WRA

Feasibility Study: Sacrosanctuary, a State for the Stateless
Preliminary Report

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WRA

World Refugee Agency

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I. Executive Summary

> **"** Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning
> to breathe free"
>
> **Emma Lazarus, *New Colossus***

These words adorn the Statue of Liberty, but today they ring hollow across the world. Stratifying poverty is not a particularly satisfying task, but facilitating interventions on a macro scale requires serious study in an effort to distribute finite resources. Today, there can be little doubt that refugees are at the bottom rung of this ladder.

The United Nations, NGOs and governments alike unite in talk and action, yet despite their best efforts always seem to find themselves back at square one, at the onset of the next crisis. To truly solve this problem requires a radically different solution, one that will redefine the UN's place in the world, along with how society values sovereignty today.

To dumb it down, imagine a Sidewalk Labs for refugees. To smart it up, imagine UNHCR as an independent federated nation… a start-up country that accepts any human as a citizen and provides them with shelter, sustenance and dignity. Why do we not have ready-built and reusable infrastructure for those in need? It doesn't make economic or moral sense to constantly and consistently fashion solutions for them after the proximate cause of their misfortune.

Naysayers will term this idea fanciful, and in a sense they are right. How can anyone build and operate a mini-economy, much less govern a sovereign nation, when its populace is essentially donated and free to repatriate when ready? For one, refugees spend an inordinate time away from their home country, averaging out to roughly a decade and a half – not exactly transient. But the beauty of this solution is that it isn't solely for displaced persons, but a second-order effect of solving the "stateless" problem. This initiative represents the transformation of a refugees' last resort into their first line of defense.

Finally, lest there be any confusion, the idea of what we are naming "Sacrosanctuary" is not and will never be a for-profit initiative nor an attempt to arbitrage refugees' human capital. The zero-fail mission is to create a safe, dignified and voluntary path to citizenship.

II. Introduction

a. Context and background of the study

We live in a world at an inflection point of technology radically changing our evolution as a species. Geopolitical fissures erupt at the release of a tweet, and it often seems that society prefers to focus on finding solutions to "elegant problems", – those which garner the most public attention, yet prove to be of little consequence in the here and now. That is not to dismiss the dedicated social entrepreneurs and activists who endeavor to marry technology with new solutions, but food, water and shelter will likely forever outweigh AI, blockchain and CRISPR as these technological advancements yield diminishing, if any, returns for the stateless.

While we don't believe the nationalist – or nativist – political philosophies that have experienced a recent global renaissance are sustainable, I posit that it is equally irresponsible to think we may ever find ourselves in a peacetime period of equal opportunity and general prosperity.

We face one current calamity in climate change that could rapidly deteriorate in ways the IGPCC never modeled, but another in the future demographic imbalance of aging, developed societies vs. youthful, developing nations. "Countries with rapidly growing and very youthful populations, other things equal, tend to have a higher incidence of civil wars and other forms of civil violence. They also struggle to increase their education, infrastructure, and health services fast enough to keep up with populations that are growing at more than 2% per year."[i]

This idea succeeds when closed-border countries fail us. This idea is unnecessary if we choose to enter a new phase of cultural evolution.

b. Rationale

The rationale for such an initiative is built upon a moral, legal and technological argument. The moral case is straightforward. The legal argument is founded upon the ideals of the UN Charter, UDHR, ICCPR and ICESCR that all signatories are bound by:

- Chapter 1, Article 1, part 2, which states that the purpose of the UN Charter is: "To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace."[ii]

- Article 1 in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[iii] and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[iv], which reads: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 15, which states that everyone has the right to a nationality and that no one should be arbitrarily deprived of a nationality or denied the right to change nationality.

