Redesigning Refugee Communities

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PART I: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE AND UNHCR

In Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt, the number of Syrians fleeing civil war in their home country reached one million this month, with over 400,000 having fled in the last nine weeks (UNHCR, 2013b).

In South Sudan, a refugee camp of over 32,000 refugees is struggling to overcome a hepatitis E outbreak that has affected more than 6,000 refugees across the country (UNHCR, 2013f). Dadaab, Africa’s largest refugee camp, which has existed in Kenya for more than 20 years, and hosts nearly a half a million Somalis, recently suffered a grenade attack killing two youths and injuring seven (Al Jazeera, 2013).

Every day, and all over the world, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR) addresses the emergencies faced by people who can no longer find protection from their home governments. 85 percent of the staff for UNHCR works in the field, registering refugees, finding them permanent settlements, and coordinating the distribution of shelter and aid to refugees. The rest of the UNHCR staff works to coordinate responses to pressing emergencies, from mass refugee influxes to security threats. Amidst all these emergencies, UNHCR aims to improve their response to refugee needs. However, given the size of the immediate needs that must be met, UNHCR is only able to react to urgent problems. As a consequence, refugees around the world still suffer from disenfranchisement, hunger, illness, and uncertainty about their future.

As Stanford students, we have the luxury of time and the resources of our institution to allow us to think proactively about the problems facing refugees. This paper aims to propose innovative ideas and methods for improving the refugee experience. With time to think about the overarching issues that UNHCR faces, but with an understanding of the urgency of their work, we submit this paper in hopes of providing options for UNHCR to enhance their operations across an array of topics from emergency communications to long-term protracted camps to food security.

In Part I of this paper, we introduce the collaboration between Stanford University and UNHCR that led to the creation of this paper. We then provide background information and context on UNHCR and its organizational structure. In Part II, we introduce and discuss in greater detail the nature of our individual projects, which are focused on early camp set up, host community relations, and food security. We conclude this paper with a discussion of next steps and implications of our projects and this Stanford-UNHCR collaboration.

The Task

For over 10.5 million people around the world, their country of origin is no longer a safe place for them. They have fled their homes, because, according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Protection of Refugees, they have “a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social or political group; are outside the country of their origin; and, due to this fear, are unable or unwilling to afford the protection of that country.” (Feldman, 2007)
Therefore, these people seek protection in new countries that must, due to international law, accept these refugees even if they do not have the capacity to care for them. At this point, UNHCR works to register incoming refugees, coordinate the provision of shelter, food, and health care, and work to find them a permanent residence. In addition to the 10.5 million people classified as refugees, many more depend on UNHCR in their position as internally displaced persons (who are unable to safely live in their homes but have fled to other parts of their home country), asylum seekers, and stateless persons. UNHCR assists all of these people, coordinating both their legal and physical protection.

But this task is not without its wealth of complexities. Host countries prefer for refugees to be treated as temporary, not permanent residents, and so they are not allowed to get the jobs or build the homesteads that would make them self-sufficient. Refugees pour out of conflict-ridden countries en masse, often overwhelming recipient nations that are themselves unstable. Durable solutions are hard to find, as refugees wade through lengthy asylum processes. Aid agencies that are meant to provide emergency relief end up being the sole livelihood of refugees that are displaced for an average of 17 years (UNHCR et al., 2005d). Throughout this all, UNHCR faces limited institutional funding, that often depends on the generosity of donors responding to situation-specific appeals, making it difficult to plan for the future.

In April of 2012, recognizing these complexities, UNHCR proposed to Stanford University that Stanford take on the task of conceiving innovative opportunities and methods for improving the refugee experience. Over the course of the following year, Stanford faculty and students in different disciplines throughout the University worked with UNHCR to further define their needs and identify key issue areas. As part of this collaboration, we worked with UNHCR to redesign the refugee experience in each of these areas, taking into account the bureaucratic procedures and legal obligations of UNHCR, as well as the diverse needs of refugees in different settings. The UNHCR Innovation team, put together by Deputy Commissioner Alex Aleinikoff, supported our efforts, giving us insight into best practices and on the ground needs, as well as connecting us with additional UNHCR staff.

Through our research, we identified refugee registration and communication, host country relations, and food security as four areas where we could provide meaningful innovations to UNHCR’s current operations. In this paper, we will explain our rationale for focusing on these issues, explore the status quo and previous innovations in these fields, outline the goals and methods of our plan of change, and recommend steps for implementation of these goals.

**Origin of the UNHCR**

In the story of mankind, countless people have been forced to flee their countries of origin in search of safety from persecution, political violence and/or armed conflict. But it was only until the first part of the twentieth century that governments around the world recognized the importance of coordinated international action in protecting refugees. UNHCR has its origins at the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations (UN), which in the 1920s launched a number of initiatives to protect refugees in Europe. The first of these initiatives was the Office of the High Commissioner for Russian Refugees in 1921. This office was established to support people who had become refugees in the wake of the Russian revolution. Among the main goals of this initiative was to clarify the legal situation of refugees by providing them with identity
documents, secure employment opportunities, and help those willing to be repatriated to return home. Another initiative was the High Commissioner for Refugees coming from Germany, established in 1933 to find a permanent home for refugees fleeing Hitler’s Germany (UNHCR, 2005). In 1938, the High Commissioner for Refugees was created as an amalgamation of the two offices described above; however, as the role of this organization was very limited, it ended only eight years later. In 1946, an Intergovernmental Committee was convened with the objective to help refugees of the Second World War. This Committee was replaced in 1947 by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), funded by the United Nations two years after its creation (UNHCR, 2005).

The International Refugee Organization was the first international agency to deal comprehensively with all aspects of refugees’ lives, including registration, determination of status, repatriation and resettlement. The IRO was strongly attacked by many countries for its resettlement activities. This situation, along with the fact that only a limited number of countries were contributing to its budget, led to its eventual demise in 1950.

Finally, in 1950 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. Initially UNHCR was established to operate for a period of three years, reflecting the disagreement among States over the political implications of establishing a permanent body. However, only a couple of years later, the United Nations came to the conclusion that a permanent body was required to oversee global refugee issues.

Since its origins, UNHCR has helped tens of millions of people to restart their lives. Now, with headquarters located in Geneva, Switzerland, an annual budget of US$3.59 billion in 2012 and a staff of 7,685 people in more than 125 countries, UNHCR continues to help approximately 33.9 million refugees and other persons of concern around the world (UN Refugee Agency, 2013a).

**The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol**

In 1951, in addition to establishing UNHCR, member countries of the United Nations adopted the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which provides the foundation of international refugee law (Jastram & Achiron, 2001). It comprises the definition of a refugee and the standards for the treatment of refugees worldwide.

At first, the Convention was limited in scope to people who became refugees before 1951 and focused its application to European refugees. However, in 1967, after the political instability and thousands of refugees that followed the decolonization of Rwanda and Burundi, the international community was pushed to adopt the 1967 Protocol to the 1951 Convention. This Protocol removed from the 1951 Convention both the restriction to be applied only to refugees displaced before 1951 and the restriction to focus only on events occurring in Europe.

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1 By Resolution 319 (IV) of the United Nations General Assembly.
UNHCR Objective

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has a mandate to provide, on a non-political and humanitarian basis, international protection to refugees and to seek permanent solutions for them (UNHCR, 2005). The international protection of refugees begins with securing their admission to a safe country, the granting of asylum and ensuring respect for their fundamental human rights. Among these fundamental rights stands not being forcibly returned to a country where the refugee’s safety or survival is threatened. The international protection of a refugee ends only with the attainment of a durable solution – that is, their voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country.

According to UNHCR, governments around the world have primary responsibility for providing international protection to refugees on their territory. To assist with this, UNHCR works to ensure that governments take all necessary actions to protect the well-being of persons of concern (refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless and internally displaced people) who are on their territory or who are seeking admission to their country.

According to UNHCR’s mandate, the persons of concern are defined as follows:

- A **refugee** is any person who is outside his or her country of origin or habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return there as a consequence of either a well-founded fear of persecution or serious threats to life, physical integrity, or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events disturbing public order.

- An **asylum-seeker** is a person who is seeking international protection whether as an individual or a group basis. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it.

- **Internally displaced persons** are people who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters and who are within the territory of their own country.

- **Returnees** are former refugees or internally displace people (IDPs) who return to their country or region of origin, whether spontaneously or in an organized manner (UNHCR, 2006).

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2 **Non-refoulement** principle, which according to the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees means that no one shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom.
UNHCR Structure

UNHCR is governed by the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) consists of 87 members selected by the ECOSOC and is in charge of approving the agency programmes and its budget on an annual basis (UN Refugee Agency, 2013b). The High Commissioner is appointed by the UN General Assembly for a five-year period and is responsible for the direction and control of the agency in conjunction with a Deputy High Commissioner and an Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and Operations.

The areas of operations, protection, external relations, human resources and finance are located in the Geneva headquarters; however, because of the complexity of UNHCR actions, most UNHCR operations are in the field (85 percent of UNHCR staff are located outside of headquarters) (UN Refugee Agency, 2013c). As a result, UNHCR’s core work is managed from regional offices, branch offices, sub-offices and field offices placed in the proximity of refugee locations. UNHCR relies on voluntary contributions from governments, inter-governmental institutions, individuals, foundations and corporations. In 2012, the UNHCR budget was US$3.59 billion (the largest in history) with the biggest programs in Iraq, Pakistan, and Sudan. The largest contributors in 2012 were the U.S. (with US$793 million), Japan (with US$185 million), the European Commission (with US$164 million), Sweden (with US$118 million), Netherlands and the United Kingdom (with US$103 million) (UN Refugee Agency, 2013d). This reliance on contributions leads to significant difficulty predicting future aid flows, and leads to shortfalls when emergencies occur before funding comes in.

UNHCR Partnerships

Given that protecting refugees is primarily a responsibility of states, cooperation between states and UNHCR is imperative. For governments, this cooperation implies granting asylum and protection without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin, and also providing funding to support UNHCR’s operations. In turn, UNHCR ensures that states sustain their commitments to protect refugees by monitoring national practices, intervening on behalf of individual refugees when necessary and helping governments to improve their capacity to protect refugees and IDPs. By providing assistance, UNHCR enables states to accept refugees more easily, as it relieves states of some of the financial burden of hosting refugees. Although UNHCR is the only United Nations agency with the specific mandate to protect refugees, it partners with other UN bodies in carrying out its missions. One example of this is the UNHCR partnership with the World Food Program (WFP) in charge of delivering relief food aid to refugee camps. Another partner is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which coordinates UN assistance in humanitarian crises. UNHCR also collaborates with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which coordinates all UN development activities including the oversight of long-term development actions following a refugee emergency. There are also various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that play an invaluable role in strengthening the international protection of refugees. Currently, many NGOs work with UNHCR as implementing and operational partners. Implementing partners are NGOs that receive financial support from UNHCR to perform specific services to help refugees. Operational partnerships involve close coordination between
UNHCR and other NGOs in order to support work in emergency relief and settlement, but these partners do not receive financial support from UNHCR (UNHCR, 2013). Because of their community interactions, NGOs are often in a prime position to monitor and report on violations of refugee rights.

**UNHCR's Operations**

To lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, UNHCR divides its scope of operations into the four following categories: protection, emergency response, assistance, and durable solutions.

**Protection**

International protection includes a range of activities that ensure that all women, men, girls and boys of concern have equal access to and enjoyment of their rights in accordance with international law (UNHCR, 2006). Protection activities undertaken by the UNHCR include (UNHCR & NGO partners, 1999):

- Ensuring that countries admit and register asylum-seekers and refugees; these people are not forcibly sent back to their countries where their lives would be in danger;
- Assisting governments in determining who is a refugee;
- Working to ensure that the human rights of refugees and other persons of concern are respected and upheld. Among these are the rights to life, liberty, and protection against physical violence;
- Assisting governments in developing and implementing national laws that protect the rights of refugees, the internally displaced and other of concern to the UNHCR; and
- Promoting accession to and implementation of refugee conventions and law.

**Emergency Response**

UNHCR has the capacity to respond to new emergencies such as an armed conflict that has the potential to result in a refugee crisis. UNHCR currently has the capacity to deploy Emergency Response Teams (ERT) within 72 hours and immediately mobilize financial resources to meet the response to an emergency without delay.

