GILA RIVER COOPERATIVE INNOVATION PROJECT

Arizona State University

JUS 497/591:
Social Enterprises:
Innovation, Justice, and Community Development

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The New Roots Farm and Food Security Program at the International Rescue Committee is preparing and empowering refugee farmers with the technical and business knowledge necessary to form and launch, Gila Farm Cooperative, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In conjunction with this endeavor, the JUS 497/591 Social Enterprises: Innovation, Justice, and Community Development course dedicated a three member student group to partner with the IRC and Somali-Bantu, Togolese, and Uzbekistani farmers to develop promotional materials and strategies to help these groups of farmers develop their cooperative and publicize it to the Phoenix-area community. Under the Direct Marketing, Training & Business Development for Refugee Farmers grant, stemming from the USDA grant of Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), New Roots Farm Program coordinator and our project mentor, Jessica Woiderski, was designated the task of establishing the legal structure and marketing platform for the cooperative-managed CSA.  

As of May 2011, the cooperative is in the early developmental stages. While the New Roots Farm Program involves 83 farmers, only 27 of them currently participate in the Gila Farm Cooperative.

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1 The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is an international organization that “responds to the world’s worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives” (IRC, 2011). In establishing a CSA in the Phoenix metropolitan area this international organization is giving back and investing in their local refugee community, specifically, because engaging in this program realizes their commitment to give refugees the opportunity to start “new lives and become self-sufficient, productive citizens, who add to the vitality and promise of the nation” (IRC, 2011).

2 The SEAZ project partnership meetings began in the summer of 2010 between Professor Vanna Gonzales and Community and Economic Development Manager, Jon Vosper; they worked together to establish the parameters of the project so that the latter would meet both course requirements and the IRC. Jessica Woiderski came on as the New Roots Farm Program coordinator in early 2011. Shortly after that, she became the project manager and mentor for the JUS 591 student team and existed as their liaison between the refugee farmers and the IRC Innovation Project.
Cooperative. During the course of this project, the student team worked with the Somali Bantu, Uzbek and Togolese farmers.

The purpose of the student collaboration was to support the farmers and IRC staff member Jessica Woiderski, in designing and starting the CSA cooperative. The specific skill set of the students that was applicable to this project was knowledge of the third sector, specifically in cooperative formation, democratic organizational structure, and the marketing and publicizing of agricultural cooperatives. During the JUS 497/591 class component the students read, wrote and discussed these issues; the cross-collaboration of this project and the student team created an outlet for learned knowledge to meet practical application. The initial research began on March 30, 2011, with the final report and marketing materials submitted on May 6, 2011. To undertake the research for the project, student team members established a partnership with key members of these communities: two Somali Bantu women, Binto Abdikadir and Fatuma Mahat; a Uzbek man named Rahmat Kobilov; and a Togolese man named Koffi Ogou. With the help of interpreters provided by IRC and the Somali Bantu, Uzbek, and Togolese communities, students were able to interview each farmer two to three times from April 2 through April 18, 2011.

Meetings and interviews were scheduled through Jessica Woiderski, IRC student mentor and project manager. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including the local farmers’ market in Phoenix and Scottsdale, the IRC headquarters in Phoenix, and Gila Farm in Chandler. In preparation for these meetings, the student team did background on each ethnic group’s home-country and reasons for fleeing as well as coordinated site visits to their local associations and farms for in-depth observations. The purpose for this background knowledge was to be courteous of the sensitivity of subjects and traditions, and to pay respect to the history of each culture and interviewee. Additionally, interviews were conducted in more intimate and
personal locations to establish rapport with each group and to facilitate the use of interpreters. Interpreters were used for three of the interviewees, while the fourth individual\(^3\) felt comfortable speaking English and did not use an interpreter. In order to make these events as productive as possible for all parties, the student team held separate meetings with Jessica Woiderski and the professor of the class, Dr. Vanna Gonzales, throughout the process to ensure that the project was moving in an efficient and balanced manner and was meeting the needs of all members. In working with multiple people and groups it was imperative for us to be flexible with the set-up of the project and continually adjust our strategy to reach our goals.

In conducting this research the team accomplished both unexpected and planned goals in both the materials we produced and the process of undertaking the project. One of the main objectives that we accomplished was producing marketing materials (individual flyers for the farmers interviewed and a pamphlet for the cooperative) that told the stories that each farmer wanted to convey about their community and their farming. Each farmer was able to look at and approve of the ideas and general look of the materials through the use of an interpreter. These materials were then combined with all of the information gathered and photos taken during the project to create three mini-videos that told the stories of each ethnic group. They resulted in a culmination of the developed project and relationships formed.

Another key accomplishment was establishing trust between ourselves and the farmers. While measuring trust is difficult, we can say that we were welcomed into their associations, invited to their farm to see their produce, and given long, detailed accounts of their life, tragedies, families and dreams in farming and in life. A key aspect of this was our genuine interest in the lives of their families and communities. Besides the original questions designated

\(^3\) This individual knew a total of four languages and served as an interpreter for his fellow refugees.
to be asked in the interviews, a lot of our questions regarding their history, lives and families came up throughout the interviews. These created intimate moments and knowledge where stories from both interviewer and interviewee were shared, creating personal connections.

Finally, one of the most important goals that we achieved but had not initially intended was helping the farmers understand how the cooperative could be beneficial for them. During our interviews we asked them about their thoughts on the benefits, the negatives and their overall concerns and questions regarding the cooperative. Through these questions we were able to transfer their answers to the project manager and at times have the project manager answer their questions at the end of the interview; it was a transfer of information that we had not initially thought of as a target, but that turned into something we believe is extremely vital to the advancement of the cooperative. While one of the main purposes of this project was to facilitate the marketing of the cooperative, this connection of information was equally important. The development and future sustainability of the cooperative depend on how the organization is started, the construction of primary goals and how the farmers understand their role in the establishment and the role of the organization in the community (Cress & Snow, 1996). This goal relates specifically to the importance of the relationships formed, and their relevance for broader goals linked to development of the cooperative. Also, this displays the relevance of the refugees within the broader context of community development in Phoenix. This cooperative is an avenue where the expertise of the refugees will be cultivated and the organizations benefits shared with the greater Phoenix community in terms of healthy, organic, locally grown produce.

Through this project, the hope is to aid the IRC in informing Phoenix metro residents about the CSA cooperative and their local farming businesses through the use of the strategic planning and the creation and dissemination of promotional materials: flyers, pamphlets and
Additionally, an innovative aspect of this collaborative project has been educating the farmers about cooperative identity, promoting greater cross-cultural awareness of the farmers’ communities and how this relates to the construction of the cooperative. Most importantly, the project’s purpose was to collaborate with IRC’s project coordinator to develop strategies to enable the refugees to integrate their agricultural products into the mainstream American commercial market, but to also create a space in which their unique identities and contributions can be made more visible and better appreciated within the greater Phoenix area. By shedding light on the particular stories of the Somali Bantus, Uzbeks and Togolese, and their unique approach to farming and community, we hope they can cultivate and maintain a larger and more consistent customer base through the cooperative.

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the IRC innovation project and how the cross-collaboration between the student team, IRC and the farmers facilitated the design, start-up, initial marketing and strategy of the Gila Farm Cooperative. In addition to detailing how and why it was undertaken, it will highlight the specific ways in which this shared experience, and the specific projects generated by it, will contribute to the future development of the Gila Farm Cooperative. In order to exemplify the rich culture and agricultural skills that the farmers bring to the cooperative, the first section of the report highlights each ethnic/linguistic group of farmers through case studies. These case studies will provide background information on the farmers and their community, the opportunities and challenges presented for individual farmers and their community by the cooperative and specific ideas each group has for the cooperative. In section two of the report, Project Conceptualization, we layout the methodology and techniques used for data collection as well as emphasize the
promotional materials designed and produced for the farmers. In section three, *Strategic Planning*, we outline the short and long term strategic plans suggested to the cooperative by the student team for reaching low-income communities and creating a cohesive governing body in the cooperative. In the concluding section, *Constructive Evaluation*, we offer an assessment of the overall IRC project as part of the Social Enterprises class and as an external project with IRC and the farmers.

