered in supporting students' mental health and well-being on campuses.

Parallel sessions, in particular, provided ample time for in-depth deliberation, enabling group members to contemplate innovative approaches for addressing existing challenges. Highlighted below are key themes that emerged from the discussions:

- The Current State of Mental Health and Student Support in Institutions Across the African Continent and What It Means to Have an Afro-Centric Approach
- Exploring the Complexities of Student Support Services
- Walking in Their Shoes - A Student's Journey
- Successful Approaches to Student Support
- How to Foster a Healthy Campus Using Afro-Centric
- Supporting Scholars in Becoming Successful Alumni Who Give Back

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM
AFRO-CENTRIC APPROACH WALKING IN THEIR SHOES
ESTABLISHING WELLNESS CENTERS
STUDENTS WHO ARE REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLES
MENTAL HEALTH
SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES STUDENT SUPPORT
STUDENT'S JOURNEY
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES COMPLEXITIES OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
HEALTHY CAMPUS USING AFRO-CENTRIC
BECOMING SUCCESSFUL ALUMNI WHO GIVE BACK SUPPORTING ONLINE LEARNERS
A CRITICAL ROLE FOR NON-CLINICAL STAFF HIGH RISK STUDENTS
STUDENT SUCCESS
AFRICAN SCHOLARS ABROAD



- Best Practices In Establishing Wellness Centers :
A Strategic View of Mental Health in Decision Making
- Best Approaches to Supporting Online Learners
- Non-Clinical Staff: A Critical Role for Student Success
- Mental Health Providers: Creating A Supportive Ecosystem
- The Role of Institutions in Supporting African Scholars Abroad
- Supporting Students Who are Refugees and Displaced Peoples
- Hearing Voices: Exploring Best Approaches to Supporting High Risk Students
- Supporting Students with Disabilities

■ Insights from the discussions:

Drawing from the rich fabric of partner experiences, the invaluable exchange of best practices, and the candid exploration of challenges during the panel discussions and breakout sessions, we have distilled the essence of these conversations into four comprehensive sections. Additionally, we present a dedicated segment interpreting the realities encountered by students in the diaspora. The following sections outline the main insights gathered from the discussions:

1. Stigma and Access Barriers:



Perceived Stigma: Stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant barrier, with many students hesitant to seek help due to fear of judgement or discrimination.



Cultural Norms: Societal expectations and cultural attitudes towards mental health contribute to the perpetuation of stigma, particularly regarding gender roles and help-seeking behaviours.



Marginalised Populations: Students with disabilities and Refugees and Displaced Persons (RDPs) face even more struggles related to stigma and access to support services.



Awareness Campaigns: Efforts to combat stigma through targeted awareness campaigns and education programs are crucial for shifting societal perceptions and promoting acceptance.



Accessibility Challenges: Limited access to mental health services, including financial barriers and insufficient resources, further aggravates the challenge of addressing mental health needs on campus.



One of the biggest lessons I've learned is the importance of involving Mastercard Foundation Scholars in our solutions. Understanding the context is crucial for providing appropriate mental health and wellness support. We must also explore innovative approaches discussed during this convening.

We look forward to engaging and collaborating to ensure our scholars receive the best care possible when it comes to mental health and well-being.

Ian MWANGI

*Higher Education Inclusion Coordinator
DREEM Project WUSC, Kenya*



We have specific context problems, and as we deal with context specific issues we also have to find context specific solutions.

Prof. Anne Marie KAGWESAGE

Director, Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, University of Rwanda

2. Support Challenges:



Staff Training: Equipping university staff with adequate training and resources is essential for effectively supporting students' mental health needs and providing appropriate interventions.



Resource Strain: Institutions face resource constraints, including limited staffing and funding, which impact the capacity to meet the growing demand for mental health services.



Integrated Support Systems: Developing integrated support systems that encompass both clinical and non-clinical staff is crucial for providing holistic care and addressing the diverse needs of students.



Collaborative Partnerships: Collaborating with external organisations and mental health professionals can augment university support systems and enhance the range of services available to students.

Some of the key insights and learnings from the Solid Minds Partners Learning Convening 2024 are that strengthened higher education institutions are critical not only in providing quality teaching and learning, but also in nurturing the next generation of African leaders by providing innovative wrap-around support, such as cultural context mental health support. They cannot do this alone; the role of health ecosystem workers becomes quite imperative.

Emmanuella Alimlim
Mastercard Foundation Program Partner
Scholars Program Network



We learned here how we can support students and administrative staff in terms of mental health. It is important that at the institutional level there is support for mental health and I thank Solid Minds for the opportunity that was offered to us to come to this convening.

