

Mastercard launches 2020 Girls4Tech programme to STEM tech skills shortage

Ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March, Mastercard launched its 2020 South African Girls4Tech programme at Phoenix College in Johannesburg to inspire and prepare 110 girls aged between nine and 11 for careers in science and technology. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills are still the most in-demand jobs in the South African job market, yet only 13% of graduates in STEM fields are women.



A hands-on inquiry-based STEM programme, Girls4Tech incorporates Mastercard's expertise in payments technology and innovation, and includes topics such as algorithms, digital convergence and cryptology. Mastercard employees serve as mentors and role models as they guide participants through practical and fun exercises.

"Driving inclusion, and equal opportunity are key priorities at Mastercard," says Suzanne Morel, Country Manager at Mastercard South Africa. "Through our Girls4Tech programme, we are committed to developing a strong pipeline of talent by encouraging girls to embrace the subjects that will prepare them for the workforce of the future, while helping to reduce the shortage of STEM skills that are needed to boost South Africa's economy.

"STEM skills are not only critical in giving women a leg up in the job market, but they can also help to boost their earning potential. This is important if we are to close the gender pay gap."

By providing real life and hands-on activities for each concept, Mastercard volunteers show young girls that being friendly, enthusiastic, mathematical, artistic, scientific, logical and even creative are all skills that connect to a STEM career.

"A lot of girls believe that they are not cut out for technology careers and need more confidence. They need to have good role models so they can see that they can do it too," says Morel.

While Girls4Tech inspires young girls to build the skills they need in STEM to become problem-solvers and the leaders of tomorrow, it also aims to ensure that women have a voice in the development of the products and services of the future.

According to Nielsen, women wield the buying power in South Africa, with 60% the primary purchaser within South African households, while 71% are responsible for grocery shopping. And their influence is still to grow as 21 million female consumers are expected in the local market by 2025.

“How can we possibly create products for everyone if we don’t have representation of women in the decision-making, engineering and innovation processes? It is critical that women have a seat at the table, so that we can design solutions that better meet their needs. By creating a world with women in mind, and women involved, we can unlock limitless possibilities for us all,” says Morel.

Since its launch in April 2014 in the United States, Girls4Tech has reached more than 500,000 girls in 27 countries, including over 1000 girls in South Africa. Mastercard has further committed to reach 1 million girls globally by 2025. Additional programmes will be rolled out to schools in Johannesburg and Cape Town later this year.

To learn more about the programme, please visit the [Girls4Tech webpage](#).

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