

Youth**Action**Net®

# CASE STUDY SERIES

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**Fatuma's Voice:**

*BUILDING AN AFRICA THAT CAN  
SPEAK FOR HERSELF*

*A partnership between:*



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Foreign Service  
Global Human Development Program



## **Introduction**

*This is one of a series of case studies produced by students enrolled in the Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University through its partnership with the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Students enrolled in a course exploring the role of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs were paired with young leaders of social ventures identified through the IYF's YouthActionNet® program. The students were given the assignment of analyzing the venture's assets, successful methodologies, and opportunities for investment to increase impact. Through this experiential learning process, the student consultants gained hands-on experience and exposure to the needs of social enterprises. The ventures, too, benefited from student insights into their strengths, areas for growth, and recommendations for enhancing their impact and sustainability. The Georgetown practicum is part of YouthActionNet's larger efforts to partner with institutions of higher learning around the globe to integrate social change into the academic experience and career interests of students.*

## **International Youth Foundation**

*The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.*

[www.iyfnet.org](http://www.iyfnet.org)

## **YouthActionNet®**

*Since 2001, YouthActionNet, a program of the International Youth Foundation, has provided founders of social ventures, ages 18 to 29, with the training, networking, coaching, funding, and advocacy opportunities they need to strengthen and scale their impact. These young social entrepreneurs have pioneered innovative solutions to critical local and global challenges, resulting in increased civic engagement, improved health, education reform, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and more inclusive societies. Our work is carried out through a network of 23 national and regional youth leadership institutes that collectively support over 1,350 young social entrepreneurs globally.*

[www.youthactionnet.org](http://www.youthactionnet.org)

## **Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University**

*The Global Human Development Program of Georgetown University is home to one of the world's premier master's degree programs in international development. An innovative, academically rigorous skills-based graduate program, the Master of Global Human Development degree prepares the next generation of development professionals to work with public sector agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations that advance development. Through coursework, extracurricular activity, and practical fieldwork experiences, our graduates develop the insights, skills, and experiences necessary to become leaders in development and make a difference in our global community.*

<https://ghd.georgetown.edu>

## INTRODUCTION

### *Meet Chris Mukasa, Co-founder of Fatuma's Voice*

Chris Mukasa, a Kenyan poet and an entrepreneur, is using poetry, music, and other art forms to affect meaningful social change in Kenya. Through a combination of formative experiences during his youth, Mukasa developed a strong appreciation for the importance of youth-centered platforms for open, honest, and creative self-expression. The primary source of his motivation to engage in fostering open and free expression in Kenya was his experiences as a volunteer with several youth initiatives in Kenya and an internship with U.S.-based Student Life and Compassion International, organizations committed to child development and youth empowerment.



While still a psychology student at the University of Nairobi, Mukasa founded the Kenyan Poets Lounge, a forum for poets and lovers of poetry to read, discuss, and share insights into each other's literary works. The initiative grew rapidly, reaching more than 60,000 members in a few months, making it impossible to meet in a university classroom. One day, Boniface Mwangi, the founder of Pawa 254, a social hub supporting the arts and community engagement, reached out to Mukasa and offered him a space to hold poetry meetings.

Mukasa took the Kenyan Poets Lounge to the next level by using the art as a transformative tool rather than just entertainment, giving rise to Fatuma's Voice. Fatuma's Voice started when Musaka wrote a poem about a fictitious 50-year old mute woman on the streets of Nairobi and asked his performers and poets: "If you were to speak on behalf of Fatuma, what would you say?" To Mukasa, Fatuma serves as a powerful symbol of many Kenyans' inability to express themselves. It is no coincidence that Fatuma is fifty years old, about as old as Kenya's independence (Kenya became independent in 1963). Kenya's independence brought an end to British colonial oppression. However today, as Mukasa explains, many Kenyan youth experience a different kind of oppression, that of an inability to express themselves publicly. In this sense, Fatuma's Voice is situated within Kenya's experiences of resistance and quest for freedom of expression.

