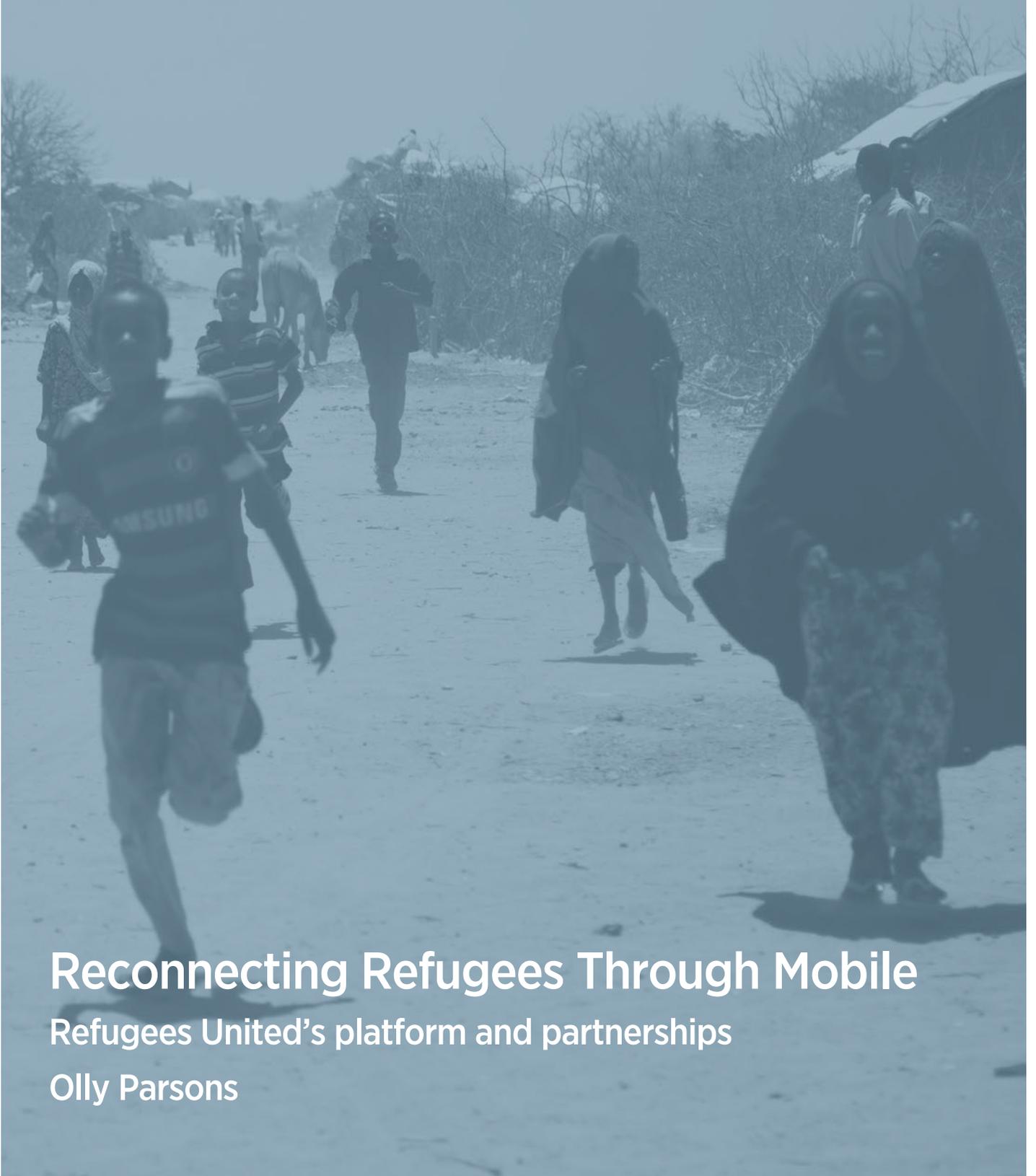




Disaster Response



Reconnecting Refugees Through Mobile

Refugees United's platform and partnerships

Olly Parsons

GSMA Case Study: Executive Summary

Mobile Network Operators (MNO's) can contribute to reconnecting separated families across borders and conflict zones and measurably improve the lives of thousands of families by leveraging their scale and access to millions of subscribers. Through partnering with MNO's, Refugees United, the world's largest global family tracing platform, is harnessing the unique potential of mobile in facilitating family reconnection. This case study identifies the need for such platforms and examines the partnership, technology, lessons and opportunities that have arisen from collaboration between MNO's and Refugees United.

