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Independent Study Product Proposal
Mapping the World’s Refugees
Borderwork(s)
The Vision

Uhuru is a free mobile phone application that allows users to communicate with refugees and aid workers in English, Arabic, and Kiswahili, by submitting reports via SMS text messaging, email, a mobile application, a website, and Twitter hashtags. These reports can track drought conditions, report malnutrition, connect resettled refugees, and inform communities of local entrepreneurial activities.

The application makes use of Ushahidi crowd mapping for information on refugee resettlement (source website: https://uhuru.crowdmap.com), and will be available for a free download on the Apple iOS Application Store.

Product Concept

To address the communication needs of refugees and aid workers around the world, Uhuru will serve as a communication medium and an information platform. Uhuru is a mobile phone application that uses crowd-sourced reports to compile a map of refugee needs and information. The application is developed with open-source software provided by Ushahidi, a non-profit that facilitates crowd-mapping technologies for social causes. The mapping aspect will crowd-source information on domestic resettlement in the United States. This will allow resettled refugees to connect with each other using crowd mapping to advertise ventures in their local communities. U.S. domestic resettlement policy
encourages entrepreneurship among refugee communities through home gardening initiatives and cultural services, and this application would facilitate the way individuals market their activities.

A user will submit a report with a title, a description, the date and time, their location, pictures of the event, and they will file their report under a category. The categories will likely change and expand as time passes, but they will include “Food Attractions,” “Health Care Needed,” and “Service Attractions.” As the website moderator, I must confirm a report before it becomes publically accessible. Additionally, I can verify a report to give it more plausibility. These mechanisms prevent a user from submitting many false reports that could overload the site. A tool within the application allows users to easily Tweet or text a report to someone. To cater to individuals who are not literate, I designed the user interface of the application (see schematic images near the end) to be heavily reliant on visuals and symbolic icons. Reports on Uhuru can be submitted in a variety of ways: through a text message, an email, the Uhuru website, with a specific Twitter hashtag, and the mobile application. The website serves as a hub for all the reports, and allows those without mobile phones to access Uhuru. Below is a picture of the Uhuru homepage:

The website is already up (https://uhuru.crowdmap.com), and I will develop the mobile application on my own, with guidance from the Borderwork(s) Humanities Lab at Duke University, and the network provided through HASTAC. I hope to create a solution that can be continually updated as problems occur, and easily expanded if the project meets its downloading goals. One easy way to measure the success of Uhuru is the development of a competent application. However, a mobile phone
application is a waste if it is never used. Therefore, another measure of success is to see how many mobile devices download the application itself. My goal is to have 1,000 downloads by August 2012. This is a great measure of success, because an inept application will not receive many downloads. This measure also creates market force incentives, an efficient way to promote social good.

Target Market and Trends

Uhuru is targeted for two markets: resettled refugees in the United States and individuals in refugee camps. This dual target is necessary because the two groups are intertwined and they could help each other through the usage of Uhuru. A resettled refugee can see what issues are afflicting refugees in camps abroad, and contact American aid directly. A refugee in a camp could see the entrepreneurial activities of a resettled refugee and use some of those ideas themselves. However, as usage of Uhuru grows, it is possible one group will use the application more and crowd-out the other group’s reports. If this is the case, Uhuru could be easily adapted to better facilitate the predominant group, and a new application could be built for the other group. Mobile applications can be easily updated to reflect the usage of the user.

In refugee camps, there is a pronounced need for more information. For example, the Kenyan Dadaab Refugee Camp is currently the largest refugee camp in the world, and many individuals fleeing the Somali drought arrive every day. Many long-term residents of Dadaab have trouble accessing information on weather conditions, aid registration, camp services, and government policies. Internews, a non-profit news organization dedicated to social causes abroad, recently conducted a study on the needs of refugees in the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. Below is a graphic of their results:
In the Dadaab Refugee Camp, 91.8% of long-term residents get information from the radio. But, refugee communities in Dadaab lack two-way messaging and access to media and communication platforms. Notably, 17.6% get their information from mobile phones, 6.4% get information from the Internet, and 5.1% get their information from SMS text messaging. These latter mediums are much more effective at communicating information, and they also allow feedback and responses. For example, a refugee in Dadaab, upon hearing a false report on the radio of an aid arrival, cannot immediately respond to correct the information. Uhuru allows users to verify the reports other users submit, thereby producing more accurate information in the long run. Improving the access to information is essential because residents can locate family members and discover opportunities that may help them leave.

In the United States, refugees struggle to depart from government assistance. Most refugees take up low-level service jobs that do not provide skill training or opportunities to learn English. The most successful refugees start their own businesses, because they are able to effectively use the skills they came with. No single government program can accommodate every resettled refugee, because they are from all over the world and have varying interests and skills. North Carolina’s Research Triangle contains a large number of international refugees, from Burmese populations in Chapel Hill, Montagnard populations in Greensboro, and Bhutanese and Iraqi populations in Durham. Resettlement agencies, like Church World Service or World Relief, help these refugees find housing, get supplies, and apply for government healthcare. However, the extent to which these resettlement agencies are obligated to help refugees is limited, in most cases, to weekdays and a total commitment of three months. In three months time, refugees are expected to become proficient in English and find jobs. For most refugees, this simply is not feasible, especially when they arrive with medical conditions, psychological damage, children, little to no vocational skills, and no background in English. Resettlement agencies cannot sustain equitable treatment for the numbers of refugees and asylees they accept because they are understaffed and underfunded. Once resettlement agencies sever contact, refugees are left to fend for themselves, and in most cases, they become reliant on the good will of religious organizations. Uhuru would allow refugees to give an entrepreneurial pursuit a jumpstart in marketing, which would facilitate the sustainability of their endeavor.