**Assistance**

UNHCR, in conjunction with partner organizations, provides immediate relief to women, men, girls, and boys of concern to the agency, in the form of food, potable water and adequate shelter as well as education and health care. It also helps coordinate the efforts of NGOs, governmental as well as inter-governmental organizations and civil society organizations (such as universities, advocacy groups, foundations and corporations) concerned with the welfare of refugees.
**Durable Solutions**

UNHCR works with countries to identify and provide durable solutions for refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. It seeks to help reintegrate returnees before and after they go home through repatriation, local integration and resettlement programs. The organization establishes livelihood programs, enables shelter provision and also monitors how countries that have signed onto the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol are implementing those treaties. UNHCR also provides advice to governments, courts of law and other authorities and advocates on behalf of persons of concern to the UNHCR.

**Operative Snapshot**

UNHCR has a total of 17 operations currently ranging from emergency response to basic protection activities. Country operations are being carried out in Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Canada, Somalia, Panama, Lebanon, Yemen, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Brazil, Mexico, United States, Venezuela, and Argentina. As illustrated below in Figure 1, UNHCR was dealing with 10+ million refugees worldwide in 2011 with the biggest refugee operation in Pakistan of 1.7+ million refugees.

![Figure 1: Refugee population by country of asylum 2011](source: UNHCR Statistics)

**Critiques of UNHCR**

Since its formation, UNHCR has dealt with increasingly complex refugee crises but with varying success. Consequently, UNHCR's global responses, while forthcoming in many cases, have been on the receiving end of criticism in mass media as well as scholarly work. First, UNHCR is
criticized for an over extended legal mandate and lack of resources to meet its mandate (International Development Committee, 1999). UNHCR's international protection is said to be selective, heavily dependent on non-available resources and political perspective of the emergency situation, thereby denying refugees of the rights guaranteed under the *Refugee Convention*. UNHCR also often receives vastly different donations based on the political context of the refugee crisis, leaving refugees in less geopolitically strategic areas in the lurch.

Second, UNHCR is accused of failing to prioritize the security of refugees. Amidst conflict and its chaos, refugees tend to be the most vulnerable segment of a population; in absence of emergency response or adequate preparedness, refugees face dire security risks that may lead to worsening of the crisis situation (Mcgrath, 2011).

Third, UNHCR is assessed to have failed in creating an organization that can synergize different stakeholders, such as host governments, partner organizations and local communities, to carry out emergency response and from there on devise a path to reintegration and resettlement of refugee communities (Morris, 1997). The *Refugee Convention* envisages repatriation, reintegration and resettlement to be the logical outcomes of an emergency response; however, critics from the development sector find that UNHCR has been unable to work with host governments and refugee communities in enabling these goals. Instead, they suggest, UNHCR remains a bureaucratic organization, resistant to change and unable to learn and adjust to the challenges posed by increasingly complex emergencies (Weiner, 1998).

It is against this background of the critiques presented above, and with a desire to have a proactive, rather than a reactive approach, that we propose solutions for UNHCR that can overcome some if not all of the problems that refugee communities experience.
PART II: SOLUTIONS

From hereon in the paper, we present three solutions for improving the refugee experience. They are RescueSMS, Shared Spaces, and Small-Scale Agriculture.

EMERGENCY CAMP SETUP: RESCUESMS

With special thanks to Jessica Dittmar and Ben Rudolph for their ongoing contributions to this project.

Introduction

During the first weeks of the emergency phase, refugees arrive in the thousands each hour to a new refugee camp, in dire need of food, water, shelter, and medical attention. However, UNHCR staff does not have adequate time or resources to 1) communicate the types of assistance available to each individual refugee in the stressful, chaotic first weeks of camp setup, leaving refugees confused and disempowered, or 2) identify refugees with disabilities, acute health conditions, and other vulnerabilities, leaving these refugees without the targeted assistance they need. To close this information gap, we created RescueSMS, an online software platform allowing both one-way and two-way communication between UNHCR and refugees. Leveraging mobile phone technology, RescueSMS allows UNHCR staff to streamline the registration of refugees, database refugee profiles, and communicate with refugees using SMS. During the first weeks of the emergency phase, RescueSMS can quickly gather refugees’ demographics, identify refugees with vulnerabilities, and provide targeted assistance. In this way, RescueSMS can 1) offload the pressure on UNHCR staff in the stressful, chaotic first weeks, 2) enhance communication between UNHCR and refugees, 3) improve UNHCR efficiency and effectiveness in providing targeted relief to vulnerable refugee populations, and 4) importantly, empower refugees to claim their social and economic rights.

Chaos in the Emergency Phase

When refugees stream out of their countries of origin, they arrive at new or existing refugee camps that are in a state of chaos, as described by the refugee and relief workers we interviewed. Oftentimes, new refugees have few resources beyond the clothes on their back, but an understaffed refugee camp is also unable to meet their needs, as they scramble to get additional staff, register refugees, and set up basic services.

A major cause for chaos is a lack of available relief staff. Although UNHCR is able to deploy a small emergency team to a new location within 72 hours, bringing in additional staff and aid to run a camp of thousands takes significant time. Ten months after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, many camps were still in this “emergency phase,” with the ensuing chaos impacting refugees struggling to receive aid. Refugees International reported that due to lack of available relief staff, less than 30 percent of displaced persons camps in Haiti had camp managers, resulting in mismanagement of non-governmental organization (NGO) resources and a lack of information among refugees about their settlement options (Refugees International, 2010). Our interviews with current and former relief workers confirmed this trend, with former UNHCR official Eric
Morris describing multiple occasions where only up to five international staff had access to a newly displaced population when an emergency began, even though they faced hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Critical Registration and Information Gathering

When refugees first arrive to a camp, one of UNHCR’s first tasks is to register the refugees, both in order to get a sense of their needs and also to distribute aid in an orderly fashion. UNHCR views refugee registration as a protection tool, in that it assists in both legal and humanitarian protection of refugees (UNHCR, 2013e). But, with small numbers of staff and large numbers of newly arriving refugees, it is nearly impossible to gather all the important information UNHCR needs in a timely manner. Thus, in the emergency phase, when the camp is still being set up, registration is frequently done via three levels, each accomplished as UNHCR and relief agencies begin to calm the chaos that comes with refugee influxes. During level 1 registration, usually completed within the first couple of days of refugee arrival, a simple name and household size is recorded, to give UNHCR a sense of the number of refugees. Level 2 registration, which often cannot be completed for seven or more additional days, aims to get a more detailed assessment of individual refugees, including age, ethnicity, and illnesses. Eventually, during level 3 registration, UNHCR works to collect information about vulnerable refugees that have specific needs or have had specific abuses perpetrated against them in their home countries or en route to the camp.

Because of limited resources amongst staff, UNHCR’s ability to conduct this registration process is hampered, leading to large time lags between level 1 and level 2, and an inability to assess refugee needs. Monica Noro, a long-time staff member at UNHCR who works on early camp setup, noted that one of the most critical impacts of this registration time lag is the inability of UNHCR to identify particularly vulnerable refugees and address their needs. During a focus group organized by the NGO Asylum Access with refugees, refugees expressed frustration with their reliance on an inefficient registration system. They explained that upon arrival, there is “No refugee receiving system...[refugees] come and need to fight to be registered...some people not registered, but still refugees...if you don’t have papers, you don’t get [medical] treatment.” They emphasized the importance of registration, saying, “If you’re not registered, you’ll die,” but called for humanitarian assistance before registration processes.

Currently, UNCHR is using a specially designed registration system, called proGres, to register refugees. While the system has cutting-edge design, data entry is reported to be onerous and missing information is common.
Information Gaps

The lack of basic information about refugees has been repeatedly shown to be a major stumbling block for relief workers trying to assess their situation, both during the emergency phase and as camps continue into the post-emergency phase. The importance of data gathering in the emergency phase of refugee camps and beyond has been particularly demonstrated in public health operations. During emergency scenarios, such as the influx of new refugees, health officials are unable to conduct large-scale monitoring efforts that will help inform them of their efficacy and where their focuses should be. Simple reporting mechanisms, however, can provide crude data on the incidence of disease amongst refugees, allowing health workers to use their limited resources for the most efficient interventions. In their study “Infectious Diseases Surveillance During Emergency Relief to Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal,” Dr. Anthony Marfin and his colleagues conducted simple monitoring efforts to assess the morbidity rates and incidence of common diseases among refugees being relocated. Their data allowed public health officials to place a higher emphasis on oral rehydration and plan for a suspected outbreak of cholera, thereby increasing health worker efficiency and efficacy (Marfin et al., 1994, 381).
It has also been found that aid recipients value communications from relief agencies during times of crisis. When drought affected the food supply in Isiolo, Kenya, ActionAid worked with residents to form “Relief Committees,” and supplied them with cell phones. Using the cell phones, the Relief Committee members were able to communicate with truck drivers and food distribution center leaders about when food deliveries would arrive from ActionAid and the World Food Programme. Rather than spend time waiting for food deliveries to arrive, or finding themselves short-handed when it came time for food distribution, the community was able to plan ahead for the aid deliveries, improving relations with the relief agencies. Committee members also took it upon themselves to use the phones to report disease outbreaks and natural disasters affecting their community (ActionAid).

Using Cell Phones to Close Information Gaps

As we researched methods to improve both information gathering and communication between relief agencies and aid recipients, we found a number of successful projects using the widespread proliferation of cell phones in the developing world as a tool. Voix de Kivus, a project of the Center for the Study of Development Strategies at Columbia University, uses community reporters to gather data on instances of violence in Eastern Congo. The reporters send coded information via SMS to NGOs, who can then analyze the security situation in the region. Reporters used solar chargers to keep their cell phones charged, and the project texted them SMS credits on a regular basis in return for their participation.

Voix des Kivus uses FrontlineSMS, a cell phone text-messaging platform that allows developers to create different types of cell phone communication systems. Another example is Medic Mobile, which uses text messages to help rural community health workers follow-up with patients on their medicines and report back to health clinics that are too far for the patients to make regular visits to.

UNHCR is also taking steps to improve communication with refugees via text messaging. A pilot project with urban refugees in Nairobi, Kenya aims to keep disperse refugees aware of their asylum status, using SMS technology. This effort works to prevent refugee frustration as they wait in lines and travel long distances to determine the progress of their asylum applications.

Project RescueSMS

Taking lessons from the existing projects described above, and with a specific focus on UNHCR’s registration and communication needs, we developed RescueSMS. RescueSMS is an online software platform designed to address the challenges of communication between refugees and UNHCR field staff, specifically a large number of refugees and relatively few UNHCR field staff members. It serves as a platform for UNHCR field staff to receive incoming text messages from refugees as well as respond and broadcast text messages to the camp. The core goal of this project is to not only aggregate information from refugees, but to efficiently process those messages so that UNHCR can respond appropriately.
To facilitate the use of this system among refugees, registration will be as simple as a refugee sending an SMS with his/her name to the specified UNHCR number. This will work across multiple camps because each camp will be assigned its own toll-free number. Once a refugee has been logged into the system, UNHCR can begin sending and receiving messages from that client. These messages can be designed to survey, alert, update or respond to the refugees. To further fill in the refugee’s registration profile, UNHCR can automatically send survey questions about the refugee’s age, ethnicity, and other demographic data. As UNHCR moves out of the registration phase, UNHCR can use the system to send group or individual messages, and can also receive messages from individual refugees.

RescueSMS has two main features, the inbox – where messages are read and sent, and the contacts page – where contacts are edited and reviewed. The uniqueness of this project comes in the implementation of these two features. Design is also a key aspect of this project, as this will make the use of the platform simple and intuitive for already busy UNHCR staff.

The RescueSMS inbox (illustrated on the following page) displays a current list of text messages. SMS messages can easily be found by searching for keywords in those messages, for contacts who sent them or by the date the message was sent. Once a query has been done the resultant set of text messages can then be tagged so that UNHCR can organize text messages quickly and efficiently. Additionally, the tag can optionally be applied to all incoming text messages that fall under the same criteria. Text visualization is another aspect that RescueSMS leverages in order to allow UNHCR to understand text messages quickly. With unique approaches to visualization techniques, UNHCR will be able to understand large swaths of text messages in a very short amount of time. Lastly, UNHCR always has the ability to respond to any number of searched text messages. For example, a search for the tag “community leader” will produce all text message written by community leaders. From there UNHCR can simply hit a button to compose a message to all community leaders.
Figure 3: The RescueSMS Inbox Page

Source: Authors’ Rendering

Figure 4: The RescueSMS Contacts Page

Source: Authors’ Rendering
The second facet to RescueSMS is the contacts page, as illustrated in Figure 4 on the previous page. This page will allow for the tagging and filtering of contacts. In this way, UNHCR can review subgroups’ profiles within the camp. Initially, the repository of contact information will be sparse since refugees only register with their name and phone number. However, as refugees respond to automatic messages asking them for additional registration information, UNHCR can create a robust database of information. This information enables UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva to compile data of refugees and coordinate the amount of assistance needed, reducing the pressure on the local UNHCR staff.