**SECTION I: Ethnic/Linguistic Case Studies**

According to the U.S. State Department a refugee is, “a person who has been forced from his or her home and crossed an international border for safety” (U.S. Department of State, 2011). Thousands of these individuals have left their home countries and come to the United States because of violent political, social, and/or economic marginalization. Just a year ago Arizona took in 4,700 refugees (DeParle, 2010). Unknown to the local established population, the state has been a major recipient of refugees, who have embedded themselves in the local economy primarily through the domestic care and service sectors. Organizations like the IRC handle their resettling, giving refugees shelter, sustenance, and employment resources (IRC, 2011). Despite the difficulties in leaving their homes and adjusting to American life, many refugees appreciate their new surroundings, seeing Arizona as a place of opportunity and renewal with its relatively low cost of living (DeParle, 2010). In response, Arizona residents have supported the refugee presence, appreciating their work ethic, economic contributions, and law-abiding behavior. It is these conditions of refugee acclimation and local backing which the Gila Farm Cooperative hopes to grow out of. Each of the case study groups have faced some form of oppression, coming to the U.S. to seek asylum and lead new lives in Arizona. Though of different ethnicities
and speaking different tongues, these groups have the common desire to make a positive impact for themselves as well as their new American communities.

**Somali Bantu**

The Somali Bantu are a minority ethnic group, which reside in the southernmost Juba Valley region of Somalia. Descendants of African tribes in Eastern Africa, Somali Bantus have endured marginalization because of their linguistic, physical and cultural distinctions from native-born Somalis. In the culture profile Lehman and Eno (2003) wrote for the Center for Applied Linguistics *The Somali Bantu: Their History and Culture*, they maintain that the persecution of the Somali Bantus stems from their adherence to retain and preserve their cultural traditions. They described persecution to be dependent on cultural assimilation:

There are those [Somali Bantus] who are indigenous to Somalia, those who were brought to Somalia as slaves from Bantu-speaking tribes but integrated into Somali society and those who were brought to Somali as slaves, but, maintained, to varying degrees, their ancestral culture, Bantu languages and sense of southeast African (Lehman et al, 2003, p. 1).

Those Somali Bantus that endured the most oppression and violence since the Somali War broke out in 1991 were the same people that conserved and defended their cultural roots as a means to counteract their slavery. They have been relocated to countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique and the United States. In an article for the *Center for Immigration Studies, Out of Africa: Somali Bantu and the Paradigm Shift in Refugee Resettlement*, Barnett (2003) explains that the Somali Bantus were legally recognized as a vulnerable group with “special concern” status in

1999 by the U.S. State Department. According to Barnett, this “special concern” categorization, which is comparable to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) refugee status, granted 13,000 Somali Bantus legal protection and entry into the United States as of 2003 (p. 4).

The resilience and ethnic pride that is characteristic of the Somali Bantus becomes evident upon meeting and talking to Fatuma Mahat and Binto Abikadir, two of the eighteen Somali Bantu group members that participate in the International Rescue Committee’s (IRC) Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and Gila Farm Cooperative. More specifically, the story of loss and hope of Binto underscores the perseverance and fortitude that characterizes this group. Binto lost her father and mother as a result of the war, separated from her entire family except her uncle she went on to form a family on her own, first in the refugee camps of Kenya and later in the United States. Binto told us that she lived in a refugee camp in the neighboring country of Kenya for approximately ten years. Lehman and Eno explain that since “the Bantus were the backbone of agricultural production in Southern Somalia and had large stocks of food on their property”, as the civil war intensified bandits began to steal and oppress farmers, eventually driving them out of their farms into refugee camps in Kenya border-towns (10). Binto expressed the unwavering commitment most Bantu refugees have in staying true to their cultural roots despite geographic and cultural relocations. She exclaimed “when I was in a refugee camp I have my culture and when I came to the United States I still have my culture…I don’t wanna part with it”. (Personal Interview, April 4, 2011).

Along with their rich, cultural heritage, the Somali Bantus bring the farming experience and skills gained in their native country as assets that can be contributed to the cooperative. The Somali Bantus determination to surpass any challenges posed before them is a valuable attribute
that can enhance the efficiency of the cooperative. Their strong commitment to cultural integrity and community prompt them to join collaborative schemas, such as cooperatives, mainly to facilitate the establishment of a strong Somali Bantu farming tradition and community here in the United States. Moreover, Somali Bantus strong ties to ethnic community can be ascribed to the fact that their exclusion from mainstream Somali society prompted them to adhere to their ancestral social structures, retaining close alliances and linkages to their clans (p. 5).

The same ethnic pride and determination that motivates the Somali Bantu group towards hard-work and community unity can also present itself as a potential challenge to their adequate collaboration and cooperation with both Gila farmers from other ethnic factions and co-op customer members. Since Somali Bantus are adamant proponents of cultural preservation they might at first not be so eager or receptive to receiving advice from other farmers much less from farmers with other cultural traditions. As previously explained, Somali Bantus are accustomed to working within their own ethnic social structures and might also be hesitant or unaware of how to form decisions within larger governance platforms such as the cooperative. In general, it will be difficult for the farmers to agree upon decisions involving the organizational and structural formation of the cooperative. Also, the language barrier between the Somali Bantus and consumers is another aspect that may affect and potentially damage the flow of dialogue and/or collaboration between the latter groups.4

The formation of an agricultural cooperative will not only allow Somali Bantu farmers to establish a permanent consumer base and thus hopefully sell more produce, but it will also familiarize them with American farming techniques and business protocols. Gaining knowledge about American farming operations through their involvement in the cooperative will create the

4 Section three of this report will propose a general strategic framework for resolving the various challenges and issues.
capacity for Somali Bantus to pass on their knowledge to their community members, rendering an opportunity to establish a farming tradition that is representative of their unique cultural history and traditions. Above all, the dedication demonstrated by the Somali Bantus can be marketed in promotional materials to exemplify their commitment to the cooperative. More specifically, in the exit interview with Binto, she proposed moving to the farm to work extra hours so as to ensure the success of the cooperative, (Personal Interview, April 11, 2011). As the cooperative moves forward these assets and potential issues that the Somali Bantu community brings with it, like the other refugee groups, will have to be dealt with collectively to further the progress of the organization.

Uzbeks

With the wind whipping around us on a hot April afternoon at Gila Farm, our feet precariously placed between the small plants, we listened to the words of Rahmat Kobilov. He spoke of fleeing his home-country of Uzbekistan after the major political demonstration, the Andijan Uprising, created danger for many Uzbeks. Uzbekistan is one of the larger Central-Asian countries, land-locked between Kazakhstan to its north, Turkmenistan to its south, Kyrgyzstan on its north-west border and Tajikistan and Afghanistan on its south-west and southern borders (U.S. Department of State, 2011; CIA World Factbook, 2011).

Uzbekistan was conquered by Russia in the late 19th century. While it has been independent since 1991 it still functions at times, in terms of political and economic actions, under Soviet-style policy. An example can be seen in the reported dictatorship over land and
planting. During our interviews, Rahmat reported that land is rented to farmers and then the crops that are to be planted are dictated to the farmer via a state rendered contract. The farmers are not allowed to plant for themselves or their families, only for the stipulations set by the state. They do not and cannot own the land; everything is controlled by the government, with little input of the citizens. As Rahmat stated, “There is no freedom in planting in my country” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011). Uzbekistan has in the past had a rich agricultural background as indicated through the interviews with Rahmat, but its pollution with agrochemicals and depletion of local rivers has left the land in a precarious state. However, its recent issues with “terrorism by Islamic militants, economic stagnation, and the curtailment of human rights and democratization” (CIA World Factbook, 2011) have created havoc for a large majority of the Uzbek people.

Rahmat Kobilov, like many of the other Uzbeks escaping the after-math of the Andijan Uprising, came to the United States in 2005 after being in Romanian refugee camps. The Andijan Uprising stemmed from a conflict between local businessmen and the Uzbek government. According to local and national news reports, businessmen were being held prisoner for their ties to an unsanctioned religious group. When they were freed via armed gunmen their liberators took control of the main government building and held a large public rally in front of it. This caused a riot, firefights, civilian deaths and the start of unrest in Uzbekistan (Olcott, 2006).

According to Rahmat Kobilov and Tohir Umarov, his interpreter and fellow Uzbek refugee, anyone associated with the business QST⁵ were suspects of the state. QST served as an umbrella organization for many other business operations: building and construction,

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⁵ Rahmat nor Tohir could translate the name of the company or provide more than QST as a name due to the language barrier.
commercial products, communication and restaurants. From the start of the uprising they were not allowed to return home for fear of their own safety (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011). Rahmat told us of how the QST business “had 5,000 people and were providing medical care, welfare needs, unemployment, supported preschools, medical services, family problems and needs to their employees. The government thought they were getting too powerful” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011).

In addition, both Rahmat and Tohir told us of how after the start of the Uprising the people affiliated with the business that were threatened by the government walked 30-40 miles with only the clothes on their backs to Kyrgyzstan. There they were confronted at the border with more armed guards waiting to kill them (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011). They, along with many others made it safely across the border to become refugees in a new nation, first in Kyrgyzstan, second in Romania, and for a large majority, finally in the United States. It is doubtful that Rahmat or any of the other Uzbek refugees that fled in relation to the Andijan Uprising will be able to return safely any time soon, as there have been violent reports regarding those who have tried to return (Inglizcha, 2010). This is relevant in that it helps explain why the Uzbek population of Arizona has come to call the state their new home.