The Problem

- 45.2¹ million forcibly displaced people world-wide
- Hundreds of thousands of families separated by war, conflict, and natural disasters
- Non-existent or severely limited access to computers and Internet among many refugees

The Refugees United Solution

- Refugees United operates a global family reconnection platform, with more than 280,000 displaced people looking for missing family members registered in its database by February 2014
- Number of registered users is growing by more than 12,000 people in search of family per month
- The platform is accessible via simple, low-end mobile phones using SMS and USSD, as well as online connectivity

Key Findings

- Mobile Network Operators can enable social change through their scale and access to millions of people
- Mobile Network Operators can be part of an innovative approach to solve a global problem through engaging in a meaningful multi-sector partnership
- Working with a global technology partner like Ericsson enables Refugees United to create a platform with global scale for greatest impact. Mobile technology can empower refugees by giving them agency over their own tracing and reconnection through familiar technology and user-centric platforms
- Refugees United partnerships with MNOs demonstrate the social impact that operators can have in reconnecting loved ones by providing a valuable service to a demographic of their subscribers while building brand equity and customer loyalty

¹ UNHCR 'Facts and Figures on Refugees' <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>

The Problem

Conflict and persecution forced an average of 23,000 people a day to flee their homes during 2012. At the end of the 2012 45.2 million people were displaced worldwide, the highest number since 1994 (UNHCR, 2013).

Natural and political crisis, disasters and conflicts, have the potential to shatter livelihoods and force people from their homes and communities, often with little or no time to plan, and even less chance to communicate with loved ones. In some circumstances the fear of political persecution or violence may be so great that people intentionally avoid being traceable. For this reason, any service requiring personal information needs to be both secure in terms of its data management, but also intrinsically trustworthy by the end-user if it is going to be successful in engaging buy-in from this vulnerable user group.

By harnessing the power of mobile technology, Refugees United aims to empower refugees to take the search for missing loved ones into their own hands, through a mobile device. Achieving this goal requires leveraging the scale that Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) possess through their infrastructure, brand and reach in even the most remote of places. By providing access to a free, easy-to-use database, registered users are given the chance to search against various identifying criteria, with the ultimate aim of finding a match and reconnecting with loved ones. The platform depends upon a number of partnerships, on MNO engagement, and support from technology vendors. It further benefits from on-the-ground collaboration with humanitarian groups. Traditional 'physical tracing' activities have attempted to help unite displaced people with their loved ones, but the scale of this task is a daunting one. Family tracing has long been a priority for multiple humanitarian organisations. The mobile industry is now uniquely positioned to play a role in this process, able to both reach the target population and to facilitate communication between humanitarian organisations and refugees requiring assistance.

The purpose of this case study is to highlight the fundamental role of MNOs and mobile technology in the work of Refugees United to extract lessons learned from partnerships to date and to explore the value and opportunity of such initiatives. It highlights Refugees United's unique convergence of technology, private and public partnerships and the benefits that these partnerships bring to Refugees United, MNOs and refugees themselves.

"Everyone has the right to know where their family is. With the right mobile operator partnerships in the right places, and on the ground support from aid agencies, we believe we can reach millions in search of missing loved ones. Connectivity is there. Our technology is there. Now what is left is for us to collaborate, to share our knowledge, to help those less fortunate."

Christopher Mikkelsen, Co-Founder of Refugees United

Refugees United

Refugees United (www.refunite.org), supported by the IKEA Foundation, Omidyar Network, Ericsson, and a number of smaller foundations, is comprised of less than 20 full time staff. The organizational aim is to register 1 million users on the platform before 2015. By the 26th of February 2014, 280.000 users were registered on the platform, with numbers increasing dramatically each time a partnership with a new operator is launched. The first principal of Refugees United is to offer its service to all refugees and others who have lost contact with family and loved ones - regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, caste, formal status, religious or political conviction.

Refugees United has partnerships with mobile operators in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somaliland, Somalia, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Egypt and South Sudan are target markets for the near future.