The first forum happened on July 12, 2013 in Nairobi, and has happened every week since. Musaka co-founded Fatuma's Voice with poet Eric Otieno, and now has a team that includes four other people: Nuru Bahati, Ian Obonyo, Daniel Nyacharo, and Lavender Awuor. Fatuma's Voice also expanded to the port city of Mombasa and Nakuru, the fourth largest city in Kenya. The Kenyan Poets lounge still exists today and works with Fatuma's Voice by providing artists for the forums.



## **Fatuma's Voice is empowering Kenyan youth through artistic expression.**

### ***The Problem***

Mukasa's motivation to found a platform like Fatuma's Voice stems from the flaws in the Kenyan educational curricula and the social stigmatization surrounding youth expression. Art is optional in Kenya's educational system and due to budgetary constraints, few secondary schools can afford to offer arts courses. Curriculums instead emphasize cognitive subjects like literacy, numeracy, and communication, creating a significant gap in the education system where teachers spend too much time preparing students for exams and leave out time for creativity. The Kenyan educational curriculum has also been widely criticized as being ill-suited for the needs of learners and not linked to the labor market, contributing to youth unemployment, which in turn increases frustration among youth.

In addition, Kenyan culture does not fully promote self-expression. As Mukasa mentions, "There is a culture of silence, a culture of respect for the elders, and young Kenyans are expected to always stay quiet, without questioning anything." Kenyan youth represent 65% of Kenya's population and 73% of them are afraid to stand up for what they believe in for fear of retribution. Young Kenyans who are afraid of expressing themselves or inclined to keep their opinions to themselves end up having strong feelings of anger and frustration. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a report demonstrating links between criminality and the inability of Kenyan youth to express themselves, and stated that, "a society that negates the self-expression of young people means that many [...] are unable to translate their aspirations into a productive and fulfilling future" and this fuels frustration and results in crime and violence. These frustrations can be reflected in the high rates of criminality, incarceration (54.3% of those convicted are between the ages of 18 and 35), rising unemployment (75% of unemployed Kenyans are below 35 years old), and suicide rates of young Kenyans.

### ***The Solution***

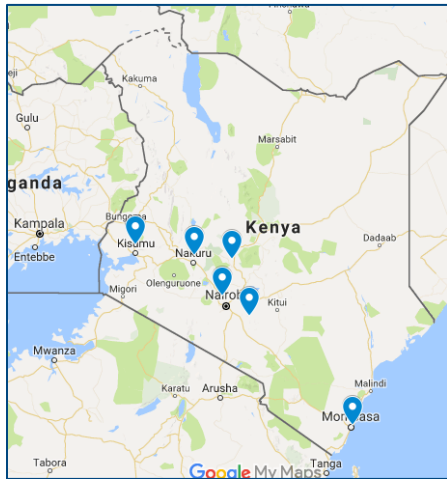
Fatuma's Voice attempts to meet the need for young Kenyans to express and discover their own voices, while also challenging the social stigmatization of self-expression and identifying solutions to social issues. Moreover, Fatuma's Voice attempts to discourage criminality and violence, decrease unemployment by building the confidence and self-esteem of participants, and increase the motivation of youth to voice their opinions and beliefs.

The use of art allows people to open up, air their frustrations, share their thoughts, improve their mindsets, and connect to the stories of others. Creating a platform to connect people from various backgrounds, create awareness of social issues, and explore solutions is crucial to youth empowerment. By empowering youth, Fatuma's Voice enables young Kenyans to be able to create solutions to social problems.

### ***Operational Model***

Fatuma's Voice is a registered non-profit organization. Currently, income comes from a grant from the Danish Embassy in Kenya and the 100KSE entrance fee to the forums. These revenue sources

help compensate artists and pay for logistical needs and salaries, and cover operational costs, including the rental of venue space and any extra costs including printing posters, snacks for participants, and transportation for artists.