Despite the atrocities that have taken place in the lives of the Uzbek refugees, they have come to Arizona to start anew and build on the knowledge of cooperation and hard work that they learned in Uzbekistan. Specifically, Rahmat has brought his 15 years of extensive traditional farming experience to the irrigated farm land of Arizona. In South-Chandler, motivated by his family still living in Uzbekistan and his newfound family, the Phoenix-Uzbek community, he cultivates a few acres at Gila Farms. There, Rahmat, along with other Uzbek farmers, produce a variety of vegetables and locally famous Uzbek melons that are devoured by
Phoenicians every summer. Their delicious, organic produce can be seen at the local farmers’ markets where the Uzbeks collaborate with other refugees.

An important part of Rahmat Kobilov’s farming in the United States is his dedication to his customers. “I’ve been doing this job for 15 years and the important thing is not making the money … of course you make money but it’s not like the important thing. This is my healthy job ... I take care of people. My food is healthy. It’s all organic. It helps people” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011). Rahmat is also an active and proud member of his community where, in addition to farming, he and his fellow Uzbeks participate in an Auto Repair business as well as a newly opened restaurant, Golden Valley Restaurant, located in Glendale. This genuine community collaboration will be a great asset for the cooperative and has the potential to grow. During the course of our interviews with Rahmat we discovered that that while the Uzbek refugees in the United States were originally split up into different states, they are slowly trying to amass a large population in Arizona to create stronger ties and a larger network given that the largest number of refugees was originally placed in Arizona.

The Uzbek community, as indicated by Rahmat and Tohir are excited to participate in the cooperative and see the benefit it may have on helping their small amount of produce reach more people (Personal Interview, April 13, 2011). Rahmat excitedly promoted the idea of cooperative farming. In discussing teamwork within the cooperative he stated that, “It’s good to work as a team. Sometimes it doesn’t work to plant by myself. It is good to have … to share with all of us and to listen to who’s gonna say what.” (Personal Interview, April 13, 2011). In addition to revealing his positive attitude toward cooperating among his fellow Uzbeks, it also reveals a willingness to pursue organizational structures that formalize this collaborative spirit. Rahmat explained that while there was no organization like the IRC in his country, farmers and others
did get together and talk about farming and participate in collective enterprise. The cooperative economic framework that underlies economic relations in their home country, as well as a persistent cultural commitment toward group effort, bodes well for the Uzbek’s continued commitment to, and participation within the emerging Gila Farm Cooperative.

Another positive indication of future collaboration was revealed by the way in which Rahmat spoke of the strong bonds of solidarity within his community. Just like in his home-country, if the Uzbek farmers here in the United States need help planting or harvesting they can count on their community members to be called upon to come and help. As the cooperative moves forward it is our opinion that the collaborative work-ethic that the Uzbeks already possess will help the entire group of farmers. Nonetheless, it may be challenging for the Uzbeks to trust the other ethnic/linguistic groups at the same level as their own community members. The cooperative is still in the early stages and while Rahmat and the other Uzbeks are excited for the cooperative, they are not completely certain on how it will work or what their ideas might be for contributions to this group. Rahmat does have a vision for the future though. He echoes the dreams of many Uzbeks as he wishes that in the future the people of the United States will know about the hard work of the Uzbek people and will know of their mouth-watering melons grown locally in the organic fields of Arizona.

**Togolese**

The Togolese Republic, commonly referred to as Togo, is a West African nation bordered by Ghana and Benin along the Gulf of Guinea. Togo’s existence is the result of European partition. The country lies in the historically notorious “Slave Coast” where European traders pick-up forced laborers (BBC News, 2011). Administration first came under the Germans, but was transferred to the British and French after World War I as an acquisition of
war. France became the principle authority in the area till 1960, a legacy that still remains by the use of French as the official language. With independence though came further internal hardship for the Togolese.

Togo’s first president was assassinated in a military coup that lasted seven years. The result was the regime of Colonel Gnassingbé Eyadéma, a figure who would dominate Togo for over 30 years. Eyadéma’s state banned all political opposition leaving only one party that was supported by the armed forces. The 1990s saw legalization of other political parties and the formation of a democratic constitution, but these advances were marred by accusations of rigged elections and coercive suppression (BBC News, 2011) by Eyadéma’s government. Even after his death in 2005 Eyadéma remained influential, installing his son Faure as president, thus subsequently renewing protest within the nation and international condemnation amidst allegations of voter fraud. The ensuing political violence has produced over 40,000 refugees and an estimated 500 killings, reportedly done by security forces (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

Those refugees that eventually came to the United States had jumped from one refugee camp to another in neighboring African countries. Koffi Ogou, a rural farmer who fled during the political upheaval of the first Eyadéma’s elections in the 1990s, attests to moving from camp to camp in Ghana and later the Ivory Coast before coming to the US in 2008 (Personal Interview, April 5, 2011). His involvement with the International Rescue Committee is similar to other Togolese refugees in the US. Koffi states that he and other refugees were living in urban areas
such as Chicago in Koffi’s case. Upon learning of the IRC’s New Roots Farm Program that gives refugees the opportunity to farm open land, he and others entered the program and moved to its instillation in Arizona. They were enticed by the chance to engage in familiar work and own land (Personal Interview, April 5, 2011). Farming in a new environment does have its difficulties though, and has lead Togolese refugees such as Koffi looking to a cooperative model to alleviate the new hardships.

The problems the Togolese have with farming in the IRC program stem from a physical and legal alienation from the cultivation area. The foremost problem for the Togolese refugees is distance. In a discussion with Koffi Ogou, he expressed how he and other Togolese lived and worked other jobs in the Phoenix urban area, and had little time to tend to their plots about an hour away in Gila Farm, south of the city of Chandler. His personal experience entails only being able to travel to the farm on his off-days as maintenance keeper for Delta Airlines in Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. This means he only farms twice a week and heavily depends on traveling with fellow Togolese refugees to get to the farm because of the cost of fuel. This physical distance from the land has discouraged many Togolese farmers Koffi says, and many drop out of the program. The other issue is ownership and use. Despite being able to farm a plot of land, the plot does not belong to Koffi Ogou. Though Koffi does not personally pay for land use and from all accounts has autonomy over what he grows and how he tends to his crops, the land is still a rented area on behalf of the IRC. Farmers like Koffi have their productivity under scrutiny by the land-owners and have no permanent tie to their plot.

Because of these hardships, Koffi looks to the developing Gila Farm Cooperative to find security and resources for him as well as other refugee farmers, especially his fellow Togolese community members. The cooperative offers shared labor, mutual responsibility, and greater
access to capital and resources, all of which interest the farmers in order to gain entitlement and profit (Personal Interview, April 13, 2011). As of now, the Togolese community support Koffi, offering to drive him to the farm and lending their labor. For them he is a bedrock in their stream of adversity (Personal Interview, April 5, 2011). In return Koffi is trying to facilitate the involvement of other Togolese farmers, serving as an interpreter for those wanting to acquire loans with IRC assistance to start cultivation projects. This active internal community solidarity as well as an expressed willingness to work with other refugees of other backgrounds gives the cooperative a foundation on which to build upon.

Section II: Project Conceptualization - Promotional Material Objectives & Rationale

From the beginning, the project coordination of the IRC staff, the farmers, team members and the professor were difficult, but possible through a conceptualized schema of the project. This plan subsequently served as a blueprint for developing more specific objectives, as well as a process for realizing these various objectives through a scheduled work plan. It became evident from the outset that there were dual goals placed on the student group by the IRC staff and faculty mentor. The IRC sought to develop a marketing campaign that would introduce and promote the Gila Farm Cooperative. As the principle faculty member involved in designing and teaching ASU’s JUS 497/591 course, Dr. Gonzales, on the other hand, pushed the student group to pursue analytical work that would apply course material to the formation and future of the IRC’s CSA initiative.

One of the challenges facing the IRC innovation project team was that the CSA would not be established until the cooperative was well underway and since the cooperative is still in its initial stages, we were compelled to scale down our initial ambitions to a dimension sufficiently
realistic to enable us to accomplish key goals. As a result, the most innovative components of our project focused less on specific outcomes than on process. Though we had a limited time frame in which to work on the project, we were able to serve a critical role in establishing the basis for future collaboration by getting to know individual farmers, their diverse communities and their distinctive perspectives and attitudes toward the emerging cooperative. As a result, we helped to establish a solid foundation for collaboration on the one hand, while developing specific marketing materials and tools, as well as broader strategic plans to implement them, on the other.

