OPEN AID INITIATIVE

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Executive Summary

Today we lack answers to simple questions like: how many non-profits are operating in Africa? What percentage of non-profits work on water and sanitation issues compared to HIV/AIDS? Evidently, we don't have enough information on non-profits if we can't answers these questions. The **Open Aid Initiative** aims to gather a comprehensive database of non-profit organization working in Africa to improve aid transparency and effectiveness and to foster collaboration and information sharing. Our goal is to collect and open up non-profit data to engage other stakeholders in evidence-based conversations on development.

Background

Problem

There's too little information on non-profit organizations working in Africa. Africa's dilapidated states attract foreign aid and a plethora of groups working on development projects. In 2011, public charities in the United States reported over $1.59 trillion in total revenue and in 2010, bilateral aid to Africa, adjusted for inflation, more than quadrupled over the past decade, from $1.4 billion in 2002 to $8.1 billion (Congressional Research Office, 2012). Organizations with good intentions travel to African countries with hopes of impacting lives, but get overwhelmed by the magnitude of problems encountered in the landscape. These groups still manage to implement projects; yet comprehensive and effective development will increase with the availability of information about organizations with similar or complementary missions.

Importance

After a studious review of the literature and other platforms, we believe the lack of an information-sharing platform makes non-profits working in Africa inefficient, opaque, and lacking productive and sustained collaborations. We need to answer simple questions, including: How many non-profits are there in Africa? What percentage of non-profits work on

water and sanitation issues compared to education? Presently, we do not have adequate information on these non-profits. The basis of this project is to develop an understanding of the root causes for the inadequacies, expose findings and most importantly create a platform where information on non-profits can easily be retrieved.

For example, an organization working on projects in Kenya to provide access to clean water for 100 schools discovers that a majority of the sanitation systems are plagued with maggots. The organization lacks the budget or expertise to help build or renovate the sanitation systems but understands that provision of clean water alone will not solve the problem. Conversely, a comprehensive project in partnership with an organization working on sanitation would have a significant impact, yet there are no existing information-sharing platforms to connect the two groups with parallel agendas.

Project Landscape / Competition

There are some organizations and international agencies working on data transparency and aid effectiveness. The World Bank is working on a platform that brings together development partners, governments, civil society organizations, foundations, and the private sector to improve aid transparency and effectiveness (World Bank, 2013). Guide Star India also has a strong database of non-profit organizations working in India. Its mission is to "transform how Indian NGOs report and share information, and, is changing the way the people perceive, interact and engage with NGOs." (Guide Star India, 2013) Our core competency is based on the ability to focus narrowly on building a strong database of non-profit organizations.

Open Aid Initiative

It's evident that organizations working in Africa can't solve problems alone without strategic partnerships and information sharing. The problems that organizations encounter are complex and multifaceted, and the inability to share information regarding lessons learned or potential partnerships cripples many organizations' missions in Africa. To ameliorate this problem, we are introducing the Open Aid Initiative.

Mission

Open Aid aims gather a comprehensive online database of non-profit organization working in Africa.

Vision

To improve aid transparency, foster collaboration and information sharing.

Goal

Our goal is to collect and open up non-profit data to engage other stakeholders in evidence-based conversations on development.

Key Objectives

- Collect and publish non-profit data in an open and accessible machine-readable format.
- Develop a map to visualize the locations of non-profits and their projects.
- Build capacity for non-profits and help disseminate information to the world.
- Customizability of non-profit data.
- Encourage the standardization of non-profit data dissemination around Africa.
- Create a unique electronic identification number for non-profit organizations.

Scalability

We understand one size doesn't fit all in international development or aid disbursement. However, we are confident that by building a strong data architecture that encourages the standardization of non-profit data dissemination, this approach can therefore be easily adopted by non-profits in Africa and eventually around the world.

Incentives for Non-Profits

- Free online profile non-profit organizations can login and update.

- Opportunity to disseminate completed projects to a reputable online community.

- Online depository to upload important documents for public access.

- Display of information on organization's memberships & accreditations.

- Free and easy connections to other organizations with similar or different mission.

- Opportunity to advertise and build a strong donor base.

- Fundraising opportunities through our foundation partners.

- Capacity building and data analysis workshops.

Pilot Project

Create an online database of local and international non-profits organizations working in Ghana.

Functions

Our data points will quantitatively measure and disseminate impacts organizations are having in communities. Additionally, this platform will connect various non-profit organizations with comparable interests and projects. It can also allow non-profit organizations working in Africa to maximize their resources by strategically collaborating, communicating, and sharing information to help move the frontiers of their missions forward. Above all, it will help foster non-profit collaboration, increase social benefits and help organizations maximizes their resources through effective synergies.