In order to achieve success, RescueSMS must both address the needs of refugees and that of UNHCR staff. At the very least, UNHCR staff must be able to use RescueSMS to gain information about incoming refugees more quickly and with more thoroughness than their current system. But, beyond integrating RescueSMS into UNCHR’s current systems, there is the potential for RescueSMS to address other information gaps facing aid workers. UNHCR staff could use RescueSMS to text message refugees about important events and communicate with individual refugees on specific issues, such as a follow-up to a visit to a health clinic, or an update on a refugee’s asylum application, as we’ve seen achieved in the case studies described previously. By compiling the data coming into RescueSMS, UNHCR could visualize needs and demographics in all of their refugee camps, helping them provide timely information to providing agencies and donors alike. And by using RescueSMS among aid workers, RescueSMS could provide important communication capabilities for emergency teams or for working groups representing people from different aid agencies.

**Objectives**

A panel of former refugees noted that they wish they could have known what was going to happen to them. They explained that especially in the early days of being a refugee, they did not know what their future held, both with regards to their political status, and with regard to their immediate survival.

With RescueSMS, we aim to quell some of this uncertainty, by providing a more efficient and direct way for UNHCR to communicate with refugees. First, by broadcasting information about aid deliveries, refugees can get a sense of when aid will come. Later, with direct messages to specific groups, such as asylum seekers, people with children under five, and so forth, refugees can learn how UNHCR will aim to address their needs. Refugee communication with UNHCR will also allow refugees to claim the services they need, rather than wait for those services. By taking the initiative to fill out surveys, and alert UNHCR to the needs of their family, refugees are able to play a role in determining the aid coming to the camp. Finally, with the ability to profile refugees, especially special needs refugees, earlier, UNHCR will be able to treat refugees not as a homogeneous group, but as individuals. Information gathering can help UNHCR understand what food, healthcare, and other items are needed for different refugees in their camps. By using text messages, this should be able to be accomplished with less staff and in less time than with their current methods.
RescueSMS aims to improve the refugee experience by proving a faster registration system, and providing them more information from UNHCR. We envision that by using RescueSMS, UNHCR staff will be able to more quickly move to level 2 and even level 3 registration, responding to the needs of the most vulnerable refugees before it is too late. Additionally, we hope it will provide refugees with a means to communicate their needs rather than waiting for someone to ask them. The efficiency and information gained by UNHCR will allow UNHCR staff to better provide for refugees, leading to a more tolerable refugee experience.

Implementation

Despite the potential for RescueSMS to improve the registration process, enhance communication between UNHCR and refugees, and improve the efficacy of UNHCR operations, behavioral, logistical, financial and political challenges must be addressed. Here, we propose a framework to ensure that RescueSMS can be as successful as possible in improving the experience of refugees.

Access, adoption, and appropriate use

There are several behavioral and cultural challenges that RescueSMS needs to address, particularly access, adoption, and appropriate use. First, since UNHCR is primarily concerned with protecting the rights of refugees, RescueSMS can only be used to facilitate or supplement, and not replace, the existing registration and communication systems. Indeed, despite the reliance on mobile phone technology, RescueSMS must not unintentionally privilege refugees using cell phones over other refugees. For instance, some refugees may not be literate, speak the language used in the host government or refugee camps, or own cell phones, limiting access to RescueSMS-facilitated registration and communication with UNHCR, which assumes both literacy and cell phone use. Thus, we intend to investigate alternatives for refugees who are not literate or do not have access to cell phones, such as voice-recognition or human-facilitated systems. However, RescueSMS can still facilitate registration and communication with the majority of refugees, so that limited human resources can focus on providing targeted assistance to the most vulnerable refugee populations.

Second, RescueSMS can enhance the efficacy of current UNHCR operations only if refugees use the system. Initially, UNHCR may encounter distrust from refugees. Indeed, refugees may be reticent to provide personal information to an unknown entity, especially if they feel targeted or persecuted, and moreover, refugees may not view RescueSMS as a credible service. Thus, UNHCR must explicitly assuage privacy concerns and officially endorse RescueSMS to improve trust and encourage use of the service. Concurrently, UNHCR must ensure the protection of sensitive information received from refugees, through encryption of text messages and other security measures.

Third, based on the experiences of other text messaging-based services, refugees may not respond to text messages from UNHCR, accurately or at all. Thus, UNHCR needs to include incentives to encourage refugees to establish initial contact with RescueSMS, to respond accurately to text messages broadcasted by UNHCR, to respond accurately, and to continue...
engaging with UNHCR via RescueSMS. In particular, UNHCR must incentivize and remind refugees to update information regularly, such as cell phone number. Meanwhile, RescueSMS must be able to manage multiple SIM cards and phone numbers for each individual or household. For example, to encourage refugees to establish initial contact with RescueSMS upon arrival, UNHCR can use simple communication strategies such as arrival signs or megaphones. Later, UNHCR can transfer prepaid text messaging credits or other goods or services (which cannot be manipulated by the host government or rebel groups) to encourage responsiveness and continued engagement with RescueSMS.

Fourth, misuse or misunderstanding of the role of RescueSMS by refugees may reduce the effectiveness of the online platform as a communication channel. During a focus group with both Southeast Asian and East African refugees, refugees emphasized the oppressive boredom experienced daily within rural refugee camps and mentioned the possibility of refugees sending text messages to RescueSMS, without any purpose. Again, UNHCR may need to rely on incentives to reduce the likelihood of such text messages, while RescueSMS may need to include an in-person or computer-assisted (i.e., natural language processing) filter. In addition, refugees must clearly understand the role of RescueSMS within UNHCR operations, as discussed further in the next subsection.

**Role within existing operations**

In order for RescueSMS to have value added to UNHCR, UNHCR needs to define the role of RescueSMS within their existing operations. First, integration of RescueSMS into the existing registration and communication systems will encourage the adoption and success of the online platform. As mentioned earlier, UNHCR currently uses proGres to register refugees, and senior emergency response officials have suggested that integration of RescueSMS with proGres, or incorporation of proGres into RescueSMS, will reduce administrative costs and inefficiencies (i.e., using the systems concurrently). In addition, UNHCR must update job responsibilities to include use and management of RescueSMS. Based on preliminary user interface tests, users are able to use the online platform with proficiency and ease within half an hour, due its simple and intuitive design. Thus, using RescueSMS should not encroach on other job responsibilities.

Second, UNHCR needs to define the role of RescueSMS vis-à-vis existing emergency response operations and to manage refugees’ expectations accordingly. Indeed, there are several potential roles for RescueSMS. For instance, if UNHCR intends to use RescueSMS only for registering and profiling (i.e., collecting demographic data) refugees, and for broadcasting group-specific messages to refugees, then refugees must not expect to use RescueSMS to ask questions that require individual responses, such as emergency help. If instead, UNHCR intends to use RescueSMS for monitoring and responding to individual concerns and emergencies, then refugees must be informed of RescueSMS as an alternative voicing these concerns in-person at an UNHCR field staff office. In this case, RescueSMS needs to include an in-person or computer-based verification system to appropriately interpret text messages from refugees exaggerating their distress or urgency of their situation or from non-refugees seeking to abuse the system. Thus, appropriate text messaging between UNHCR and refugees and mutual
understanding among both refugees and UNHCR field staff will help to ensure clarity regarding the specific role of RescueSMS with urban and rural refugee camp operations.

Reliance on mobile phone technology

First, RescueSMS relies heavily on refugees’ use of cell phones, and specifically, communication via text messaging. The presence of cell phones in both urban and rural refugee camps is a critical prerequisite to the success of RescueSMS. According to UNHCR’s Monica Noro, most urban refugees use cell phones and increasingly, rural refugees own cell phones as well. Indeed, Refugees United, an SMS-based service for refugees to search for missing family members, estimates that 78 percent of refugees in East Africa own mobile phones, and in recent years, cell phone proliferation has vastly increased in countries with large refugee inflows (Onyiego, 2010).

Second, RescueSMS relies heavily on functioning cell phone networks and the area of cell phone network coverage. Such reliance can increase the dependency of UNHCR on third-party organizations, such as host governments or rebel groups, to maintain the smooth functioning of cell phone networks. For instance, since cell phone networks are often damaged or shut down in conflict zones, UNHCR must ensure that its operations do not rely completely on cell phone communication. In addition, high volume of traffic from tens of thousands of refugees arriving in a short period of time can overwhelm the cell phone network. In these high-risk cases, UNHCR may need to partner directly and independently with local cell phone service providers, in order to prepare logistics and operating capacity appropriately.

Third, RescueSMS indirectly relies on electrification, in that refugees need to be able to charge their cell phones. Particularly in the emergency response phase, the scarcity of resources may restrict the ability of UNHCR to use not only RescueSMS, but cell phones. During a focus group with refugees from Southeast Asia, refugees noted that while surrounding communities are electrified, often refugee camps are not. Indeed, these refugees mentioned that the host government does not focus on electrifying refugee camps and that they could only access electricity through illegal agreements with locals. One solution may be that used by Voix des Kivus, whereby solar chargers are made available to the community, perhaps for communal use.

Fixed and variable costs

In order to use RescueSMS, UNHCR needs to sustainably finance both the associated fixed and variable costs. Specific fixed costs include financing the server to host the online platform, the installation of the software on UNHCR computers, the training of staff in the appropriate use of RescueSMS within the scope of their operations, and the maintenance of the online platform over time, among other costs.

In terms of specific variable costs related to text messaging, UNHCR must finance the cost of sending and receiving text messages both for UNHCR field staff, and potentially, for refugees as well. To send and receive text messages from refugees, UNHCR will incur a cost varying between 0.02 to 0.04 USD per text message. For example, if UNHCR sends 10,000 text
messages to refugees arriving in the first few days of the emergency response phase, the total cost would range from 200 to 400 USD, with the addition of 16 to 32 USD per week if UNHCR then sends 800 text messages to subsequently arriving refugees.

In addition, to encourage the use of RescueSMS among refugees, UNHCR may potentially have to finance the cost of sending and receiving text messages on behalf of refugees as well. In general, refugees use prepaid credits to use text messages, again at prices ranging from 0.02 to 0.04 USD. Ideally, UNHCR could partner and negotiate with local cell phone service providers to allow refugees to text UNHCR toll-free. Alternatively, UNHCR could reimburse refugees with cell phone credits to cover the cost of sending text messages to UNHCR. However, this option prevents refugees without any prepaid credits to send text messages to UNHCR. In this case, to improve access, UNHCR may have to physically distribute prepaid credits to all refugees, with the hope that the refugees use them for registration via RescueSMS, and not communication with family or friends.

**Recommendations**

RescueSMS has great potential to assist aid workers, but it must be further tested and refined to ensure it fills the needs of the refugee community. Following our team leader’s need-finding trip to refugee camps in Ethiopia, the RescueSMS team will continue to work to refine the product to meet UNHCR’s needs. During these need-finding trips, we primarily intend to test the assumptions underlying our prototype and to receive user feedback on RescueSMS from relief agencies and refugees. Specifically, we aim to understand the current registration and communication processes in refugee communities, including:

- Communication needs of refugees and UNHCR field staff;
- Frustrations of refugees and UNHCR field staff with the current receiving system;
- Cell phone use by refugees;
- Refugee emotions, capabilities, and obstacles regarding SMS communication and registration (i.e., literacy, languages, cultural dynamics, responsiveness, cost, privacy concerns);
- Cell phone network coverage and cell phone proliferation in refugee camps, and other feasibility challenges (i.e., availability of electricity);
- Volume and helpfulness of SMS responses from refugees; and
- Vulnerabilities to the system that require back-up systems.

We’ve already shared our prototype with a number of UNHCR staff members, many of whom have provided us with valuable feedback, as well as expressed excitement about using the tool in the field. Further conversations with UNHCR can also help us understand the logistics necessary to place signage around a camp and use cell phone registration data to help aid agencies send the appropriate supplies to and around the camp.

Eventually, we will pilot an iteration of RescueSMS in a refugee camp, preferably one with an ongoing influx of refugees. RescueSMS could be piloted with UNHCR, or, if the UNCHR team is unable to prototype it, another aid delivery agency that requires registration. This pilot project
will provide valuable feedback on issues with integrating the system into UNHCR’s, and will allow for appropriate changes to be made. Based on the outcomes of the pilot project, we recommend rolling out the program to any refugee camp where communication and registration issues persist.

