

"EVEN SMALL ACTIONS CAN HAVE A GREAT RIPPLE EFFECT"



Zipporah Gakuu is a first-year student and part of the first cohort of Mastercard Foundation scholars at Sciences Po. From Kenya to her first steps on campus to today, her commitment to giving back to society and defending women and children's rights is growing everyday.

You are now in your second semester of your studies at Sciences Po. What were your first impressions when you arrived?

My first semester was initially a bit of a hurdle due to the language barrier and the different climate. Today, my French has improved drastically and I am more adjusted to the weather, considering it was my first winter experience!

What have you learned so far that has changed how you apprehend your career goals?

I have learned that anything is attainable as long as you put your all into whatever it is you want.

Have you gotten involved in any clubs, athletics or other student life activities on campus? What have these experiences brought you?

I am a member of the SASA Association on campus, which is an association that focuses on African issues. As a member of the Logistics pole, I am immersed and engaged in African issues by discussing and debating with fellow African intellectuals, but also by coming up with possible solutions to try and act on them. This has enlightened me on the whole scope of possibilities for the African continent to overcome its challenges through unity. I also joined the Amnesty International in Reims and AISEC. Through these associations, I have been able to express my opinion and standpoints on different issues facing humanity. I have become more aware of various human rights issues and their violations. It has encouraged me to not remain silenced whenever these violations occur, and it has made me realize that even small actions such as signing petitions can have a great ripple effect.

After high school, you volunteered at the Child Vision Support Foundation, helping disadvantaged young women access sanitary products. How did this experience shape your aspirations?

I attended a public primary school in Naivasha, Kenya. At thirteen, most of my female classmates were starting their menstrual periods. Some of them would opt for pieces of cloth or cotton as they did not have access to proper sanitary towels. Others would not come to school at all during their menstrual periods. This made me realize the challenge that young school girls faced during this time of the month. Despite the efforts of some NGOs to hand out sanitary towels to adolescent girls, they were never enough. More needed to be done, thus, during my gap year, I decided to volunteer with the organization.

This experience nurtured my passion for community service and giving back to society. It made me a believer in small efforts having huge effects on society. It empowered me and encouraged me to motivate other young girls in my society to come together to achieve the goals they set for themselves and their communities.

You've said that you would like to become further involved in defending women and children's rights in Africa with organizations such as Amnesty International. What main developments would you like to see happen?

Women and children tend to be the most vulnerable members of society. Their rights are infringed everyday despite the efforts of countless organizations that support them. I dream of a day where gender equality shall be attained, a society where half the population shall no longer be held in silence. My goal is to empower as many young women as I can, as women are the pivots of society. Once a woman's rights are observed, children also see their rights defended. I imagine a community where no child dies of starvation, no child has to hawk in the streets, no child has to sleep out in the cold, and each and every child has access to basic needs. To achieve this, one needs to understand why these issues arose in the first place, why our societies oppress women and children. Studying social sciences at Sciences Po will give me this knowledge. It will help me understand the process of socialization and maybe then, we can be able to retrace our steps to what went wrong.

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*Photo: Portrait of Zipporah Gakuu
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