Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Mastercard Foundation, and EF Education First have partnered to provide language and skills training to the tourism and hospitality industry in the country.

The joint program will primarily focus on English proficiency and communication skills, which have been identified as a critical challenge for the industry. It will also boost essential hospitality skills, including knowledge about the attractiveness of Rwanda as a premier tourism destination and a focus on how to offer world-class service during events and conferences.

The first phase will include 2,000 workers and, upon successful completion, the program will expand countrywide and scale to include up to 30,000 participants from a wide range of job functions across the entire tourism and hospitality value chain. With a special focus on women and underprivileged youth, graduates of the program are expected to increase their employability, and significantly improve their career opportunities in the future.

Launching in May 2020, the program will be delivered online via EF's virtual English school – EF English Live. EF will work closely with local partners, including the Rwanda Convention Bureau (RCB), the Rwanda Utilities and Regulatory Authority (RURA), the Chamber of Tourism (CoT), and other affiliated associations, to ensure an inclusive, relevant, and successful training program.

Commenting on the partnership, Clare Akamanzi, the RDB Chief Executive Officer, said: "*Human capital development is a cornerstone for Rwanda's Vision 2050. We are pleased to partner with the Mastercard Foundation and EF Education First to improve English language proficiency and communication skills, which remain a critical challenge in the tourism and hospitality industry. We believe that this will greatly contribute to the level of service provision not only in the service industry but to the rest of the economy*."

"*This training program is critical if we want to maintain the important gains made in Rwanda's tourism and hospitality industry. Growth in the industry is vital to reducing poverty, improving the employability of young people, and moving the nation to middle-income status. We encourage young people to take advantage of this opportunity as, in addition to improving their proficiency in English, they will be able to strengthen their digital skills. Both are essential for succeeding in this sector and ensuring that young people have the resilience and relevance to thrive in our changing world. We welcome EF to our group of Hanga Ahazaza partners*," said Rica

Rwigamba, Rwanda Country Head at Mastercard Foundation.

EF has assisted many governments with large-scale training programs to enable personal and professional development for staff of strategic sectors of the economy, including tourism and hospitality.

“*This is a unique public-private partnership, entered into during an unprecedented time for the world and for Rwanda. We are proud to be able to bring our global expertise and best practices in training to the Rwandan tourism and hospitality industry. We hope to boost morale among staff and equip them with the skills needed to make Rwanda the destination of choice for foreign visitors to Africa. We are making a significant pro bono investment to make this program a reality, and we are also committed to supporting other sectors, including education, to ensure Rwanda reaches its bold ambitions for the future,*” said Carl-Johan Westring, President Customized Solutions at EF.