In Nairobi, Fatuma's Voice holds a forum every week at Pawa 254, focusing on a thought-provoking topic chosen by the participants and the audience. Every forum holds ten artistic performances and a professional guest is invited to provide a factual voice to the discussion. Performers read poetry, play music, or just talk to an audience about an issue. The average number of participants per forum is 100.

After success in Nairobi and assessing the need for similar forums in other cities and counties, Fatuma's Voice expanded to Mombasa and Nakuru where forums are led by locals who have been trained by the staff. Fatuma's Voice's strong commitment to meeting the needs of Kenyan youth has been particularly valuable when expanding to other cities. Mukasa's

team makes sure that the topics of the forum adapt to the needs of people in Mombasa and Nakuru in order to maximize the social impact. With the support of the Danish Embassy, Fatuma's Voice hopes to expand to the Kenyan counties of Kisumu, Machakos, and Nyeri by the end of 2017.

Since July 2013, Fatuma's Voice has achieved great success in Kenya. It has held more than 150 forums, hosted more than 1,400 artistic performances, and attracted approximately 15,000 participants. Fatuma's Voice also has a significant popularity online with over 500,000 people participating online (through live streaming, blogging, or other). Mukasa's team monitors and evaluates Fatuma's Voice through the administration of questionnaires in the audience and feedback from artists and attendees relating to the overall impact of Fatuma's Voice.

## KEY ASSETS AND SUCCESSFUL METHODOLOGIES

### *Unique Blend of Poetry, Art, Music with an Educational Purpose*

Fatuma's Voice uniquely combines various art forms (dance, theater, poetry, music) for educational purposes, and more importantly, for youth empowerment. Initially, arts and music were part of the national education curriculum. However, they were removed in favor of sciences and language disciplines, and arts became optional disciplines, usually only remaining in schools able to afford the additional cost. The use of art as a powerful tool for the voiceless has been motivating and encouraging for Kenyan youth. Through the forums, the audience can interact with artists and poets, and work together on creating a national art identity. Through Fatuma's Voice, youth are challenged and encouraged to explore their talents, become social participants, and improve the society in which they live. The social platform

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*What are we learning here? We are learning that anyone can do something. All that you require is to have that spark of passion and you can make a big change that has the ability to transform the lives of thousands.*

*Kennedy Odede, Founder of Shining Hope for Communities*

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strongly focuses on concepts that are not taught in the classroom, including improving self-esteem, self-expression, courage, and self-discovery. The connection created between audience, artists, and social realities leads young Kenyans to creatively think of potential solutions to social issues.



### ***Youth-run, Youth-led, and Youth-focused***

The team members of Fatuma's Voice are all in their twenties, and their passion and ambition has attracted thousands of young Kenyans. They are also able to clearly design an enterprise that meets the need of their generation. Other organizations focusing on youth empowerment in Kenya are often run by older generations and don't always understand the needs of young people. Kenyans also lead the course of the forums by setting up their own agenda and tackling the issues as they see

fit. These issues focus on the personal experiences of participants and the general social issues that affect youth, such as unemployment, social class, sexual violence, and political participation, which, in turn, draw more young Kenyans to attend and participate in the forums.

### ***Political Neutrality with Ability to Advocate for Policy Change***

Given Kenya's tense socio-political climate, Fatuma's Voice is able to remain politically neutral while challenging social issues. From December 2007 to February 2008, Kenya experienced ethnic violence and over 1,300 deaths, triggered by disputed presidential elections. Kenya is home to over seventy different ethnic groups and the election violence further fueled divisions between Kenyans and politicized free speech, further stigmatizing self-expression. In the wake of the 2013 elections, Fatuma's Voice offers an empowering message of hope and unity to young Kenyans. The organization has worked to maintain political, religious, and ethnic neutrality by creating a safe environment for self-expression. This neutrality has encouraged Kenyans from various cultures, religions, and backgrounds to attend and participate in the forums. By gathering artists from various ethnic groups, Mukasa's team also seeks to foster a national voice and art identity. Fatuma's Voice attempts to encourage young Kenyans to think for themselves and make their own political opinion. Without promoting any political party, Fatuma's Voice fosters tolerance, diversity, and inclusion.

