Institution: Colorado College

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Project name: Sewing the Seeds of Peace

Date: June – August 2016

Location: 6th of October district, Cairo, Egypt

Background:

Since the start of the Syrian civil war, many civilians have found their houses and their old lives destroyed. Many people escaped the carnage to neighboring countries, including: Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Since these countries are where the biggest refugee camps are, people tend to forget about the refugees in other countries. As of 2015 there are an estimated 133,726 documented refugees living in Egypt with many more undocumented refugees on the fringes. With the recent UN announcement of a cut in the amount of aid going to the Syrian refugees (2014), their situation is worsening considerably. These refugees also receive very little aid from the new Egyptian government, which sees them as a liability and a burden. As a matter of fact, many Syrian refugees have been deported and detained for their perceived support of the previous government. As such, the Syrian refugee population is in a very desperate state. Young Syrian girls have been married off by their parents to older men for money and in hopes of getting better lives. Young Syrian children, whose parents have no source of income, have been appearing more and more as beggars on the streets of Egypt. The goal of my project is to address the underlying root of the problem, poverty. Thus, this project is going to be aimed at providing some Syrian women with the tools and skills to create a sustainable income. The project will include taking a group of twelve women, providing them with sewing machines, over-lock machines, embroidery machines and material, teaching them how to sew crafts and clothes, and helping them market it to the local population.

6th of October City:

The city of 6th of October has a staggering 30,943 Syrian refugees. This makes them account for approximately 70% of the city’s 44,404 residents, making their host community unable to fully provide for them. The majority of the refugee population in this city is also living below the poverty line of $2 dollars a day per family. Thus, I will partner with BESTfoundation in Egypt, an NGO, which is also a UNDP partner. Using the funds awarded to the project, I will buy a suitable number of machines, along with threads and fabrics. Rooms and appropriate spaces will be rented out for the duration of the project, which would be approximately three months (Also located in the 6th of October district). This will include lessons in sewing, weaving and machine care by one trainer and one technician who will be recommended by BEST**.** After the women are taught and are able to work on their own, through my supervision in collaboration with their mentors, they will be endorsed to go to one of the Syrian textile fairs that are all around Cairo. Their booth will also have a sign that spreads awareness about the suffering of these refugees in Egypt, as well as pamphlets given out describing the Syrian refugee crisis, helping decrease xenophobia and humanizing these refugees. The women will be given the machines to keep and work from, to sell their crafts for future income. This wills the women a source of income for their children and for themselves, allowing themto feed their families and maybe have enough money for medicine or education.

Objectives:

* Teaching Syrian refugee women to craft and sew with machines that will be bought for them.
* Endorse their cause and find them a venue to sell their crafts.
* Give them a good supply of fabrics to work with and a location to work from.

Sustainability:

This project is quite sustainableforthese select women. The lessons and the machines along with an initial amount of fabric will be provided to these women for free. They will also be endorsed and their crafts showcased in craft fairs around Cairo, which are present all year long. These women, who would also be taught to use different machines, could continue working together to get the best quality of merchandise possible. Profitability will make this project sustainable and the more success the women will have, the more sustainable and durable this project will become. The women will also be given a stipend at the end of each month, to be able to support themselves while they are participating in this project. The machines will also be bought from a licensed dealer with a warranty that will keep the machines in working condition after the project is finished. Even after the three months, the women will still have our numbers (my number and that of a BEST contact) and I will personally be in contact with them when I am in Egypt.