To fully benefit from the resources RescueSMS provides, UNHCR will have to integrate it into its current registration systems, and work with cell phone providers to work out a toll-free number for refugees to register for the system. They’ll have to have a field worker in each location take responsibility for replying to text messages and for setting up the survey in the appropriate language, as well as place signage throughout the camp encouraging refugees to register. Additionally, a staffer in UNHCR Headquarters should be analyzing the data coming in from RescueSMS, helping other aid agencies estimate and respond to the needs of the camp.
HOST COMMUNITY RELATIONS: SHARED PLACES

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Introduction

The presence of a large refugee population in a host region or country can significantly disturb existing communities, social patterns, and resource allocation. While camps are built to serve as temporary and impermanent settlements in times of emergencies, the reality stands in stark contrast. As of 2007, 7.89 million of the world’s 12 million refugees and asylum seekers have been in camps for five years or more and 7.13 million of them for ten years or more (UNHCR, 2008b). Designing refugee camps based on the concept of temporary emergencies when dealing with protracted refugee situations does not only lead to inefficient use of resources, but it also causes tensions between refugee and local populations (Feldman, 2007). This fundamentally impedes the ability of the refugee population to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace, which UNHCR states as being its ultimate goal (UNHCR, 2013c).

In seeking to help refugees rebuild their lives, UNHCR has identified and employs three durable solutions open to refugees in protracted situations:

1. Voluntary repatriation: UNHCR provides assistance to refugees in voluntarily returning home once the region of their former homes, and the general political environment, is considered safe and stable again;

2. Resettlement to a third country: this is pursued in situations where it is impossible for a person to go back home or remain in the host country;

3. Local integration: integration offers a more complex definition, but as framed in refugee conventions and as exercised by UNHCR, it grants full and permanent asylum, membership, and residency status by the host government (Kibreab, 1985). This de jure integration of refugees is based predominantly on refugees’ legal status. But, it is granted to such a small number of refugees that the de facto integration bears little weight in the recommendation of rethinking refugee communities. Crisp (2003) offers a more socio-economic definition of integration. His concept is based on a combination of access to sustainable livelihoods, the enjoyment of a standard of living comparable to a host community, and a life free of discrimination. Integration is thus always a social and economic process, and only in some exceptional cases does local integration include access to citizenship.

From the mid-1980s onwards, there was consensus surrounding the notion that repatriation – normally but not necessarily on a voluntary basis – was the only viable solution to refugee problems, particularly in Africa and other low-income regions (Crisp, 2003). But more recently, there has been an increasing awareness regarding the serious roadblocks facing refugees in returning home: the conflict and violence that initially drove refugees
from their homes is often still unresolved; obsolete infrastructure, including destroyed roads and land mines, adds challenges to moving around large population; and once back home, refugees often face serious employment challenges, a lack of opportunities, and the inability to support themselves and their families.

UNHCR has also actively pursued and focused on resettlement for refugee populations and it remains a viable alternative, but it too has faced serious challenges, obstacles, and limitations in providing a primary durable solution to protracted refugee scenarios. Resettlement is a rare option for a small minority of the world’s refugees – less than 1 percent of the world’s refugees were resettled in third countries in 2005.

Repatriation and/or resettlement have not proven capable of addressing the vast majority of refugees and refugee camps and refugees can remain displaced for years or even decades and protracted conflicts keep refugees in limbo, where they are neither able to return home nor resettle in third countries. Thus, UNHCR is turning increased attention toward policies and activities that foster integration in order to improve the lives of refugees in protracted camps. In turning towards processes of integration as a more feasible durable solution, UNHCR is working towards a transition away from life-saving activities toward sustainable programs and increased self-reliance among refugees. For example, UNHCR started livelihood projects for urban refugees in 2012, and it is currently developing a three-year self-reliance program for Dollo Ado, Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2013d). These programs illustrate UNHCR’s recognition of the need to shift away from purely camp-oriented policies to policies that promotes greater long-term and sustainable thinking.

One specific approach to local integration in protracted refugee situations that UNHCR is currently focusing on in particular is Development Assisted Integration (DAI). Similar to the concept of full integration, DAI rests on the assumption that local integration is both viable and desirable for both the local and the refugee community. In essence, DAI entails voluntary settlement of refugees in the communities of the host country either by leaving the refugee camp or remaining in the campsite after UNHCR officially closes down the refugee camp. In both scenarios, UNHCR continues to provide funding for “enabling refugees to settle amongst locals by strengthening the services and livelihood opportunities available to both populations” (p. 50, Feldman, 2007).

And indeed, even in cases where full integration was not achieved, it has been shown that refugees who have led a productive life in exile, received an education, developed practical skills, and accumulated some resources may actually be better prepared and equipped to go home and contribute to the reconstruction of their country than those who have languished in camps for years, surviving on minimal levels of humanitarian assistance (Crisp, 2003).
Case Study Evidence: Where models of integration and shared institutions have proven successful

UNHCR’s increased focus on integration strategies is backed up by a number of successful cases of local integration across different geographic locations. As UNHCR identified, these cases exhibit strong efforts of “partnerships and collaboration between agencies and countries in the pursuit of collective solutions” (p.6, UNHCR, 2008b) and require “vision and leadership of host governments” (ibid).

Uganda
In Uganda, where refugees are entitled “to live in settlements as opposed to camps”, “travel freely within the settlements” and “are allocated land to cultivate” (Orach, 2006), UNHCR and the government of Uganda launched an integration of health services to eliminate parallel service systems for refugee and host populations. The objective to improve the standards of living of both the refugee and host community was realized by employing a policy of integration. The integrated system, which receives financial and logistical support from both the central government and UNHCR, has contributed to “improved geographic and temporal accessibility of health services” (Orach, 2006) and “an enhancement in the harmonious relationship between refugee and host populations in the refugee-affected areas”.

Zambia
The Zambia Initiative was a three program backed by a $25 million fund provided by several international donors and the Government of the Republic of Zambia to address the combined effects of food deficit, poor infrastructure, limited access to public services and economic opportunities, and “in the process finding durable solutions for refugees” (p.3, Zambia Initiative Review, 2004). The initiative was launched “in recognition of the positive role that refugees can play to alleviate poverty and to create an environment conducive for refugees to become productive members of the host society” (p.3, Zambia Initiative Review, 2004). To implement the program and improve the quality of life of local host communities and refugees, the Zambia Initiative organized local development committees consisting host and refugee communities to bring development through improved health, education, and vocational training. The committees consisted of 50 percent and 25 percent refugees, depending on the concentration of refugees in the respective communities.

Tanzania
In 2006, the Government of Tanzania enabled the country’s largest group of refugees to become self-sufficient. Over 150,000 Burundians were allocated five hectares of land per refugee family, which they turned into productive land. The refugee communities substantially contribute to the national economy by making up over one third of the agricultural produce and almost half of the tobacco cash crop production in the districts of their settlement. The ensuing nationalization of the Burundis can be seen as a result of how well this population responded to the original self-reliance promoting policy and the willingness of the refugees to contribute positively to Tanzanian society. The Government of Tanzania has recognized the economic benefit the refugees bring to the area and agree to
a tight partnership between Tanzania’s government, UNHCR, and donors that “has helped to change the refugees’ lives for the better and bring them long-term certainty” (Welch, Head of DFID office Tanzania in The Benefits of Belonging, UNHCR, 2010).

Ecuador
Lagro Acrio in Ecuador is a region characterized by the absence of public institutions and scarce socio-economic development. In urban settings, UNHCR seeks to identify the needs of refugees in Lagro Acrio and local community through participatory processes in coordination with town councils and other local institutions. UNHCR uses these insights for policy-making and development plans. More specifically, UNHCR encourages integration and peaceful coexistence and ensures the benefit of host communities in the planning of their community projects. One of the recent examples of this cooperation was the inauguration of the multi sports hall, built jointly by UNHCR and the town council in the San Valentin neighborhood of Lago Agrio (UNHCR, 2012).

UNRWA
The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has served roughly one third of the five million Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip through camps which have been open over 60 years. Extreme poverty and decongestion motivated the UNRWA to begin improving the camps’ physical and social environment through the introduction of a participatory, community-driven planning approach in 2007. In Talbiyeh Camp, Jordan between 2009 and 2011 the community defined needs and priorities, and implemented an array of projects that addressed spatial, infrastructural, social, and economic needs. The project also energized the community, restoring dignity through participation in decision-making (UNRWA, 2012).

Pakistan
The Refugee Affected and Hosting Area (RAHA) is a joint initiative between the government of Pakistan and UN agencies, such as UNHCR, to “assist Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the communities that host them”. One of the outcomes of the initiative has been the modernization of the Hayatabad medical complex, which now provides free treatment to Pakistani nationals and Afghan refugees, the latter making up forty percent of the center’s patients. As part of the RAHA initiative, the donation of surgical equipment did not only turn the medical center into a highly functional medical center offering a broad range of medical services, but also “promote[s] coexistence while improving social services and creating economic opportunities” according to the head of UNHCR’s office in Peshawar, Pakistan. In total, the RAHA initiative is expected to benefit up to 2.5 million Pakistani and Afghans (UNHCR, 2011).

Challenges facing integration approaches
Despite these success stories and because local integration usually refers to granting full and permanent asylum, membership, and residency status by the host government, local integration has not been widely adopted by host countries around the world. Full local integration is frequently characterized by a number of substantial resistance factors. Most
significantly host government fear that they lack the economic, social, and governmental structures to sufficiently capacity to absorb large numbers of refugees; refugees are also reluctant to give up hope of eventually returning to their home country. Host countries also push back on refugee integration because of perceived negative effects, such as depletion of resources (such as the cutting down of trees for firewood); development of camps as bases for military opposition activity and “enclaves of political ferment” (p.52, Feldman, 2007); financial and political burden on the host country; and local economic effects created by camp services being offered only to refugees and not surrounding local community, undermining local services by paying higher wages and luring away the most qualified staff.

Because of these perceived negative effects of refugees and refugee camps, one of the greatest limitations to local integration projects and social and economic interaction between local and refugee communities is the commonly observed restriction on free mobility “in and out of the camp” (p.52, Feldman, 2007). Combined with employment restrictions for refugees, the host government’s demand for — often qualified — labor cannot be met and thus hinders a positive contribution of refugees to the local economy.

**Project Shared Places**

Despite the significant and daunting challenges facing integration and the negative perceptions of refugees, the situation is, however, not a uniformly negative one. As revealed by the case studies above, ad hoc programs or initiatives that either directly or indirectly address refugee-host community tensions have been implemented by refugees, NGOs, and UNHCR in many camps. Driven by refugee needs or interests, facilities or projects are opened to the host community for use, with the host community itself having varying degrees of involvement. These facilities, projects, or initiatives, however, display a number of shortcomings. They (1) are not systematic, and occur via individual initiatives at only a few camps, (2) face challenges of long-term sustainability, and (3) are not fundamentally and universally being driven and designed to address the sources of host community-refugee tensions.

While there remains significant challenges to creating or fostering integration, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, there is an important opportunity space to better understand how integration has been created, why it has worked, and how to systematically implement programs and policies that contribute to improving refugee lives while they remain in limbo in camps.

**Objectives of our proposal and the concept of a shared place**

Our project advocates for the systematic, appropriate development of shared places at all UNHCR camps, whether recently established or protracted. A shared place or initiative is one in which both refugee and host community would have, and perceive, equal ownership and access. In particular, it consists of a physical space, located between the host community and the refugee camp, in which members of the refugee and host communities
jointly plan and implement projects that are *mutually beneficial* to both communities. A shared place, for example, may contain a school, medical facility, or public market – or perhaps even a forestation project or a religious center – which would be used by both host community members and refugees. As illustrated in Figure 5 below, the shared place would provide a place where the two communities could learn, trade, receive services, and simply interact.

**Figure 5: Rendering of a shared place**

This is a rendering of what a shared place might look like at the Kebribeyah camp in eastern Ethiopia. The blue represents the outline of the host community, the green represents the boundaries of the refugee camp, and the orange circle in between represents the location of a shared place, which could be, for example, that of a market place, a hospital, or a school.

In addition to improved facilities and employment prospects, the refugees gain an opportunity, through the shared place, for authorized, legal interaction with the host community outside the camp confines, opportunities for cultural and educational exchange, and a site of shared ownership between refugees and local communities. Locating the space
between the communities makes the space easily accessible and creates a physical link that does not encroach upon the host community. At the same time, the location offers refugees authorized exit from the camp. Shared places would thus help defuse tensions over resource competition, allow both communities to satisfy both social and physical needs, and facilitate a neutral framework for interactions that alter negative perceptions. Shared places thus serve as a link between two entities, thereby helping to foster a sense of community through a shared responsibility of construction and maintenance.

