ANNUAL REPORT
2016 - 2017

KIGALI, RWANDA
A WORD FROM OUR FOUNDER

Dear Friends,

This year marks momentous change for Akilah. We moved into a beautiful new campus in downtown Kigali so that we now have space to grow our current student body of 470 students to over 3,000 students in the future.

We’ve come a long way from our two-room campus that opened in 2010 with only 50 students. When we moved into our second campus in 2013, we couldn’t afford to buy enough furniture to fill the classrooms and offices, so I took all the furniture out of our house, including bookshelves, tables and chairs, and our living room couch, and moved it over to campus so the space didn’t feel empty. Our house was bare, but at least Akilah looked impressive to the students!

Luckily students no longer need our living room couch. The new campus includes five computer labs, a spacious library, a rooftop terrace overlooking Kigali, and a cafeteria that is always bustling with extracurricular activities.

Our reputation has evolved from a small, scrappy school into a respected, professional institution that prepares young leaders to launch their careers. We adopted a new academic model that uses competency-based education to improve our academic outcomes and ensure that students are equipped with practical, market-relevant skills in technology, hospitality, and business management. We redesigned our logo and brand to reflect our evolution into an international institution of academic excellence and measurable impact.

We are thrilled to welcome Her Excellency Joyce Banda as our Honorary Chancellor. As the former President of Malawi, the second female president in Africa, and a lifelong champion of women’s education, I can’t think of a better figure to inspire and mentor the next generation of Akilah women.

I’m deeply proud of our students and grateful to witness the powerful transformation happening both on our campus and in Rwanda. I am more optimistic than ever about the strength of Akilah’s academics and team of staff, faculty, and advisors, who work tirelessly to improve our model and expand opportunities for young women in the region.

We have ambitious plans for the future: we will open seven new campuses by 2031, educating more than 30,000 young women a year. In addition to our two-year, accredited diploma programs, we are now offering shorter certificate courses for students who are unable to pursue their studies full-time. We recently launched a new and improved version of MindSky.com, our online talent marketplace, which connects students and alumni to employers across the region.

As we expand into new countries and launch new academic programs, empowering women with the agency to determine their personal and professional futures remains at the core of our mission. Thank you to everyone who has believed in the Akilah vision these last eight years. Your support has enabled us to pioneer a model of leadership education with proven results. Over the next 15 years, we’re committed to creating more transformational opportunities for women throughout sub-Saharan Africa. We hope you’ll join us.

With gratitude,

Elizabeth Dearborn Hughes
Founder & CEO
AKILAH:

OUR MODEL
The Akilah model combines practical and theoretical knowledge with soft skills development in leadership, public speaking, and community service. Students master concepts and skills aligned with the region’s fastest-growing industries so they graduate with in-demand expertise and rise quickly to management roles.

MISSION
Akilah offers a unique model of market-relevant education that enables young women to achieve economic independence and obtain leadership roles in the workplace and in society.

VISION
Akilah aims to build future generations of women leaders and professionals in East Africa through an international network of campuses.
OUR GRADUATES

88% JOB PLACEMENT RATE WITHIN SIX MONTHS

GRADUATES EARN 12X RWANDA’S NATIONAL MEDIAN INCOME

58% OF GRADUATES HAVE RECEIVED A PROMOTION OR RAISE

THEIR IMPACT

90% OF GRADUATES ARE SUPPORTING AT LEAST ONE OTHER PERSON FINANCIALLY

GRADUATES PAY FOR THE HEALTH CARE OF AT LEAST 2 OTHER PEOPLE AND THE SCHOOLS FEES OF 15 OTHER PEOPLE

82% OF GRADUATES ARE PARTICIPATING IN AT LEAST ONE COMMUNITY GROUP
2016
OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

‘MAMA RWANDA’ DOCUMENTARY FILM PARTNERSHIP & SCREENING TOUR

AKILAH AMBASSADOR: SAKINA USENGIMANA

Last summer, Sakina was selected to represent Akilah on our “Mama Rwanda” tour through the U.S. Sakina travelled with our development team from New York to Boston to Florida and California. Sakina graduated with the Class of 2016 from the Business Management & Entrepreneurship program and has already started her own successful jewelry and accessories business, Iwacu Rwanda Design.

Highlights of her trip included speaking alongside New York Public Radio President & CEO Laura Walker and former Kate Spade & Company Corporate Social Responsibility SVP Sydney Price at the New York City premiere of “Mama Rwanda” and speaking to students at The Agnes Irwin School about her experiences as a female entrepreneur.

