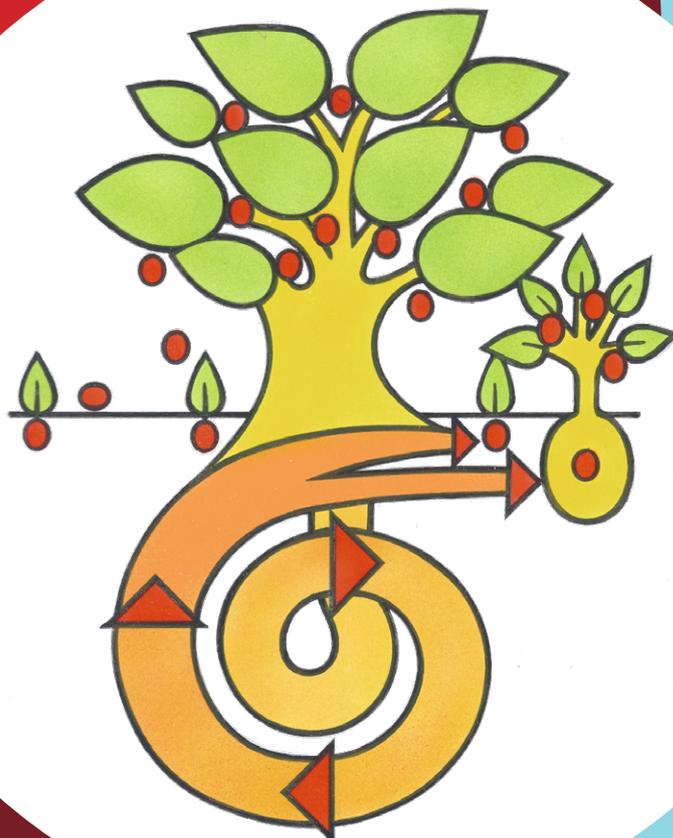


# Refugee-Led Action

A community-based approach emphasising  
strengths, resilience & access to human rights



# Context



## 68.5 million displaced people in the world

**They are increasingly used to polarise societal opinion and limit integration.**

Refugees are too often perceived as incapable and vulnerable, as a burden and a drain on host countries.

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## Approaches of top-down assistance

**Service-delivery lacks consultation on needs and creates dependency.**

Refugees are not given ownership and decision-making rights over their lives; their skills and ideas are unutilised.

Assistance is unable to meet the demands and creates helplessness.

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## Lack of communication & coordination

**Secrecy between service providers leads to inefficiency and ineffectiveness.**

It can also cause programme duplication, over-stimulation, training fatigue, confusion, disillusionment and mistrust.

# Summary

**We are a multidisciplinary and multicultural team of people who believe that through compassion and combined action, we can create a better world.**

We want to drive leadership and innovation in refugee work to improve efficiency, effectiveness, quality and social outcomes. Same Skies' innovation is best described through its perception of refugees, who are traditionally seen as vulnerable. Same Skies refers to "capacity-strengthening", rather than "capacity-building" because we acknowledge an existing base of capability in every community. Our work is based on the conviction that every individual has skills, knowledge and experiences to contribute to society. We focus on the resilience of refugees, rather than seeing them as vulnerable. This paradigm shift has a very significant, transformative impact on people's lives when it is applied throughout every step of project management.

**We stand for Refugee-Led Action – a community-based approach emphasising strengths, resilience and access to human rights.**

Actors from within the refugee community take ownership, conceiving, designing, implementing, and evaluating their own initiatives.

We work in line with the Action Commitments of the **World Humanitarian Summit 2016**. We are dedicated to contributing to the Core Responsibility 3 of "Leaving No One Behind" and to a shift towards more investment into local capacities as per the Humanity Agenda, by reducing vulnerability and increasing the self-reliance and resilience of refugees and host communities. Protection should be about collectively creating an environment that allows everyone to claim his/her rights.

## **Vision:**

Refugees & asylum seekers live with dignity and self-determination.

## **Mission:**

Innovative Refugee-Led Action that strengthens existing community-based capacities.

