

Rotary International Global Grant Scholarship

Our District 5170 Candidate: Abisola Kusima



Abisola Kusimo hails from New Jersey by way of her parent's immigration from Nigeria to the U.S. in the 70s and 80s. Currently, Abisola is a Mechanical Engineering PhD candidate with a Management Science and Engineering PhD minor at Stanford University. She also holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, with triple minors in Rhetoric Communication, Engineering Leadership, and Technology Entrepreneurship, from the University of Maryland College Park. At Stanford, she co-founded the Africa Development Scholars group, an interdisciplinary graduate-level workshop that centers students engaged in critical scholarship on the continent. It is sponsored by the Stanford King Center on Global Development. In

2018, she co-facilitated a weeklong training on 3D printing, computer-aided modeling, and robotics for over 200 primary and secondary school teachers in Ghana and Nigeria as part of a larger multi-country initiative. Her research focuses on developing culturally-relevant techniques for scaling industrialization and supporting high value-added manufacturing processes in West Africa.

Throughout her time at Stanford, Abisola has been privileged to partake in incredible academic experiences. In 2018, she won the American Society for Engineering Education's "Best Diversity Paper" award for her conference paper and presentation. As part of the award, Abisola was invited to the 2019 national conference to present her research as one of the opening session's plenary speakers, the only student to do so. At Stanford, Abisola has been committed to improving campus life and encouraging the diversification of academia. Last academic year, she pioneered three campus-wide initiatives: (1) Helping first generation/low-income graduate students gain access to professional clothes for conferences and presentations, she started a quarterly Clothes Swap that brings together 100+ faculty, staff, and students; (2) Engaging underrepresented racial/ethnic minority women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in programming around four key pillars; and (3) In partnership with the School of Engineering Dean's Office, she pioneered an initiative called W.O.C.E. (Women of Color in Engineering), co-leading a collaboration with several key campus administrators to create an enduring institutional solution that prepares students and graduate advisors for the nuances in international fieldwork/research as a direct result of individual identity.

Notably, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) remains the last major region in the world lacking strong policy, standardized skillsets, and an infrastructure supporting industrialization. Given its size, geographic positioning, and desperate need to address job creation for unemployed youth, Africa is well-poised to emerge as the continental front-runner for the low-skilled manufacturing work slowly leaving China. This summer, as a case study, Abisola's research

Continues on Next Page

will further explore barriers to local SSA artisans' late-stage product development by observing and teaching at a Ghanaian school. Through this work, she hopes to design innovative capacity-building interventions for scaling successful initiatives and expanding individuals capacity to aspire. Envisioning her future career, she hopes to be recognized as a catalyst in the creation of African makerspaces and incubators that imbue people with the creative confidence to devise, design, and build their own solutions. It is her dream that this research sit in the larger framework of "making possible in Nigeria and beyond," building out the emergence of the continent's formal manufacturing industry.

For Abisola, engineering is another medium for her self-expression; a language of equations, theorems, and their interactions with people. Her other expression of choice is competitive spoken word poetry, also known as slam. As a national slam poet veteran, Abisola strives to continuously challenge the mold of what an engineer looks like. She has performed for corporations, universities, student organizations, and conferences in front of hundreds and sometimes thousands of audience members across the world.

Abisola has said:

"Success is not the climbing of a ladder; it's being lifted up by the people that you've helped along the way. And I am so grateful for the Rotary Club's commitment to reduce poverty and develop sustainable opportunities for positive change in the world. This support provides the platform that I need to lift as I climb. I look forward to furthering our partnership through the duration of the scholarship and beyond, as we mutually invest our time and energy into tackling global challenges and providing solutions where they're needed most."