SEPTEMBER

‘MAMA RWANDA’ SCREENING TOUR

Akilah partnered with award-winning filmmaker Laura Waters Hinson on the release of her documentary “Mama Rwanda” and co-hosted a series of screenings in major U.S. cities. Each screening included a panel discussion around women’s potential to transform their lives through education, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

OCTOBER

KIGALI MARRIOTT GRAND OPENING

Akilah’s longtime employer partner, Marriott International, opened Rwanda’s most luxurious hotel with dozens of Akilah graduates on staff. Alumnae who completed Marriott’s training program in Dubai returned home to assume management positions, while new graduates were hired as front desk associates and more. Marriott has employed over 60 Akilah graduates worldwide.
CLASS OF 2016 GRADUATION

In January, 82 young women graduated from Akilah, including our first class of Information Systems students. The Class of 2016 marks Akilah’s largest graduating class to date. Alumnae started their careers with some of the region’s most exciting employers, including African Entrepreneur Collective, Impact Hub Kigali, Kigali Marriott Hotel, One Acre Fund, MTN, RwandAir, Off Grid Electric, and more.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR CAREER SUCCESS

Akilah also began working with MindSky, an East African technology company co-founded by Elizabeth Dearborn Hughes and Anastasia Uglova, to provide students and graduates with comprehensive career services. Through MindSky’s job platform, students and alumnae can strengthen their career-navigation skills, work one-on-one with a dedicated Talent Advocate, and view and apply to jobs from hundreds of employers.
FEBRUARY

AKILAH WINS IDEO GRANT
Akilah was selected as one of six recipients of an OpenIDEO Youth Empowerment Challenge grant. The grants recognize promising solutions that create economic opportunities for youth in East Africa. Akilah will receive financial and design support from IDEO.org to expand its education-to-workforce model for women throughout East Africa.

INCUBATION CENTER OPEN FOR BUSINESS
Akilah’s new on-campus Business Incubation Center opened its doors as a collaborative space for students to develop their business ideas. The center runs a six-month program that takes Akilah entrepreneurs through business model development, testing, and launch. Students are also connected to mentors in the private sector and prepped to apply for external funding. The first cohort of student businesses included an event planning company, an online recruitment platform, and a girls’ mentorship platform.

“MOST STUDENTS FACE THE SAME CHALLENGES. THEY HAVE BUSINESS IDEAS BUT NO FORMAL WAY OF PUTTING THEM INTO ACTION. THE INCUBATION CENTER OFFERS A THOROUGH SUPPORT SYSTEM. THAT MEANS WE CAN TRACK THEIR PROGRESS AND CONNECT THEM TO MENTORS, AND IT’S BOTH CHALLENGING AND REALLY EXCITING.”

Stanley Mukasa, Business Management and Entrepreneurship Program Manager
ROSE MUMUZA

CLASS OF 2017
FIRST FEMALE SAFARI JEEP DRIVER IN RWANDA

As the 2003 Landcruiser trundles over the rutted dirt road, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake, a group of young boys turns to stare wide-eyed. They’re used to seeing safari jeeps on the road to Akagera National Park, Rwanda’s only Big Five safari park, but the driver grabs their attention.

Rose Muhumuza (Hospitality Management ’17) flashes a brilliant smile and honks the horn at her impromptu audience; she’s unfazed by the attention. As the first female safari jeep driver in Rwanda—one other woman became certified after her—she’s a singular sight on the roads.

“We don’t have pioneer female drivers,” she explains. “People don’t have in their mindset that women can drive safari jeeps. They think it’s only men. But we are also capable of driving and doing even better than men,” she adds with a smile.

“PEOPLE DON’T HAVE IN THEIR MINDSET THAT WOMEN CAN DRIVE SAFARI JEEPS. THEY THINK IT’S ONLY MEN. BUT WE ARE ALSO CAPABLE OF DRIVING AND DOING EVEN BETTER THAN MEN.”
BLAZING A NEW TRAIL

If anyone can chart a course for women to follow in the safari guide industry, Rose is the perfect pioneer. A graduate of Akilah’s Hospitality Management Diploma program, Rose has achieved every goal she’s set.

Two years ago, Rose laid out two objectives: she would work at Kigali Marriott Hotel, Rwanda’s newest luxury property, and she would obtain her license to drive a safari jeep. Considering she’d never driven a car, much less a safari jeep, and was working a full-time job in addition to her studies at Akilah, she knew her goals would be tough to reach.

