Background Information

An unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also millions of stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. In 1959, the Dalai Lama and about 80,000 Tibetans were forced to escape to India after China’s takeover of Tibet.

The government of India has built special schools for Tibetans, providing free education, healthcare, and scholarships for students who excel in school. There are settlements, which are remote and far flung from the mainstream Tibetan community. Many Tibetans have also resettled to small towns as they provided better opportunity for their livelihood. Children of such parents were deprived of school to learn Tibetan language and familiarize themselves with Tibetan culture. Tibetan local bodies, in such places, have started schools on their own initiative. However, they failed to maintain the initial zeal and tempo to run and manage them. A lot of these schools lack several modern facilities such as a proper functioning computer lab or access to the internet.

Project Goal

The project aims to improve the life of the Tibetan children by providing them with modern education and the basic knowledge of computer science. As a prospective Computer Science major, I feel that in today’s world, one is almost close to being illiterate if they don’t have the basic functional and operational knowledge of computer science. Based on my previous interactions with these kids, I realized that a few of them are aware of what a computer is but most of them have never used one in their lifetime. The unlimited source of knowledge called the internet is unknown to them. In an already overpopulated country like India, where the jobs are scarce even for qualified people with degrees, I feel that their current system of education is not preparing them for the world. These kids, despite working hard towards their education and coursework are not nearly as competent as their peers in other schools, because of the quality of education they receive.

This project aims to bridge the educational gap between the children in the Tibetan refugee schools and other schools with modern amenities by developing a small, viable sustainable computer lab and establishing a self-sustainable computer science curriculum that will help them learn more about the world of computer science and explore vast arrays and dimensions of knowledge available through the internet.

Action Plan

Currently, there are 71 Tibetan refugee schools in India with approximately 10,000 students. There are several of these schools that operate without a functional computer laboratory. While some senior secondary schools do have access to a couple of computers, it’s usually the elementary and middle school kids who suffer in terms of proper access to digital literacy. We will start off by selecting one of these schools (potentially the one with the most isolated location and the least facilities). In almost all cases, the problem is not in terms of space or building infrastructure but the mere cost of the computers themselves. I seek to tackle this issue by purchasing used machines that are in workable conditions. Since there aren’t a lot of shops selling used digital devices in the remote locations and villages where these schools exist, I will buy them in the nearest city or town and have them transported to the school at a low cost. I will then set up the machines in one of the spare classrooms that is deemed to be used as a lab.

I will also set up a high speed internet connection in the lab and connect all the machines to it with a common server (monthly data costs for unlimited internet plans start for as low as 7$ in India). Once the lab is setup, I will spend the next few weeks educating the faculty and the students about computers and the internet in general using practical lab based classes. Meanwhile, I will also spend my time devising a curriculum for the students of different grades that can be incorporated into their schedule and be followed on a weekly basis.
Divyansh Singh, Class of 2023

Timeline

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<th>Schedule</th>
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| **Week 1** | 1) Travel to the closest city to the school.  
2) Research and find stores with the best deals on used computers in the city.  
3) Research and find the best deals on transportation and logistics. |
| **Week 2** | 1) Make the necessary purchases.  
2) Get the machine parts shipped to the school.  
3) Get the Broadband connection.  
4) Set up the Lab in School.  
5) Brief the faculty of the school about the upcoming classes.  
6) Start with the classes. |
| **Week 3** | 1) Continue the classes.  
2) Train the faculty.  
3) Meanwhile, start working on the curriculum to be followed after I leave. |
| **Week 4** | 1) Continue the classes.  
2) Finish the curriculum.  
3) Wrap up the classes.  
4) Distribute small treats among the kids on the final day. |

Sustainability and Future Prospects

I believe that I will leave my project in a stage where it becomes self-sustainable. Given that data costs are really low in India, I will also leave the school with sufficient funds to pay for a year of internet for all the machines connected by the common server. Also, since the existing faculty at the school will be trained in the CS curriculum, the students will have a guideline to follow. Since my entire family and most of my friends live in India, I can also ask someone to pay a visit from time to time and send me a report on how efficiently the curriculum is being implemented. I also plan to continue to support the school and even other such schools in the future by procuring help from the philanthropic wings of tech companies like Facebook and Google.

My Role

I personally believe that as students, one of the biggest ways we can promote peace is through education. A proper modern education teaches people about the different cultures across the world and in turn, teaches them to be more accepting of other people, hence promoting communal harmony. Shaping the young minds for a liberal mindset and providing them with better educational opportunities, especially those whose parents or ancestors have been victims of wars and conflict or have been forced away from their homeland, is of utmost importance.

I also believe that my previous work experience with the Tibetan Refugee children in New Delhi would prove to be beneficial for this enterprise. A link for the same has been attached with this proposal (New Aruna Nagar (Majnu Ka Tilla) Tibetan Refugee Colony, New Delhi) and I strongly request that it be considered a part of my application.

Citations

Tibetan Refugees | Figures at a Glance | STS Schools | Education Department