Dr. Gonzales and our IRC project coordinator, Jessica Woiderski, both helped us design the parameters of the innovation project in a manner that best balanced expectations of the Phoenix IRC with class requirements. Dr. Gonzales suggested that we determine who the audience would be for the project in order to help to clarify the project-groups goals. Following the professor’s advice, in consultation with Jessica, we decided to create farmer profiles and pamphlets which utilize the personal story of the refugee clients to uniquely market their produce through the cooperative. As the data collection process progressed Jessica specified the guidelines for the marketing component of the project, which included the need for a unifying theme and promotional materials geared toward developing the cooperative’s identity. As a result, the student team collaborated with IRC staff to design a pamphlet that explains the cooperative and provides a brief introduction of the ethnic farming groups.

Since we had promised the farmers our help to promote their products in exchange for their cooperation in being interviewed, we thought it would be appropriate for us to create additional fliers that help individual farmers expand their customer base within the primary venues in which they currently sell their produce: farmers markets. Moreover, in collaboration
with our faculty mentor, our student team decided that it would be important to prioritize the farmers as a key subject in the formulation of meaning and understandings about what the marketing campaign and cooperative structure could mean for them and their community. As a result, we made a concerted effort to keep the farmers informed of the conceptualization of the project, and worked with them to develop promotional material that echoed with the specific needs of the farmers we were interviewing. Throughout the first-round of interviews, we explained to the farmers the type of materials we were planning to develop (one page flyer, tri-fold pamphlet) and also ensured them that we would not make any items public until they approved them. In addition, the team also combined all of these marketing ideas and information gained and turned them into short, four to five minute photo collages, which we subsequently transformed into YouTube videos. These videos combine the photos of the farmers and projects, small snippets of information about the farmers, their communities and their stories and are set to their traditional ethnic music. (SEAZ Project: Togolese Video; SEAZ Project: Somali Bantu Video; SEAZ Project: Uzbek Video).\textsuperscript{6}

As for the analytical element of the project, our student team decided that the best way to integrate an analytical component to the project was to formulate portfolio case studies that would gauge discussion on the advantages and challenges of forming a cooperative and CSA not only in the context of the IRC refugee project, but in promoting greater awareness on cooperative development throughout the Southwest.

**Promoting Social Awareness**
In branding the farmers markets and cooperative’s fliers as part of a greater cause that aimed to forge the economic self-sufficiency of refugee farmers, our team sought to evoke an

\textsuperscript{6} These videos can be found at www.socialeconomyAZ.org under ASU Course, Innovation Projects: SEAZ Project: Togolese Video; SEAZ Project: Somali Bantu Video; SEAZ Project: Uzbek Video.
emotional response or awareness that would connect and capture the customer’s attention to the refugee’s story. By narrating the refugee farmers’ stories of struggle and determination we not only attempted to elicit customers to empathize with the farmers story, but we wanted consumers to understand that in doing something as basic as participating in a cooperative they were helping a greater cause for refugees while simultaneously purchasing organic and environmentally friendly food. For instance, the Uzbek farmer’s story of struggle is best exemplified in his account of the protest against oppressive government policies, which imposed harsh and exploitative restrictions on Uzbek farmers. In our first interview Rhamat summed up the socio-political turmoil in his country by emphasizing his personal experience. “If you’re a farmer [in Uzbekistan] you have to plant whatever the government says…government handles everything” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011).

In joining a cooperative, consumers can pledge to help refugee farmers gain self-sufficiency in an otherwise daunting, American labor market. Indeed, all four farmers we interviewed indicated that they have had problems establishing a solid consumer base that would loyalty come to them each time they needed to purchase produce. For example, when asked about the benefits he would personally obtain in joining the cooperative, the Togolese farmer, Koffi answered, “the cooperative will allow us to get markets…my problem [at this point] is the markets” (Personal Interview, April 13, 2011). Furthermore, the refugee farmers also expressed that they saw the cooperative as an opportunity to potentially help themselves become self-sufficient and not dependant on IRC. For example, the Uzbek farmer described planning to expand their business as a future goal if the marketing aspect of the cooperative was successful. Rahmat stated, “If this cooperative works good and our product sells well we’ll continue to work with the cooperative and get more acres and technical tools” (Personal Interview, April 13,
Throughout the first and second interviews, Rahmat mentioned the idea of potentially buying his own farm and tools rather than having to depend on planting by hand or on borrowed equipment from both the landowner and IRC.

Above all, the promotional materials aimed to convey a message that emphasized the importance of purchasing from refugees as a means to forge a community bond, which would symbolize the acceptance of these new groups into the local community. When buying a product, consumers balance the pros and cons of their investment and thus want a clear understanding of the tangible and intangible benefits that they will procure in their purchase so as to make a final decision. This is why our student team felt that it was important to add a list of the benefits to the pamphlet that patrons would incur if they enrolled in the cooperative; it was done as means to incentivize the consumer to join the cooperative.

**Promotional Material Formulation Process**

While this project was an embedded component of the School of Social Justice JUS 497/591 course which began in late January, 2011 the field work component of the course did not begin for students until March 30th, after which point we began to interview farmers at local Farmers’ markets, and compile profiles of individual farmers and their communities. While we created the guidelines for the farmer’s profile template as a team, each team member created an individual farmer’s profile for a distinctive ethnic group. We utilized the farmer profile fliers as our master template, from which we developed short individual biographies as well as a more comprehensive individual biographic pamphlet for promoting Gila Farm Cooperative. The farmer profiles contained a personal story and set of illustrations of each ethnic group at work either at the downtown Phoenix farmer’s market or Gila Farm. While attempting to capture the
unique identity of each community, we strove to develop farmer profiles from each ethnic group so as to enable consumers to better understand farmer’s Background, Farming Experience, and Community.

**Background**

The background section is relevant because we want the customer to understand the cultural richness and diversity each group offers, while also emphasizing the circumstances that drove them to this country and the challenge it will take to adapt\(^7\). During the initial stages of the interview process we experienced problems engaging the Somali Bantus in our project and getting them to contribute personal narratives or experiences that could be utilized to depict the struggles of their journey. We found it particularly difficult to establish rapport with the Somali Bantus in our first meeting at the farmers market, specifically because they were hesitant and did not go into great detail when answering the questions we posed. Among the key contributing factors that can be attributed to lack of rapport throughout the first meeting with the Somali Bantus are that we did not provide enough specific information about the project before initiating the interview. Fatuma inquired about the purpose of the research project, repeatedly, asking how relaying their personal information to us would help their community. Another aspect that diminished our rapport with the Somali Bantu community during the initial meeting was that we did not have enough background information on the political and/or cultural dynamics in Somalia. We did not understand that Somali Bantus identified more closely with their ethnic [Bantu] roots rather than with their national or state-hood ties. Fatuma clarified to our student

\(^7\) The following are the background section questions our student team utilized throughout the interviews: Where do you farm and live? What country do you come from? Can you tell us a little bit about your home country? Can you tell me a little bit about your family? What are the cultural differences you see between here and your home country? How have you adjusted to them?
team that she was Somali Bantu and not Somali as our interview question stated. Also, the environment made interviewing difficult since the marketplace was loud and crowded. For example, there was tap dancing going on directly next to us while we were conducting Fatuma’s interview, causing the interviewee to lose focus and also making it hard for us to listen to both the interviewee and the audio-recordings produced that day. Additionally, participants might not have felt comfortable disclosing personal information in a crowded public space. Yet, despite these difficulties, we were able to secure some information from the Somali Bantu farmers and follow through with a second interview at a familiar setting in which they were more comfortable disclosing their struggles and ideas on the cooperative.

**Farming Experience**

In asking questions about the refugees farming experience we hoped to get consumers a better idea of the economic differences that farming in the States entails compared to the refugees homeland. Most farmers mentioned that the main benefits of farming in the United States included the availability of utilizing highly technical farming tools, such as tractors and specialized irrigation systems. Fatuma mentioned that cultivation and harvesting was easier and more efficient in the United States than in their home-country, specifically since, “In Somalia, farmers have to grow every two years, waiting for the rain to come” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011).

Farmers believed that their selling and overall farming skills could be improved through their involvement in the cooperative. All farmers expressed lack of marketing information and experience in the American economy as a setback that could be

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8 The following are the farming section questions our student team utilized throughout the interviews: Did you farm in your home country and what kind of crops did you grow? Are any of the crops you grow here the same that you grew back he? Are they different? What are your favorite vegetables to grow and eat? Do you have any recipes?
alleviated through the cooperative. For example, Koffi expressed his belief that establishing a cooperative can eliminate the competition that most farmers experience when pricing and selling their produce. From his perspective, “what harms the farmers is competition between themselves in the market…in a cooperative you would have the same quality of produce” (Personal Interview, April 2, 2011). Eliminating, or at least minimizing competition and forging expanded consumer networks through the cooperative would allow them to sell more and have the financial assets to invest in technical tools or seminars to improve and facilitate their farming procedures.