But Rose was determined. She attended class at Akilah in the mornings and afternoons and then went straight to her full-time job with Eco-Safaris Rwanda, where she worked until 10 p.m. or later, finally returning home to check on her younger brothers, who support three of them. Weekends were a mix of work, studying for her safari jeep driver’s license, and catching up on schoolwork.

The license training took three months and required her to learn theory, perform a series of practical tests, pass a final exam, and complete a complicated registration process. She recalls struggling to master the delicate balance between clutch and accelerator as well as the embarrassment of stalling out at a well-trafficked intersection. “The other male drivers can be very discouraging,” she says. “When I’m parking, they’ll tell me I should stay in the office. They know me as a hoteller, and they say that doesn’t match with driving.” Their comments only made her more determined.

‘IT FELT LIKE PILOTING A PLANE’

“Getting a safari car driver’s license is really very hard. But I was passionate about not driving a regular car, I wanted to drive a safari car ... to me it felt like piloting a plane,” she recalls. She passed her driving exam in January 2016 and has continued to train under Evranste Ntombara, the founder of Eco-Safaris Rwanda.

In October, she wrapped up her internship at Kigali Marriott Hotel, where she worked in the Food & Beverage Department. She’s two for two goal-wise, and she’s just getting started.

AN APTITUDE FOR EDUCATION

Rose assumed the mantle of responsibility early. Her mom died when she was 12 years old. “My mom died when my youngest brother was three. When the teacher asked him for his mom’s name, he gave her mine,” she recalls.

Rose’s aunt didn’t want her niece to forgo her education to care for her siblings. She took Rose in and encouraged her to complete high school. After graduating, Rose set her sights on Akilah. “I had never even dreamed of joining any other university ... I was the girl who got the highest marks at my school, so I had opportunities to go to the district university and maybe other universities, but I wanted to go to Akilah because I loved it. I knew they would equip me with different skills, and I loved hospitality.”

“I WAS THE GIRL WHO GOT THE HIGHEST MARKS AT MY SCHOOL, SO I HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO GO TO THE DISTRICT UNIVERSITY AND MAYBE OTHER UNIVERSITIES, BUT I WANTED TO GO TO AKILAH BECAUSE I LOVED IT.”

‘I GOT IN TWICE’

Rose applied to Akilah and was accepted in 2012, but she faced a dilemma: She wanted to send her brothers to school and needed an income to support them. “So I said, ‘Let me lose my place, I will join later on.’ I kept working, and I managed to push my brothers to join school,” she explains. She reapplied to Akilah in 2014 and was admitted again. “I got in twice. That shows how much I love Akilah,” she says with a laugh.

She continued to support her brothers and financed her education with Akilah’s student loan program, which allows students to defer up to 70% of their tuition until after they graduate. “So that’s how I managed to study at Akilah, while at the same time helping my family out,” she explains.

Rose will graduate in November 2017. She’s already set new goals for herself. She plans to stay in tourism and hospitality, building her skills with an international brand like Marriott before launching her own tour company. She’s also committed to setting an example for future generations of Rwandan women—to show them what is possible with determination and discipline.

“I remember when I was still doing practicals, I would drive to my neighborhood, and everyone would come running out to see me driving by in the big safari car. They would all be talking about it on the roadside,” she says with a grin. “People can now see that a girl can drive a safari vehicle—sometimes they are laughing, but mostly they are just astonished.”
In July, Parfaite Wirira (Information Systems ’18) was sworn in as Akilah’s new Student Guild President. For the next year, she and her Cabinet will oversee student activities on campus and serve as the link between students and Akilah’s faculty and staff. “When you’re passionate about something, it’s not too hard to work a lot. Being on campus on weekends will not bother me. It’s my duty to help my fellow students and be their voice,” Parfaite says.

APRIL

EVENING & WEEKEND PROGRAM

Akilah officially launched its Evening & Weekend Program for working professionals and mothers. The alternative hours make it possible for young women to pursue their education and build their careers without sacrificing their work and family responsibilities. The Evening & Weekend Program will be offered across all three diploma programs.