A story of family tracing in Somalia

Fatima* left her home one evening to walk to the local store. When she returned she found a grenade had been thrown into her compound. Amid the destruction there was no sign of her family, or her newborn child. She fled into the bush. Over the next two years Fatima tried to find her family, traveling with others who had fled the village.

Eventually crossing into Kenya, Fatima was told about Refugees United by two aid workers at a school she found employment with. "I signed up. I had to. I didn't stop think, I'd do anything to find my child."

The Refugees United platform offered Fatima a secure place in which to search for her family, protecting her number from those she feared contacting

Fatima continues her search for her family. "I just think that every day might be the day that they sign up. And when that happens we will find each other again finally"

Somaliland launch

The chances of Fatima reconnecting with her family have been increased with the launch of the mobile service in Somaliland. Each time an MNO enters into the partnership this effectively opens up the population to free access to the Refugees United service. In addition, marketing campaigns and launch activities raise awareness of the service throughout the country. The more people who sign up to the platform, the more likely possible connections become.

The platform

At the center of the work that Refugees United undertakes is the tracing platform: a database of all of the refugees who have registered to use the service. This platform has been developed through a partnership with Ericsson, a leading mobile technology company, who has been supporting the work of Refugees United since 2010. When a user registers they provide information about themselves, which is stored in the database; depending on the level of data the user chooses to share, a profile includes physical description, name, place of origin and clan or tribe, as well as defining features such as scars or birthmarks, nicknames and the school they attended. This information must be submitted voluntarily by the user, in the understanding that it will be visible to others in the system. At no stage will the user's mobile number, email address, or current location be revealed. Once this is recorded in the database, a user can search for the name of their missing loved one and see if there are any immediate matches. Users are also able to list someone as missing, inputting the same descriptive information as they did for themselves. Any potential matches are listed for the user to review. If a user finds someone in the database that they believe to be the person they are looking for, they are able to send them a private message within the system to try and establish if the match is genuine. This is the only stage at which contact information can be shared: when the user chooses to share it through a private message. If the match is genuine then the users have been successfully reconnected. If not they can continue their search. With on average 3000 new users registering a week, if the person the user is looking for is not in the database when they first search, they are encouraged to check back at a later date. If users receive a message through the platform they will be sent an SMS notification alerting them that they should check their account. In recognizing the oftentimes limited technological experience of the user group, Refugees United continues to develop its technology to do more and more of the "work" for refugees.

Options for sign up

As a result in part of the technical and MNO partnerships formed, users can now sign up and interact with the tool in a variety of ways,

- **Online via a computer (www.refunite.org) or a mobile phone (WAP).**
- **Via a toll-free phone line (for selected countries)**
- **In person, face to face with a Refugees United (or Kenyan Red Cross) staff member**
- **Via zero-rated SMS**
- **Via zero-rated USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data)**

As long as the user has a mobile number, any of these options can be used to search and connect with their missing loved ones. The platform is developed using low-tech, user-friendly solutions, which are most likely to be available for refugees, however, smartphones and social media can also be used.

Why mobile?

Mobile technology provides a number of opportunities that maximize the effectiveness of the Refugees United platform. These are intertwined but broadly could be defined as:

Access – Through partnering with MNOs, Refugees United receives access to their new partner's customer base. This gives Refugees United a direct communication channel to large proportions of a country's population. Through agreements with partner MNOs, SMS broadcasts can be sent to customers, with information on Refugees United and how to access the tracing tool. The ability of MNOs to zero-rate all user interaction with the Refugees United platform creates what is effectively a "free" service, removing cost as a barrier to access for the end-user.

Scale – This direct access allows Refugees United to communicate with their target audience in a country, introducing the service, encouraging and facilitating registration without needing ground staff in remote areas. Physical tracing practices have required refugees to travel to specific humanitarian centers, or humanitarian staff to travel to them. Any progress updates need to be communicated in the same manner. Mobile-enabled tracing removes the barrier of location, and allows communication to be an integrated part of the process and provides a channel for information sharing to increase efficiency, awareness raising and sign-up. Ericsson, Refugees United's technology partner, is present in more than 180 countries, and has helped to facilitate local implementation of the service.

Empowerment – By making the platform accessible through a mobile phone, the tool and its ability to assist in family tracing is put directly into the hands of the user. This in turn provides the user with more control and flexibility, able to access the platform from any location (network coverage providing) without the need for internet connectivity. The user is not required to use cyber cafes, which would raise issues of accessibility in terms of proximity, location and cost. The user can interact with their own phone, a tool they are familiar with, in their own time.

