

Project Proposal: Inspiring Academic and Career Success Through Peer-Mentorship: Bridging Butaro's Secondary and Post-Secondary Populations

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Background: The 1994 Rwandan genocide, which killed up to 1 million of its citizens and destroyed much of the country's social and physical infrastructure, was fueled by exploitation of systematic inequities between the Tutsis and the Hutus. Rwanda's post-genocide recovery is widely regarded as a success story, with reconciliation and social cohesion at the core of the healing process. On the outskirts of Rwanda, the village of Butaro, in the Burera district, still experiences reverberating effects from this catastrophe. Currently, Butaro sees a considerable dropout rate of 16.2% between primary and secondary school. This project catalyzes continued structural process of reconciliation and cohesion through a methodology.

In 2011, to address inequalities in rural health care, Partners in Health (PIH) built the Butaro District Hospital and Cancer Center, providing the district with a functional hospital and transforming Butaro into a hub for medical education and cancer care in East Africa. PIH then established the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE), which resulted in the displacement of some local families. UGHE recognizes the importance of building community relationships, especially as the first cohort of medical students begin their experiential-learning curriculum, and as the campus expands. The University recently formed a Community Outreach team, comprising both graduate and undergraduate students, who will form the core of these efforts to build social cohesion and increase economic opportunities in Butaro.

Program Target: Peacebuilding is unequivocally linked to education advancement and threatened by sustained inequities in populations. While UGHE has created a foundation for effective rural-based healthcare and physical infrastructure for tertiary education, there remains a disconnect between the University and the greater Butaro community. Our primary goal is to reduce these educational inequities by helping to reverse high secondary school drop-out rates and building relationships between the University and local communities to promote social cohesion. School dropout rates are influenced by many factors including household economics, community values, and school opportunities. In Butaro, the key factor in dropout rates are poor performance in national examinations (which limits opportunities for government scholarships and continued education) and the lack of career opportunities following secondary school. Through the pedagogy we help UGHE introduce, we hope to connect local communities to the university and help regional students to access opportunities.

An underlying issue in dropout rates are inadequate English language skills, which prevents the full participation and learning of Butaro's students in their classes. Leveraging positive role models and English language education, this approach includes mentorship, increased awareness of opportunities and exposure to careers, increased resources, and a more positive atmosphere surrounding youth outcomes and higher education.

Connection to Peace: Education will be the greatest enabler of opportunities and life success for Rwanda's young people. Structural exclusion from these opportunities has the potential to foment violence and the conditions for human rights abuses. By encouraging further education, young people will be able to understand the potential in working towards a common goal, thus establishing a sense of social cohesion, belonging and hope. Schooling and community connections encourage youth to become involved in other empowering hobbies, organizations, and movements, thus benefiting the community as a whole. Through peer mentoring, we hope to foster relationships, and instill trust and confidence, all of which act as the foundation to peace.

Program Details (peer-mentoring, community development): Our program will match approximately ten undergraduate and graduate students with community high-school students in a peer-to-peer mentorship structure. These mentoring relationships will reinforce the importance of continued education by introducing a role model. The program will consist of weekly meetings between the mentor and their group of high-school students, emphasizing connections between the community to the university and encouraging collective learning. Along with targeted English language classes, other sessions will include: building professional relationships, planning for higher education and careers, managing academic, family and work obligations, and exam preparation. Classes will feature team-building activities, goal-setting workshops, guest lecturers, and coaching for standardized

tests. Mentors will also have one-on-one meetings with students that are tailored to the needs of the particular students and address more personal obstacles.

The mentor groups will create a dynamic support system of like-minded peers with common goals, providing both a sense of community and an academic-focused environment. This peer-mentoring initiative aims to foster an atmosphere that enhances the sharing of ideas and a sense of belonging among the students. Our mentorship program was inspired partially by the Dartmouth SIBS program, which pairs Dartmouth students and youth in the surrounding area with the goal of fostering healthy relationships and introducing positive role models. Our collaborators in Butaro have expressed enthusiasm in enacting a similar program with UGHE student mentors. Additional workshops and guest speakers will cover a variety of focuses, including professional development/career exposure, opportunities for higher education, and leadership development. Food, school supplies and other educational resources for students and families will be provided as an incentive to participate. Workshops will run Summer 2020 (June 5th-23rd). We would allow for the 5th and the 23rd as being solely travel days.

Implementation will go as following: **Phase 1** (January - March): Research & development of mentor program structure with consultation with UGHE (Mentor group/workshop structure; criteria for selecting participants) **Phase 2** (March - April) Preparation: Advertising for awareness and interest in village (flyers, visits to secondary schools). The Community Outreach team holds meetings with the community to get feedback on the program. Find mentors. **Phase 3** (April) Project finalization: Selection of participants who demonstrate academic & social needs; revision of mentor program based on feedback. **Phase 4** (June) Implementation: Visits of mentor sessions; hold workshops with guest speakers. **Phase 5** (June and on). Monitoring: Periodic mentor check-ins; surveys; feedback.

Qualifications: Our group leverages diverse perspectives and different strengths and comprises three sophomores majoring in economics, environmental science, and anthropology. During the summer of 2019, Hugh interned under Dr. Agnes Binagwaho, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE). He developed strong relationships on the Butaro campus with peers who have become our partners, and with whom we collaborated with to write this proposal. Eleanor, was the co-founder of her high school's Student Athlete Leadership Team. The team held sports clinics, put on PR events, and attended conferences to improve their own functionality. Lannan has worked for the past two years as a college guidance consultant. Together, we share an appreciation for multi-disciplinary and peer-based learning, believing this pedagogical approach allows us to better understand and engage with society. As Dartmouth students and Division 1 varsity athletes, we are well-equipped to handle and facilitate fast-paced learning environments while committing to, and balancing, other commitments. What is most valuable, however, is our shared experience as undergraduate students, which allows us to better connect with our partner team. While we bring ideas, the actual work will be done through collaboration between university teams. Additionally, members of both teams have recently transitioned from secondary education to higher education, bringing experience from different educational systems. We can better understand the needs and obstacles of secondary education students in preparing for post-secondary opportunities.

Long Term Impact: In consultation with our partner team, together we hope to pilot and introduce a mentoring initiative adapted to the specific needs of the Butaro community. At a broader level, our program attempts to catalyze a shift in community-school relations. An underlying cause for decreased motivation and secondary school completion is the reality that older students end up unemployed after secondary school. By exposing Butaro students to opportunities beyond secondary school, this program will encourage social cohesion, increase retention rates, and foster networks between positive role models and younger generations.

To measure the success of the program, we will note the number of mentor volunteers we retain as well as regional high school students who participate. Ideally, these workshops and mentor pairings will inspire other community engagement events such as forums, tutoring sessions, standardized test prep, etc. Through continued contact with our team in Butaro, we will establish a system to track attendance at workshops and meetings and will monitor secondary school retention rates. Success for this program would mean an increased secondary school completion rate and increased desire among local students to pursue post-secondary education.