CREATING COMMUNITY IMPACT

Every year, our final-year students venture outside the classroom to bring lasting solutions and positive change to vulnerable communities through a Social Change Project. These projects are part of Akilah’s leadership curriculum and an essential component of the students’ journey to becoming community leaders and role models. The Class of 2017 taught women’s cooperatives new skills in financial management and customer service, supported the production of washable sanitary pads with community health workers, and raised awareness about nutrition and gender equality.
AFRICA’S SECOND FEMALE PRESIDENT NAMED HONORARY CHANCELLOR

Former Malawi President Joyce Banda joined Akilah as Honorary Chancellor. Banda brings decades of experience in government, advocacy, business, and philanthropy to Akilah’s executive team. She will provide advisory support as the institute scales its educational model across sub-Saharan Africa to serve more women.

“GOVERNMENTS, ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR MUST ACTIVELY WORK TOGETHER TO REMOVE BARRIERS FACING WOMEN SO THAT THEY CAN ATTAIN POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP. AKILAH OFFERS AN IMPORTANT SUCCESS STORY IN THIS REGARD.”
AKILA DOUBLE STUDENT BODY

Nearly 400 new students arrived on campus for the Institute’s 2017 orientation. The class is Akilah’s largest ever and will graduate in two years. The students also participated in Akilah’s new seven-week Bridge Program, which is designed to strengthen students’ English language skills and prepare them for their full-time studies.

MOVING TO OUR NEW CAMPUS

This fall, classes started at the new Akilah Institute campus in downtown Kigali. Nearly 600 students and 60 faculty and staff moved into the beautiful new campus, which has space for our growth to 3,000 students. The new campus features IT labs, a spacious library, and a rooftop deck with a stunning view of the Kigali Hills.

TRANSITION TO COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION (CBE)

Akilah has transitioned all of its diploma programs to a competency-based curriculum, which emphasizes practical skills and mastery of core competencies. Students will be tested on what they know and can do, rather than abstract concepts and time spent in the classroom.

CBE is particularly effective for professional development because it focuses on workplace-relevant skills and concepts.
GIRLS WHO CODE

As an Information Systems student, Sonia was selected to join the camp as a mentor and role model to 15-through 18-year-old girls, alongside 10 other women from Rwanda. Every day for nearly three weeks, Sonia taught classes on leadership, gender in STEAM, self-confidence, and community change through technology.

Through counselors like Sonia—and with support from inspiring mentors, such as former NASA Astronaut Leland Melvin and Malawi’s First Lady, Dr. Gertrude Mutharika—the camp is designed to encourage girls to pursue degrees and careers in technology, develop their leadership potential, and build friendships and networks that will give them new opportunities in STEAM fields. “Teaching those girls and being a role model to them was the best experience ever. I had so much responsibility. It made me realize that I can handle more than I thought I could,” Sonia says of her experience as a teacher and role model.

INSPIRING OTHERS

To prepare for her new role, Sonia pulled inspiration from the Akidah Institute’s model of teaching. “I tried to run my classes in the same way as we do it at Akidah. Our instructors don’t push us to memorize everything, but encourage us to think about how we see a certain issue. It made [my students] eager to learn in class because it was different. They would look forward to coming to class every day.”

Although she’s still a student, Sonia isn’t new to leadership roles. She’s a former President of the Student Guild, Akidah’s student government. Her experiences as President enabled her to transition into her role as counselor with confidence and familiarity. “Being a counselor would scare others, but at Akidah we are one community and one family. I brought that to Malawi. I wanted to make it a flexible community, where everyone felt safe to share their thoughts and ideas. I think it made it easier for everyone to learn and grow.”

“THE RESPONSIBILITIES I HAD MADE ME GROW AS A PERSON, AND INTELLECTUALLY. THE MORE I KEPT TELLING THESE GIRLS TO VOICE THEIR OPINIONS AND MAKE CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, THE MORE I UNDERSTOOD IT MYSELF.”

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL CHANGE

The camp—which is a joint effort between the U.S. Department of State, the U.N. Foundation’s Girl Up campaign, Intel Corporation, Google, and others—focuses on social change as much as technological skills. According to Sonia, the dual emphasis aligned with her Akidah education. “One of the courses I taught was about the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals. The task was to develop projects that will help the U.N. solve global issues related to these goals. The girls did such cool projects! They created apps and websites, and because it’s in my field, it felt great to be able to help them. It was amazing to see how they opened up to global issues.”

The girls weren’t the only camp beneficiaries. The experience changed Sonia too. “The responsibilities I had made me grow as a person and intellectually. The more I kept telling these girls to voice their opinions and make change in their communities, the more I understood it myself. The more I repeated it, the more it became my thing. I can’t tell these girls to make a change if I don’t do it myself,” Sonia explains.