# Our commitment

## Diversity

We value diversity in our team, as well as in our projects. We harness the existing skills and experiences that everyone brings to the team, and we see differences as an opportunity, acknowledging that our diverse backgrounds help us to continuously challenge each other and realise our potential. Same Skies acts with cultural sensitivity and in respect of the local communities, designing structures and activities that foster harmony, tolerance and understanding between refugees and host communities. In line with our values, it is important to us that projects are open to everyone, and that different members of the community are encouraged to get involved.

## Innovation

Innovation is an aspect of change that is often neglected in humanitarian action. By innovation we mean using creativity to adapt to changing circumstances, and simplifying processes, mechanisms and tools, rather than reinventing the wheel. The innovation in Same Skies challenges the conventional and looks at needs as they are expressed, not as we imagine them to be. We try unique ideas without being afraid of failure, and we take scalable risks while systematically monitoring, mitigating and managing them. On a global scale, innovation is more crucial than ever, especially in protracted crises, where original and bold solutions are needed to sustainably protect and assist large numbers of refugees. Refugee-Led Action gives the right and responsibility for leadership back to communities themselves. This enables genuine ownership while at the same time being more cost-effective than traditional approaches.

## Ongoing learning & adaptation

We are responsive to constructive criticism, and we share our best practices and lessons learnt with other actors. Same Skies encourages refugees, stakeholders and supporters to provide feedback and to raise concerns and complaints. We are committed to responding with appropriate action. At the same time, Same Skies encourages refugee community actors to always welcome and be receptive to constructive criticism from their own communities, including members of the local host community. They regularly convey to us their activities, successes and challenges.

## Transparency & accountability

We are transparent and clear in our intentions and means. Our commitment is to the people with whom we work; primarily to refugees and asylum seekers, and secondly to our donors and supporters.



# What we do

## 1. Training, coaching & mentoring to increase capabilities

Same Skies trains, coaches and mentors individuals and groups to strengthen their organisational and educational capacities. We support community actors to build their confidence and enhance critical thinking. The aim is for them to recognise their strengths and weaknesses, to cultivate their identities, and to add purpose to their own lives, and those of their fellow community members. We encourage them to pass their new knowledge on to others and to strengthen the group structures and processes needed to lead and manage successful community-based initiatives.

## 2. Co-designing refugee-led solutions

Same Skies creates the basis for dialogue, helps refugee communities identify and prioritise their needs, and to define the best means of responding to them. We provide guidance with project cycle management to conceptualise and implement context-specific, culturally sensitive and sustainable ideas that shift traditional power dynamics. We facilitate the realisation of refugee-led initiatives that help refugees strengthen their sense of community and develop their independence. We also help refugee groups become financially independent and sustainable.

## 3. Creating a global community to shift paradigm

Same Skies partners with like-minded people and organisations that want to rethink and revolutionise conventional approaches in refugee work. We drive innovation and change by promoting Refugee-Led Action and enhancing leadership. We raise local awareness and connect people from various backgrounds across borders, while creating a network of peer support. If you want to get involved, please check our leadership programme “Transformative Leadership in Action” ([www.sameskies.org/leadership](http://www.sameskies.org/leadership)).



# Objective & key strategies

## Flexibility

Our approach reflects the manner in which refugee-led initiatives grow organically over time. Our processes are flexible and adaptable to different technical areas as identified by the communities. We make a point of remaining focused on our objectives while staying flexible in our processes, and continuously evaluating progress.

**Overall objective:** contribute to enhanced self-determination, resilience and wellbeing of refugees

**Expected outcome 1:** Diverse teams of refugee community actors are able to lead initiatives in a structured, context-sensitive and lasting manner.

**Expected outcome 2:** The teams are able to independently provide regular and safe services based on community needs.

**Expected outcome 3:** The teams are able to sustainably mobilise required resources through strong local and international networks.