**Community**

Questions concerning community are significant because they illustrate the important role that community plays in the survival of the refugee in the American landscape. A key theme that was emphasized and observed throughout the data collection process was that of community and teamwork, which seemed to play a very important role in the lives of all the farm workers interviewed. When asked about community and teamwork, the farmers all recounted having worked to varying degrees in communal-driven labor environments in their own home countries. Koffi, the Togolese farmer mentioned that cooperatives were popular mechanisms in his country and sponsored by the government. Upon meeting several members of the Uzbek community in Phoenix, our student team realized that the communal camaraderie and teamwork was a very important aspect of Uzbek cultural traditions. For example, in the first interview, Rahmat mentioned that he relocated to Arizona in order to be in the same state as the

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9 The following are community section questions our student team utilized throughout the interviews: How do you define your community here in the United States? What role do you see yourself playing in this community? What do you want to accomplish in America?
majority of his compatriots. The strong communitarian roots of the Uzbeks are best exemplified in the following explanation of their coming together in Arizona:

All of us wanted to be in one state, that way we can work together. That is what we used to do in our country before we came to the United States, we had factories and restaurants…it was more than five thousand people under one business. More than fifteen companies and we all knew each other (Personal Interview, April 13, 2011).

Furthermore, Rahmat talked about plans to rebuild the Uzbek community here in Phoenix. He said that they had already started the process of opening a restaurant, Asian market, and auto-repair business all heralded under their community association, which is named after their hometown in Uzbekistan. The Somali Bantu farmers also had strong community links; both female farmers are active and proud members of their community association where they, along with their family members, participate in ESL and immigration classes, as well as other recreational programs. While attending a meeting at the Somali Bantu Association, we noticed that it was a central meeting point; refugees gathered at the association to interact with other community members and participate in the array of services offered.

After compiling and integrating the relevant information on these three subjects of inquiry, we then added a picture of the farmer, his or her produce and a quote that best represented the story of the farmer and his ethnic group. (Appendix III: Promotional Material I Farmer Profile Filer) Apart from finding that refugee farmers held communitarian work ethic traditions and ideologies as part of their culture, most importantly our results suggested that through innovative schemas, such as cooperatives that promote inter-ethnic affiliation, the IRC helped refugee farmers build social capital networks beyond their traditional ethnic parameters. Working with farmers from other nationalities and cultures open up an array of opportunities and resources available to the
farmer, especially because inter-ethnic collaboration such as this can provide intangible resources and/or benefits (e.g., innovative farming techniques or advice from different cultural perspectives) that would not be accessible if refugee groups remained isolated in their ethnic enclaves and did not interact with the larger refugee community

In addition to the individual flyers of the farmers’ interviews, the team also created a pamphlet for the cooperative. The cooperative pamphlet was an extension of the farmer profile project; we utilized data from the latter and formatted it into the cooperative flyer template along with an initial design by the IRC Intern. After conducting our second-round of interviews at Gila Farm and prior to integrating the data into the cooperative flyer template, we provided the farmers with a rough outline of the latter and showed them what information each section would contain and ultimately what it would all look like once it was finished.

Initially, we had conceptualized integrating both a brief overview of the ethnic group history and the personal story of the refugee farmer, but unfortunately the pamphlet looked very crowded. Instead, each team member condensed the relevant data for their assigned group into a brief historical account with images of the farmer and his or her produce. The pamphlet is organized into three main sections: (1) the Gila Farm Cooperative title and logo, (2) a basic introduction to the concept of cooperatives, which outlines the advantages of joining a cooperative and (3) the Get to Know Our Farmers section, which features the ethnic history and illustrations of farmers which are representing the Somali Bantu, Uzbek, and Togolese members of the cooperative.

(Appendix IV: Promotional Material II – Cooperative Pamphlet)
Innovative Educational Component

In designing the promotional materials for the farmers and their cooperative our student team thought it imperative not only to understand their marketing needs, but to also understand their interests and the key goals and objectives of the IRC project and its affiliates. The educational component to the promotional material was incorporated so as to transfer marketing to the farmers, aiming to foster the development of human capital and thus ultimately greater capacity within the cooperative more generally.

Initially, our plan was to develop a marketing-101 styled seminar, which would equip the farmers with creative ideas and basic marketing knowledge that they could apply to further enhance their own marketing needs e.g. creating other promotional materials such as buttons, fliers and photo montages from the advertising design elements and information we had formulated. Most importantly, throughout this seminar, we hoped to arm them with basic marketing skills and/ or frameworks that they could utilize for future promotional endeavors of the cooperative, specifically, because they will ultimately be in charge of managing the cooperative once their partnership with the IRC finalizes. That is why, we had planned to show the farmers and IRC staff the semi-final version of the promotional materials so as to address the farmers marketing needs and discuss any last minute concerns or feedback that both the farmers and IRC might have on the flier and pamphlet before submission for printing and distribution.

Moreover, in our initial plan of action we indicated that utilizing the IRC’s few computer stations as well as our own laptops could be a way to show the farmers the software, the promotional materials and all of the details that have made up the semi-final production of the materials. At this point, the student team would then be able to work one-on-one with each linguistic group and farmer, as well as the IRC project leader to come to a consensus on the
materials. Ideally, we were hoping each linguistic group would get a block of time to meet with us separately to go over their individual materials as well as the group information; also, it was hoped that the IRC project coordinator would be present during all of our meetings so that we could be in continual communication and could solve any problems that might potentially arise. This was initially planned so that in the future they could hopefully design and work on their own marketing materials autonomously.

Unfortunately, the educational component was only partially realized. Although we were able to show the farmers portions of the products as we were developing them, and they were able to give us feedback during this process, the more ambitious aspects of our initial plans did not come to fruition for several key reasons. Given the number of collaborators, relatively short timeframe and issues related to transportation and alternative school and work obligations, the student group found it difficult to coordinate a forum with all the intended parties. Moreover, coordinating diverse linguistic groups together for the same meeting made scheduling interpreters extremely difficult. Secondly, the feasibility of organizing the seminar was questioned by our IRC mentor, specifically in regards to concerns that the refugees might not have the requisite skills and/or access to the technology needed to apply the marketing strategies, which were to be discussed at the seminar. Third, the time-constraint that our student team was experiencing, having to meet project deadlines and other academic or work-related commitments also added to the complexity of the logistical elements. In conjunction with this, refugees typically had trouble securing transportation to meetings, so we would have had to coordinate transportation schedules well in advance so as to accommodate the refugee’s transportation needs.
Despite these constraints, the team did manage to meet with each group of farmers after finalizing the second-round of interviews and briefly reported and illustrated a preliminary status of the fliers and their content. One team member, Gene Sanchez, scheduled a meeting with the Uzbek group to conduct a similar version of the abovementioned educational component plan. Meeting on Tuesday May 3rd at the IRC offices, the farmer, interpreter, and Sanchez met and discussed the implications of the promotional materials and the farmer’s reactions and thoughts to them. Unfortunately, the meeting was marred by unexpected technological glitches, (e.g., problems opening promotional materials due to incompatible software issues) and subsequent coordinating and scheduling conflicts. Rahmat, the Uzbek farmer had just finished business at the IRC and could not meet when Sanchez arrived. Coincidently, the Somali Bantu farmers were at the office, but had to attend to resolving other issues with our IRC coordinator. Luckily, Sanchez did have the opportunity to engage in an in-depth and extensive discussion on the promotional material with the Togolese farmer, Koffi, who expressed great satisfaction with the material and had only a few minor suggestions on the music for the photomontage.

The process of collaboratively designing and developing promotional materials with IRC staff and refugee farmers was innovative in itself, specifically because in getting to know the various farming communities and engaging with them in the process of conceptualizing and promoting the Gila Farm Cooperative, the student group was able to help foster internal mutuality within the cooperative. Based on our interview data and observations, it seems that above all, the refugee farmers saw the cooperative as a tool of empowerment that would not only help them build stronger linkages with the Greater Phoenix area community at large, but also as a result of these established community networks and propel them towards greater economic prosperity.
Section III: Strategic Planning

In conjunction with the process of creating and realizing the specific promotional materials discussed above, the student the team was also engaged in formulating a short and long term strategic plan to help advance the key social and economic goals of the cooperative, particularly those relevant to supporting the cultural identity and economic self sufficiency of refugee farmers in the greater Phoenix area. Part of the planning and implementing of the marketing materials and strategic planning involved discovering the parameters that IRC project coordinator Jessica Woiderski was working within. Her grant is rather complex with a component which entails developing the cooperative to reach out to low-income people. This essentially means cultivating a considerably wide-ranging customer base, from the low-income to high-income Phoenix populations. Because Jessica indicated that she had relatively little previous experience in marketing to-and/or engaging low-income communities in an endeavor of this nature, she was eager to utilize our suggestions and innovative marketing ideas for serving this segment of the population. This has consequently influenced the focus of our strategic plan and the specific solutions proposed to promote Gila Farm Cooperative as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) cooperative.

