



# OUR GENESIS

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THE HISTORY OF HATUA'S  
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

2006-2021





## FROM POVERTY TO PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

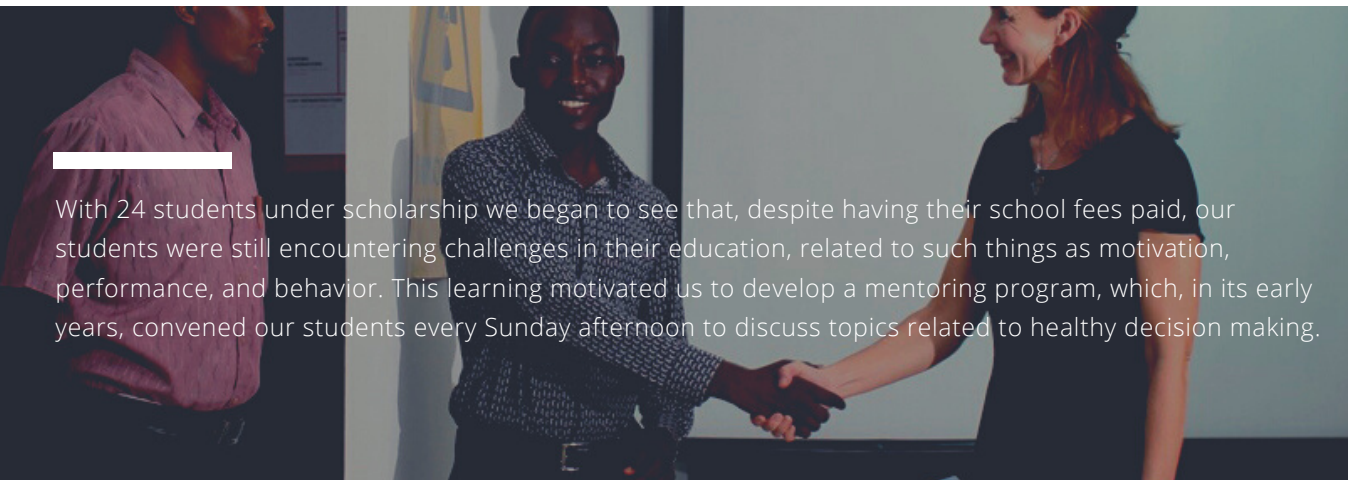
Over the past 15 years, Hatua has developed an approach to fighting generational poverty that enables low-income youth to access the resources present in our communities that are designed to prepare youth for professional success, but have been previously out of reach to them. Throughout, we have developed a deep understanding of the needs of our youth, not by conducting a survey with the intention of establishing a model to fight poverty, but instead by steadily and continuously walking with our youth through every step of their journey from the end of primary school into their professional careers and gaining rich insights from the experiences of each student individually as well as their outcomes collectively. This organic approach to program design is rooted in the understanding that the journey of raising youth from children into adults is a nuanced process that is unique for every young person but ultimately universal. This universality has become clear to us as we have come to understand that the most effective approach to fighting generational poverty is by making available to youth from low incomes families the same resources and opportunities that every parent aspires to provide to their own children. These essential resources include: 1. access to quality high school and university education, 2. mentoring focused on soft skills and values critical for career success, 3. connections to professional networks and industry-specific career guidance, and 4. links to professional opportunities. In our earliest days, we started by providing access to high school education. Over the 14 years that have followed, in response to our students' needs, we have added layer upon layer to our program design in order to transform the lives of our youth from poverty to professional careers.

Co-founders, Peter Kwame and Gabrielle Fondiller, first worked together in 2006 conducting research to understand the coping mechanism low-income Kenyans use when their income does not meet their basic needs. Through their research, Kwame and Gabrielle developed close relationships with many of our interview participants who opened up about their personal lives, what they could and couldn't afford, and how they survive extreme poverty. After two months Gabrielle and Kwame concluded their research and wanted to show their appreciation for these families in a way that would be meaningful to them. When reflecting on the wants and needs of each family it became clear that each family wanted the same thing- to provide their children with a good quality education.

In 2007 we began providing scholarships by paying school fees for one child per family among our key interview participants. During that same year, we began researching the challenges low-income families face in their efforts to provide their children with education, in part through interviews with Ministry of Education officials and Head Teachers in our local public schools in Likoni. Our research led us to award additional scholarships in 2008. This time we worked in partnership with our local public primary school Head teachers and class 8 teachers who helped us to identify students from families that could not afford high school education. We then conducted home visits and interviews with each referred student's family. This process led us to enroll 17 new students in 2008.



With 24 students under scholarship we began to see that, despite having their school fees paid, our students were still encountering challenges in their education, related to such things as motivation, performance, and behavior. This learning motivated us to develop a mentoring program, which, in its early years, convened our students every Sunday afternoon to discuss topics related to healthy decision making.





Another challenge we faced in our early years was the question of how to ensure our student selection process was fair and free from bias, given that the need for scholarship exceeded our means. We determined the best solution was to award scholarships based on both need and academic merit. This led us to create the competitive application process that we continue to use today, which considers students' end-term marks in primary school, application essays, teacher's recommendation letter, and standardized exam results. We then aggregate the overall score for each applicant and record their points against each application's reference number. From these scores, we select the top candidates for home visits.

During these visits, Hatua team members working in pairs meet students' guardians to assess the financial need of each applicants' families and determine their need level, which is added to our application score sheet. This sheet does not include the names of applicants. We then select the top-performing female and male candidates from among those who have been determined to be of high need, meaning without a scholarship they will not continue their education. By making our final selection based on scores and not names we ensure our selection process is without bias or favor.