Data Points

Our data points will include but are not limited to the following:

Geography (Operational): State, City, and Village in Ghana etc.

Area of Specialization: Health, Education, Sanitation, Housing, Infrastructure etc.

Funding: Percentages (Private or Public)

Number of Projects Complete or Ongoing: this will further be classified into (Optional)

Area of Specialization

Expense for project (like <$10k, $10k-$12k)

Basic Information:
Location: Address of HQ

Year of Start of Operations:

Size of Organization: 1-20 (Small), 20-100 (Medium), >100 (Large)

Logo: Upload Image (If Available)

Technical Implementation

The bedrock of this platform is rooted in free and available machine-readable data. The tech initial implementation of The Open Aid Partnership can be divided into three subsystems:

Registration of Non Profits (Self Register or Opt In Methodology):

This functionality of this system is designed to collect information about non-profit organizations. This will contain the data points that were established as necessary for instituting an identity for non-profit organization on the platform. The information collected will be used to create a record or profile.

Searchable Interface for Searching for Non Profits

The search criteria will be based on the different filter criteria available such as geographical location, area of interest/outreach, size of organization etc. This functionality will be key for member organizations to connect with each other.

Communication Module

This function will enable member non-profit organizations to communicate with each other. This functionality will provide a channel for member organizations to interact with each other. This will enable them to potentially form partnerships on projects or share valuable information when appropriate.

Future Expansions:

Posting of projects inviting partnerships

This functionality of the system will encompass a model where one member organization could post a proposed project and it will be available for other member/non-member organizations to view. This will enable member organizations to form partnerships based on project interests and other non-member organization to join our network and form partnerships based on project interest.

Database of skilled Individuals and communication module

This functionality will encompass the need for skilled people of various member organizations, which are partnering up on projects. This functionality will contain a platform for interaction between skilled individuals like engineers, health experts etc. with member organizations for working on projects.

A system for collaboration online

This functionality will allow partnerships formed by member organizations to work and collaborate effectively online. This would include tools for project management, document management, resource allocation etc.

An open data standard reporting system for reporting growth in impact

This functionality will allow us to make the data on all our member non-profits available online. It will also help us understand the impact of our application by measuring the collective impact of various partnerships that were formed as a result of our application. This will be our test of effectiveness for our application.

Registration of Non Profits:

This can be performed in two different ways.

1. From Existing Datasets
2. Voluntary Registration

Existing Dataset:

The information on Non profits in Ghana can be collected from existing data set:

1. Obtain the dataset of non profits operating in Ghana from the US Government, The Foundation Center or if possible, the Ghanaian government,
2. Clean and transform the data to fit our Ontology.
3. Store it in the centralized database.
4. Create the profile for organizations in the dataset.
5. Create an owning procedure where a representative from the non-profit would be given permission to own the profile page of the organization.

Voluntary Registration:

The information on Non-Profits in Ghana can be collected using voluntary registration in the following ways:

1. Create a registration page in accordance to our criteria.
2. Obtain information from the registration and store it in our centralized database.
3. Instantly create a Profile page for each organization.

Searchable Interface for Searching Non Profits

This would be divided into two parts:

Search criteria:

Search criteria would consist of various factors that a member organization would look for in a potential partner or associate organization. These factors would include but not be limited to geographical area, type of funding, size of organization, area of work etc.

This search criterion is based on the tagging rules that would be implemented during the registration of an organization. An organization will be tagged with multiple attributes corresponding to multiple characteristics of the organization.

Search results

The search algorithm will return a result set based on the search filters/criteria/preferences. We will be displaying these result set in two types of views initially.

List view:

A list of the organizations that are part of the result set. This will also include small tiles depicting the info of the organizations in the result set.

b) Map View:

A map (Google map/equivalent) will be used to depict the list of organizations in the result set.

Communication and Recommendation Module

Communication Module:

Initially a communication module would consist of a request based mailing system. This system will be used by member organizations to interact with other member organizations. A request based mailing system is necessary to eliminate spam messages and also to leave the choice to connect for member organizations.

Recommender Module:

A recommender system is a norm in myriad social networks today. We feel that such recommendation network will be able to provide some useful connections that member organizations may overlook. Though the recommendation system can be a bit of a discomfort for usage, we feel that the benefits outweigh the cost for such a system

Technical Aspects:

Database Requirements:

We would start with an **Oracle database** for storing our data and move to more scalable databases as our data storage requirements begin to grow. We want to go with Oracle as it is widely used and developers for oracle are available and cost less when compared to other databases.

Front End Requirements:

We want to use a web programming language that is compatible with older version of Internet browsers. This is very much required, as some non-profits may not have the newest software. Content management systems like **Drupal** are under consideration.

Search Engine and Search Result Visualization:

Zeroing on a search algorithm is very important to ensure consistent performance and speedy results.