SONIA (PICTURED, RIGHT) WITH CAMP ATTENDEES
VISION FOR SCALE

BY 2031, AKILAH WILL HAVE SEVEN CAMPUSES ACROSS AFRICA, EDUCATING MORE THAN 30,000 STUDENTS EVERY YEAR.

OUR NEW BUSINESS MODEL

We have developed a new financial model that will allow us to efficiently scale over time without continual dependency on donor funding. This change means that we can serve exponentially more students while maintaining the superior quality of an Akilah education.

NEW CAMPUSES

Over the next 15 years, Akilah will open seven new campuses in sub-Saharan Africa, while expanding the size of its Rwanda campus. Akilah will open its next campus in 2018.

OUR NEW ACADEMIC MODEL

We’ll transition our diplomas from a traditional classroom environment to a blended, competency-based education model that leverages a digital platform for content delivery and assessments. This ensures students demonstrate mastery of specific objectives and provides for a more personalized learning experience. The new model will enable Akilah to engage students more effectively and use faculty more efficiently.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

We will also offer certificate courses and online educational programming. Courses will leverage Akilah’s existing curriculum to enable young professional who are unable to pursue full-time education to advance their careers and position themselves more competitively in Africa’s job market.
“WE ARE VERY AWARE THAT WE ARE CREATING ROLE MODELS. OUR STUDENTS ARE INSPIRING OTHER GIRLS TO TAKE THE LEAP AND BE ENTREPRENEURS.”

STANLEY MUKASA
PROGRAM MANAGER
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

“We can see in class how focused our students are. For them, it is not just about getting their diploma. They want to be someone important in their community, someone who can build their career, support their family.”

TERRY KIBUI
PROGRAM MANAGER
HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

“Still today, people tend to think girls can’t do tech, but my experience is that they understand and experiment with it just the same way as boys do. It’s all about how well we teach them.”

FAUSTIN SORONCHO
PROGRAM MANAGER
INFORMATION SYSTEMS

“Education and income generation are game-changers for women, not just for the women themselves, but also for their families and communities. If I spend my whole life working toward that end, I feel like that’s a good reason to get up every day.”

KAREN SHERMAN
PRESIDENT

“Educating young women is very powerful. Our students go out in society and act as change agents and inspire other women who didn’t have the same opportunities. We tell them that they must be ambassadors for change and narrow the gap between men and women.”

PAUL SWAGA
PROGRAM MANAGER
CORE PROGRAM

“Our model is unique, and it has proved to be working. Our students are the next generation of female leaders and they will build their families, communities, and the country at large.”

ALINE KABANDA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RWANDA CAMPUS
AKILAH FOUNDATION
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FINANCIALS
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING ON AUGUST 31, 2017

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

CONTRIBUTIONS & GRANTS $ 2,609,461
INVESTMENTS & OTHER REVENUE $ 45,902
TOTAL INCOME $ 2,655,363

GRANTS TO AKILAH INSTITUTE $ 1,130,466
EXPENSES WITH DIRECT BENEFIT TO AKILAH INSTITUTE $ 782,296
ADMINISTRATIVE & FUNDRAISING $ 703,140
TOTAL EXPENSES $ 2,621,902

INCREASE IN NET ASSETS $ 33,461

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS $ 1,317,891
LIABILITIES $ 571,903
NET ASSETS $ 745,988

*These financial statements have not yet been audited and are subject to change. Audited financial statements for fiscal year ending on August 31, 2017, will be available in February 2018. The statement of activity numbers are presented in an unrestricted format.

THE AKILAH FOUNDATION IS A U.S. NONPROFIT THAT SUPPORTS WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AKILAH INSTITUTE. THE FOUNDATION BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS AND DONORS WORLDWIDE TO SUPPORT THE AKILAH INSTITUTE AND ITS STUDENTS.
THE AKILAH INSTITUTE OFFERS A UNIQUE MODEL OF MARKET-RELEVANT EDUCATION THAT PREPARES WOMEN TO LAUNCH SUCCESSFUL CAREERS IN THE FASTEST-GROWING SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY. SINCE 2010, AKILAH’S DIPLOMA PROGRAMS HAVE EQUIPPED HUNDREDS OF WOMEN WITH THE ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL, AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS NECESSARY TO START THEIR CAREERS AND ADVANCE RAPIDLY INTO MANAGEMENT ROLES.

KIGALI, RWANDA