As our number of students under scholarship continued to grow we continued to develop our understanding of the resources they require to excel in school. An important lesson for us during the earlier years was a disparity in success rates between day school and boarding school students. We found that day scholars were more likely to drop out of school or face major hurdles in their education due to the financial burdens faced by their families, or by the type of activities they engage in during their out-of-school hours. Students in day school were not guaranteed three meals a day, and most survived on 1 or 2 meals, they also were expected to perform a significant share of family chores, which disproportionately limited the time girls were given to study. These lessons led us to enroll all of our high school students in boarding schools where they are guaranteed adequate food, time to study, and limited exposure to the type of social distractions that can impede a teenager's education, particularly within communities where many of their fellow teens have dropped out of school.

In 2010, we conducted a random sample survey of 900 households in Likoni and found that challenges facing our students as they attempt to study at home were widespread. For example, over 25% of homes lacked electricity, forcing children and youth to study by kerosene lamp or candle light. This motivated us to open our first library, which accommodated an average of 250 visitors daily, providing each with a safe, quiet place to study, fully equipped with curriculum and revision books for primary and secondary school studies. In the years since we have developed a number of library programs and established a network of satellite libraries in public primary schools throughout the communities we serve.

Each library serves as an entry point into our communities, a means of extending the benefits of Hatua far beyond our scholarship recipients, and a point of access for youth seeking to join our scholarship program.

By the four-year mark, our first students were graduating from high school and it was clear that their prospects were only slightly better than those of youth who had not attended high school. We recognized that these students would not be equipped to join professional careers and lift themselves out of poverty unless they continued their education through the tertiary level. We, therefore, decided that students who upheld Hatua's standards and values during high school would continue to receive scholarships through college or university.

Having decided to extend scholarship beyond high school and on to university, we found that our students had a gap year between when high school ends in November and when college and university enrollment takes place the following September. We observed that this period of time can derail the prospects of an 18-year-old if left without structured activities. We also recognized this time as a rich opportunity to engage our students in experiential learning. This led us to develop our gap year program, which trains our recent high school graduates as peer mentors and engages them to provide peer mentoring to students in primary and secondary schools throughout our communities. The topics we focus on each year are determined by input from our partner schools, as well as our observations of the main challenges that can either derail the education of our own students or help them make choices that enable them to thrive in education and life after school.

These topics include healthy and unhealthy relationships with a focus on teen pregnancy prevention, financial literacy with a focus on understanding the importance of budgeting and saving, substance and drug abuse prevention, and civics with a focus on countering violent extremism.

As our earliest students began university, we came to understand two additional areas of need that our students face. First, we recognized that arriving on campus without a support structure to welcome you can be lonely, and can also leave a student feeling lost within the bureaucracy when trying to secure on-campus housing or register for classes. This led us to develop Hatua Student Unions, each comprised of all Hatua students within a university. Each Union has elected officials who include two welcome committee members, charged with meeting new students when they arrive on campus and guiding them through the new student registration process. These older students serve as their "buddies" as they acclimatize to campus life. Unions also convene regular get-togethers of all members to help Hatua students stay bonded to one another and serve as sources of mutual support.

Through our regular check-ins with students, we next came to realize that our students needed guidance through the process of seeking attachment and internship opportunities in order to graduate with the type of entry-level experience employers seek.





We did not have within our team the industry-specific knowledge or networks needed to provide the guidance our students needed, so we developed our professional mentoring program. This program pairs each of our university students with a professional working in the career field the student wants to pursue when they graduate. Thanks to our volunteer mentors our students are able to overcome the network deficits faced by youth from low-income communities.

By 2015, we had 6 university graduates and began meeting with local CEOs and HR managers to gain a better understanding of the needs and the pain points companies face when sourcing entry-level talent. We learned from this outreach that employers are seeking to hire for a specific set of soft skills, mainly proactivity, conscientiousness, communication skills, and flexibility. At this time these mindsets, values, and skills were already significant components of our mentoring programs, which we had, over the years, developed into 9 foundational modules conducted during high school holiday mentoring, followed by gap year and tertiary mentoring which build on these core competencies through experiential learning. Recognizing the significant overlap between the skills we focus on to build students' ability to succeed in school and navigate the challenges of their personal lives and the skills employers seek, we began the process of redesigning our mentoring programs to make this overlap explicit and to further strengthen our focus on soft skills for career success.

Through our engagement with employers, we also learned that companies are excited to consider our candidates through direct referrals. This led us to develop our employer partnerships program, through which employers refer mentors from among their top-performing team members, and consider Hatua students and alumni for attachment, internship, and job opportunities.



As our alumni mature into their careers, we are supporting them to use their experience to help other marginalized youth to access professional opportunities through mentoring and referrals.

In the years ahead, we aim to formalize access to career guidance through our alumni network by launching a “network bridge” program which fields education and career questions from among our communities’ youth and matches each question with the member of our network best positioned to provide an answer.

While we have been guided by the experience of our students, alumni, and employer partners, we have also found that our lessons learned from experience match the research findings of those seeking to understand the barriers faced by low-income youth. By formulating our programs to meet the needs of our youth and utilize the resources available within our communities, we have been able to develop programs that leverage the strengths of Kenya’s education system and the private sector to serve youth who had previously been deprived of access to both. Our youth, who would otherwise drop out of school after primary school, are now graduating from college or university with the skills, experience, and networks they need to lift themselves out of poverty and help others do the same.