A significant asset to Fatuma's Voice is the ability to advocate for policy change. Fatuma's Voice empowers youth by addressing contentious social issues and working towards the identification of potential solutions. This creates a generation of advocates and change-makers. Fatuma's Voice also works towards policy change by educating youth about the language in the official political arena. Mukasa explains that young Kenyans have difficulties understanding politics and policies, concepts

not taught in schools. A recurring topic in the forums is civic participation and voting rights. Participants attempt to explain what it means to be a voter in Kenya, how voting works, and how young Kenyan's voices can be heard through the process of voting. Fatuma's Voice also encourages young Kenyans to take up leadership positions. Finally, Fatuma's Voice attempts to bring politicians closer to the youth. Fatuma's Voice has been trying to challenge government elected officials and political leaders in tackling important social issues, and attempt to influence policies passed in parliament. For example, in one Nakuru-based forum, Fatuma's Voice invited a political leader to a discussion with the audience. In turn, the participants were able to connect more directly with their officials.



Moreover, Fatuma's Voice has established a partnership with government actors whereby government institutions share an idea for a forum with Fatuma's Voice. For example, a government institution working on reducing drug use suggested Fatuma's Voice to hold a forum on the topic of drug abuse. In return, the government institution would cover the expenses for that forum. Despite the non-political nature of Fatuma's Voice, this partnership remains highly beneficial in its attempt to work with various stakeholders on social issues.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

Common to all young ventures, the biggest challenge Fatuma's Voice faces today is financial sustainability. The project started as a small initiative without a clear budgeting plan or marketing strategy. Fatuma's Voice needs a strategy to generate a higher revenue stream, have a stronger impact on the communities, and expand to other locations. In addition, Fatuma's Voice does not have experience managing a social enterprise and it is therefore essential to bring in experts who would provide professional advice and training to ensure that all staff are more effective in the future.

## Financial Sustainability

First, Fatuma's Voice should fully develop a sustainability plan, outlining various funding streams, in addition to goals relating to programming, impact, and future expansion. The Danish Embassy in Kenya has been supporting Fatuma's Voice since 2015 and is currently the only funder. The three-year contract it is due to expire at the end of 2017, and currently the forum entrance fee of approximately 1 USD helps cover some costs, but is not sufficient revenue to be financially sustainable. Therefore, Fatuma's Voice urgently needs to identify new funders, renew their contract with the Danish embassy, or improve their financial plan to ensure sustainability and be able to expand to Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania in the next few years.

Mukasa's team is in the process of developing a sustainability plan and establishing a board of advisors, however, they have not yet identified additional funders. Fatuma's Voice has started looking at various strategies to generate revenue which include turning the forum into a TV show through the already-established partnership with Arimus Media; establishing work relationships with companies that offer education services and youth empowerment; receiving a portion of proceeds from books and art sold at the forums by participants; and publishing a book that would include stories of artists and participants. These options to generate revenue would allow Fatuma's Voice to cover most costs and expand to other locations. Nevertheless, some of these options might not necessarily provide a continuous and consistent funding for the next few years, and it still seems necessary to explore options that would provide grants from foundations and government institutions.

Based on the focus on arts and education, some examples of potential funders include private sponsorships for entertainment and arts initiatives, foundations granting funding for arts based programming such as the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Hewlett Foundation. Given Fatuma's Voice's already established partnership with government actors (albeit ad-hoc),

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*In the next two years, I want to see Fatuma's Voice claim its space in public. Can we go to these spaces? Claim them and change the mindset, and thereby be a part of the transformation of Kenya into a nation that is strong, focused... A Kenya that has equity and protects the rights of all.*

*Achieng' Abura, Musician*

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Fatuma's Voice could explore additional opportunities with government institutions that would provide a more consistent funding stream. In addition, Fatuma's Voice could work with other NGOs that have a mutual interest, such as NGOs working for youth empowerment or on arts education. Moreover, the private sector can also play a significant role in providing funding to Fatuma's Voice through private sponsorships whereby companies would benefit from the artists' work at Fatuma's Voice.

