



Scholars attending the Leadership congress 2018 held at Namugongo Martyrs Senior Secondary School recently. Photos by Shamim Saad

How Mastercard Foundation scholarship changed Onzia's life

By Vivian Agaba

After completing her Senior Four, Judith Eyoa Onzia had no hope of going further with her education. She knew this was the end of her education journey.

She had lost her father. Her mother, who was a peasant could not single-handedly take care of her seven siblings, along with 10 other dependants.

To make matters worse, towards the end of every term as examination would get closer, the school would send her home for school fees.

"This lowered my esteem so bad that I had no hope of going further with my education. I was stranded," she says.

"I knew my education journey would end in Senior Four despite being among the top five in my class always," she added.

But as luck would have it, one afternoon, the school headmistress where Onzia was studying from called her and informed her about the scholarship opportunities at BRAC.

Without hesitation, Onzia began chasing and applying for the scholarship and lucky enough, she got it the very first time she applied.

"The moment it was confirmed I had won the scholarship, I promised to study hard and have since then been on the top of my class," she says.

First scholarship

She got the scholarship in 2013.

joined Makerere High School Migadde, performed well and was able to join Makerere University still on MCF scholarship where she pursued a bachelors degree in Economics and will be graduating in 2019.

"My next step is pursuing a Master's degree in economics and I am looking for a scholarship to go and study. I want to be among the people who make policies which economically influence this country.

She says the journey has so far been so good. She has taken on leadership roles such as chairperson of the debate club.

She also travelled to UK to attend the university summer school and has also

developed connections and speaks on conventions.

"My esteem is high. I am always looking out for opportunities to speak to young people who are in bad situations like I used to be, to encourage them to have hope, dream big, always do their best because no one knows what will happen tomorrow or who is watching their story."



Onzia, one of the beneficiaries of BRAC Scholars Programme

Adolescents get safe spaces

By 17, Monica (not real name) has overcome more than many people do in a lifetime. At the tender age of 12, she was raped by four men.

"My mother was preparing dinner and realised that we had no salt, so I was sent to the nearby shop to buy some. As I returned, I met a group of boys who gang-raped me. I was left unconscious."

Monica was a victim of gender-based violence, one of the most rampant abuses of human rights that is sweeping across the country, and the continent at large. In Africa, one out of five girls have been sexually abused in their childhood, directly impacting their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Monica, like very few victims, sought help and was referred to a hospital one week later. On taking a pregnancy test, she was informed that she was pregnant.

"At this point, my life turned dark. As my pregnancy wore on, I became the talk of the village. My friends deserted me, my mother began torturing me psychologically, and I was forced to drop out of school. I thought my only way out was suicide. I had become an outcast, and somehow thought the pregnancy was my fault."

Forced to make a life for herself and her newborn,

Monica began doing small jobs to earn an allowance. She was making less than sh2,000 a day and it was not enough for both her and her child.

"Foolishly, I took solace in a man who wooed me with petty cash and gifts. I was ignorant, naive and vulnerable and ended up pregnant again. The man I thought was my refuge ran away upon hearing the news of my pregnancy. I was abandoned again."

One million girls under 15 give birth every year in Africa, and Monica's story has been echoed across the globe. BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) programme is allowing adolescent girls to learn and tackle critical social issues including sexual and reproductive health, early marriage, gender-based violence, all within safe spaces.

Monica joined the programme after the birth of her second child, and slowly she has become a more hopeful individual.

"I know later this year, I am going to get my savings from this SACCOS and I will start my clothes business. I know I will one day make enough money to return to school and complete my primary education. No man can deceive me again," she says, with a smile on her face.