Communication – The ability for the user to engage directly with the platform and Refugees United staff; with access to the toll-free line users are able to reach Refugees United agents in their call centre, with these agents in turn able to troubleshoot, assist with registration and help to access messages or perform searches.

Partnerships

Partner group	Offering
Project lead (Refugees United)	Coordination and strategic planning Platform & Database maintenance
Technology partners (Ericsson)	Technical development and support Engagement with MNOs
MNOs (Safaricom, Vodacom DRC, Telesom, Hormuud, Asiacell, Zain Jordan and AVEA)	Network reach and access Awareness raising Zero-rated services
Humanitarian organisations (UNHCR and other organizations)	Trust through familiarity Awareness raising On the ground support/access

Fig 1.1

Ericsson

Ericsson partnered with Refugees United in 2010 and assisted Refugees United with the development and deployment of a mobile phone application to further support reconnections, enabling the mobile enabled version used today. Ericsson supports Refugees United in three key ways;

- By supporting the business development process for Refugees United through leveraging Ericsson's position within the telecommunications industry and introducing the work of Refugees United partners and customers.
- By supporting the technical development and accessibility of the platform.
- By providing ongoing technical support and advisory services

The mobile search tool and the online platform were built with a refugee in mind, taking into account illiteracy, privacy, low bandwidth, cost, language and trust. In line with their wider sustainability vision and Technology for Good Programme, Ericsson also provides ongoing technical support and advisory services to Refugees United, and shares a joint goal with Refugees United to have 1 million refugees on the platform by the end of 2015.

Partnerships have been formed in the DRC with Vodacom, Kenya with Safaricom, Jordan with Zain, Avea in Turkey, Asiacell in Iraq, Telesom in Somaliland, and Hormuud in Somalia. This has allowed Refugees United to increase user options for interacting with the tool where data connectivity may not be available. Many users will be familiar with USSD through tasks such as mobile top-up and mobile money platforms. This blend of digital technologies which combine access to the platform via SMS, USSD and toll-free lines coupled with awareness generated via SMS

campaigns, highlights the potential role for the mobile industry to have a transformative social impact on the lives of their subscribers.

Privacy and security

Security and Privacy of the user's information is at the heart of the family-tracing tool for both Ericsson and Refugees United. With many refugees fearing political persecution, users must trust the service and know that the information they provide is secure. In 2013, a three-week privacy and security assessment was performed by two volunteers from the Ericsson Network Security organization in order to improve the understanding of all the organizational risks inherent to Refugees United operations. This included both technical and non-technical matters. As a result, Refugees United was able to identify and adopt strategies to mitigate further against privacy and security risks.

The application servers and databases are hosted in a Tier 4 compliant data center in Denmark, the home of Refugees United head office, to eliminate the risk of physical data theft. The application layer is strengthened by utilizing Cloud Flare to protect against known large-scale attacks and individual computers known to be infected with malware. Access to the sensitive data stored in the database is only delegated to few selected employees of Refugees United, who are operating under strict NDA agreements.

Refugees United call centre

The central touch point for the majority of interaction between Refugees United and their target audience is the Refugees United call center in Nairobi, Kenya. From here 13 full time agents manage all of the calls to the toll-free line, with additional staff trained and on standby to work during big campaigns. Cyrus, a team leader at the call centre said "You can tell as soon as an SMS campaign has been sent out, the response is immediate! A lot of people want to know more about Refugees United, and so we start by asking them if they are looking for missing family or friends." Callers are currently given the option of 7 different languages at the start of the call.

Recent user call figures received by Refugees United's call centre				
Country of call origin	October	November	December	January 2014
Kenya	27,134	20,097	20,041	10,244
DRC	12,770	15,419	28,556	29,251
Somalia	0 (pre launch)	70	113,155	36,702

Fig 1.2

This not only makes the line accessible to the different countries in which the programme is live, but has the additional impact of increasing levels of trust and comfort for the caller, with many of the agents being refugees themselves. As one user stated, "If you're a Congolese refugee and you can speak to someone from the DRC then you feel that they're more likely to understand your situation."