Moreover, in the same vein that the U.S. and other countries are trying to reckon with their past and talk about reparations, is it not inconceivable to think that former refugees in the future can lay claim given their mistreatment after applying for asylum[v]? As Wes Boyd, a psychiatrist and bioethicist at Harvard Medical School who has evaluated more than 100 asylum seekers in the past decade, wrote, describing the migrant camps, "most kids will have lasting scars from what they have seen or are enduring right now... they're going to need as much medical help as they do legal help."[vi]

The technological argument is that we have reached a point where we can produce low-cost, high-quality shelter through novel methods (existing containers or modular structures), a much higher output of food (GMO, AgTech and IoT pursuing high-yield crops) and the educational and communication resources to teach kids, retrain adults and communicate across several languages through AI-enabled devices.

c. Objectives and Scope of Review

The objectives of this study are to identify the key components to an initial pilot of such a state for both parties: the World Refugee Agency and the beneficiaries (citizens). The most prominent precedent of conferral of statehood is exhibited by the UN's own 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine – though it was never implemented – and the subsequent birth of the nation of Israel.

N.B: The below obstacles represent the major issues we anticipate given our collective knowledge dealing in forced displacement and resettlement; we fully acknowledge that several other unforeseen challenges will arise, as we will detail and deal with in Section III's Approach and Findings.

Rescue

Key Short-Term Obstacles: WRA

Financing: While short-term financing can be provided through the WRA's Global Programmes unit or through a pro rata re-allocation from the Regional budgets and Pillars, it is envisioned that long-term financing will be accomplished principally through the same mechanism that funds the WRA currently: public (government) and private donations. It may very well make sense to use existing infrastructure financing structures currently used by the World Bank, IMF and IFC such as a public-private partnership to leverage all parties globally.

Land acquisition: This is likely the second greatest challenge that will be overcome with intense diplomatic and political efforts. The easiest option would be to lease large private tracts of land with a negotiated agreement on entry to refugees (Western Australia, Northern Canada, Central Asia). Another option would be uninhabited areas (islands or desolate areas) which will have to compete with environmental issues and finally, desolate areas of expanse which will likely pose a comfort issue re: climate. A long-term vision would have a few different settings.

Transportation: Moving tens of thousands of human beings and their things will come at great cost, though the UN has a sizable fleet, and with a joint military effort using modified C-5 and C-17s, it's doable. Prior precedent exists in Operation Exodus, which once evacuated 1,000 Ethiopians of Jewish descent in an El Al 747.

Infrastructure: The initial thesis behind Sacrosanctuary was to create a "Sidewalk Labs for refugees" – that we should create reusable infrastructure and reimagine IDP tents and refugee camps. Undoubtedly, this will come at a massive upfront cost: farms scaled to a projected inhabiting population, digging of wells and/or desalination depending on location, and building modular housing without upsetting the natural order (human, animal and environment). The highest consideration will go towards the downstream consequences of natural resource consumption and depletion.

Governance: The organizing principle behind Sacrosanctuary's governance is to eventually become a participatory democracy, with potential future effort to marry the concept of futarchy without jeopardizing anyone's franchise. However, we believe a socialist philosophy with equitable resource distribution at the outset with a sun-setting transition is the best way forward. Fairness is subjective in this context, and there will be a commission composed of representatives from each of the UN member states (with a potential proportional weight for each vote based on contribution amount per capita) along with NGOs providing the most amount of aid of to be a good start. Ultimately, Sacrosanctuary's raison d'être is best summed up by U.S. Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley: "The people closest to the pain should be closest to the power."

Recovery

Key Long-Term Obstacles: Empowering citizens and building an economy

Employment: While governments traditionally view full-time employment as necessary for self-sufficiency[viii], a traditional pitfall of resettlement is finding a job commensurate with their education and skills. Thus, the initial info intake and citizen profile will necessitate a mapping of aggregate labor supply and demand, the latter to be worked through with the commitment of the private sector. An especially important component of stable employment will involve job development/re-training/up-skilling[ix] and subsequent placement with a shared-profit (hybrid of for- and non-profit) incentive to multinational conglomerates. A key point to avoid is the compulsion of undesirable employment à la penal colonies and value the quality of employment vs. speed of placement.