As a form of “social agriculture” a CSA is a community venture that brings … consumers together with farmers in the common interest of creating sustainable co-operative farms that produce organic food for the community” (Steinhoff, 2005, p. 278). One of the key goals of the Gila Farm Cooperative is to become established as a CSA. The strategies the student group proposed for developing the CSA focus on developing a three-tiered cost structure; collaborative meetings between the leaders of the linguistic groups; and building a low-income consumer base via cooperative-community school partnerships. Jessica Woiderski is in full support of our
ideas and is already implementing the beginning stages of introducing the ideas to the refugee farmers.

The student team generated initial ideas for the Gila Farm Cooperative through: a review of the academic literature on CSA movements and cooperative business and social enterprise (Steinhoff, 2005; Briscoe & Ward, 2005); interviews with participating farmers; and our observations of the initial process of cooperative formation.

The tiered cost system, a more short-term goal, consists of three tiers. The first tier has a payment portion that covers the cost of one produce box each week for 27 weeks. Additionally, this tier includes a charitable cost portion that goes towards the third tier low-income group; the price of the box in this tier is more expensive as the extra money is used for low-income populations. The second tier is the average cost of only the weekly produce box for a single buyer. The third tier is designed for low-income families and will be supplemented by the extra funds generated from the first tier and by volunteer hours that would equate the price of one box of produce per week per purchaser.

The tiered system is as follows:

**Three Tiered Process**

- **First Tier**: Average Dollar Amount Plus Charitable Gift - $450 for 27 weeks ($17 a week)
- **Second Tier**: Average Dollar Amount - $350 for 27 weeks ($13 a week)
- **Third Tier**: Free
  - First option: funded by first tier charitable gift (For every 5 1st tier = 1 3rd tier)
  - Second option: volunteer hours that equivocate 1 box every week (Steinhoff, 2005, p. 282).

The importance of the tiered system is that it allows people from different economic backgrounds be a part of the CSA cooperative. This not only helps Jessica Woiderski fulfill the needs of her grant, but also creates a diversified source of clients for the cooperative. Successful

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10 Pricing is currently an estimation until further research can be done on existing CSAs in Arizona and competitor’s pricing.
models of cooperatives have shown that being innovative and having diversified resources and clients can help create long-term sustainability for organizations (Briscoe & Ward, 2005).

In order to procure clients for the tiered system, the farmers will have to start generating enthusiasm among the consumer base of their local farmer’s markets. Additionally, the farmers will need to promote their cooperative and the idea of the CSA to their neighbors, local businesses and community members from an inside out approach. Farmers will have to look internally to their communities for clients first and then spread their outreach to individuals and groups outside of their immediate pool of contacts. The farmers will not only be the growers, but will also be the marketers and sales people. Their stories, faces and work at the farmer’s markets are already selling and marketing the produce they have farmed.

The local nature of the cooperative creates a personally connected relationship between the farmers and the clients and thus leaves the farmers filling the role of many parts of the business, marketer, seller and farmer. For some of the farmers this will be easy as they are already seen as trusted leaders in their communities; for others it will be a bit more challenging until they have proven themselves in the cooperative and in their communities. It will be their locally grown, organic produce that nourishes the bodies and souls of their community members. They will need to develop a mind-set similar to their marketing approach in order to fully immerse themselves in their product and the CSA’s purpose. The more positive a brand and image the cooperative has before acquiring clients the easier it will be to sell the idea of a tiered system that looks less like charity and more like community investment (Andreason & Kotler, 2003; Ritchie, 1999).

While the cooperative will not be directly affiliated with the IRC, it will be indirectly. This relationship could have a positive or negative effect on how the cooperative and the
refugees are seen. The farmers are doing the work producing, harvesting and selling the vegetables and fruit, but members in the community may see their IRC affiliation as a charitable cause and not a business. This creates a necessity for the farmers to create a positive and legitimate business image of the cooperative before trying to sell an idea where part of people’s money goes to pay for others in a tiered cost structure; the tiered structure itself could be seen as charitable. To start the cooperative off on the right foot a positive branding and image will be necessary primarily at the formational stage.

The second part of the short-term strategy is helping to create stability within the governing structure of the organization. This might be dealt with through several meetings of the cooperative leaders where they learn to trust each other over time and see the collective benefit of their work. As long as there is a sense of accountability and trust between the members and farmers the logistical challenges of teamwork and mitigating collective action problems can become possible (Briscoe & Ward, 2005, p. 70). Especially when it comes to establishing the terms of sharing production, consumers and farmers should reach an agreement on the prices and distribution of production. This is why in the article Community Supported Agriculture: A Movement for a Better Food System, Steinhoff (2005) suggests having a strong decision-making mechanism in place to establish the goals, budget, publicity strategies and distribution policies of the cooperative (p. 281). Moreover, this decision-making structure should be a forum in which farmers, distributors and CSA members can openly address and solve problems diminishing the chance of challenges. Besides regular meetings of the ethnic leaders, a hybrid democratic governing structure balanced between corporate drive and non-profit fulfillment of social needs should be considered (Bordt, 2005; Fenn, 2004; Jurik, 2005; Pfeffer, 1997). These innovative ideas have the potential to create cohesion and long-term sustainability for the organization.
The third strategic plan, a more long-term goal, comes exclusively from the need to include low-income families in the CSA and find a way for low-income families’ needs to be met in the process. According to Pelch and Kolodisnksy’s 1997 article in the *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, families often do not have the time to be involved in a CSA. The cooperative could mitigate part of the problem by incorporating the CSA with local schools. Promotional events and advance marketing tools as well as a pick-up points could be implemented in the schools. This could help to draw low-income families into the CSA program as well as market to schools and children. To begin, the leaders of the CSA would have to choose a few local schools to concentrate on, meet with the school boards and administrators and submit their idea on a community partnership. Within this model, the refugee farmers could develop local, social networks to promote their vision within the local schools attended by their children and the children of their friends and neighbors. These are not only likely to represent the most responsive environment to the idea of the CSA cooperative, but also an environment easiest for the farmers to operate in given established patterns of social and cultural interaction.

One way to potentially catalyze development, which expands beyond the immediate neighborhood and/or social networks is to link to broader advocacy networks such as those represented by First Lady Michele Obama’s “Let’s Move” Child Obesity program (http://www.letsmove.gov/). Once the network of cooperative supporters has reached critical mass and the relationship between the cooperative/CSA and the school(s) has established a partnership, they will need to implement an initial marketing phase to identify interested families and gauge their responsiveness to the cooperative’s key mission and goals. This can be facilitated by a kick-off event that brings the schools, families and whole community together to
promote the particular program, and the CSA as a whole. This event could be held at the school or at the cooperative’s farm.

In order to implement these strategic plans, it is imperative that the cooperative leaders -- those members chosen by the larger group of farmers that represent each ethnic/linguistic group in the cooperative could meet and facilitate a cross-cultural dialogue regarding marketing and outreach for the coop as discussed previously. While the ideas of the tiered cost system and connecting with local schools have not been fully established, the hope is that they will grow as the cooperative and CSA develop. Both the tiered cost system and working with community schools can help to promote the CSA as well as reach out to low-income families and their local communities.

**SECTION IV: Constructive Evaluation**

In creating marketing material and strategic plans for the Gila Farm Cooperative the project group learned first-hand the complexity of forming a cooperative. Among the conceptual and analytic issues introduced in the JUS 494/597 course included the link between organizational formation and community development; individual and community-based perceptions of what cooperative forms of organization represents; these organizations’ relation to cultural identity; and their perceived capacity to facilitate mutual economic gain. All of the farmers we interviewed, whether Somali Bantu, Togolese, or Uzbek described, to one degree or another, how their communities assisted in their agricultural endeavors. The Somali-Bantus have a resident association that provided family and citizenship services. Tohir and Rahmat elaborated on how the Uzbek refugee population transplanted the idea of the QST organization to community members in Arizona, while Koffi expressed how he receives travel aid and encouragement from other Togolese to support his farming endeavors.
In creating an image for the cooperative it was important to take into account how to fit these different conceptions of community into a solidarity movement. Special interest was given to finding a common theme in the narratives of collective rehabilitation within these communities of displaced persons. The hope is to have a similar development such as in San Diego’s New Roots Farm where the shared experience of being a refugee created cross-cultural bonds of support between farmers (Ponsen, 2010), bonds that form the identity of the cooperative. Solidarity is not simply manufactured by promoting cooperative values. Instead it is underlying community or social ideals that make the cooperative an appealing enterprise for laborers (Bendick & Egan, 1995, p.76). The student group sought to use the refugees’ concept of community to form a vision of the cooperative. That way it becomes an organization of social empowerment (Nembhard, 2001, p.299-317) that fosters the refugee’s principles of reciprocity, communal labor, and strong customer relations.