Houessou YELINDO
Vice Chancellor, University of Abomey
Calavi, Benin

3. Increased Awareness of Mental Health Concerns:



Prevalence of Disorders: The prevalence of mental health disorders among university students is increasing, influenced by factors such as academic pressure, social stressors, and global events like the COVID-19



Student Concerns: A significant percentage of students express concerns about their mental well-being, highlighting the urgent need for proactive intervention strategies and support mechanisms.



Identifying Vulnerable Groups: Understanding the factors contributing to student vulnerability, such as socio-economic background, cultural factors, and pre-existing mental health conditions, is essential for targeted interventions.



Crisis Response: Developing crisis response protocols and mental health crisis intervention teams can help universities effectively manage mental health emergencies and provide timely support to students in distress.

What we've learned here is, first, the importance of collaboration, openness, and enriching ourselves with our diverse specializations across disciplines. This is crucial for effectively addressing prevention, support, and case management.

Another key point to emphasize is the significance of technology and platforms that can greatly assist us in our work.

Additionally, we must not overlook the importance of building the capacity of various stakeholders.

This includes not only students within program frameworks but also administrative staff and teachers involved in the mental health support initiatives.

Fatou Diop Sall

Social Affairs for Mastercard Foundation Scholar Program, University Gaston Berger, Senegal



4. Holistic Approaches:

Cultural Sensitivity: Adopting culturally sensitive approaches to mental health care, grounded in African perspectives and traditions, can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of interventions.

Multi-Factorial Understanding at Individual Level: Recognizing the multi-faceted nature of mental health challenges and addressing underlying factors such as socio-economic disparities, systemic inequalities, and cultural dynamics.

Comprehensive Institutional Insight: Recognize the diverse elements that institutions need to take into consideration to enhance the wellbeing of students and staff, including socio-economic resources, campus culture, campus size, geopolitical context, student involvement, and available facilities.

Community Engagement: Fostering community engagement and involvement in mental health initiatives, including peer support programs, community dialogues, and cultural events, can promote a sense of belonging and collective well-being.

Intersectionality: Considering the intersectionality of identities and experiences, including race, gender, sexuality, and disability, is essential for developing inclusive and equitable mental health policies and practices.

African-centric approaches to mental health, embracing indigenous wisdom coupled with available knowledge in psychology, not only acknowledge the rich diversity of our cultural landscapes but also offer pathways to healing and resilience that resonate deeply with our communities.

It's time we embrace these holistic approaches, weaving them into the fabric of our university support systems, and nurturing environments that honor our heritage, uplift our spirits, and empower our students to thrive.

Anele Siswana

*Mental Health Advocate
South Africa*

5. For Students in diaspora:

Navigating Cultural Transitions: Students living abroad grapple with navigating cultural transitions, balancing the assimilation into unfamiliar environments while preserving ties to their cultural roots. These discussions emphasised the necessity of tailored support services to assist students in addressing the complexities of cultural adjustment and identity exploration.

Cultural Relevance in Mental Health Services: There is a pressing need for mental health services tailored to the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students in diaspora. Recognizing the diverse cultural beliefs within these communities, initiatives that offer culturally sensitive counselling, support groups, and outreach programs are essential to ensure equitable access to mental health support.

Navigating Family Expectations and Financial Strain: Students in diaspora often contend with the weight of family expectations, including the assumption that studying abroad equates to financial prosperity. This misconception adds pressure on students who may already face limited financial resources and the reality of high living expenses. Balancing these expectations with the financial strain of tuition fees, accommodation costs, and daily living expenses can significantly impact students' mental well-being. Implementing targeted interventions, such as financial literacy programs and support networks, can help students manage these pressures and ensure equitable access to resources for their academic success.



■ Recommendations:

At the heart of university mental health initiatives lies the complex journey of students as they navigate the academic, social, and personal landscapes of higher education. Understanding this journey entails recognizing the diverse experiences, challenges, and aspirations that shape each student's path. From the pressures of academic performance to the complexities of identity exploration, students face many stressors that impact their mental well-being.

Concurrently, centralising staff wellness emerges as a critical component in cultivating supportive environments. Staff across different institutions have identified stress, overwhelming caseloads and staff burnout as primary issues that negatively impact their daily experience of work. By prioritising the mental health and well-being of university staff and approaching staff through a holistic lens, institutions not only ensure the availability of empathetic and capable support systems, but also foster a culture of care that permeates the entire campus community. In this interdependent relationship between student journey and staff wellness, universities can lay the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities that prioritise mental health for all. The following are key recommendations which rose from the convening discussions:

1. Strengthen Anti-Stigma Campaigns: Launch comprehensive campaigns to challenge mental health stigma, engaging students, staff, and the broader community in dialogue and education initiatives to promote understanding and acceptance about mental health. Through these campaigns we will highlight the recognition that struggle is a universal experience and promoting positive mental health is a charge for all.