Success stories in UNHCR literature exclusively focus on the potential benefits of full local integration. As discussed in the case study section above, in a number of cases, the host government provided resources for refugee self-sufficiency (e.g. agricultural land and inputs), which eventually led to the acceptance of the refugees as part of the local community. In other cases, refugees benefitted from more permissive legal regimes (e.g. the right to work or legal residency) such that refugees had opportunities for both self-sufficiency and greater integration. It is precisely this balance between integration and social interaction that we seek to fill. A shared place thus walks the tightrope between advocating for full-fledged integration and continuing under the currently preponderant model of isolation. Between these two models lies the core of our concept: establishing and fostering social and economic interaction between these two communities.

The concept of a shared place also shifts the emphasis beyond refugee’s pure physiological needs to include those of social needs such as dignity and the need for life beyond survival. At present, UNHCR has primarily been focused on providing basic services and needs to refugees, such as food, water, shelter, and medical attention. While these needs are immediate and essential, refugees, particularly in protracted camp settings, suffer from a lack of attention placed on social needs and the sense of belonging.

![Figure 6: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](source: Authors’ rendering)

The shared place emphasizes and seeks to shift away from basic physiological needs to greater social needs, whether the camp setting is new or protracted.
As illustrated in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs above, these social needs are no less important. The concept of a shared place highlights and seeks to address and fulfill these needs. Supported by a number of interviews with UNHCR staff and refugees in both the U.S. and Ethiopia, the shared place concept dispels the myth that refugees live on the brink of survival. They need and require a more robust life, and providing this through shared places is one integral step in the direction of helping refugees create a life of dignity.

**Implementation**

*Choosing a Shared Place*

The approach of a shared place seeks to use the insights on successful integration projects in protracted refugee camps and transfer them to (1) current protracted refugee camps that meet the necessary requirements for shared places and (2) the planning of future refugee camps that will include the shared place concepts.

Planning and implementing shared places requires collaboration between UNHCR (and aid providing partners), development donors, and the host government to establish the legal framework and financial basis for the projects. Shared places can initially be implemented most easily in camps, whether new or protracted, where UNHCR decides to provide basic facilities, such as schools, to the camp community without the need of additional funding.

Shared places should be implemented where the following requirements are met:

1. The refugee camp must not be too isolated and removed from the nearest local community. The shared place must be in easy commuting distance of both the refugee camp and the local community—in most cases, that will mean a walkable distance of a maximum of two miles for each community.

2. Tensions of ethnic or other nature should be considered carefully when planning shared places. Shared places are arguably easiest to implement where the level of tensions between the communities is relatively low. The shared space concept is less likely to have a beneficial effect if the level of hostility within the camp, or between the camp and local community, is very high. In short, if there are armed hostilities, or if refugees are being recruited by the militias of the country of origin, a shared place is going to become the scene of violence rather than positive interaction.

*Overcoming host government hesitation*

Implementation of the shared place always requires the permission of host governments for refugees to access and potentially work in the shared place. It is therefore important to highlight the benefits of shared places when planning the concept to host (national and local) governments.
Host governments have proven to be more cooperative whenever there is a clearly discernible contribution to their country. Hence the focus of shared places must be to identify the needs of the local community in conjunction with understanding the needs of refugees and UNHCR in terms of desirability (refugees), feasibility (UNHCR and implementing partners) and viability (UNHCR and other funding). It is imperative that all shared places enable both the local and refugee population to enjoy a decent standard of living, and living a life free of discrimination. Depending on the nature of the shared place, this can entail providing opportunities for economic activity.

Shared places that are substantially funded by UNHCR and international development agencies have great potential to resonate positively with host governments (both on the local and national level), because (a) shared places offer institutions and infrastructure that can be used by the local community, (b) shared places offer employment opportunities for the host nation’s population and (c) the financial support for construction and maintenance coming from UNHCR and other aid agencies. In other words, the provision of shared institutions also allows the two communities to pool resources and share operational responsibilities while simultaneously attracting use and providing benefits to both communities. Supporting the government in identifying certain industries that may provide employment opportunities down the time may help agencies identify relevant skills training and other practical livelihood activities. Finally, structures in the shared place can easily pass into the local community’s ownership and thereby become permanent assets to a host community.

**Funding**

Funding is another major element of implementation, but shared place projects do not have to be resource-intensive. First, the projects themselves need not be elaborate. Second, in many cases, the projects provide resources UNHCR generally provides within the camp setting, or that the host government might fund within the local community. Shared places merely calls for these projects to be planned differently – with the input of both refugees and local community members – and built in different locations – in a shared place between a camp and a local community. For example, if UNHCR is planning to build a new school for refugees where the local community also requires one, the shared place project may simply be the construction of a new school accessible to both communities along with related spaces such as a playground. Or, if the local community has a pressing need for improved medical facilities, collaboration between the host government and UNHCR can lead to additional services which were initially beyond the host government’s means. These partnerships between UNHCR, host governments, and development aid agencies lower the financial burden each faces, while increasing the benefits provided.

In order to create ownership and sustainability, the shared place is created and built by refugees and host community members working directly together. They use the resources – resources identified as desired by both communities – side by side. This helps with shifting perceptions and allowing refugees to start to be seen as part of, and contributors to, the local community. The more this relationship develops, the easier it will be to accept and
implement more substantial refugee rights, including broader mobility and employment rights, and possibly local integration. But if the refugees do repatriate, the shared place and its resources can easily pass into full ownership of the local community.

*Consultation, Community Engagement, and Construction*

In establishing and building a shared placed, consultations and community engagement, both with local tribal leaders as well as local and regional administrations will be absolutely key to the success of the shared place. In collaboration with ENNEAD Architecture firm, who has been engaged with this project over the course of the past year, Figure 7 illustrates the process of visualizing, establishing, and using a shared place. As shown in panels 1 through 3, consultation with all stakeholders and direct community engagement will be necessary to determine the nature of the shared place that would provide the greatest amount of mutual benefit to both communities and that would remain useful for local communities if/when refugee camps are closed. Construction would be jointly done by both the refugee and host communities, using local resources for the building materials (panel 3). As refugees and local community members use the space, it becomes a more integrated, permanent feature of the local architecture (panels 4 and 5), providing access to both communities (panel 6). And yet, if the camp were to close and refugees were repatriated, the shared place would remain and continue providing benefits for the host community.

**Figure 7: From Consultation to Construction to Use**

Phase 1: consultation with the local community; Phase 2: consultation with the local community; Phase 3: community engagement with all stakeholders in order to identify overlapping needs that would be fulfilled by the shared place; Phase 4: construction begins with both refugees and locals participating jointly; Phase 5: joint use and ownership of the shared place by both communities; Phase 6: over time the shared place will expand and become part of both communities; Phase 7: the shared place will become a place where both refugees and host community members come to interact, providing mutual benefit to both communities; Phase 8: the shared place will remain easily accessible and relevant for the host community once a refugee camp is closed and refugees are repatriated or resettled.
The Long-Term Change of Perception: Key to Success

From burden to benefit (UNHCR, 2008b) remains the long-term vision of this project: refugees must be perceived, recognized and acknowledged as benefits to the host community and country. Resources that arrive through their presence should engender positive responses, not resentment, bitterness and fighting over ownership. Shared places will directly assist in refugees being seen, and enable them to act, as positive assets. Collaboration between all stakeholders will ensure that any infrastructure built or initiatives undertaken provide maximum utility while minimizing required economic inputs. The long-term vision of shared places builds on best practices in local integration efforts without requiring the host government to fully embrace *de jure* integration.

In the long run, the developing relationship between the host community and refugees can improve conditions for the implementation of more substantial integration policies, such as full employment and mobility rights. The shared place concept shifts the emphasis in refugee aid from provision of basic physical requirements to provision of the resources necessary to lead lives of dignity; it also shifts the perception of refugees from aid recipients to community members, helping to transform the perceptions of refugees from being a burden to becoming an asset.

Recommendations

Moving forward, based on need finding and information gathered in Ethiopia with the support of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), we therefore aim to articulate the preconditions and groundwork needed to build a shared place or initiative, common roadblocks and points of failure, the metrics needed to evaluate success or failure, and the steps needed to ensure their long-term sustainability. Specifically, we seek to understand the underlying motivations of all stakeholders (host and refugee community, local and national government) and systematically use this understanding to design a framework to get the buy-in and support of all parties.

In particular, we recommend the following:

- *The creation of a Shared Place Fund:* The objective for implementation is to first apply this systematic approach at a few camps, evaluate results, and build to a universal policy ingrained in UNHCR planning processes and applicable to all camps. Successful implementation and positive outcomes will provide sufficient backing to expand the concept of shared places. We envision a future where, driven by refugee interests and needs, a United Nations or NGO field worker can apply for funds explicitly allocated for shared places that are subsequently branded explicitly as being equally accessible, and designed *for* both communities. This, however, will require greater coordination and cooperation between UNHCR and other development agencies both in and outside of the UN. In order for shared places to be financially successful and sustainable, UNHCR and development agencies will thus need to set up a joint fund that is not constrained by the yearly annual budget
cycles to which emergency aid to refugees is currently bound. This does not necessarily have to require acquisition of new funds; rather, it requires greater coordination and integration of emergency and development funding.

- **Greater focus on community engagement:** As supported through research conducted in Ethiopia, the needs of the host community are often neglected, and are core to our approach. Thus, involving the host community at different levels from tribal leaders to local and regional government administration will be critical. While projects located between, and beneficial to, both the host and refugee communities are being implemented in camps such as Bambasi in the western region of Ethiopia, these practices are largely sporadic and lack a systematic consistency. Based on the implementation strategy outlined above, UNHCR should carefully gather needs and input from both the refugee and the local community in conceptualizing, planning, and implementing shared places.

- **Positive Impact Metrics:** Additionally, while UNHCR currently has metrics and robust analytics regarding the impact of short-term and emergency projects, the organization lacks a process for quantifying and assessing the positive impact of refugees on a local community and a hosting government. In implementing shared places, UNHCR therefore needs to monitor, record, and assess the impact such initiatives have on all stakeholders involved.
ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY: FOOD SECURITY

Introduction

UNHCR’s Role in Food Provision

UNHCR in conjunction with the World Food Programme is currently tasked with providing food to refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) around the world. By the end of 2007, the WFP provided food aid to 2 million refugees (UNHCR, 2008).

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security for a household as having “year-round access to the amount and variety of safe foods that its members need to lead active and healthy lives” (UNHCR, 2008). For the majority of refugees, who are located in isolated camps, the only source of food is food rations consisting of rice, beans, oil, salt and sugar via distribution centers.\(^3\) Most refugees live in a situation of partial or complete dependence protracted over decades and are unable to meet their own food needs both because they are frequently not allowed to hold a job, and do not have the land, skills, training or key inputs needed to farm their own food.\(^4\) As a result they stay in a precarious situation for a long period of time.

As a way to ameliorate these problems, international communities dealing with refugees’ issues have pointed out the unsustainable and insecure notion of food aid, and have shifted efforts and discussion to the promotion of self-reliance (Bakewell, 2002). International agencies and NGOs have multiplied their attempts to capitalize on the skills and capacity already possessed by the refugees as a way to help refugees to construct their livelihoods. The UNHCR’s Handbook for Self-Reliance (2005) defines self reliance as,

> The social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity. Self-reliance, as a programme approach, refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance. (UNHCR, 2005b)

Improving self-reliance to reduce dependency has been a goal of UNHCR for the last four decades. As early as 1960s, UNHCR began considering agriculture-based encampments as a way to promote self-reliance. The focus on self-sufficiency led to interests in agriculture-centric camp design and the formation of communities relying on small-scale farms. Many of these efforts were not successful, partly because of political economy reasons, and partly

\(^3\) This is the case of Eritrean refugees in Eastern Sudan; the Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia; Somali refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia; the Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Burundi, as well as the Bhutanese refugees in Bangladesh and Nepal.

\(^4\) A protracted refugee situation is one in which refugees remain in camps for more than five years without a distinct possibility of finding a durable solution.
because of organizational constraints faced by UNHCR. Under UNHCR’s current refugee policy, self-reliance is promoted not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to achieve other ends, namely the reduction of expenses and the promotion of durable solutions.

Problems with Current Food Systems

The WFP recommends allocation of 2100kcal/day to every refugee. The average refugee receives 1750-2100kcal/day, with a ration consisting of mostly cereals, oil, salt and sugar (Wtsadik, 2009). Currently, a “serious nutrition emergency” is defined as a malnutrition rate of over 15 percent in the camp (UNHCR, 1999). However, these measures highly underestimate the nutrition deficiencies within the camps since they are based only on macronutrients distributed.