These conceptions of community were revealed when the clients were asked about what they understood about a cooperative. Answers were not concrete and based on professional knowledge, but what they had recently learned from the IRC and hoped to see in the future. This gradual familiarity of the cooperative system is ideal in the sense that the clients are imputing genuine ideas and parameters. Such an outlook allows the farmers to truly make the cooperative theirs in what they believe it should be. The student group facilitated such participatory thinking in the interviews, but made sure not to dictate strict definitions of a cooperative. Getting accustomed to the cooperative system will take time and patience for the farmers, but already there exists the ripe conditions of community and willingness to join others in a common cause.
Enhancing Preliminary Research & Early Project Development

Adaptation and adjustment was key in the planning and executing of the IRC innovation project. Being that the CSA cooperative was still in its extreme infancy, the project group had limited information as to what it could do and what its objectives were. The team had to acclimate to changing conditions, modifying its methods and goals throughout the project. With much flexibility and patience on the part of the mentor, instructor, these measures enabled the project to materialize. The need to adapt and modify could have been mitigated or at least minimized by allowing more preliminary research preparation and earlier involvement in the embedded component of the educational course.

Another aspect that is pertinent to the IRC innovation project is the unique yet sensitive aspect of dealing with diverse cultural groups who are victims of violence and repression. This required additional readings on the client farmers’ culture and history as well as on refugees in order to apply course material to the needs and situation of the clients. The inclusion of a basic literature review prior to meeting with the ethnic/linguistic groups could have aided the group on what questions to ask and how to administer them when interviewing the clients from different backgrounds. The project group adapted, however, taking advantage of opportunities to meet and know the clients on multiple occasions, doing cultural research in conjunction with producing marketing materials and working with the mentor and course instructor to discuss topics of concern and acquire additional relevant material to read and to study.

Along with conceptual material, the course also provided literature regarding interviewing and ethnographic procedures. Though ethnography was never done, the readings did give students a sense of what to expect and how to conduct field research. Chapter 5 of
Qualitative Interviewing emphasized how interviewers needed to be cordial and relaxed in order for the interviewee to feel comfortable with giving comprehensive answers (80), while Chapter 6 (110) covered how to use a recorder in order to free up an interviewer in creating a rapport with their subjects. This information guided the student group in how to interact with these refugees with traumatic experiences and a language barrier. A compliment to the literature could have been a small in-class seminar regarding field research. Principally the focus should be on how to interact with refugees and how to work with an interpreter. Students were fortunate to have the IRC brief students on how interpreters work. Nonetheless an explorative lecture or discussion, much like the technological equipment tutorial with Ruvi Wijesuriya, would have complimented the research literature.

One of the fortuitous parts of the IRC project group’s preliminary research was the existence of cooperative and CSA course literature that the students were already familiar with. In particular the Kristen Rusch reading “Our Food” contained case studies that were expounded upon during the classroom phase of the course and were reintroduced to understand the goals of the CSA cooperative marketing campaign. Additional readings by Steinhoff and Ward also gave the group a conceptual guide in molding and executing the innovation project.

One of the few regrets the group had over the innovation project was the limited time. The window of under a month to conceive and display a finished product hampered the group from broad action and put it under a constant time strain. Group members expressed their wish to have been more involved earlier in the semester so as to acquaint themselves more with the client farmers, their mentors, and the IRC. Particularly they would like to have had more time to: build trust and rapport with the client farmers; familiarize themselves with the IRC, its functions and mission as well as their mentor. Perhaps a conjunctive period of both classroom instruction and
project development could start as early as February to maximize the time for the group to work with the IRC without cutting into the curriculum.

**Internal Coordination**

Even though the IRC innovation project group had a limited amount of time, it maximized what time and resources it did have, coordinating amongst themselves and their mentor on logistics and implementation. Consistent communication was an important factor in the group’s chemistry as well as in their interaction with the clients and mentor. In the month given, the group met with each other, their project mentor, and conducted interviews at least once a week, on separate occasions. The project group was able to go over material and delegate tasks on a regular basis meeting in the same designated office in Wilson Hall on the ASU Tempe campus. With their project mentor, the whole group or at least one representative met with the IRC mentor to give progress reports as well as discuss expectations in the marketing campaign on a weekly basis. The same was done in interviewing with the clients as most of the time the whole group could not be present. The group also extensively used electronic mail to share material and touch base with the IRC. Constant contact and communication is what enabled the project to be formulated and prepared during the entire process.

**CONCLUSION**

The student team collaborated with the IRC, and refugee farming communities to help create a strategic plan, both short and long-term, to promote the Gila Farm Cooperative in the IRC’s New Roots Farm and Food Security Program with the USDA grant. Within this broader innovation project, the promotional campaign aimed at building an identity for the cooperative through the unique narratives of refugee farmers within the Togolese, Uzbek, and Somali-Bantu communities. Though the material made in the campaign ultimately serves a preliminary function in branding the cooperative, items such as the profile flyers are meant for immediate use
by the individual farmers to gain exposure for their produce and their cooperative. This material focuses on the refugees’ communities, the added dimension of social integration, and their dedication to providing quality organic produce for Phoenix consumers.

Introducing a new social force within the Phoenix area is only the first half of the program. The aim is to have the cooperative’s efforts address an existing social need, in this case feeding lower income sectors. With the farming cooperative reaching out to underprivileged consumers and the consumers facilitating the incorporation of refugee farmers, the result is two vulnerable sectors creating a distinct community supported agriculture based on social reciprocity. As evident in the formation of the refugee community, it will take time to establish ties. But the farmer’s aspiration for a loyal customer base and low-income individuals need for cheaper, healthy food creates the conditions for this unique CSA.

Specific mechanisms on how the CSA will operate are in the developing stages with the cooperative, which is itself in the early stages of development. Conceptual contributions on the part of the student group include the creation of a tiered cost system for the CSA cooperative and working with community schools to promote family integration into the CSA. Patrons for these measures will have to first come from grassroots advertising in the form of word-of-mouth as well as utilization of the marketing material provided by the student group. Emphasis should be placed on the cost system’s flexibility and the provision of healthy food for schoolchildren.

External influences could also help to maintain the CSA movement. Involving city councils and possibly tying in federal social programs may help in legitimizing and possibly funding the movement. However, the cooperative must be able to maintain its independence, with members being the sole decision makers to protect the integrity in workplace democracy.
With its symbiotic nature the cooperative CSA can be a model for how social enterprises address broad community needs. In addition to supporting low-income families, the cooperative can be used as a vehicle to bring awareness and aid to other social issues, such as that of refugees in Arizona. By incorporating elements of social assimilation, food security, and worker participation in this program, the Phoenix area economy can become an innovative culture of humanitarian values driving capital initiatives.
Appendix I: Methodology and Data Collection

Preliminary Research Conducted Prior to Entering the Field

Background preparation was needed to create smooth rapport with the refugee clients. We engaged in preliminary research on each of the linguistic groups to better understand their story as well as avoid any communication taboos that could taint the interview. Also, the research and/or writing done for the scope of our Third Thought Piece assignment adequately prepared us for the data collection process, providing us with material that illustrated building rapport, question probing and interviewing techniques.

Building Rapport

The first and most essential part of the data collection process was that of building rapport and the getting farmers to accept our presence, suggestions and assistance in the development of the cooperative. Especially after the first set of interviews with the Somali Bantus, we found that introducing the context and/or purpose of our project at the beginning of the interviews was crucial in getting farmers to contribute their personal histories and opinions to our project. Explaining that our project would help the them sell more produce got farmers motivated to actively participate and provide as much detail as possible in their answers. We also discovered that answering any questions the interviewee’s might have satisfied the clients and proved to hold the commitment of the clients.

Integrated Data Collection Approach: Note-Taking, Audio-Recording and Photography

We interviewed the refugee farmers as a team; usually one person would be in charge of the questions, while another was managing the audio recorder and a third member was busy jotting handwritten notes of the process. Generally, the person who was producing the promotional material template for that particular ethnic group was designated the role of interviewer. If throughout the interview one of the team members had an additional question for the farmer they would freely interject without ruining the flow of the interviews.

First Round of Interviews: (1) Entailed basic introductory questions and info. (2) We informed farmers about our marketing strategy and that from the interviews and photos, we would be creating at least one, if not two, marketing items that would help them sell their produce.

Second Round of Interviews: (1) Entailed Questions on the cooperative. (2) Showed the farmers the promotional materials.