Same Skies develops and defines **project outputs & activities** together with the community actors, focusing on three key areas:

1. Internal structures
2. Involvement of the wider refugee community
3. External networks

## Remote oversight & support

Remote oversight & support is a management approach traditionally only used as a last resort due to perceived constraints and risks. We transform the limitations of this management approach

into opportunities to reinforce decision-making, ownership and autonomy. It is our ideology not to permanently base staff in the field, and we try to avoid high-resource/high-cost activities. Financial and strategic oversight is retained remotely. Same Skies' role is to advise, mentor and coach by providing educational, technical, and financial assistance. Underlying is the assumption that this will consequently enable genuine ownership, resilience and sustainability if risks and constraints are monitored, mitigated and managed effectively.

## Creativity & technology

Same Skies' remote oversight and support necessitates the use of creative strategies to maintain communication. To this end, we utilise social media groups in WhatsApp and Facebook in addition to online conferencing technologies like Zoom and Skype. We support communities in developing websites and social media pages for communications with supporters, and we offer training in the latest crowd-funding approaches and platforms.

## Sustainability

The core principle of our approach is that refugee-led initiatives need to be lasting and self-sustainable. Ideally, Same Skies' support is phased out after permanent or self-sustaining changes have been realised. Therefore, sustainability and exit strategies are incorporated into all stages of project cycle management. From the onset, Same Skies aims to inculcate knowledge and skills within a fixed time period, and our support is based on a clear, time-bound memorandum of understanding with communities without jeopardising intended outcomes. From the beginning, we are very clear about our commitment, and refugees are involved in decision-making processes.

# Project phases & duration

We want to facilitate sustainable structure and durable change, and we take our commitment to refugee communities seriously. Our projects typically last between 9 – 24 months, depending on the context:

**Scenario 1 – dormant:** Same Skies initiates a project, based on a lack of services and support available to refugees in a specific area. Community actors have to be identified first. We allow up to six months to form an initial team of community actors to work with.

**Scenario 2 – informant:** Same Skies commences a project after being approached by an individual from the refugee community who wants to develop an initiative. This informant can be used to mobilise other community actors to form a team more quickly. Sometimes this can be achieved through one community consultation workshop; in other scenarios it will take a few months.

**Scenario 2 – existent:** Same Skies starts to support an existing team of community actors after being approached by the group itself or by an external stakeholder (e.g. UNHCR, donor). If a project starts with this scenario, the project duration will depend on the stage of team development. Establishing strong teams of refugee community actors takes time. As with any other group, they often go through recognisable stages. We use Bruce Tuckman's model of team formation as a basis to determine which phase a team is in and consequently how much time will be required to strengthen it in a sustainable and lasting manner. The illustration below shows the different phases and the minimum time required to move on to the next.



# Key steps

We have defined key steps as a guideline for our projects. Depending on the development phase at the project start, some key steps might be skipped or emphasised.

## Step 1: Community consultation

We identify under-served populations through consultations with local actors. This is followed by participatory workshops to assist communities in the identification and prioritisation of their most significant challenges and underutilised skills and resources.



## Step 2: Group formation

During the consultations, we identify and mobilise community actors, who want to establish or strengthen community initiatives. The development of teamwork and group identity, with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities is a major part of this step.



## Step 3: Design & programming

We help community actors to design, plan and strengthen solutions that they can implement themselves. They consult with local authorities and source a suitable venue to become a community space if required.



## Step 4: Seed-funding

We provide seed-funding and in-kind donations for the establishment. We differentiate between one-off and ongoing costs. Generally, we only support the set-up and we try to keep the ongoing costs to a minimum to facilitate financial independence and sustainability.



## Step 5: Capacity-strengthening

In order to encourage ownership and independence, we do not deploy staff to the field on a permanent basis. Rather, community actors run and manage all daily activities with support through ongoing remote coaching & mentoring and regular training & monitoring visits.



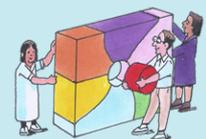
## Step 6: Mentor development

It is our experience that refugee-led initiatives naturally inspire replication by others. Therefore, we train and equip community actors to share knowledge and become mentors for others.

