

Project Summary

The aim of this project is to reduce the social and political violence prompted by high school dropouts in Zimbabwe using a financially self-sustainable chicken-rearing project that trains high school dropouts (ages 14-19) to become their own “rural entrepreneurs.”

Background and Context

In Zimbabwe, peace and youth empowerment are intricately entwined. Youth empowerment, coupled with sustainable job creation, is essential in fostering the attitudes and security that beget peaceful living. The prevailing hyperinflation, however, has significantly crippled the Zimbabwean economy, resulting in a desperate situation for more than 15 million people—widespread abject poverty and a 95% unemployment rate. The number of school dropouts has increased by 20% owing to child marriages, lack of school tuition, and dangerously high HIV prevalence. In times of a fiscal crisis and/or a general election, these unemployed school dropouts are deployed to intimidate political opponents of the ruling party for pittance and alcohol. During the dreadful drought of 2003 and the ‘harmonized’ elections of 2008, for instance, youths acted as enforcers of bad government policies by attacking overcharging retailers, arresting people in possession of scarce commodities, confiscating goods, and obstructing opposition supporters from obtaining food aid.

Project, Participants and Organizational Support

I firmly believe that how this cohort of young people is supported and engaged significantly determines the prospects of maintainable peace and development. I plan to execute my project in Mutare, a vibrant farming town in the east of Zimbabwe that has been consistently plagued by social and political violence for the past twenty years. To achieve this, I intend to partner with indigenous community leaders (clerics, headmasters, etc.), local high schools, and youth-oriented organizations. One particular school, Beulah Heights, has already offered me a sizeable piece of land for a viable chicken-rearing project. This project will initially employ 50 local young people in the rearing of 1,000 broiler and 500 layer chickens—the first element of the project. Once our birds have reached a target weight of around 3-5 lbs. (1.4-2.42kg), we will put our market plan into action and bring them to the farmer’s market, or sell them directly to consumers, butchers, abattoirs, and restaurants.

Two volunteer teachers from Beulah Heights and I will be engaged in the second, complementary element of the project: teaching these young people the entrepreneurial, financial and mathematical skills they need to thrive. The syllabus for this teaching program is currently being developed in conjunction with Shane Auerbach, an Economics professor at Carleton College. The educational model I propose undertakes a different path in the struggle to lessen social and political violence in Zimbabwe. In addition to a robust three-month training course, the curriculum also involves bi-weekly discussions on violence, drug abuse, and child marriages (which I’ll facilitate with the help of Youth Alive, a local youth-oriented organization). Most importantly, it’s intended to inspire our youths to *think big*, and dream beyond their current circumstances—hence the name of my long-term initiative to change Zimbabwe, ThinkBIG. Our youth need the correct mindset, freedom, and means by which they can deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the development of a peaceful country. Through this training program and a hands-on chicken-rearing project, I seek to ensure that they acquire the pertinent skills and knowledge to initiate their own “rural enterprises,” access decent jobs in the agricultural/livestock sector or finance their own education. I hope that as ThinkBIG grows during and after summer 2018, we can increase the number of school dropouts we employ, raise more species of chickens, and generate more profit to turn into future projects.

Project Timeline

I have already set up an advisory board that will assist and advise me during the project’s execution. This board comprises Rebecca Z. Mano (who is the founder of Education Matters, an organization helping low-income youth in more than 17 countries and four continents to access higher education in the US), Eric Carlson (Carleton class of

1966, and a consultant with 25 years in research, product development, and executive management), Robert Scarlett (Carleton class of 1966, and an adviser to small- to medium-size businesses seeking access to Latin American markets), Faress Bhuiyan (an associate professor of Economics at Carleton College), and Zamani Sithole (who is the director of Beulah Heights Schools). In mid-March, prior to my arrival, I will, via Skype, start the preliminary selection process of a local committee of 6-10 individuals, which will be involved in the day-to-day operations of the project, including after I leave. Three exceptional individuals have already demonstrated their ability to work with children on a chicken farm, and expressed a firm commitment to help me fulfill my vision. With their help, I will select the rest of this committee during a second and final interview in Mutare. By that time, I will have started advertising the project as early as mid-March through word of mouth, social media, our strategic partners, Beulah Heights, and flyers. The same channels will be used throughout the summer to market our products and services. I plan to arrive in Zimbabwe on June 5 and begin recruiting the project's participants. The buying of chickens, veterinary medicines, stock feed, and other necessary supplies will take place later that week, before the project commences on Monday, June 11. Our teaching program will run Monday through Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. A typical day will involve lunch, a lecture from our volunteer teachers and/or myself, and a team-building exercise. By the end of the summer, I hope to see our participants driving this project forward themselves using the business skills and experience they would have gained. On August 4, two weeks before the end of the project and my departure, I will start scouting for similar rural communities in Zimbabwe where I can bootstrap a successor project using the revenue generated from this project. After only 12 weeks, the project in Mutare will have made a profit margin of more than 47%, which will be enough to sustain the current project and initiate another one in another part of the country. Once I get back to school, I will be working closely with my local committee, headed by Dr. Sithole, the director of Beulah Heights, to ensure continued success, scalability, and sustainability of the project.

I plan to develop means to measure the results of this project qualitatively and quantitatively: informally assessing participants' business skills and experience before and after the summer, counting the number of school dropouts who go back to school and/or find decent jobs in the agricultural/livestock sector, tracking those who start their own small enterprises, and so forth.

I have no doubt that this project and the ThinkBIG initiative that it will start will be able to promote peaceful living by exposing school dropouts (many of whom are used as instruments of state violence) to self-sustainable business models, quality financial training, and mentorship opportunities. By combining a franchise model with social entrepreneurship, this project can be replicated anywhere in Zimbabwe or Africa. I am determined to see ThinkBIG continue and expand after I leave for the US. I hope that through this pilot project in Mutare, and my participation in programs such as Harvard Synergy (hosted annually by the Harvard Social Innovation Collaborative), I will be able to connect with like-minded individuals interested in streamlining peace building in Africa through self-sustainable business models for youth and children.

Personal Background and Qualifications

I derive great impetus for my proposed 2018 Project for Peace from my own experiences with social and political violence in Mutare. With both parents struggling to make ends meet, I had to finance my own education by selling bread and fruit drinks after school. More often than not, I was exposed to primitive violence—or the threat of its use—on the streets. Had I not received a full ride to study in the US, I would still be selling bread (or worse, drugs) to take care of my family. My project is therefore founded upon the conviction that everyone can make it in life if given the chance. I spent my last two years of high school working hand in glove with the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization, and Economic Empowerment, in my capacity as Child Governor for Manicaland province (representing over 100,000 children in the junior parliament), to reduce dropout rates and assist underprivileged students like myself to stay in school. This initiative, if funded, is a continuation of those concerted efforts and an expression of my strong belief in our young people. A former Child Governor, member of the Carleton Business Club, senator in the Carleton Student Government, and treasurer of the African and Caribbean Students Association, I possess the relevant skills, knowledge, and qualities to drive this project forward and make an indelible impact in Zimbabwe and beyond.