

The Hubs Project Draft (version: 31/3/2022)

A. Introduction

This draft is a document in development expected to reach its final stage by **10 April 2022**. Despite this version having only a half of the previous pages (2), we have been mostly adding ideas and expanding the concept. The main remaining need is to assure proper focus for the pilot project but we remain open to any suggestions!

The Hubs project is meant to become a central activity of Gorilla Highlands Experts (GHE) as a yet-to-be-registered nonprofit organisation. The GHE blog offers additional information on the project and people behind it and the comment section there is supposed to be the main feedback channel. If you are looking for a less public way to share your thoughts please email miha@gorillahighlands.com or message +250 783 118 421.

B. Context

The Gorilla Highlands region — one of stunning beauty and abundance — remains in a tenuous security and economic state due to the paradox of personal poverty amidst richness of natural resources, lingering militarisation, mistrust and endemic corruption. Young people of Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo lack business opportunities and models for effective activism to bolster their communities. Blended forms of entrepreneurship, conservation, creative activities, sports, practical support, peacebuilding, and movement mobilisation can bring a wide variety of people together to forge relationships, nourish grassroots solidarity and introduce greater dynamism in problem solving.

The future of this region will remain tenuous unless people become more confident leaders and advocates in and for their communities. Person-to-person exchange and organising done at scale can help make up for the absence of government efforts in regional peacebuilding and civic engagement. Particularly given the young average age, we see an important opportunity to envision and co-create home-grown solutions to the various challenges facing the region.

C. Project Mission Statement

We create physical and virtual hubs in Rwanda, Uganda and DR Congo to connect the youth of these countries and give them practical skills that lead to personal development, civic engagement and regional peacebuilding.

D. Theory of Change

If we make a conducive and stimulating environment for young people, they will feel more empowered and confident to lead positive changes in their communities. This, coupled with economic development, will boost peace and security in the transboundary region.

E. Pilot Project Concept

Create a one-year pilot project in Rwanda's Musanze district offering young people (15-30 years of age) connections, support, solutions to their problems and active exposure to societal issues. It will attract the youth by having an emphasis on entrepreneurship skills and transboundary personal connections but include much more (see *F. Major Elements*). No permanent location is envisaged during the pilot phase.

The pilot project will mostly target the students of educational institutions around the Karisimbi area of Musanze Town while remaining open to the youth who don't have access to school.

F. Major Elements of the Pilot Project

1. partnerships with businesses, organisations and individuals ready to share their space and skills
2. website (re-activation of the community aspect of the Gorilla Highlands Experts website)
3. USD 10,000 seed funding capital (available to members for conservation/environmental businesses)
4. personal growth sharing meetings and sports gatherings (weekly)
5. social responsibility program focused on Historically Marginalised People/Batwa (monthly)
6. leadership training sessions (monthly)
7. eco-friendly small business development campaign (quarterly)
8. international friendship summer camp (annual)

G. Major Milestones/Key Events

| date | milestone/event |
|------------|---|
| 15/4/2022 | Launch website |
| 30/4/2022 | Partner up with five (5) physical space providers |
| 30/4/2022 | Enrol ten (10) expert volunteers |
| 30/4/2022 | Acquire quarterly operational funding of USD 3,000 (and again for each quarter) |
| 6/5/2022 | Train the enrolled volunteers |
| 13/5/2022 | Start weekly activities |
| 30/5/2022 | Enrol seventy (70) members |
| 1/7/2022 | Start monthly activities |
| 30/7/2022 | Acquire half of seed funding |
| 15/10/2022 | Obtain funding for international summer camp |
| 30/11/2022 | Obtain full seed funding |
| 23/12/2022 | Hold the international summer camp |
| 31/12/2022 | Launch mobile app (based on the BuddyBoss platform that powers the website) |
| 31/1/2023 | Review the pilot project |

H. Assumptions

1. Having entrepreneurial trainings for local businesses, international retreats, social gatherings and startup grants can attract the target audience.
2. The project is in line with Rwanda's socioeconomic objectives.
3. Due to gains in Covid vaccination physical meetings will not be restricted again.

I. Central Risks & Mitigation

1. Cultural tendency to not share information and express feelings —> Volunteers to take the lead sharing their personal experiences and discussing social life before engaging in more private issues. Assure potential members of confidentiality of their membership and information.
2. Misconception about project objectives by local authorities —> Clearly communicate our intentions and keep all communication channels open.
3. Inability to fundraise target amounts —> Tap into personal networks, prepare a general fundraising campaign for other audiences.