The nutritional status of many refugees in protracted situations has deteriorated drastically in the past decade. In addition, in face of budget constraints in the 1990s, the WFP was forced to reduce emergency rations. In 2007, UNHCR targeted seven countries to address particular high malnutrition rates and other health related challenges: Kenya, Ethiopia, Nepal, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Bangladesh. The interventions (like the distribution of enriched food products) succeeded in reducing the malnutrition rates in many of the camps and improving the nutrition health of refugees (UNHCR, 2007). However, these programs, though successful, were intended to be temporary, and food and nutrition security remains a critical challenge for UNHCR in most camp situations.

The main problems of the current food program are the following:

• **Ration card food distribution is inefficient and vulnerable to corruption**: When refugees arrive at a camp, as part of the registration process they are each provided with a ration card through which each family head will be able to receive food. Food rations will depend on the size and special characteristics of the family (for example, the presence of small children or pregnant women). Refugees are divided in groups and food is handed out to each group on different days to avoid chaos. Even so, refugees stand in line for several hours outside the distribution center to retrieve their rations. Oftentimes, women bear this responsibility.

The current ration system also makes it difficult for women to separate from abusive husbands for fear of losing their only food source, since ration cards are usually registered in the name of the male head of the household\(^5\) (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

\(^5\) Recognizing such potential for abuse, a series of UNHCR protection guidelines over the past decade have recommended providing refugee women with their own registration documents and individual access to humanitarian aid.
A refugee census carried out by UNHCR in countries like Sudan and Uganda revealed that in some refugee camps, households have more than one ration card. In that case the family consumes one food ration and exchange the other one for money or other need items. UNHCR also realized that some refugees were not properly registered and therefore were barred from receiving food rations.

- **The logistics of food distribution in refugee camp is costly:** The logistics involved in managing the distribution of bulk commodities to remote refugee camps is complicated and costly. It requires meticulous planning and enormous funding. Most of the time, UNHCR in conjunction with the WFP try to source locally; however, given the size of the refugee population and the bulk of donors providing in-kind contributions, it is often necessary to bring in supplies from other parts of the world either by ship, road or air (World Food Programme, 2013). Sometimes, before the aid can reach its country of destination, it is necessary to upgrade ports and secure warehouses in the host country.

In recent years, some donors (mostly European countries) have shifted away from in-kind food donations to adopt cash as a way to help relief organizations to purchase locally. However, the United States, which is the biggest WFP donor, still gives preference to in-kind food donations produced in the U.S. The logic behind this decision is to support the American agriculture sector by donating excess supply. However, the premiums paid to suppliers and shippers combined with the increased cost of food aid due to lengthy international transport raise the cost of food aid by over 100 percent compared to local purchases (Shah, 2007).

- **Food supply is often insecure because it is reliant on international aid:** The WFP relies entirely on voluntary donations from the international community (World Food Program, 2013b). As a consequence aid depends not only on the fluctuations of the economy or international prices of food and fuel, but also in the domestic and international political climates. Gaps in food delivery are due to lack of funds from donors, variations on donor country surpluses (donors use to provide their surpluses as external aid) and food losses which may occur at a different points in the system during transport, warehousing or distribution. Finally, authors like Frederic Mosseau (2005) suggest that food aid is often used as a foreign policy tool making it insecure.

- **Macronutrients and micronutrients deficiencies and health problems:** The Handbook for Emergencies of UNHCR recommends the allocation of 2,100kcal per day to every refugee (UNHCR, 2007). However according to the UNHCR Statistical yearbook 2008, the minimum standard is only met in only 57 percent of the country operations (the average refugee receives between 1,750-2,100kcal a day) (UNHCR, 2009). Not reflected in these statistics is the reality...
that many refugees trade a significant portion of their food rations for non-rationed food (such as fresh vegetables) and other goods. Thus, actual consumption is likely to fall far below the minimum requirement.

Aside from unstable food supply when there are disturbances in food aid, one of the greatest problems in refugees’ diets is the monotony of the diets, which do not fulfill micronutrient needs even when total calories satisfy the UNHCR recommendations. The lack of fresh food and diversity causes severe malnutrition and deficiencies, particularly when refugees remain in camps for more than a decade and rely solely on food aid.

Improper nutrition affects refugees’ physical health, making them more vulnerable to diseases, as well as mental health issues. Children and pregnant women are particularly at risk and iron deficiency is a widespread issue. Malnutrition can retard growth and development of refugees, reduce physical activity, impair resistance to infection, increase morbidity and lead to disabilities and death making them more vulnerable to diseases (FAO, 2013).

- **Food aid has negative effect on refugees’ mental well being:** Food aid creates a system of dependency and reliance in which refugees cannot be in charge of their own lives. Most of the time, refugees are not allowed to work outside the camps or own land to produce. Even if they are allowed to carry out some sort of agriculture in some regions the soil is already depleted because too many people use the same land. As a result, refugees are deprived of any alternative means of livelihood apart from the external aid they receive. Studies about the mental well-being of men in refugee camps report that men usually express shame because they cannot “be a man” and provide for their families with the necessary clothing and food (Jaji, 2009). As men’s capacity to earn income and provide for their wives and children gets eroded, so is their authority within the household leading to modifications in the structure of families within the camps.

**UNHCR’s Current Food Security/Nutrition Initiatives**

Current strategies have focused on improving distribution channels or nutritional value of foods. However, such interventions often fail to produce significant nutrition improvements because they do not address broader questions of refugees’ livelihoods and empowerment. Current initiatives include the following:

- **Diversification of food and food supplements**
  One of the simplest and most direct way of lessening nutrition deficiencies is increasing the variety of food in the ration, or providing micronutrient supplements. In 2007, for example, the WFP added peanut butter, tomato paste, and lentils to the traditional food ration (Wtsadik, 2009). However, there are many limitations to diversification; refugees still lack fresh foods and remain dependent on food aid.
• **Fortification of food**
  Another strategy of supply micronutrients is fortifying items in the current food basket. Fortified sugar has been distributed to refugees in Latin America and fortified rice to refugees in Asia and Africa (Wtsadik, 2009). In some cases, regional level fortification brought the extra benefit of stimulating in the local economy. However, most areas hosting refugee communities lack the infrastructure, capital and knowledge to fortify foods for human consumption.

• **Vouchers for food**
  In urban refugee settings, the UNHCR/WFP tested handing out vouchers for refugees to redeem food items in local markets. Iraqi refugees in Syria, for example, were given electronic vouchers. Though this gives refugees more choice and flexibility, this strategy is only viable in urban camps.

• **Farming and gardening**
  Farming projects already exist at an ad hoc basis. Faced with inadequate and unstable food supply, refugees often attempt to grow their own food whenever possible in the limited spaces they have. In some cases, such as camps in Belize, Uganda and Tanzania, the host community is willing to grant underutilized land for agriculture to refugees. More commonly, refugees grow micro-gardens in crowded backyards or hanging baskets. Farming improves food security and nutrition of refugees directly, and in the best cases provide a source of extra income for refugees. Unlike the other strategies, promotion of farming leverages skills of refugees themselves and provide means of livelihood for refugees, thus reducing reliability on external aid.

**Why current actions are not enough**

**Limited coping strategies**

Food security must be considered in relation to refugees’ overall livelihoods. Food, aside from shelter, is among the most basic need to remain alive. After a crisis situation, refugees use various coping strategies to respond to a shock in food supply. Food aid is one form of coping, but it is often not enough. Another coping strategy is the purchase of food to compensate for shortcomings of food rations. Refugees who are permitted to travel in and out of a camp may find employment opportunities outside the camp and supplement their rations with purchases from local markets. In some urban settings, refugees may have

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6 For example, rice is fortified by small rice millers in the Philippines.
7 In Belize, in the early 1980s, each refugee family was allocated 50-acre holdings. In Tanzania in the 1970s, each family was given a minimum of ten acres of land for farming. More recently in Uganda, the government allocated approximately 1.333 square kilometers of land for the development of settlements with the aim of allowing agricultural self-sufficiency, and to encourage local integration (UNHCR Uganda, 1996 and 1999).
access to remittances and capital from transnational communities, providing cash for purchase of food (Wtsadik, 2009).

However, refugees may also use negative coping strategies in response to a food shock. One of the easiest strategies is reducing food consumption. Lacking means of livelihood and employment, refugees often resell a portion of their already sparse food rations to purchase fresh vegetables or trade for goods not in the ration—such as health care or education. For example, a survey on Kakuma camps also reveals that poor households sell up to 50% of their cereal rations at every distribution (Jansen, 2009). Consequently, refugees’ food security is closely tied with their livelihoods.

Moving out of Crisis

Adam-Bradford et al. (2009) identifies four distinct stages of disaster management (see Figure 8 below).

In the first stage, the relief phase, efforts center around meeting the basic needs of people after a crisis (shelter, water, food and medical care). The rehabilitation phase shifts focus to more structural adjustments to help people recover their losses. Finally, in the reconstruction phase, actions are taken to restore affected areas to their former living conditions after a period of rehabilitation. In the refugee situation, this framework is useful in thinking about means of moving beyond crisis relief and toward more sustainable strategies. In particular, the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases emphasize the importance of breaking away from dependency and building capacity toward self-reliance.
In the context of food security in the current refugee setting, there seems to be a lack of linkage from the relief phase to the rehabilitation phase. Rather, most refugees continue to be dependent on emergency food aid and receive little support aimed at building capacity and self-reliance. Food production is a means of bridging relief and rehabilitation and plays an important role in mobilizing communities following the impact of a crisis. Rather than focusing on improving food distribution, food production views refugees as resourceful. In the best cases, refugees achieve self-sufficiency through selling the fruits of their harvest in local markets. However, even when complete self-sufficiency is not achieved, farming projects offer powerful benefits.

Cultural Opposition/Ignorance

In addition to a growing number of urban refugees who may not know how to farm and may be hesitant to try, there may also be direct cultural resistance to farming based on the historical roles. For many nomadic groups who have survived using animal husbandry, farming carries undesirable cultural connotations and invokes a sore history of conflict and misunderstanding. While programs like the school garden and community pilot program are aimed at mitigating and overcoming resistance, the degree to which they are successful may well determine the overall success of any further gardening programs.

On the other side of the spectrum, some refugees are very experienced farmers and may not be receptive to new forms of farming that the UNHCR proposes. Different strategies will be needed for different types of refugees—those with strong farming backgrounds and those with no farming experience.

Division of Roles

While farming/gardening may alleviate micronutrient deficiencies, it is unclear how it affects individual roles, especially of men. Most farming programs seemed to have been aimed at women, which has proven to be more effective in terms of spillover benefits. However, gardening programs that neglect men also fail to address the loss of identity that many men in camps feel. While gender roles and feelings of worth and usefulness can be incorporated into garden projects, their neglect may lead to heightened feelings of helplessness or uselessness among certain populations.

Farm and Resource Management

Management of farming inputs, including seeds, fertilizer and tools is essential to the success and sustainability of farming projects. In situations where farming has been implemented, refugees often complain about the lack of seed variety or the need for better tools (for example in the Bambasi camp in Ethiopia, Sudanese refugees participating in kitchen garden projects opposed to farm a special type of okra that they did not consume back in Sudan). Currently, farming projects have been targeted and operate at small scales, without systematic mechanism for distribution of inputs.
Resource limitations

Farming is dismissed as implausible in many situations on the basis of lack of adequate land or water. While it is true that an abundance of land and water resources would lead to better yields and higher chance of self-reliance, farming does not necessarily require optimal resource endowments. Techniques like urban farming and small-scale mobile farming have shown success in situations were land and water are scarce.

Project Food Security: Five-Step Systematic Approach to Farming and the Farm Card

Farming projects have been part of refugee camps either carried out formally by UNHCR and WFP, or informally by the refugees themselves. Many models of small scale farming have been already tested and implemented. However, most of them have been short-lived or failed due to logistical and funding issues and a lack of community engagement. With different geographies, refugees’ knowledge about agriculture techniques and perceptions of farming, aid workers encounter many challenges in implementing successful farming projects.

The benefits of farming extends far beyond nutrition and healthy and represents not only a survival strategy, but also a livelihood strategy. Farming allows refugees to obtain more food, more variety, more dignity, more security and the possibility of being economically self-sufficient. When refugees are offered the opportunity to participate in garden projects they can leverage small scale farming to pursue economic self-sufficiency. Therefore, supporting farming projects in refugee camps contributes to UNHCR’s objective to find long-term solutions for refugees and IDPs.

