Promoting Peace through Street Kitchens

Institution: Hood College  Project Dates: June 10 – July 30  Project Location: Kabul, Afghanistan  Advisor: Dr. Allen Flora  Collaborating Org: SHOOB

Background

The poor get poorer and the rich get richer because you need money to make money. This idea is based on an amount of money you need in order to start anything to make a life in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, over 10 million people live in poverty. They do not have the basic & necessary means to live a life. The lack of jobs, lack of income, and the deteriorating security is giving rise to the number of homeless people, beggars, and thieves; and most importantly, these jobless and homeless people are becoming a prime and easy target for extremist groups such as Taliban and ISIS to hire them to carry out their malicious activities. People will do anything to provide for their families and selves, even if it means using illegal means or joining such extremist groups.

Plan

My plan is to create a platform where selected individuals sell food in a mobile cart on the streets—mobile kitchens. Selling food on the streets will give them an opportunity to earn money, to feed their families as street food has a big industry in Afghanistan. In addition, this will help them stand on their feet, give them self-confidence and an opportunity to earn money in the right way and deviate them from illegal activities.

I am proposing to buy mobile food carts and give them to vetted and selected individuals. This food cart is easy to find or simply order it at a nearby carpentry store to meet the individual’s needs. In other words, I will be loaning carts with some of its supplies (i.e. gas cylinder, required pots etc.) to these individuals. In return, as they make a living, every three months they will be reimbursing me with half of the cart price. For instance, a cart costs 21,000 AFs, at the end of every 3 months, they will be reimbursing me with 10,500 AFs, which is half the price of the cart. This reimbursed non-profit income will be used to buy more carts and repeat the same steps. Ideally speaking, suppose I buy 20 carts for 21,000 AFs each, I will get a return non-profit income of 210,000 AFs. This will allow me to buy 10 more carts, and 3 months later (6 months into the project), I will get a nonprofit income of 315,000 AFs, which will be used to buy more carts.

We will basically provide a ready to start food cart, including all the equipment such as gas cylinders, pots, and also assist with as much food ingredients as budget allows so they can start right away. This will give the individuals something ready made to get started, without actually loaning anything. Loans from banks or other institutions in Afghanistan are close to impossible, and it is one of the reasons why one cannot start up their own business. You need money to make money, hence the portion of the population who don’t have money keep suffering. This ready to use food cart will give people the opportunity to jump-start their own street food business at no cost, and conveniently pay back the price of the cart and supplies in six months, or sooner if they can afford it. They can take the cart with them home or talk to their neighboring areas where they sell food to cover it in a giant baggie to protect the materials, like cart owners usually do, and park the cart in neighboring areas with other carts.

Moreover, our collaborators are generous enough to allow us to use their space and facilities for a five-day workshop to equip these individuals with basic cooking, selling, location-based demand, and competition. I have chosen 5 days for the workshop because in the Afghan culture, food is an important part of the social construct, and most males possess basic culinary knowledge, especially common dishes. If they don’t possess any basic skills, the culinary expert and someone with business knowledge or degree will equip them with these skills during the five-day workshop. The five-day workshop will help them successfully run their food cart. The culinary and business skills taught during the workshop are basic, yet necessary skills. To comprehend and practice these skills the participants do not need to be educated but education will certainly help as the end goal is to earn a living by selling street food nothing advanced like Master chief TV programs. So, keeping it simple, easy, and practical is more feasible.

Collaboration with SHOOB

SHOOB, a media and Film Production Company, will be our collaborator in this project. I have volunteered for them. The company is very reputable in Kabul, and other major cities like Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar. They have a humanitarian department carry activities in education, providing training workshops to students and orphans at orphanages, clothes drive, book drive, food drive and many different things as their social responsibility. They recently did a short documentary video for an orphanage, so they can raise better funds in London. This company is interested in being part of the project. As they have a humanitarian department, they will be able to take good care of the project and perhaps take it a notch up in the future.
Selection of individuals: nomination through community leaders (CL) and imams

Kabul, like other cities in Afghanistan, has multiple districts, each divided into smaller zones (neighborhoods). Each zone has a community appointed community leader (CL), which represents the residents of the area. Both the CL and obviously the Imam, who is a religious leader in charge of the mosque, are respected members of their specific neighborhood. The CL and imam will each nominate person(s) that are in dire need and can take good advantage of this opportunity. The criteria will include the person having a family to support, does not have a job, in need, and is dedicated to earning an honest living. Once individuals are nominated by the imam and CL, we will interview them, and we will request for documents like permanent address, a national ID, or anything that can complete their profile. If they meet the criteria, then we will sign a contract with them stating the above-mentioned plan, rules and how it all works.

In case a vendor cannot reimburse the agreed upon half price of the cart after the first three months, either s/he is new in the business and is not making enough money to reimburse and feed the family, or he has a family emergency and needs the money themselves, in that case there is flexibility of two months to reimburse the agreed upon amount. This is a peace building project; every effort has to be made to maintain peace and promote peace using peaceful methods. Shall the vendor fail in making, selling, or reimbursing, a quick one on one assistance will be provided to him from members of Shoob Company to recover, however, if that does not work either, we will bring in the CL and imam to mediate and resolve the issue.

Gender equality: promoting women rights

My project respects gender equality. This project’s ultimate goal is to promote peace; however, it will also promote women rights and discard the cultural taboos that kitchen or cooking belongs to a woman. If a woman is nominated by the CL and imam, she will be treated with equal rights and treatment. However, in the Afghan culture, street food carts’ vendors are men. In addition, insurgents mostly target unemployed men, as men are considered the breadwinners of families and they are desperate to do anything to provide for their families. But this is not to discourage women, peace cannot be built or promoted without women and men working together. If a woman is nominated, she has the choice of selling it anywhere or if she prefers we can help her set up her cart in women parks and women mosques.

Project potential

This project has great potential to evolve the local livelihood, security of the city and nation as well as the Afghan economy in the long run. For the time being the project will be in a cycle until the process fits in with everyone and sustains because the reimbursement amount is a specific amount received at different timings that will be used to buy more carts. Once the process gets running in the long this project has a high potential of a non-profit institution to expand their horizons to other cities in Afghanistan. Also, the project may evolve for their vendors too. They might change location or what they are selling and make enough money to buy or open a restaurant or start another business. This I believe is the exact aim that these poor people have a sustainable livelihood to deviate them from being an easy target for insurgents. Just like the vendors, we will have the opportunity to expand; this project as a whole can expand by switching to small shops and eventually restaurants or cafes.

This project will not only give the Afghan people hope and opportunity but teach them the culture of ownership and being independent. Starting out with helping just twenty individuals, this project can become a successful nonprofit organization in less than a decade. This project will decrease the crime rate, the lure to join extremist group because they pay, and general unemployment. Although it has great potential to grow, the direct impact at first is on twenty families, but in reality, if this project successfully provides income for their families it will deviates them from joining the extremist group and consequently as the project grows the entire nation sows the seeds. I believe this project is perfect for summer. The time limit which will be given to the people is carefully thought of and calculated to be precise in getting back the non-profit money which will be used to reinvest in more carts. Also, a more experienced company is interested in assistance us with the project beyond summer.

This project is very connected with my major. As a Business Administration major, this project is a perfect example for starting a business as an informal micro-finance bank. It has the potential to impact the nation’s economy and play a direct role in the country’s security. The managing, logistical, and administrative skills I learn on this project will give me a greater advantage to further my skills and practical knowledge as these skills are of significant importance in business and government.