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Tujenge News

Cohort Four: Tujenge Scholars Program (Class of '21)

Tujenge welcomes its fourth cohort to the family! Spring term began in late January with our biggest cohort so far of thirty students. Each day, they attend two English classes, one math class, and a computer literacy training class. In addition to the classes, students are encouraged to communicate exclusively in English, which is further driving language improvement and students' confidence to express themselves.

Scholars represent a diverse geographic cross-section of Burundi, from the renowned Lycée du Saint Esprit in bustling Bujumbura, to the remote Petit Séminaire St Pie X de Muyinga, more than six hours away by bus. Tujenge has brought this extraordinary group of young scholars together, and they now have the unique opportunity to engage with new ideas and challenge one another to grow.

This is not only our biggest cohort so far, but also our most selective and most diverse. Last year, we received 380 applications from the strongest candidates in Burundi, compared to 220 applications from the previous year. We had our work cut out trying to select from such a talented pool. We continue to prioritize gender balance in our cohort and have recruited more scholars from Burundi's rural population. Both are important because: (1) Burundi is one of the most rural populations around the world, and (2) Burundi's rural women constitute the marginalized of the marginalized. By including the two vastly neglected demographics, Tujenge is pushing the debate on the necessity for inclusion and diversity as a tool for nation building.



Strike a pose: Tujenge Class of 2021



Nina '21, Charles '21, and Noe '20 share their vision of Burundi in 10 years during one of the Orientation Week sessions.

Orientation Week, January 2020

Orientation at Tujenge is a week-long program of social and academic activities designed to introduce students to life and study at their new learning environment. The activities of the inaugural week range from introductory classes in math fundamentals and English, to teambuilding activities that better acquaint us to each other.

Orientation week culminated in a fun-filled afternoon at the grounds of Paroisse Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Gihosha, a few meters from our Tujenge premise. We played different games like volleyball, basketball, and two egg games: the creatively resourceful “Egg Drop Game” and “Egg Relay.” We all had a lot of fun getting to know each other better, and it was a great way to start off the academic year 2020-2021.



Spring Classes, Cohort Three

In January, scholars from Cohort 3 returned to campus for their final term of the program. Classes prioritize college-readiness and community engagement, culminating in a series of academic final projects.

The Cohort Three students attend seminar-style classes five days a week. Lead instructors Nganyu Nformi and Brad Gasser guide students through discussions on various college-level courses to develop the crucial skills of analysis and argument needed to succeed in their undergraduate studies. Mr. Nformi leads a writing seminar, while Mr. Gasser leads classes in programming, calculus and modern science.



Etienne, Tujenge co-founder and Executive Director, is a Gates Cambridge scholar pursuing a Ph.D. in Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge.

Faculty Highlight

Our co-founder and Executive Director, Etienne Mashuli, was recently named a Gates Cambridge Scholar and is pursuing his Ph.D. in politics and international studies at the University of Cambridge. During his studies, he will “...[look] into the experiences of a vastly marginalised group in the African Great Lakes known as the Batwa. [He is] interested in how colonial and neo-colonial notions of eugenics have turned them into a de-politicized group, one which has no say on its political, economic and social reality.” (See his [profile in the Gates Cambridge website](#).)

His undergraduate alma mater, North Central College, wrote [a succinct piece](#) on this achievement. True to his passion for inclusivity and equality, Etienne talks of his vision for the Tujenge Scholars Program: “Upsetting the status quo and creating opportunities for those living at the periphery is my lifelong calling...It is nothing less than a miracle for these young students to transition from Burundi to top institutions in North America. The goal is that this group of young leaders will be responsible for Africa's transformation.”

As a program, we congratulate Etienne on this opportunity and wish him the very best in this journey.



Mastercard Scholars: Olivier, Becky, Richard, Hussein, Thaddée, Vumilia, and Snella.

College Acceptances from Cohort Three

While we are still waiting for regular decisions, our students have already been accepted into various schools spread out in 4 continents. In North America, our students will go to Hamilton, Lafayette, Marist, Middlebury, Smith, Swarthmore, Trinity, and Vassar; in Africa, they will study in Academic City College (Ghana), Africa Leadership College (Mauritius), Africa University (Zimbabwe), Al Akhawayn (Morocco), and Strathmore University (Kenya); in Europe and Asia, our students will learn in Sorbonne University (France) and Ashoka University (India).

The amount of scholarships that our scholars have received so far are in excess of \$2.8 million. Additionally, 8 of our students have been selected for the prestigious Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program and will be attending their orientation in July at the Africa Leadership College in Mauritius.

News and Media Highlight



Wendell and Etienne, passionate about the future of Africa, put into context PM Trudeau's recent tour to the continent.

In mid-February, Wendell and Etienne wrote [an opinion piece in The Globe and Mail](#) on Prime Minister Trudeau's recent African campaign tour. Mr. Trudeau has expressed his bid to chair the United Nations Security Council, which will be voted on in June on 190 odd countries – 54 of which are African states. The PM visited Ethiopia and Senegal, where he attended a weekend session of the African Union in the former country, advancing conflict resolution and economic security.

Wendell and Etienne, however, question the sincerity of Canada's commitment to promoting human rights and inclusive governance by working with regimes that have questionable track records on human rights. In their own words: "Canada cannot expect dictators, who have no accountability, to champion women's rights, let alone the rule of law." They point out a common misconception about the prosperity of African economies translating to quality of life improvements at the grassroots level: "Although Africa's middle class is growing and living standards are slowly improving, many Africans remain poor. They are subjected to de facto economic caste that keeps them in a perpetual state of living hand-to-mouth without any viable means of achieving upward mobility."

Rather than paying lip-service to the cause of "liberal internationalism...rooted in moral authority", Canada should instead "champion entrepreneurship and innovation... [in] addition to empowering women and girls and promoting democratic values – such as the rule of law, freedom of speech and of the press, and ethnic and religious pluralism."

COVID-19 Response



In light of the rapid spread of COVID-19 throughout East Africa, and despite the lack of confirmed cases in Burundi, we have made the decision to suspend physical classes when we return from spring break next week. As scheduled, students will take the week of March 23 as vacation. However, classes for the weeks of March 30 and April 6 will be conducted remotely, with classes interacting over WhatsApp rather than in-person. Teaching staff are working to develop lesson plans for this new instruction medium, thinking of radical new ideas to continue to facilitate meaningful "e-classroom" interactions.



Tujenge is in touch with our alumni the world over, monitoring how COVID-19 has disrupted their learning.

Student preparation to deal with health crises of all types has been underway since the beginning of classes in January, with staff emphasizing the importance of good handwashing practice and limiting unnecessary physical contact with others. Students understand the importance of social distancing, while also the need to fight against the marginalization that can occur toward the sick in our societies. We expect that our Tujenge Scholars will help to combat misinformation throughout their communities, spreading verified and helpful information throughout their networks.

Tujenge Africa Foundation is also in contact with all of our alumni, helping them to navigate the uncertainty of closing schools, travel restrictions, and remote study. Scholars studying abroad are not, by and large, best served by returning to their families to navigate the crisis, which means they are mostly staying at their universities and sheltering in place. We are working with students whose universities are mandating full student evacuation to ensure that they have clear plans of action to get home or find another suitable place to spend the remainder of the term.

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