SMS campaigns, such as those in Fig 1.3, are designed and then sent out in batches by the MNO to their customers over a designated period of time. Receiving these on your phone, and then being able to call back, for free to register or get updated profile information directly, prompts a spike in calls. Localised campaigns are critical. For example, the popularity of a comic book in a nationwide newspapers in Kenya, led to hundreds of calls. The comic book referred to the USSD. Many users are familiar with USSD access due to its prevalence in tasks such as mobile top-up.

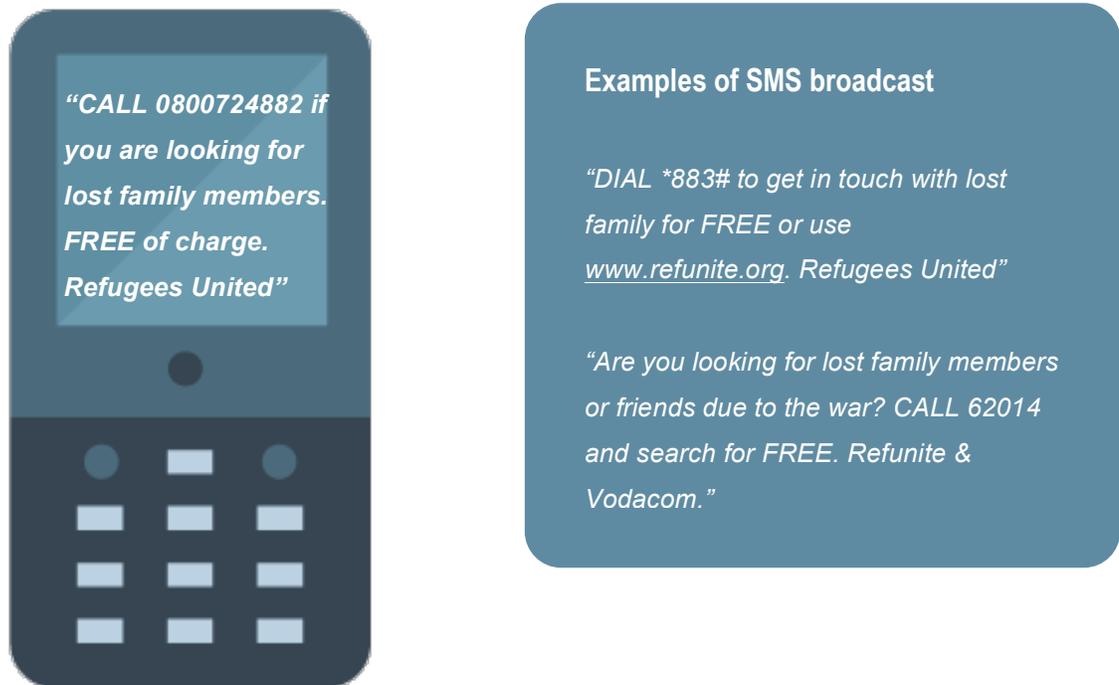


Fig. 1.3

A recent campaign prompted over 110,000 calls in its first month (see table 1.2) as Refugees United launched its service in Somaliland in partnership with MNO Telesom, the largest mobile network operator in Somaliland. While this volume of calls had the call centre working at close to its current maximum capacity, the numbers stand as evidence of the interest and need for the service from the Somali population. Many of the calls are requests for more information, and the current average sign up across countries per week is 3000 new users. The call centre also caters to registered users of the platform, providing assistance, assisting with looking at or updating elements of a user's profile. Enabling immediate contact with an agent, the call centre makes interaction with the tool easier. Rather than sitting alone in a

cyber café, a user can talk through their questions or concerns with a Refugees United agent, instantly receiving answers and assistance.

The partner MNOs hold none of the platform data, and only send the initial awareness SMS to their entire customer list or selected parts thereof; they don't hold data on who responds. As discussed previously security has been at the core of the platform design for Ericsson and Refugees United, and partners operate under the terms and MOUs set out by Refugees United.

Safaricom, Kenya

Safaricom is the Mobile Network Operator partner of Refugees United in Kenya. While Refugees United is a fairly small NGO, when they approached Safaricom they were already partnered with Ericsson and supported by UNHCR and the Kenya Red Cross Society. As such it made it easier for Safaricom to engage, with a clear view that the partnership would be aligned with the values of the Safaricom Foundation.