Government Services: The simple way to explain the economy is a welfare state, though we are creating an analogous concept of Universal Basic Citizenship (UBC), which accords every citizen an essential package of services[x], most notably: food, shelter, healthcare and education. The key distinction between this approach and socialism is that citizens can garner further wages from employment which will then be taxed. Rome wasn't built overnight, and neither will a thriving, self-sustaining economy.
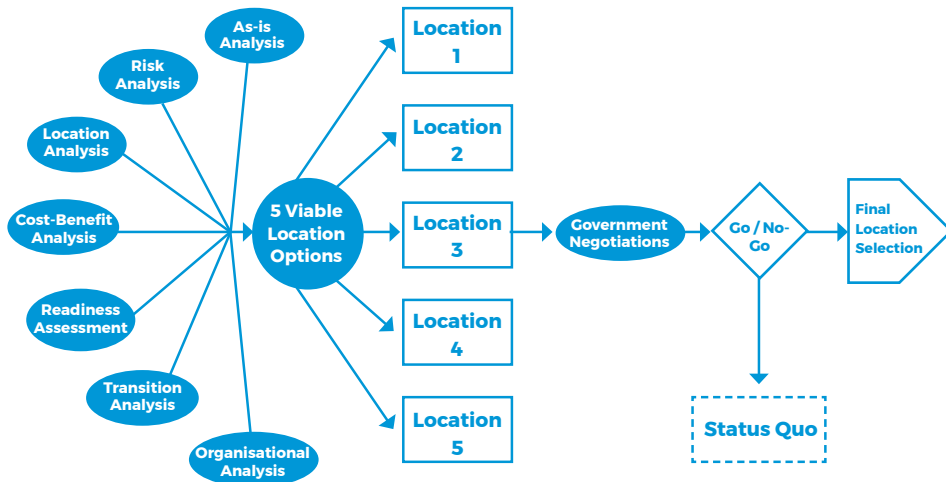
Healthcare: Transitioning from a rescue situation with mass vaccination campaigns and a triage mindset to building a scalable health system[xi] will require serious study given the complexity and path dependence of such a gargantuan task. Frankly, that can largely only be commenced once the state is up and running, and the real question is whether Sacrosanctuary's primary use is as a place of short-term refuge and medium-term resilience or long-term resettling. Front and center will be the immense mental health resources needed to combat the distress and trauma some may have suffered, along with any residual stressors or triggers.

Language Competency: Initially, resettlers will be segmented by language, mostly to decrease the lingual requirements for service providers (aid workers). However, we do think a foreign language should be an option at a certain point in schooling so that students can gain proficiency in a target language/desired country eventually. At no point does this initiative ever want to resemble anything remotely neo-colonial, and thus, a mandatory early education in a certain language (English, Mandarin, etc.) will not be considered, at least initially.

Community & Culture: The greatest hope for success of Sacrosanctuary lies in the ability to create and maintain a sense of culture, community and belonging. In a seminal work on integration outcomes, social bonds that reflect a sense of acceptance and lack of conflict, with its "linkage to a sense of safety and security, were most closely associated with positive judgements of 'quality of life' by refugees."[xii]

Unfulfilled Expectations and Hopes[xiii]: The fact of the matter is that this new nation will almost assuredly never come close to the normalcy of citizens' previous lives in peacetime. New approaches to resettlement and integration will be needed, such as dedicated volunteer service programs for adjustment support, as well as mentorship from families that have undergone acculturation. Direct cash and investment capital to spearhead innovation must also be allocated. To the extent one believes it is possible to build a more perfect society, then that must be the overarching goal of Sacrosanctuary; and who better to live in and benefit from such an ideal place than those who have the least.

d. Project Schedule

III. Approach and Findings

To be completed upon receipt of funding.

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xiv Adapted from PWC/UNHCR Outposting Feasibility Study https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/icm/4625d8462/unhcr-outposting-feasibility-study-final-report-pricewaterhousecoopers.html