Limitations

1. Time and Logistics

We acknowledge that time was one of the biggest challenges we faced in the data collection and editing process of the project. Planning, executing, and coordinating the technical or logistical elements of the project, such as scheduling the interviews with the farmers and trouble-shooting the audio recorders, were time consuming but essential for the success of our project.

1Division of Labor: Over all, the division of labor in the collection process allowed for more natural conversation, note jotting, and observation of the subjects in their environment. Thus, delegation both in the conceptualization, data collection, analysis and editing stages of the project were key in mitigating the enormity of the report and small time frame.

Debriefing: Meeting on a weekly basis, typically on Thursdays, to discuss our plan of action for that week allowed us to stay on schedule, specifically because throughout these meetings we delegated tasks for the assignments and addressed key themes of the interviews conducted throughout that week.
Appendix II: Promotional Material I – Flyers

Meet Your Farmer

Binto Abdikadir

“If we would not have community service in our area...we couldn’t have this farm and nobody could notice us...that we are Somali Bantu”.

Background:

I am a member of the Somali Bantu ethnic group. I came to the United States in 2004 after a civil war broke out in my home country. Separated from my immediate family members as a result of the war, I have formed a family of my own in the United States. Three of my children were born here and the other two, who were only five and three years old when they came to the United States, have hardly been affected by the relocation.

I currently reside in the Greater Phoenix area, and one of the most important aspects of my life is staying true to my cultural roots. That is why I am an active and proud member of the Somali Bantu community center in Phoenix where my family and I participate in ESL and citizenship classes, as well as other recreational programs. In South-Chandler I grow and harvest a delicious array of organic produce such as beans, broccoli, cabbage, corn, carrots and okra that can be seen at the local farmer’s markets where I collaborate with other refugee farmers.

Above all, I want to forge a new life in the United States and am willing to work hard to provide an education for my children.
Meet Your Farmer

Fatuma Mahat

“My dream is just for my kids to go to school, finish school and go to college… get a better job… and to have our own house… that’s our dream.”

Background:
I came to the United States in 2007 and currently reside in the Greater Phoenix area. I am a member of the Somali-Bantu, a marginalized ethnic group in Somalia, severely affected by the on-going civil war. Escaping the socio-political turmoil of my homeland I have brought my extensive traditional farming experience to the irrigated farm land of Arizona.

In South-Chandler I tend a small patch of land that produces carrots, beets, broccoli, radishes and greens at Gila Farms. My organic and delicious produce can be seen at the local farmer’s markets where I collaborate with other refugee farmers. I am an active and proud member of my community where my family and I participate in ESL and citizenship classes, as well as other recreational programs. To me, community is made up of my local neighbors, the Somali Bantu in the greater Phoenix area, and all the people involved in helping with the farm, the cooperative, and my livelihood. For the future, I hope that my work in the cooperative and on the farm will help my children gain a better education and have good jobs someday.
Meet Your Farmer

Rahmat Kobilov

“I would like to share it [the Uzbek melon] with the people … of the United States … [My contribution to] the United States is going to be the Uzbek melon!”

Background:
I came to the United States in 2005 fleeing my home-country of Uzbekistan after the major political demonstration, the Andijan Uprising, created danger for many Uzbeks. Escaping the socio-political turmoil of my homeland I have brought 15 years of extensive traditional farming experience to the irrigated farm land of Arizona.

In South-Chandler I cultivate a few acres at Gila Farms. My motivation to work hard stems from my family still living in Uzbekistan and my newfound family, the Phoenix-Uzbek community. On the farm I produce a variety of vegetables and locally famous Uzbek melons that are devoured by Phoenixians every summer. My delicious organic produce can be seen at the local farmers’ markets where I collaborate with other refugee farmers. I am an active and proud member of my community where fellow Uzbeks and I participate in an Auto Repair business as well as the newly opened Golden Restaurant in Phoenix. My wish for the future is that the people in the United States know that my mouth-watering melons are the hard work and product of Uzbeks everywhere.

To Contact Rahmat Kobilov:
(602)-410-6086
Meet Your Farmer

Kofi Ogou

“Seeing my crops grow brings me joy. I want to feel proud of my crops and have customers know I have healthy organic food.”

Background:
I am a third generation farmer from the plains of Atakpame, a rural town in the West African nation of Togo. I sought asylum from the political upheaval of my homeland in neighboring countries, and am now here in the United States with my daughter. Arizona captivated me with its promise of available land for cultivation. Farming is my joy and I hope to one day own a modest ranch that provides organic produce for my family, friends, and anyone else seeking healthy food. For now I till a few acres of land in Gila Farms, spurred on by the encouragement of the Togolese here in Arizona as well, and the desire to help my daughter fulfill her dreams of higher education.

Provides:
Radishes and lettuce. Also has experience growing cassava, yam and okra in Africa and will soon plant those locally. All produce is grown organically.
Appendix III: Promotional Material II – Pamphlet

(Front)

**What is a Cooperative?**
According to a definition by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): "A cooperative is a user-owned, user-controlled business that distributes benefits on the basis of use." Typically, coop members who join an agricultural cooperative business, contribute yearly or monthly fees to help run and manage the farm in return for a supply of fresh produce.

**Why Join a Cooperative?**
- **Better Prices**: Cooperatives cut the middleman out, allowing consumers to get the better prices.
- **Better Produce**: Cooperative partnerships between farmers and consumers guarantee that the consumer will get best produce available.
- **Better Nutrition**: In joining an agricultural cooperative members have a dependable supply of organic produce that will promote a healthy diet.
- **Supporting Local Agriculture**: In joining an agricultural cooperative members are supporting the sustainability of our local farming community.

**WHERE CAN YOU FIND OUR PRODUCE?**
- **Gila Farms**: Hours Vary (actual site of the Farmers Cooperative House is located at 2014 E. 1st St., Phoenix, AZ 85006)
- **Mesa Community Farmer’s Market**: Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Sunnyslope Branch, 3315 E. 1st St., Mesa, AZ 85205
- **Old Town Farmer’s Market**: Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the corner of Main and 2nd St., Old Town, Scottsdale, AZ 85251
- **Ahwahnee Farmer’s Market**: Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Ahwahnee Plaza, 2014 E. 1st St., Phoenix, AZ 85006
- **Phoenix Public Market**: Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Phoenix Public Market, 223 W. Washington St., Phoenix, AZ 85003
- **Gila Farm Cooperative**: Saturdays, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Gila Farm Cooperative, 2014 E. 1st St., Phoenix, AZ 85006

**Gila Farm Cooperative**
Contact Information — How to Get Involved:
Jessica Weidenslki
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Connecting people through community supported agriculture.
GET TO KNOW YOUR FARMERS

Somali-Bantu

The Somali Bantu are a minority ethnic group from southern Somalia. Descendants of African tribes in Eastern Africa, Somali Bantu, have endured marginalization because of their ethnic, physical and cultural distinctions from Somalis. As the Somali Civil War broke out in 1991, the oppression and violence against the Somali Bantu escalated and many were forced to relocate to refugee camps in the neighboring country of Kenya. Many Somali Bantu were resettled into the United States in over 50 cities of 38 states.

"I am happy to be a farmer and would rather be at the farm than work...if we can get bigger markets... I would move to the farm so I can work even harder". - Somali Bantu Farmer

Uzbek

The majority of the Uzbek refugees that came to the United States in 2005 fled their home-country of Uzbekistan after the major political demonstration, the Andijan Uprising, created danger for many of them. This uprising has separated families and created new communities of Uzbeks in the United States. Few of the refugees have been able to return home. Escaping this socio-political turmoil of their homeland they have brought the experience of traditional, organic farming to the fields of Arizona.

"It is important to work in a team ... it's good to share with all of us and to listen to who is going to say what ... and that is the important thing to work with the team." - Uzbek Farmer

Togolese

Seeking asylum from the political upheaval of their homeland many Togolese have come to the United States, specifically Arizona with its promise of available farmland. However farming is hard for the Togolese refugees, most of who are holding second jobs and must travel many miles weekly to tend to their crops. Nonetheless agriculture is their passion and the Togolese support each other, taking pride and special care in what they produce. Through providing healthy and delicious produce these individuals hope to establish a meaningful role in their new American community.

“What harms the farmer is competition between themselves ... in a cooperative you would have the same quality of produce.” - Togo Farmer
Appendix IV: Photo Montage Samples

Uzbekistan

In May 2005, many Uzbekis fled their home country after the major political demonstration, The Andijan Uprising, created danger for many of them.

Somali Bantus

The Somali Bantus are minority ethnic group from Southern Somalia. Descendants of Eastern African Tribes, Somali Bantus, have endured marginalization because of their physical, linguistic and cultural distinctions from native-born Somalis.
Togo

Various ethnic groups collectively known as the Togolese originate from the West African nation of Togo.
REFERENCES


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