2. Enhance Staff Mental Health Awareness and care through Training and Support: Implement regular training programs for university staff (both clinical and non-clinical) to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to recognize and respond to their own mental health needs effectively. Provide ongoing support mechanisms, such as counselling services and peer support groups, to bolster staff resilience and thus staff and student well-being.

3. Invest in Mental Health Resources - conventional and unconventional: Allocate sufficient resources, including funding and staffing, to expand mental health services on campus. Prioritise investments in counselling centres, crisis intervention teams, and outreach programs to ensure accessible and high-quality support for students.

4. Promote Integrated Support Systems: Foster collaboration between different departments and units within the university to develop integrated support systems that address students' holistic needs. Encourage interdisciplinary teamwork and communication to provide seamless and comprehensive care. Only by recognizing that mental health has a direct correlation to academic success, will institutions then integrate mental health support services into their ecosystems.

5. Prioritise Crisis Response Protocols: Develop clear and actionable protocols for responding to mental health crises on campus. Establish dedicated crisis intervention teams, train staff members in crisis management techniques, and ensure that students have access to immediate support and assistance when needed.

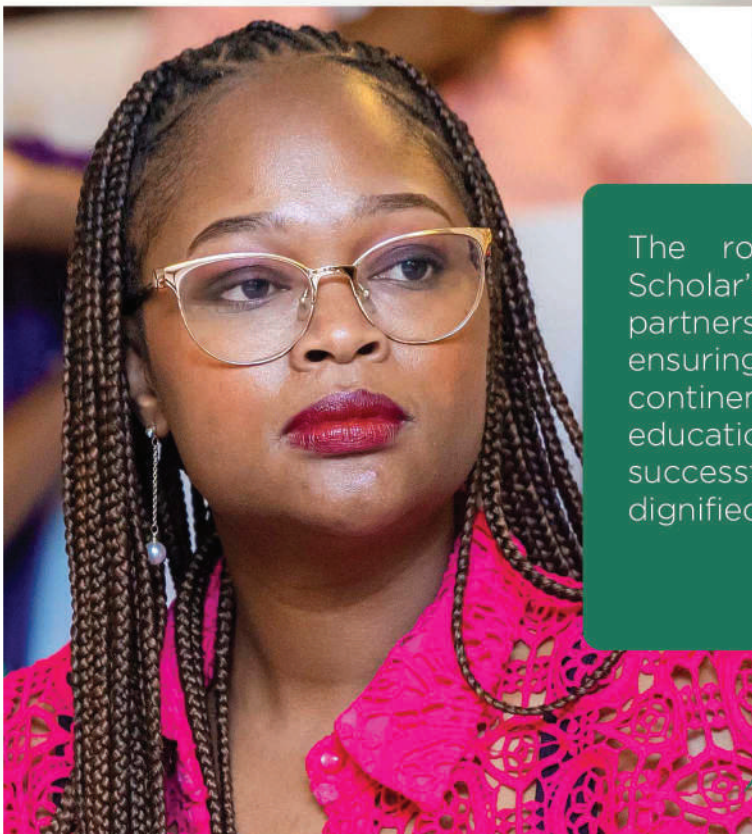
6. Culturally Sensitive and African Centered Approaches: Incorporate cultural sensitivity into all mental health initiatives, ensuring that services and resources are accessible and relevant to students from diverse backgrounds. Engage with cultural and community leaders to co-create programs that respect and honour students' cultural identities and beliefs.

7. Expand Peer Support Programs: Scale up peer support programs and peer-led initiatives to create a network of support among students. Provide training and resources for peer mentors and advocates, empowering them to offer empathetic listening, practical guidance, and emotional support to their peers.

8. Improve Accessibility of Services: Identify and address barriers to accessing mental health services, such as cost, stigma, and logistical challenges. Implement strategies to increase awareness of available resources, reduce financial barriers, and improve the physical accessibility of support centers.

9. Collaborate with Internal and External Stakeholders: Forge partnerships with student lead initiatives, parents, community organisations, mental health professionals, and government agencies to expand the range of mental health services available to students. Leverage internal and external resources and expertise to enhance university-based initiatives and support holistic student well-being.

10. Empower Alumni Networks: Engage alumni as mentors, advocates, and supporters of current students' mental health and well-being. Establish alumni-led initiatives, such as mentorship programs and fundraising campaigns, to strengthen the university's support network and promote a culture of lifelong care and connection.



The role of all Mastercard Foundation Scholar's Program partners and technical partners becomes very critical not only in ensuring that young people from the African continent and beyond access high-quality education, but also they can transition successfully in and outside of the institution to dignified work and fulfilling life.