Of the 587,223 refugees and asylum seekers registered as being in Kenya by the UNHCR at the end of 2013, the vast majority, 477,424 are Somali². The recent launch of the Refugees United platform in Somaliland with Telesom has impacts for both Somali refugees in Kenya using Safaricom SIM cards, and those still residing in Somaliland. With both groups now being able to access the service, the likelihood of signup and potential matches in the database increases.

Safaricom is considering tailored improvements to the platform as the partnership moves forwards, for example addressing terminology tweaks that would increase usage among Internally Displaced People (IDPs) within Kenya. Additionally Safaricom is exploring adding relevant information for refugees within the platform to maximise the user

“We started with a purpose statement within Safaricom, within in our own heads; that what we were here to do was to transform lives, because we firmly believe that applications in ICT can have a transformative impact on the communities it serves. And refugees tend to be that bunch of people that nobody owns and so they're completely ignored. For us it was trying to bring those people in – we don't just focus on people who are customers, we focus on society.”

Bob Collymore, CEO, Safaricom

experience.

² UNHCR, Somali Refugees in Kenya Factsheet, January 2014
<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SomaliRefugeesinKenyaFactsheet29-1-2014pdf.pdf>

Safaricom worked with the original system developed by Ericsson, adding to the Web page and WAP page zero rating browsing capability. If a user accesses the internet using these Refugees United links via a Safaricom modem, no data charges will be applied to their account. Safaricom is able to see that the daily average number of users in Kenya, be that through the toll-free line, SMS or USSD, numbers around 4300, out of a total of 77,000 registered users.



Separated in 1996, these two Congolese sisters, Patricia* and Estelle*, spent 16 years apart. In May 2012, they found each other on the Refugees United platform.



Photo caption: "Refugees United's nationwide comic book campaign reached more than 600,000 households in Kenya"

Vodacom, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Vodacom is the Mobile Network Operator partnering with Refugees United in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As of mid-2013 there were over 180,000 refugees residing in the DRC (with a further 2.6 million IDPs³). Godfrey Motsa, Vodacom DRC Managing Director, explains how the partnership sits with the network operator, "Our partnership with Refugees United fits under our Foundation, which believes that the mobile communication can address some of the world's pressing humanitarian challenges. In the Congo this is displaced people or refugees. We strive to use our mobile technology to mobilise social change and improve people's lives. The Vodacom business strategy is people-centric, so our customers come first."

Vodacom hopes to scale up the area covered by Refugees United in the country, having currently focused the majority of SMS broadcast efforts in North Kivu. With the negative impacts of conflict affecting other regions in the DRC, Vodacom are keen to see expansion into these areas.

³ 2014 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Democratic Republic of the Congo
<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45c366.html>

Family tracing; Congolese insight

Jacob* had to flee from his home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2001 when he was just 18, losing his younger brother in the process. Fleeing from political persecution, Jonathon stopped using his phone, or any form of social media for fear of being traced. After spending some years in Uganda, Jonathon crossed into Kenya in 2011 and during the registration process at a UNHCR centre, saw Refugees United staff handing out brochures. Several months later in a cyber café Jonathon signed up to Refugees United. "Initially I feared the system, it was open" he says, "But because RU was working with the UNHCR I knew I would be able to go to them if it went wrong." Jonathon found details that matched the description of his brother immediately. "It matched so we switched numbers and called, 'Oh my god, I'm talking to him' I thought. It felt so good, I was just speechless"

Jacob and his brother, who is now living in Canada have spoken regularly since being reconnected on the phone, and his brother currently plans to visit John in Kenya in the summer.

Telesom

Telesom CEO, Abdikarim Mohamed Eid, has a positive outlook on the benefits of working with Refugees United: "There is a benefit to society in Somaliland, to Telesom customers and to Refugees United portfolio in other parts of the world that join this search. I hope it will continue and it will have an outstanding effect in providing services to those who have experience displacement and that loss of family members in their communities. It's a helping hand. It's not making money but it's helping in a humanitarian manner."

Launched in December 2013, Somaliland is one of the newest engagements for Refugees United, who here are partnering with the largest MNO in Somaliland, Telesom. Globally there are over 1.1 million refugees originating from Somalia residing elsewhere. Whilst the number of refugees residing within Somalia is estimated at 2300, the number of IDPs is estimated to be a further 1.1 million persons⁴.