Another option that could increase revenue, and which Mukasa had previously explored, would be to increase the entrance fee by a couple of dollars. The additional money generated through the entrance fees would allow the venture to expand to other locations. However, it is worth noting that Fatuma's Voice's audience is young, and more than 50% are unemployed. Increasing the cost of the entrance fee would mean targeting wealthier Kenyans. Fatuma's Voice could potentially explore innovative techniques



for generating revenue without affecting the current target audience. A significant example would be for Fatuma's Voice to hold monthly events that would take form of professional artistic shows in Nairobi targeting wealthier audiences and charging significantly higher entrance fees.

### ***Staff Training and Development of Curriculum***

Considering that the venture is youth-run, youth-led, and youth-focused, there seems to be a gap in highly experienced staff who could improve the organization's social impact. Fatuma's Voice started with the ambitious idea of giving a voice to the voiceless, without an elaborate marketing strategy or substantive budget. Without highly experienced staff in technical program design, grant writing, or monitoring and evaluation, Fatuma's Voice is missing out on funding and expansion opportunities. A potential solution would be the development of training of current staff members by experts. Technical experts from organizations such as Catch-a-Fire or the Corporate Institute could provide the necessary skills for Mukasa's team to excel in programming. Catch-a-Fire is a pro-bono initiative that works with non-profits and social enterprises by helping improve programming and management and providing essential skills. Based on the needs of an enterprise (marketing strategy, financial sustainability, coaching, leadership, or other), Catch-a-fire matches professionals and expert volunteers with a social enterprise.<sup>1</sup> This opportunity would allow Mukasa's team to seek professional advice in the areas of management and financial sustainability. Another significant initiative that might be highly relevant to Fatuma's Voice is the Corporate Institute.<sup>2</sup> The Corporate Institute (a Points of Light Enterprise) is an important resource for social enterprises to expand employee programming, increase visibility, and learn best practices. The Corporate Institute offers pro-bono consulting services to social enterprises to meet the organization's needs and address critical gaps in the venture. This initiative would equip Mukasa's team with the skills and resources to manage the venture more effectively.

In addition, the development of a curriculum involving the co-founders, current staff, and experts would allow for a better management of Fatuma's Voice's newly opened locations in Kenya and abroad. The curriculum would include a guide to the best practices in managing the social venture, increasing social reach and impact, and could be used in various locations. It would also allow for more replications of Fatuma's Voice's model, and potentially lead to a higher revenue-generation.

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<sup>1</sup> Catch-a-fire Website, How it works <https://www.catchafire.org/howitworks/organizations>

<sup>2</sup> The Corporate Institute, Points of Light website <http://www.pointsoflight.org/corporate-institute>

## CONCLUSION

Over the last three years, Fatuma's Voice has expanded across Kenya and given a forum for young Kenyans to express themselves. The organization's attempt to empower youth through arts is particularly significant given the limited artistic scene in Kenya and the overwhelming social stigmatization of self-expression in a tense political climate. Mukasa's team has clearly made tremendous progress in expanding to other cities within Kenya and their motivation to improve the venture and expand regionally is inspiring. By developing a comprehensive sustainability plan, identifying additional funders, diversifying funding streams, and involving experts for the management of the venture, Fatuma's Voice will have the ability to improve current programming, achieve financial sustainability, and expand to other locations. Fatuma's Voice's role in the Kenyan society is crucial to ensuring young Kenyan's voices are heard and in advocating for policy change. Mukasa and his team are passionate about their work and with a trained staff and consistent funding, they can affect meaningful social change in Kenya, and Africa.

## FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT FATUMA'S VOICE

- [Fatuma's Voice Website](#)
- [Fatuma's Voice Facebook Page](#)
- Twitter: @FatumasVoice
- Blog: [Fatuma's Voice Blog Page](#)
- Video: [Fatuma's Voice YouTube Channel](#)

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