Layout:

1. The Project, Sewing the Seeds of Peace, is aimed at decreasing poverty among the population of Syrian refugees currently in Egypt, aimed primarily at women who have no income on their own and are struggling to get by. It will include 12 Syrian refugee women from the 6th of October district.
2. The program will take place over three months. These months will be divided intotwo sections: two months for training and one month for work. The first two months will be for training purposes with the supplies, rent, communication, transportation and lessons all paid for. The allotted training time is realistic (as the BEST foundation has had experience with projects like these and found this time period to be effective) and even has a 10 day practice period at the end for women to get more comfortable with the machine and fabric they have chosen. The third month will have me renting them a booth at the Syrian craft fair in Cairo. After the third month they will start buying the fabrics and renting a booth with the money they make. There will also be periodic supervision by both myself and the Foundation (when I am not in Egypt). I and the Foundation will always be a point of reference and a resource for these women in case they need help, have any questions or run into any trouble. My role will be a leading role where I: purchase the machines, rent the rooms, approve of the instructors, supervise and help with logistics and supplies, supervise the training sessions, be on call 24 hours while I am in the country (which is the entire project period), rent the booth for them and help them set up shop, create and print pamphlets to be handed out at the booth, help manage the business cycle and keep them in contact with a representative from BEST for after I leave the country.In order to help these women economically plan ahead, I will help them divide their business plan into 40 day cycles. After each cycle the women will buy new fabrics and materials to work with, and thus this will help them budget their business and better plan for future business choices.
3. This project will be funded by the money from the Projects for Peace grant, as well as assistance from the BEST foundation. The BEST foundation is a foundation that helps fund small businesses all around Egypt and especially in the poorer districts. They have funded many projects by finding the workers tools, shops to rent, training to work, and promotion of these small businesses. The foundation has been working exclusively with Egyptians for the past few years, but are willing to branch out to help other nationalities. Although the foundation has not worked with Syrian refugees before, it has worked with many disadvantaged Egyptians and women who come from poor backgrounds. If this program, under my supervision and management, would be successful, BEST has indicated that they would be open to the idea of opening new projects to help other nationalities. Thus this project, if found successful, would be used as a pilot program for a future similar, charitable program, but on a larger scale. BEST foundation will first contact refugee women, through local networks and connections in the district, who are job seeking and tell them about our project. I will then rent a space where these lessons and seminars could take place, perhaps a classroom. Money for transportation, communication and upkeep for the space will be provided as well. Women with children will be allowed to bring their children to work as it will not be a dangerous work environment.I will also get a couple of instructors who have specialized in textiles or crafts, to teach the women to use sewing machines. They (the instructors) will also teach the women how the machines work and the proper ways to use them, so that they can maintain them themselves. I will be buying the machines and the fabrics, looking for the cheapest items with the best quality.Many fabrics will be provided over the course of the program, which will teach the women to make many different crafts and textiles. These twelve women will all have a specialty in certain machines. There will be six sewing machines, two over-lock machines and four embroidery machines. Each woman will try the different machines and see which machine she would be most comfortable with. Thus, these women would work together with their respective machines to create better quality products. After the training course of the program, the women and their textiles will be taken to one of the craft fairs in Cairo, where their station will be paid for the first couple of months. After that, they will become independent and work together, or on their own, to produce and sell textiles and crafts.
4. This project is aimed to help unmarried women sustain themselves and married women to support their families. It would also hopefully encourage these women to continue working together instead of each going their own way, and would help the refugee community and families form closer ties with the Egyptian community. Through the use of Egyptian market space and dealing with Egyptian textile merchants, the participants will become more humanized in the eyes of the Egyptian public, where they will be seen more as a contributing force than a liability. The outcome will also encourage other refugees to look for more sustainable sources of income in a legal way. This outcome will also promote self-sufficiency for these women, as Levantinian (Syrian and Lebanese) textiles are very popular in Egyptian market places.
5. The Future impact of this project will be to help decrease the poverty in refugee areas that leads to violence, protests, begging and illegal sources of income. The signs that will be put up on the women’s booth will indicate that they are Syrian refugees, and pamphlets on the Syrian refugee crisis will also be distributed from the booth along with the sales. This will help spread awareness about the plight of Syrians, while giving these women a source of income, humanizing them to the public, giving them local connections and creating profit for them and the Egyptian economy. These ties with the community will hopefully lead to a better understanding between Egyptians and Syrians and more sympathy towards their crisis. The program differs from other charity based programs in that it does not simply providethem food or money, it teaches themto provide for themselves so that they could live and thrive as opposed to just survive.