Telesom see the potential to assist three groups within Somalia;

⁴ 2014 UNHCR country operations profile – Somalia
<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483ad6.html>

- Somali's displaced within country due to security and political turmoil
- Ethiopian economic migrants, disconnected from loved ones at home
- Somali refugees

Family tracing; Somali insight

Fatima* left her home one evening to walk to the local store. When she returned she found a grenade had been thrown into her compound. Amid the destruction there was no sign of her family, or her newborn child. She fled into the bush. Over the next two years Jane tried to find her family, traveling with others who had fled the village.

Eventually crossing into Kenya, Fatima was told about Refugees United by two aid workers at a school she found employment with. "I signed up. I had to. I didn't stop think, I'd do anything to find my child."

The Refugees United platform offered Fatima a secure place in which to search for her family, protecting her number from those she feared contacting

Fatima continues her search for her family. "I just think that every day might be the day that they sign up. And when that happens we will find each other again finally"

Somaliland launch

The chances of Fatima reconnecting with her family have been increased with the launch of the service in Somaliland. Each time an MNO enters in to the partnership this effectively opens up the population to free access to the service. In addition, marketing campaigns and launch activities raise

Kenya Red Cross Society

As a humanitarian organization, Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) has been engaged in family tracing since its inception in 1965. One of its core programmes revolves around restoring family links, and the organization has a history of supporting efforts in Kenya through physical tracing services on the ground. A main reason for KRCS partnering with Refugees United was the complimentary element of both of their activities. KRCS has been offering family tracing services, but is now looking to see how these could be supported by technology.

To support the work of Refugees United at field-level, the KRCS act as an implementing agency, working as KRCS, but carrying out the sign-up task on behalf of Refugees United. Refugees United can leverage both the reach and reputation of the KRSC within the country, the reputation and experience of KRCS acting as an asset.

Whilst this is the first project of its kind that KRCS has engaged with, it is not the first time they've partnered with Safaricom. 'Kenyans for Kenya' fundraising during the droughts in 2011 directly tapped into the customer base for support. Safaricom took up the lead with this, utilizing the connections they have with their customer base. Safaricom mobilized over 100,000,000KSH channeled through the Red Cross to help the victims." This is a further example of the reach MNOs have with their customer base, and the potential to use this access for humanitarian activities.

Benefits of partnership engagement

Table 1.3 describes the suggested benefits, both direct and indirect to each group within the partnership.

Partner group	Direct benefit	Indirect benefit
Project lead (Refugees United)	The ability through the technological platform and through access to target populations to work towards refugee tracing and reconnection	An increased reputation amongst humanitarian and private sector organisations, leading to potential future partnerships
Technology partner (Ericsson)	Connecting separated families in line with their Technology for Good agenda	Recognition of brand and customer engagement, employee engagement and strengthening brand reputation.
MNOs (Safaricom, Vodacom, Telesom)	Helping families in their local communities – in line with their CSR and Foundation goals	Improvement to brand power and customer satisfaction/loyalty
Humanitarian organisations (KRCS / UNHCR)	Collaborative effort which aligns with and contributes Working towards core aims of the organization	Exposure to new technological partnerships with the potential for future engagement in other areas of work

Fig 1.4

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Refugees United and its partner organisations have identified challenges and lessons learned from both a technical and operational perspective. Some of these challenges have been circumnavigated whilst others remain a priority for future action.

Technical Challenges

Ericsson recognised the need to identify an access model which fit these user needs and would allow for a quick implementation into new countries without having to have a team be physically present in the areas where these users reside, meaning the model could be more effectively scaled. The model takes into account illiteracy, privacy, low bandwidth, cost, language and trust issues.

During the implementation phase of the Refugees United programme with Safaricom the arrival of a new company-wide server technology, halted the progression of the service implementation but resulted in a more secure and future-proof service. The new server is expected to remain operational for the next ten years. Both Safaricom and Refugees United technicians were involved in the technical work, with both teams coming together to train on the new technology.

Reputation and Scale:

There is recognition that scale must be balanced with reliability and a certain quality of service. Godfrey Motsa, Vodacom DRC Managing Director describes how this challenge of scaling up is one that they are happy to work with. "The reputational risk is on both sides," he explains. "The SMS that are being send out are from Vodacom. Working with Refugees United at this pace. We're growing together and understanding more in the process".

