



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **BATONGA FOUNDATION EXPANDS ITS PROGRAMS TO THIRTEEN NEW COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN BENIN**

*Celebrating the International Day of the African Woman*

**COTONOU, BENIN, August 2022** — The Batonga Foundation is proud to announce the expansion of its programs for adolescent girls and young women to thirteen new communities in Atacora, located in Northern Benin. The Adolescent Girls Leadership (AGL) and Women’s Economic Empower (WEE) programs seek to build the social, financial, health, civic and cognitive skills of adolescent girls. The goal is that through developing the leadership skills of young women, they will fully realize their potential and contribute to the social and economic development of their communities.

The Batonga Foundation first joined forces with the Mastercard Foundation in 2021 to expand its proven model and program to reach more girls and women across Benin and the West African sub-region. The Batonga Foundation over the years has focused its programs on supporting adolescent girls and young women in vulnerable communities who are least likely to have access to resources and education. With the planned expansion, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, the Batonga Foundation’s programs now extend beyond the fifteen communities in central Benin to include communities in the northern region of Atacora.

To commemorate this milestone and the International Day of the African Woman, Batonga planned a launch ceremony on July 29th in the village of Natitingou, a community in the Northern region of Benin with local community members, leaders, local officials, and partners. The Batonga Foundation used the opportunity to share insights from its programs and provide a platform for program participants to share their experiences.

*“We are excited about this phase of our journey as we expand our programs to the Northern part of the country. The decision to extend to these thirteen new communities in Atacora is rooted in our mission to equip the hardest-to-reach girls and young women with safe spaces to access the knowledge and skills they need to be agents of change in their own lives and communities. Girls and young women in rural Africa do not lack potential: they lack opportunity. Teaming up with the Mastercard Foundation, a partner whose values and mission align with ours, allows us to open up opportunities for these hard-to-reach young women to fully realize their potential. Together, we will extend the reach of this program and amplify our impact across the African continent,”* said Angelique Kidjo, Founder, Batonga Foundation.



The Batonga Foundation currently operates in fifteen communities in the Central regions of Savalou and Bohicon serving 1,366 adolescent girls and 1,121 young women. The Batonga Foundation plans to enter thirty-eight new communities in 2022 to help introduce and adapt Batonga's model to suit the needs of the region. The Batonga Foundation is also partnering with Havre de Paix, an NGO based in Atacora that works to improve the overall wellbeing of the region and the living conditions of marginalized girls and young women.

The Adolescent Girls Leadership program offers access to safe spaces and mentorship for the hardest-to-reach girls with the goal of supporting a new generation of girl leaders and transforming community norms and beliefs that hold girls back from achieving their full potential. The partnership with the Mastercard Foundation will enable Batonga to reach 2,500 adolescent girls in 2022, up from the current 1,366 participants in its programs.

Batonga's Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) program builds sustained economic empowerment and income-generating models for young women aged 18 to 30 years old in rural communities. By offering access to safe spaces, peer groups, role models and mentors, the program supports young women in building and maintaining their economic wellbeing and leadership in local economies. The WEE program is expected to reach 2,700 more young women in 2022, doubling its outreach over current participants.

*"Reaching girls and young women in the most remote parts of Benin and helping them discover their potential is the noble option chosen by the Batonga Foundation. We want to build awareness of our programs and build fruitful partnerships for the betterment of girls and women. Every girl and every woman in Benin is a leader who contributes to the socio-economic development of the country,"* said Ella Wama, Benin Country Manager, Batonga Foundation.

*"Increasing access to skills that adolescent girls and young women need to be agents of social and economic transformation in their families and communities is at the heart of our Young Africa Works strategy. We are delighted to see the expansion of Batonga Foundation's programs across Benin,"* said Serge-Auguste Kouakou, Mastercard Foundation's Country Head for WAEMU.

The International Day of the African Woman, which for the last 50 years is commemorated annually on 31<sup>st</sup> July, seeks to contribute to improving the lives of African women and promoting their freedom. Recognizing that African women have been disproportionately affected since the onset of COVID-19, the Batonga Foundation aligned with this year's celebration by hosting 10 days of online activism to highlight the resilience of African women with a series of activities including a webinar and community events under the theme **"Resilience: rebounding and reinventing oneself after the global pandemic."**



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**About the Batonga Foundation**

Batonga empowers young women and girls to discover their limitless, untapped potential and transform it into social and economic power. We envision a safer, healthier, and more equitable world in which all girls and women can thrive.

**About Havre de Paix**

Havre de Paix is a non-governmental organization whose vision is to create an inclusive world in which women and youth participate in the development of society.

**About the Mastercard Foundation**

The Mastercard Foundation works with visionary organizations to enable young people in Africa and in Indigenous communities in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. It is one of the largest, private foundations in the world with a mission to advance learning and promote financial inclusion to create an inclusive and equitable world. The Foundation was created by Mastercard in 2006 as an independent organization with its own Board of Directors and management.

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