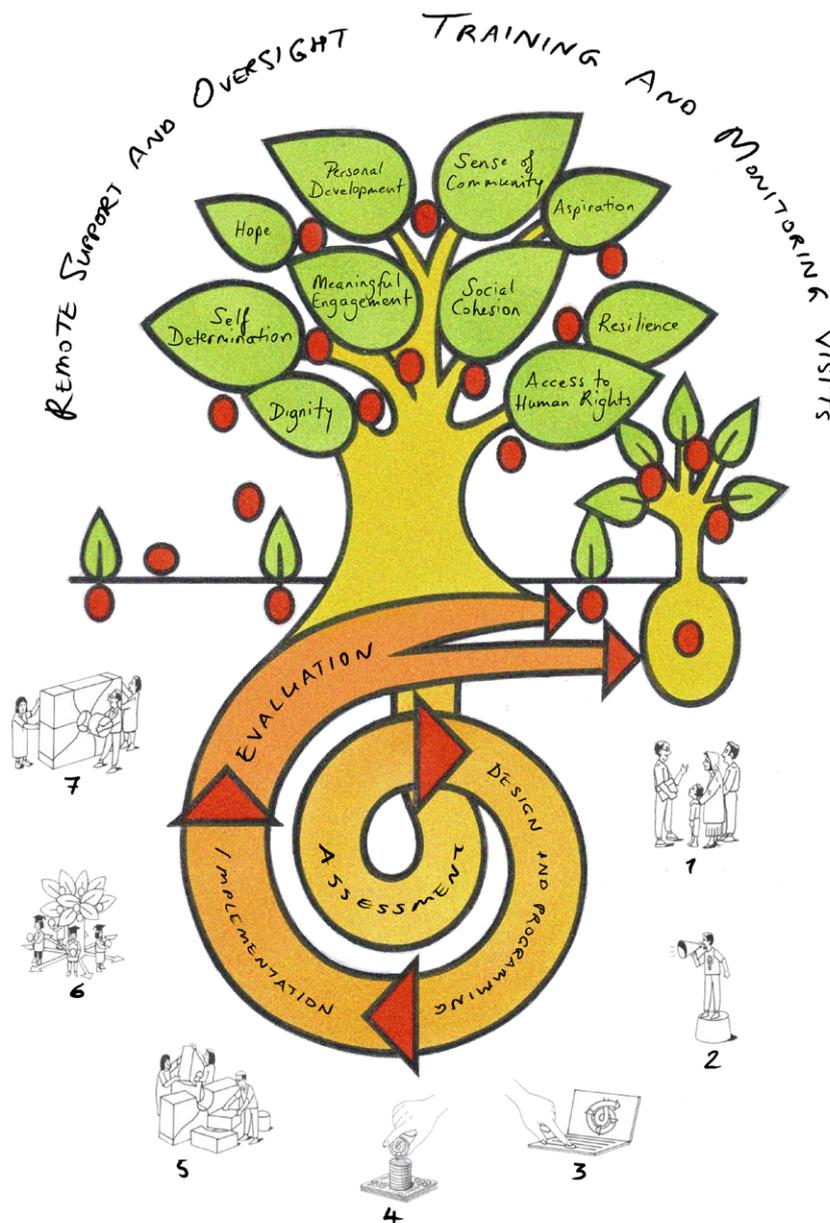


## Step 7: Handover & exit

Our support is phased out and projects are completely handed over to community actors after core capacities have been developed and permanent, sustainable structures and processes have been established.