Emmanuella Alimlim
Mastercard Foundation Program Partner
Scholars Program Network

■ In particular, Solid Minds was recommended to:

Establish a Resource Hub: Develop a centralised online resource hub that consolidates information, tools, and best practices related to mental health support in university settings. This platform can serve as a valuable repository for organisers, attendees, and stakeholders to access materials, share insights, and collaborate on future initiatives.

Create a Community of Practice: Facilitate the formation of a community of practice comprised of mental health professionals, university staff, students, and other stakeholders committed to advancing mental health support in higher education. This community can serve as a forum for ongoing dialogue, knowledge exchange, and collaborative problem-solving, fostering collective learning and innovation.

Offer Continuing Education Programs: Develop continuing education programs and professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of mental health practitioners and university staff. These programs can provide advanced training, specialised workshops, and certifications to enhance participants' skills, expand their knowledge base, and ensure the delivery of high-quality mental health care services.

■ For Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program:

Support Pilot Initiatives: Allocate funding support for initiatives that pilot innovative approaches to mental health support in university settings. These initiatives can test new interventions, technologies, or service delivery models, allowing for evidence-based evaluation and scaling of successful strategies.

Invest in Sustainable Initiatives: Prioritise investments in initiatives that demonstrate sustainability and scalability, ensuring that mental health support efforts are not only effective in the short term but also resilient and adaptable to future challenges and changing contexts.

Promote Cross-Sector Collaboration: Encourage cross-sector collaboration and partnership-building among grantees, universities, government agencies, and community organisations working to address mental health issues. Foster opportunities for knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration to maximise impact and leverage resources for collective action.

■ Challenges:

The convening witnessed a significant turnout of in-person participants, with approximately 100 participants present on-site. However, challenges arose from the hybrid format, impacting the engagement of the remaining participants who joined online (around 30 people). Notably, these virtual participants faced difficulties due to the absence of simultaneous translation and limited interaction during breakout sessions, hindering their effective involvement.

Integrating simultaneous translation for online participants wasn't possible. However, those who attended in person were provided with such services, which enabled them to actively participate into the discussions.

Additionally, the condensed duration of the event, spanning three days, proved somewhat restrictive in thoroughly addressing the diverse range of topics discussed. Several attendees suggested that a longer timeframe, ideally five working days, would have facilitated a more comprehensive exploration of the issues at hand. These challenges underscore the necessity of optimising accessibility and ensuring sufficient time for robust discussions in future convenings.

Solid Minds is committed to addressing these concerns in future events. Despite these challenges, we remain dedicated to ensuring that all participants, both in-person and online, have access to the valuable insights and discussions presented during the convening. Through the dissemination of the convening report and updates shared on our social media platforms, we aim to provide online participants with a meaningful understanding of the proceedings they may have missed.



■ Conclusion

As we embark on this journey together, let us keep in mind the ripple effect of our actions. By prioritising mental health support in higher education settings, we will not only shape the trajectory of individual student lives, but contribute to the collective prosperity and progress of our beautiful country – Rwanda.

Hon. Sandrine UMUTONI
*Minister of State for Youth and Arts,
Rwanda*

In conclusion, Solid Minds extends sincere gratitude to all partners for their active participation and engagement, which have been integral to shaping the discussions and outcomes of this convening on mental health support for African university students and those in diaspora.

We are profoundly thankful to the Mastercard Foundation for their generous funding, which has been fundamental in facilitating this gathering and underscores their unwavering dedication to advancing mental health initiatives in higher education. Additionally, we commend our team for their exceptional organisation and commitment to fostering collaboration and innovation throughout the convening.

As we reflect on the invaluable insights gained and the actionable recommendations put forth, Solid Minds recognizes the vital importance of continued collaboration and dialogue among partners. Therefore, we pledge to advocate for future convenings and commit to ongoing collaborations to ensure that the future of mental health in African university students and diaspora is effectively shaped and sustained. Together, let us remain steadfast in our efforts to create supportive environments that prioritise the holistic well-being of all students, empowering them to thrive academically and beyond.





The Solid Minds team pulled off one of our very first learning events with our scholars' program networking partners. We were able to gather to talk about mental health and wellbeing, the challenges that our scholars and alumni are facing, and it was really wonderful to have scholars and alumni present in the room to share their experiences with us. So overall impression is that it was a fantastic event.

Nura Yunus

*Mastercard Foundation Lead, Onboarding
Inclusion and Wellbeing*

Although this is the last day of the convening, our partnership has to go beyond today. The discussions and actions needed to improve and support the mental well-being of scholars and alumni in our respective countries have to continue. On behalf of the Ministry of Health and Rwanda Biomedical Centre, I would like to thank Solid Minds and the Mastercard Foundation, and all partners here present, for the organisation of this such an insightful convening.

Dr. Darius Gishoma

Division Manager, Rwanda Biomedical Centre



End!