Operational Challenges

Refugees United is a highly data-driven organization and collects data on all user patterns indicating steps toward a reconnection. Refugees United tracks and measures number of messages exchanged between users, whether users include phone numbers in messages exchanged, and other data points indicating that people are communicating and, potentially, reconnecting.

All data collected in the Refugees United database is subject to high degrees of user privacy protection. Refugees United will never read messages between users to fully establish whether a reconnection has been made. Therefore, it is impossible to measure the exact number of people reconnected through the platform. Refugees United collects and verifies all stories that are voluntarily reported by users.

While there are a number of people that have shared their stories throughout the years, data patterns indicate that actual reconnection figures are much larger than this number.

Through the stories reported as well as the increasing platform activity, measurable in data patterns on the platform, Mobile Network Operators are able to follow the social impact their contribution is having.

Even when the platform is free to access, there may be indirect barriers based on cost such as credit of charging, In these instances the importance of complimentary physical tracing services which continue to be conducted by the Red Cross are essential.

Key Lessons

- MNOs view their partnership with Refugees United as part of their social responsibility in the markets in which they operate. While this remains a philanthropic initiative at the heart of it, there are indirect benefits that MNOs may extract from their partnership including brand health, customer loyalty and satisfaction and marketing opportunity. The success of the service is entirely dependent on awareness among refugee communities that it exists. The nature of displacement necessitates tools that blend both scale and localized implementation. The blend of mobile, on-the-ground implementation and support ensures that large areas can be made aware of the Refugees United platform, while focused registration efforts can be targeted at key target communities.

MNOs can make a humanitarian difference in their countries. By partnering with small organisations MNOs can make or break planned initiatives. Support from larger humanitarian organisations can assist in facilitating trusted access to user groups through familiarity.

- Partnering in multi-sector partnerships can expose potential innovative solutions, for which blended sector approaches are the best or only means of approaching a challenge.
- The partnerships with Ericsson and MNOs, has allowed Refugees United to demonstrate proof of concept to the telecommunications industry. Their digital strategy (using USSD, SMS and toll-free lines) is allowing refugees in remote areas to access to their service and receive information on how to reach the platform. It is with this model that scale will be achieved as Refugees United continue to work towards their goal of registering one million refugees on the platform by 2015.



A mother and child walk through Eastleigh, a predominantly Somali refugee community in Nairobi, Kenya

Conclusion

Public-private partnership with the mobile industry is enabling Refugees United to carry out family tracing work on a scale which would be inconceivable for a small NGO of its size, and indeed for many much larger humanitarian groups. The unique blend of technological, humanitarian and mobile expertise is facilitating a process that requires input from each of its components to be complete and successful. The enabling role that MNOs are able to play in this case highlights the transformative capability of mobile communication to bring scale, access and empowerment to end-users. It also demonstrates the importance for continued engagement and innovation between mobile and humanitarian stakeholders.

About the GSMA Association

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Spanning more than 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators with 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in industry sectors such as financial services, healthcare, media, transport and utilities. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Expo.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at www.gsma.com. Follow the GSMA on Twitter: @GSMA.

About Mobile for Development - Serving the underserved through mobile

Mobile for Development brings together our mobile operator members, the wider mobile industry and the development community to drive commercial mobile services for underserved people in emerging markets. We identify opportunities for social, economic impact and stimulate the development of scalable, life-enhancing mobile services

About the GSMA Disaster Response Programme

The GSMA Mobile for Development Disaster Response Programme will work with mobile operators to determine how they can most effectively support each other and improve preparedness and resilience among networks in disasters. The programme will also identify how the mobile industry can best help affected citizens and humanitarian organisations on the ground following a crisis. We believe that when you restore the mobile network, you rebuild the human network.

Contact

For more information on the GSMA's Disaster Response Programme, please contact us on disasterresponse@gsma.com
<http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/disaster-response>

*Names of refugee case study participants have been changed to protect their identity.

More information on Refugees United can be found on their website:

www.refunite.org.

More information on Ericsson can be found on their website:

<http://www.ericsson.com/>



Contact Us:

For more information on the GSMA's Disaster Response Programme,
please contact us on disasterresponse@gsma.com
www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programmes/disaster-response