Search result visualization is an important aspect of our system. We have two views of the same search result.

a. List View: List of all the search results
b. Map View: Map locations of all search results.
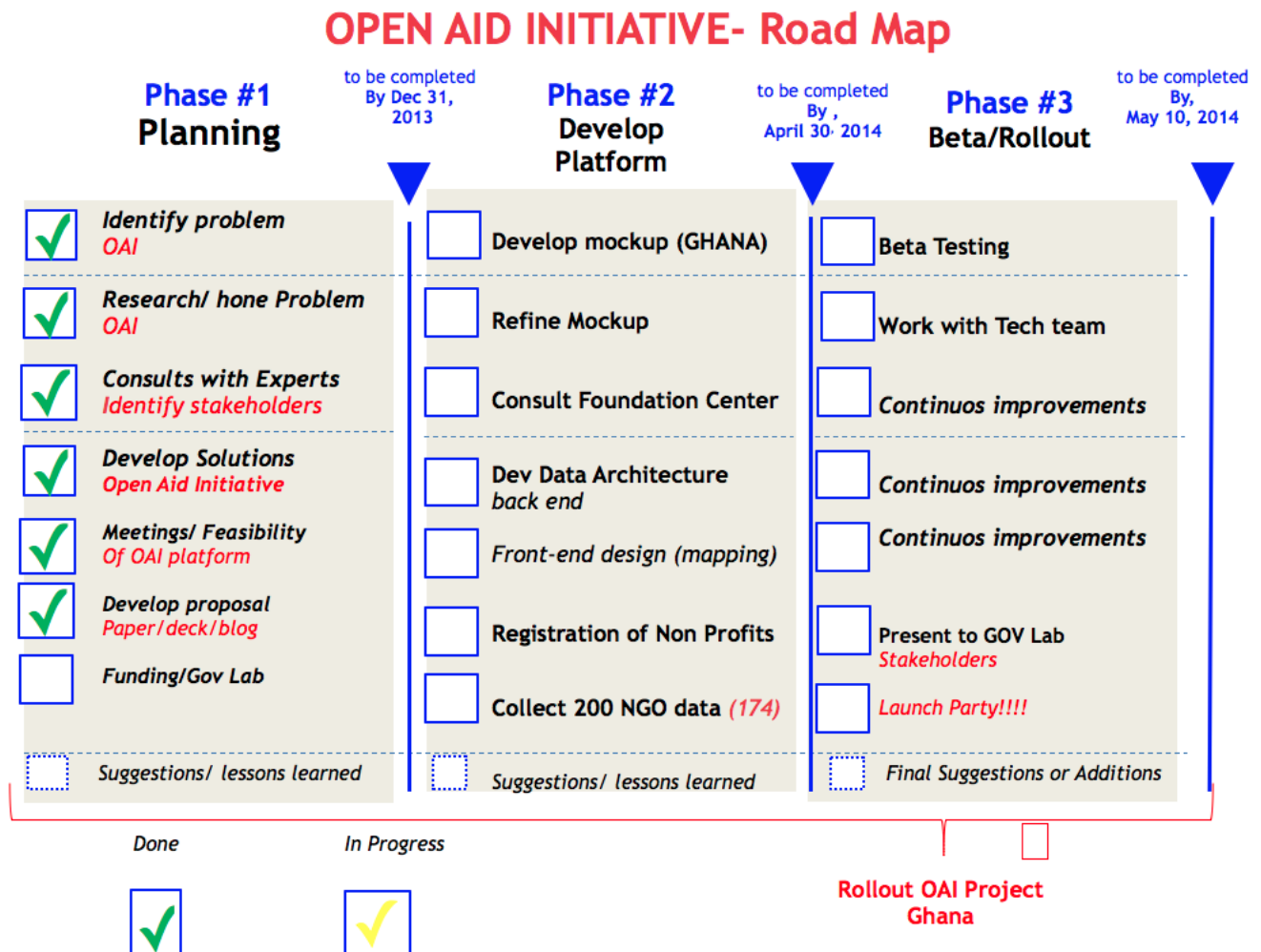
Communication module:

An inbuilt communication engine has to be developed.

1. It should represent a traditional mailing system, but we should be mindful of spammers and others security issues.
2. The mail system should be in line with other popular mail systems or an API of such mail systems can be used to connect internal mail addresses of the non-profits.
3. The mail system can be expanded to a complete collaborative dashboard system in future when we implement the collaboration subsystem.

Recommender System:

A recommender system would be a content-based recommender system that would suggest member organizations with potential partners. This would be based on key words that would be common to both organizations and the system would rate the match on a percentage level and will suggest if the level is greater than 50.

Pilot Project Road Map

OPEN AID INITIATIVE- Road Map

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