The establishment of gardening projects has historically occurred on an ad hoc basis with few tools to support aid workers to implement these projects in a systematic way. There are documents and agricultural manuals for adapting farming techniques to specific conditions. However, our research shows that there is no body of organized information and resources that provide a comprehensive implementation scheme to help aid workers improve the success rate of farming projects. There is also no consistent way to share best practices or success stories. Aid workers in many regions of the world seem to face similar challenges in terms of community engagement and sustainability of the projects, but the lack of communication channels and stored knowledge reduces the efficiency of promising solutions. More importantly, there is not a consistent framework to approach the problem of establishing a farming project from the ground up, leaving aid workers with the challenge of re-inventing the process every time.

Objectives

The objective of our project is to create a more systematic approach to implementing small-scale mobile farming projects in refugee camps based on cases of study and expert insights.
We propose a method that encompasses five phases in the implementation of successful farming projects:

1. Forming the Farm Committee
2. Understanding the Terrain
3. Community Piloting and Initial Mobilization
4. Launch and Engagement of the Program
5. Transition from Food Aid to Farm Aid

Our research shows that these five phases are consistent in all successful implementations around the world and that following these steps reduces the probability of failure. Our project is intended to become a guide for aid workers and refugees, as well as donor organizations to design, plan and execute a small-scale farming project considering the many variables that affect the outcome of the effort.\(^8\)

Recognizing that there should not be a “one size fits all” approach to agriculture, we take into consideration physical and human factors, external and internal influences, incentives, capabilities and politics that affect farming projects and support or hinder their success.

The process of Implementing Farming Programs

*Phase 1. Forming the Farm Committee*

To ensure that refugee needs are understood, local conditions assessed properly, and the farming project becomes refugee driven, refugees must participate in the implementation of the farming program. For this to happen, we propose that a Farm Committee be formed soon after a camp is established. The Farm Committee will be the institution responsible for undertaking and implementing farming programs in the refugee camp.

The Farm Committee will comprise of three sub-committees: Agriculture Advisor, Community Liaison and Advisor, and Community Mobilizer:

1. Agriculture Advisor: locally recruited agriculture experts who have knowledge and understanding of agriculture in the area surrounding the camp to ask the committee with the technicalities of farming at the camp.

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\(^8\) Currently the only documents about small-scale farming in the UNHCR small-scale agriculture web site are a Training Manual for Multi-storey Gardening which is a guide to train refugees about the importance of agriculture, nutrition and how to build multi-storey sacks; a Project Pilot Proposal on Multi-Storey Gardens in the Shimelba Refugee Camp, which describes very briefly the operational phases to be followed during the implementation of the program in Shimelba; the UNHCR Strategic Plan for Nutrition and Food Security 2008-2012 and a document about Food Security in Refugee camps, both very focused on improving the nutrition rates in refugee camps around the world. At <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4bb205da6.html>.
2. Community Liaison and Advisor: group of refugees who represent different sections of the refugee demographic. This sub-committee will advise on community characteristics, cultural considerations, and be the intermediary between refugees are those who are implementing farm projects.

3. Community Mobilizers: a group of refugees interested in leading a farming project effort and mobilizing actions among refugees of the camp. This sub-committee will serve a critical role in propelling the projects, testing in the Community Farms (below), and outreaching.

It is important that recruited refugees are compensated for their work. This can take form of monetary incentives or grant of extra farm kits.

**Phase 2. Understanding the Terrain: Creating a Roadmap**

As is typical with agricultural projects, resource assessment is an essential first step to help project managers to create a roadmap for the project. This assessment should include not just the geographic situation of a specific refugee camp but its cultural environment and the role of farming in the life of refugees. For example, in some camps, conditions are favorable to large-scale farming, allowing refugees to achieve a high level of self-sufficiency in food. In other camps, farming is supplementary to, not a replacement for, food rations. Economic self-sufficiency goes a step further and depends also on market access.

Understanding the camp requires collaboration among technical experts (in agriculture and land matters), camp organizers and aid workers, as well as refugees themselves. The first task of the Farm Committee is to understand the terrain, from a technical, cultural, resource availability and overall feasibility perspective. During this phase, it is important for the Committee to build an initial understanding of the constraints and possibilities specific to a camp. This stage is crucial to determining the scope and scale of the farm project that can be undertaken, as well as the extent to which farming can play a role in extending food security to economic self sufficiency.

Key factors that determine farming feasibility are: resources, refugee cultures, camp structures, and host government relations. Camp managers, with the assistance of an off-site agricultural liaison, need to determine the availability of land and water and soil quality. Following this, the Farm Committee needs to develop a sense of refugee view on agriculture, experience in farming and any relevant skill set. Also, the committee needs to determine if there are certain roles that the refugee community assigns by default, such as gender bias in agriculture. Finally, the Committee needs to coordinate with the host government on farming and engage relevant entities to convince them of the need to undertake a farming project.

Once all these steps are taken, the camp manager will need to make a decision firstly on whether agriculture can be carried out and if yes what the appropriate for that purpose is.
In many camp situations where refugees do not have access to adequate resources for traditional methods of farming, innovative small-scale farming techniques can be employed. The matrix below plots a variety of techniques that accommodates a range of resource constraints.

![Figure 9: Methods of Food Production]

Previously, farming was assumed to require large plots of land and a lot of water, as a consequence farming projects were often dismissed in refugee camps on the basis of inadequate resources. However, small scale and mobile farming techniques work precisely under difficult circumstances and despite lower yields and limitations on choice of crops have many benefits. Small-scale gardens are resource-saving and allow crops to be grown in non-traditional ways. In addition, small-scale gardens are often mobile. This is particularly helpful in a dynamic refugee camp setting, where there is constant movement of people. It is worth noting that the mobility feature does not suggest permanence of the farms, which is favorable to the host government (who often oppose projects that are permanent in nature) as well as refugees (who want to feel assured that they will be repatriated). Below are examples of small scale farming that have been implemented in refugee camps:

1. **Kitchen Gardens**: Farms developed on land size 2000+ sq feet.
2. **Multi-story Gardens (MSG)**: Grow crops on top and sides of sacks instead of directly on ground to save water and land.
3. **Sack Gardening**: Sack gardens, also known as “vertical farms or gardens”, are tall sacks filled with soil from which plant life grows.
4. **Key-hold Gardens**: Each keyhole garden has a composting basket built into its center. This gives the garden a keyhole shape when viewed from above; the garden uses a number of layers to retain moisture and nourish the soil, making it more productive than a conventional garden.

**Figure 10: Different Modes of Small-Scale Farming Techniques**

UNHCR and program staff will need to determine the appropriate garden scale on the basis of available resources and social structure within the camp. In most camps where water and land are limited, household-level small-scale gardening is a good starting point. Once the technique was chosen, the Farm Committee, in conjunction with participant refugees, should select the crops that will be farmed as part of the project.

**Phase 3. Community Piloting and Mobilization: Phasing in gardening**

Some experts argue that farm projects are prone to failure because not only refugees often lack the necessary skills, they may even be opposed agricultural activities for cultural reasons. However, this does not mean that farming projects should automatically be incompatible with refugees from urban or pastoral backgrounds. Engagement and participation of refugees at the early stages is crucial to the success of agriculture projects.
Prior to the full launch and implementation of a farming project, the Community Piloting phase provides a means of mobilizing interests and testing.

Piloting should take place in a public space that is visible and accessible to all refugees. Rather than creating a new designated Community Farm, the initial piloting location should utilize an existing and known location that is a central or popular location of refugees. Samples are schools, health clinics, water taps, or a centrally located space.\(^9\) The purpose of this phase is to convince refugees that gardening could become a norm in the camp and lead the transition into the full launch. The Community Farm has three important functions:

1. **Pilot test of Local Conditions:** The Community Farm is a space to test a particular farming technique on local conditions to ensure that the project is suitable for the camp. During this stage, Farm Committees are able to gather critical information on crop yields, time to harvest, etc. in developing future plans and cost estimations.

2. **Publicity and Feedback Solicitation:** The pilot Community Farm offers a space to test interests of refugees for farming activities prior to implementation. There may even be a subset of refugees (for example, single women) who are particularly interested while the rest of the camp is not. Understanding the different levels of interests is critical to identifying “mobilizers” as well as the need to mobilize, and the representatives on engagement and mobilization can help to this end. Members on engagement and mobilization can carry out all the tasks associated with the pilot, involve others who may be interested and spread the word as well.

   If successful, pilot farm will be visible and a tangible evidence of the potentials of farming projects. This will create buy-in among refugees as well as aid workers. Piloting prior to a full launch also generates self-initiated interests so that refugees do not feel that they were forced to participate in the project.

3. **Education and training:** Prior to large-scale implementation, training workshops are particularly important when implementing farming techniques that are unfamiliar to refugees (whether because they are new to farming or the particular technique). Training during the pilot phase would ensure that refugees are familiar and excited with the projects to be implemented. Since the Community Farms are located in familiar locations, refugees are encouraged to visit and learn.

\(^9\)School gardens already exist in many African countries, so the idea is not novel. Setting up gardens in schools also has the benefit of encouraging school attendance and mobilizing children, who can then spread the word to their families.
Nutrition education should also be implemented in tandem with farming education. One of the major goals of introducing farming is to improve nutrition attainment of refugees. Refugees may not necessarily have access to familiar produce from their homeland. Thus, disseminating information on available crops would be important.

Piloting does not end once the projects are launched at full-scale. Rather, the Community Farm becomes a space for iterated testing, piloting and learning new techniques and sharing best practices. The pilot farms require an initial group of refugees to work on the farms and eventually become mobilizers. Refugees with prior farming experience are ideal candidates. When this is not possible, the initial farmers will need to be trained. In return for their time and work, the initial farmers should be rewarded—for example, seeds and tools to start their own gardens, or a share of the produce harvested.

Mobilizers for the pilot do not have to be limited to the Committee; members of the refugee community outside can play a crucial role as well. School children, for instance, can be a powerful source of mobilization and publicity. An example of this occurred in Zimbabwe, where, despite reluctance from adults, children learned to farm in schools and through their success aroused the interests of their parents. School children may also be a powerful source of mobilization and publicity (Hughes & Venema, 2005).

**Phase 4. Initial Launch and Engagement: focus on improving nutrition**

Following a successful piloting phase is the Launch and Engagement phase. The goal here is to distribute the necessary supplies and services for target refugees to participate in the farming project and support refugees in building livelihoods. The Farm Committee must first determine the initial participants. This depends not only on resource capacity, but also camp size and density. One strategy is to target the most vulnerable refugees, identified with the aid of the refugee representatives on the committee:

1. Households headed by females
2. Families with children under the age of five
3. Families with pregnant women
4. Families with disabled members
5. Families with senior members

A key logistical issue is the distribution of the first garden kits. One way to ensure that the distributed materials will be utilized properly is implementing a phased distribution. For example, eligible refugees must first attend a workshop in the Community Farm, after which they are given vouchers to receive garden kits. To facilitate distribution and coordination, we propose the use of a Farm Card (please see section below).

In addition to distribution of farm inputs, provision of support and guidance will be crucial in the Launch and Engagement phase. Regular training and workshops should continue to be held on the Community Farm and serve both as a model and troubleshooting space. It is
important to allow refugee themselves to lead the workshops and encourage sharing of best practices and indigenous knowledge for crop management. Seed management is an important factor in sustaining farming projects. For example, participants need to be taught to save seeds whenever possible.

Since the goal of implementing farming projects is to improve nutrition status of refugees and enable them to build livelihoods, ongoing assessment and evaluation, led by the Farm Committee are necessary for further improvements.

*Phase 5. Food Aid to Farm Aid: Scaling Up the Impact*

Agriculture in refugee camps at the very least aims to improve the food security situation of the refugees by making them less dependent on food aid. Farming techniques introduce a degree of self-reliance and open up the possibility of breaking free from the distribution mechanism of aid agencies.

Many existing projects suffer from lack of continual support after the initial launch. As refugees success in their farming projects, UNHCR’s emphasis shifts away from food aid provider toward “farm aid” provider. In particular, in order to improve the prospect of farming projects in a particular camp, UNHCR can partner with other development organizations to assist refugee communities in enhancing infrastructure and services for agriculture. Doing so does not necessarily require expensive projects—for example, promoting simple techniques like composting and rainwater collection system can have significant improvement on yields.