Marketing Plan

“Uhuru” is Kiswahili for “freedom,” and across the world, Uhuru represents just that. To resettled refugees, Uhuru is a tool to achieve self-sustainability and economic freedom from government aid. To
refugees still in camps, Uhuru allows users to achieve a “cyber freedom” from the confines of their camp. The name Uhuru is easy to say, it is pronounced “uh-\texttt{hoo}-roo,” and it can be modified for usage as a noun or a verb. One could say, “I Uhurued our location, hopefully some customers show up soon!” A Swahili word was used for this application to entice refugees to seek this tool out above other, less targeted, social mediums.

To specifically target resettled refugees, I will reach out to resettlement agencies and encourage them to market the application to their constituents. Resettlement agencies will be encouraged by this potential solution, so I suspect they will be happy to promote Uhuru. However, to further back-up Uhuru’s effectiveness, I will also seek out the endorsement of renowned organizations that work with refugees. In April, I will attend the Clinton Global Initiative University, where I will market Uhuru to a crowd of leaders in refugee work. Additionally, I plan to contact the State Department, Refugees International, and UNHCR and ask for their endorsement as well. These methods are the most effective forms of marketing, and they do not have any monetary cost.

This summer, I will work in Amman, Jordan, a city plagued with an enormous amount of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. For eight weeks, I will work with charity organizations that host recently arrived refugees. During my work, I will promote my application, and test it with this demographic. Additionally, the organizations in Amman will also be able to promote Uhuru to their partner organizations in other refugee-prone areas. After positive experiences with Uhuru, individuals will hopefully share the application with their peers. Like freedom itself, Uhuru could quickly pick up usage and attract a massive following.

Developer Background

In August of 2010, I worked with the refugee resettlement agency, Church World Services, to coordinate activities for Bhutanese, Burmese, and Iraqi refugees. My work at Church World Services culminated in a community gathering that encouraged multiculturalism and introduced recently arrived refugees to Durham. It was there that I was overcome by the desire to continue my advocacy for refugees throughout my education and career.

My participation in Duke’s Focus Program led me to take a class focused on refugee resettlement policy, where I interviewed government workers in the Office of Refugee Resettlement and local refugee populations. In February of 2011, I was one of six Duke representatives at the ACC Leadership Conference, where I presented my approaches to refugee problems in North Carolina. In April, I
continued my research at the Clinton Global Initiative University, where I worked with international social entrepreneurs on solutions for refugee issues abroad.

In the summer of 2011, I worked at the African Immigrant and Refugee Foundation in Washington, D.C. and developed a cultural pride summer camp for the children of African immigrants. I advised individuals who were seeking asylum, and I often served as their preliminary representative when they sought legal help. I now serve as the Treasurer for Duke Refugee Aid, where I’ve superintended ESL training for over 40 locally resettled Bhutanese and Burmese refugees, and I’m also on the programming committee for Duke Africa, where I’ve coordinated multicultural celebrations of African heritage for local refugees and immigrants. In my entire advocacy, I have been searching for entrepreneurial and ethical solutions to help refugees bridge the gap between being an immigrant and being a sustainable citizen. My social entrepreneurship ventures, and my efforts to preserve multiculturalism, have provided me with a unique insight on refugee issues.

**Project Timeline**

The development and marketing timeline for Uhuru is below:

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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date/Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market Research-COMPLETE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobile Application Development</td>
<td>Refugee Needs</td>
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<td>User Interface Development-COMPLETE</td>
<td>Coding Background</td>
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<td>Interface on Xcode</td>
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<td>Final Development-INACOMPLETE</td>
<td>Bug Testing-January 10, 2012</td>
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<td>Marketing INACOMPLETE</td>
<td>Campus Outreach-March 17, 2012</td>
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<td>Clinton Global Initiative University-April 1, 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product Testing INACOMPLETE</td>
<td>Amman, Jordan-July 5, 2012</td>
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<td>U.S. Refugee Associations-August 15, 2012</td>
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User Interface

Below are screenshots of the user interface of Uhuru:

Opening window shows submitted reports in list format.

Window can be modified to a standard map format. Green pin shows the user’s location.

Users can swipe the map to any location in the world. Uhuru uses Google Maps so location names can be continuously updated.

The map can also be switched to a satellite view. Red pins mark the locations of submitted reports.
Users can edit the list or the map to just show reports of a certain category.

If the report, or the red pin, is tapped, the report overview will appear.

Users can scroll down to see a map of the location and pictures.

Users can tap the SMS icon to send a text of the report’s details.
A user may Tweet about an interesting report they see.

Users can also submit their own reports.

Users can include their exact location in any reports they submit. No need to know your geographical location, Uhuru does that for you.
Bibliography