In addition, as agricultural potentials increase, UNHCR can play a critical role in formalizing the market space. Refugees in many camps already engage in market activities, selling and trading whatever they have to obtain other goods. As mentioned earlier, these activities can have negative implications on wellbeing of refugees when their only source of income is food rations. As refugees are able to grow more of their own food, the desire to sell and trade will rise. However, as our conversations with refugees in Ethiopia revealed, refugees often lack market intuitions and undervalue the goods that they have. UNHCR can thus assist with providing a formal space for selling agricultural goods and teaching refugees basic skills in accounting and pricing.
Mechanisms for sustainable input distribution

The camp management, in collaboration with partner organizations, must develop mechanisms for sustainable input distribution. Seed management is a key initiative in this regard. Refugees must have access to seeds that are proven to work in the respective camp conditions. A seed management office led by the Agriculture Liaison of the Farm Committee that maintains information on seeds should be established. The Committee must assess the need for other inputs, such as the farm kit. Especially if farming is proving to be successful, the Camp Manager should solicit extra funds from partners to provide adequate number of farming kits. Depending on the scale of farming achieved, the resulting produce of the proposed agriculture strategy can be formalized into a means of livelihood and economic sustenance. Gardening strategies of small-scale farming and key hold gardens have the potential to provide more than what a refugee needs. A formalized market space, with the farm card system at the heart of it, can serve as a platform of exchange. Vendors can buy the produce from the refugee farmers and sell them to refugees not involved in
farming. Also, if the surplus is abundant, vendors from host communities can be potential buyers of the produce. This way farm aid, in the form of garden kits, camp manager supervision and agriculture liaison assistance, can provide a path to economic self sufficiency.

**The Farm Card System**

We propose a farm card system that provides a means of coordinating and facilitating small-scale farming projects in refugee camps. The farm card system will allow the Farm Committee to ensure community engagement of the program, manage the distribution of seeds and tools, and also facilitate exchange of extra products. In some refugee camps, like Bambasi and Sherkole in Ethiopia, the UNHCR is about to launch a new ration card system through which all the household relevant information is read through a bar code. In those refugee camps, the farm card system can be embedded in this new ration card scheme.

Farm cards can take the form of an electronic card or physical paper vouchers. Paper vouchers are cheaper and quicker to implement, but lack many of the advantages that electronic cards would have. Another advantage of the paper voucher is that camp managers can implement this method themselves with little help and strain from UNHCR's worldwide resources.

In the first stage of the farm card system, electronic/physical vouchers called Farm Cards are distributed to all refugees.

In the second stage of the farm card system, to avoid waste of resources and assure that the delivery of farming packages will fully advantageous for the community, the refugees will have to gather a certain amount of points to receive their corresponding package. These points will be collected by carrying out basic activities like supporting the Community Farm, acting as a community mobilizer, providing guidance to other refugees under the help-line of the Farm committee, or simply attending training sessions.

In stage three, the collected points will be exchanged for basic farm packages (necessary to start producing). In addition, refugees have the option to “borrow” community-owned farm tools for a certain number of points, which will be returned along with the return of the tools.

The main objective of the program is to help refugees to improve their food security. A second objective would be to help them attain economic self-sufficiency. Under this perspective, in stage four, the farm card system will allow refugees to sell their products to the UNHCR, which will redistribute those products among the most vulnerable refugees (for example single mothers who have just arrived to the camp and are not participants of any livelihood program). The idea is that UNHCR distributions centers provide refugees with points in exchange of their agricultural products. These points will be redeemed for either extra food and other necessity items, or cash. The UNHCR could push that local vendors in refugee camps accept farm card points as a payment.
Challenges to the Five-Step Process to Implement Small-Scale Farming Projects

Our proposed solution envisages a sequence of steps that will help implement farming in refugee camps; at the same time, though, we are cognizant of the challenges that these steps are likely to face. Some of the challenges are discussed below.

Allocation of garden kits

Distributing a limited number of garden kits in an optimal way is a challenge that we have tried to address through the farm card system. But it is not yet clear that the system ensures that the farm kits end up with those who are actually most competent and interested in farming. The farm card system is biased in favor of those who are early adopters and possibly more proficient in farming. Hence, a key challenge is to develop a vigilance plan through which inefficient users of garden kits are checked and garden kits are redirected to those who are most likely to use them - an aspect we hope will be addressed through the award and deductions of points from the food card.

Seed donors

The proposed process as a prototype aims to rid refugees of their dependence on food aid. But, given the need of seeds to the success of a farming project, refugees face the risk of
developing dependence on aid agencies for seeds. This will be especially true if the harvest or the crop type cultivated is unable to meet the future seed needs of refugees. It is our hope that the seed management office will become a channel through which seed donors can interact with refugees and instead of relying on aid agencies develop a system of dependence on each other for provision of inputs like seeds.

Extent to which farming will improve nutrition (Impact)

Another major challenge of the project is to measure the extent to which it can improve nutrition in refugee food consumption. The causal relationship between terrain dependent farming and food security is not clear; farming may or may not increase the availability of micro-nutrients in refugee diets to the extent that food security is achieved. But how this can best be measured is an elusive problem. Current benchmarks for measuring food provision and its adequacy fail to capture improvements in nutrition. Furthermore, characteristics such as "access to amount and variety of safety foods" are difficult to quantify and vary for each cultural and camp setting. This problem can be somewhat overcome by the presence of farm committees. Farm Committees, through feedback of the community liaisons, actively survey how food baskets of refugees are changing because of the produce from farming. Using this feedback, the agriculture liaison can make an assessment of whether the farming produce is increasing the nutritional value of diets consumed by the refugees. This measurement is especially important if farming is ever considered as a means of meeting economic self-sufficiency. As mentioned earlier, food is closely tied to livelihoods and refugees often use food as a coping strategy (reducing food consumption or selling food rations). Thus, the Farm Committee staff can ensure that refugees do not use the harvest of their farming as solely a source of income prior to fulfilling their own nutrition needs. For this reason, Phase 4 focuses on improving nutrition of refugees and it is not until Phase 5 that formal market exchange is endorsed. This necessitates regular nutrition and health assessments among refugees.

Cost of seed and input provision

Provision of inputs such as seeds and gardening kits that are essential to kick starting the farming projects in refugee camps is the responsibility of UNHCR and its partner organizations. Depending on camp size, interest and background in farming and availability of inputs in the host country, the cost of these inputs can show significant variance. High or low, this cost has to be borne by the UNHCR which might find it onerous especially as the degree of success of farming will be camp and terrain dependant. Overcoming this cost constraint is only possible if the political economy actors involved understand that the current standard of food security is failing and in light of that, a more sustainable method of food security, like our proposal, is necessary.

Tool sharing

An effective borrowing mechanism as the one proposed can lower the cost of input provision; however, shared tools will experience wear and tear which may in cases make
them non-usable by other refugees. Determining who will check this wear and tear and how will it be quantified is a challenge in administering tool sharing. It is possible that the points-based system of the farm card could address this, and put in place a very strong deterrent against poor usage of the tools. If refugees can be penalized, refugees are more likely to be careful and considerate in usage of the tools. That said, there will be a time lag before the points system deterrent takes effect as refugees will understand overtime how they are likely to lose points.

Production vs. Consumption

Farming induces refugees to produce, a shift away from the prevailing paradigm of consumption. The consumption oriented nature had the major drawback of creating a dependency syndrome, which eroded refugees self esteem and also made them less empowered. Farming provides an antidote to the issues associated with dependency. As a means of livelihood, refugees feel empowered. That they can meet some of their own needs is a way of restoring their dignity which in so many ways continues to suffer from the time they flee their homes at the onset of the disaster that makes them a refugee.

Additional Challenges

While we have addressed challenges that were central to the problem of food security, we are aware of additional challenges in implementing agriculture projects.

Potentially Incompatible Mission of UNHCR

A key obstacle preventing the UNHCR from implementing sustainable farming on a mass scale is the nature of its operations. For farming to be as successful as it is in most non-refugee communities around the world, it requires careful planning of refugee communities from the outset of their creation. However, the organizational structure of UNHCR is such that it creates a conflict between the aid driven response around which refugee communities are built and the development-oriented challenge of farming by refugees. UNHCR, given the nature of contingencies it deals with, builds its operations in a reactive mode with aid as the primary tool to meet the needs of refugees. While aid is necessary to save lives in emergency situations, its occupational and psychological effects on the refugees and camp management become detrimental in the long run. But the need of aid cannot be downplayed either; without the aid many refugees would be in dire straits, to the extent that many may die of starvation or malnutrition. UNHCR is therefore placed in an uncomfortable situation in which the temporary nature of camps deters development, but the realistic longevity of camps crushes dignity and strains resources. Although UNHCR has implemented development type programs before, the baseline philosophy that they are an aid organization remains prominent in policy. As UNHCR is and should be primarily an aid organization, it is unclear who should bear the responsibility of initiating development work, like agriculture. Although our solution puts the responsibility on the UNHCR, it may be more appropriate for a partner organization to deal with development projects - one whose mission is more appropriate for long-term solutions.
Host Government/Host Community

The relationship between a host government and refugee community is important in determining the possibilities available to refugees after they flee their homes. All host governments are not alike in their ability to deal with the challenge of hosting a sizeable population of refugees; they tend to show considerable variance in state capacity depending on resources, state institutions, national economy and cultural attitudes of local population towards refugees. In areas like Tanzania where the host government is generous with land and accommodating in allowing refugees integration opportunities, farming became viable as a path towards self-sufficiency. But in most other places, host governments are wary of projects that may extend refugees’ stay, which counters long-term goals of development work. In addition, host communities may feel threatened by competition in a local marketplace or by refugee use of local resources (like water) necessary to successful farming. These tensions pose the most serious challenge to implementing a development project like farming in refugee communities. In such environments, if farming is to have any future, such strategy should be adopted in without signaling host government the possibility of refugees permanently settling down. In countries with strained relationship between refugee communities and host governments, therefore, mobile gardening strategies like container or multistory gardening may prove optimal as they will be least threatening to host governments. Our proposed solution, however, does not address the challenge of dealing host governments. While suggesting implementation of our proposed strategy, the assumption we make is that the camp management will be able to convince host government of the need to farm and that a gardening strategy most suitable for both refugees and the host country has been chosen.

Recommendations

The proposed farming strategy is designed to meet the food security needs of the refugee communities. In doing so, the strategy seeks to integrate and address the gambit of challenges that a farming project may face. But for this prototype to be made effective UNHCR must integrate the five steps into their current operations. Some of the steps proposed may already be in practice; others, notably the farm card system, require testing and iterative refinement.

Moving forward, we hope to continue collaborating with UNHCR in testing the systematic approach in actual camps and evaluating the impacts. In addition, we recommend the following steps:

- **Cost assessment**: A detailed cost breakdown of all the expenditures that the proposed five step strategy is essential. The challenge is to develop a generic cost calculator which will give good estimates for implementation of the prototype in any setting. Furthermore, the cost assessment will be key for any decision to be made on how farming and our proposed strategy can be integrated into the redesign of refugee communities.
In addition, the following actions should be carried out by UNHCR:

- *Training programs for Agriculture Liaisons:* Given the prominent role agriculture liaisons are likely to play in the five-step strategy, we propose that special training programs for the liaisons should be organized. The Agriculture and Farming office proposed above should take a lead in this by devising leadership and technical training programs, to keep the liaisons up to date with the best practices of agriculture around the world.

- *Collaboration with NGOs:* We hope that by systematizing the implementation process of agricultural projects in a refugee setting, we increase interests in collaboration on such projects. NGOs and other aid organizations can offer expertise in local conditions, innovative farming techniques, as well as the necessary inputs to kickstart farming projects.
PART III: CONCLUSION

Over the past two years, UNHCR has identified and designated an additional 2,000 refugees every day. Refugees are among the most marginalized population in the world and their needs are considered one of the most challenging humanitarian issues the UN faces today. Refugee camps are thus crucial avenues for reform and innovation, as UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Alexander Aleinikoff has emphasized.

Recognizing that the needs of refugees are multidimensional and that there is no single solution to tackling refugee wellbeing, the recommendations and prototyped solutions generated here tackle three distinct issues in efforts to redesign refugee camps: information gathering and communication, host community relations, and food security/self reliance.

This project has expanded the initial scope of the International Policy Studies Master’s practicum. In addition to providing analytical writing and policy recommendations, each of the teams has built innovative prototypes ready to be implemented in refugee communities. Furthermore, in using human centered design approach to re-imagine to refugee experience, this project has expanded the application of design thinking to issues of social innovation and civil society.

Three of our team members have tested the prototypes on the ground in Ethiopia. This output is based on their interaction with the refugee community there, which included feedback on our proposed solutions and insights from UNHCR officials on ground. Going forward, we will continue the interaction with refugee communities and UNHCR officials to fine tune our solutions and seek suggestions on how the strategy can be made to implement with as few obstacles as possible.
References


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