**Figure 1** Refugee-Led Action



# Theory of change

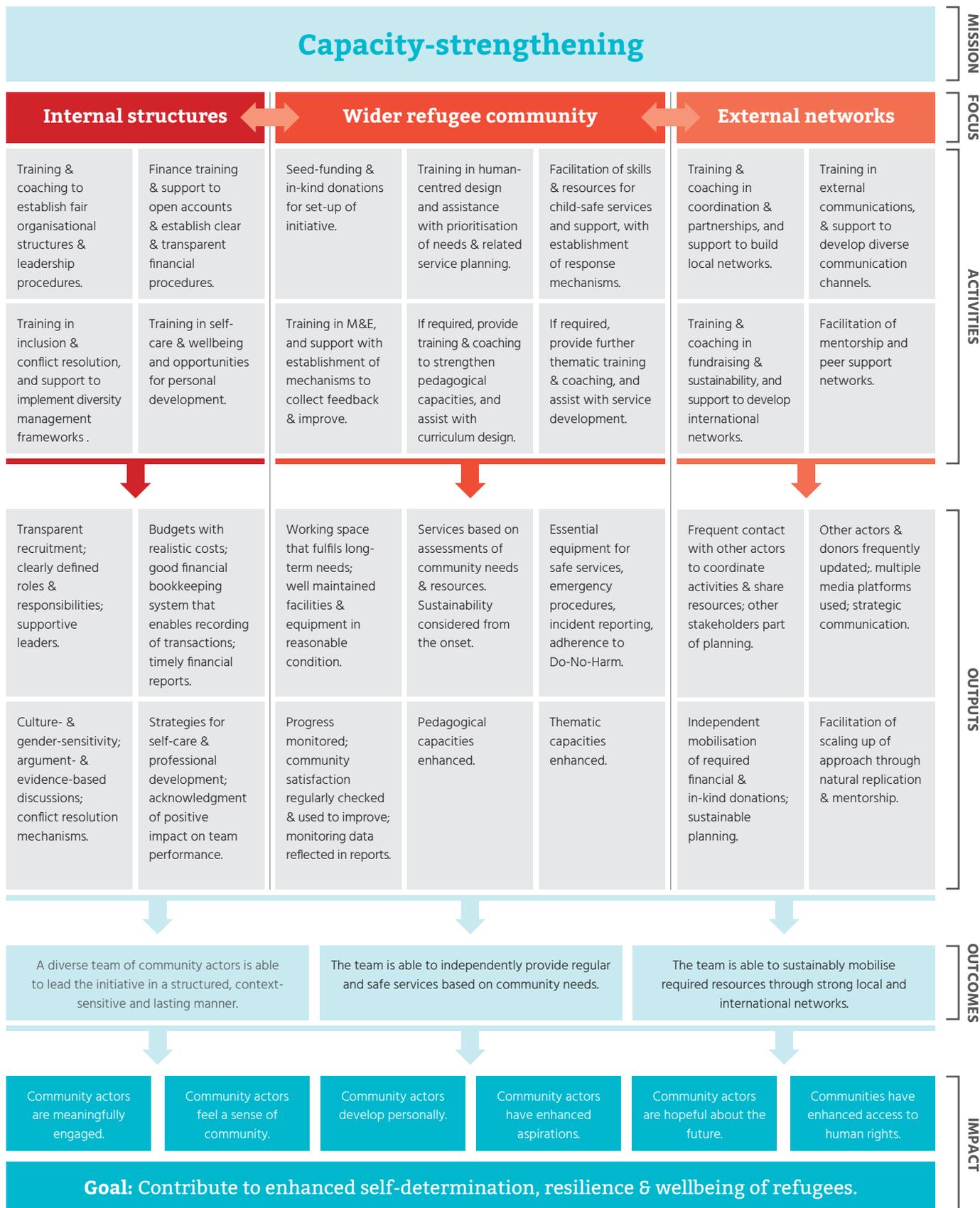
Our theory of change (Figure 2 overleaf) is that by strengthening the capacities of refugee-led initiatives to form sustainable, independent bodies that work with external partners to effectively deliver services to their communities, the self-determination, resilience and wellbeing of refugees is enhanced.

**Risk-taking:** We are not afraid to take risks. Same Skies monitors and evaluates new ideas through the controlled process of testing, adapting and replicating. We plan strategically, and we

continuously measure the impact of every project to ensure that evidence can lead to scaled-up learning and action. It is quite possible that certain strategies do not work as expected, or that they fail entirely. The crux in this eventuality is that any failure or deviation from what is expected is documented, and the learning is applied so that any factors that did not work are taken into account in subsequent strategic design. This learning also reduces the costs of replication and assists with the identification, mitigation and management of risks.

**Figure 2 Theory of change**

**Theory:** By strengthening the capacities of refugee-led initiatives to form sustainable, independent bodies that work with external partners to effectively deliver services to their communities, the self-determination, resilience and wellbeing of refugees is enhanced.



# Impact & innovation

## Improvements to efficiency, effectiveness, quality & social impact

- We design activities that are culturally sensitive, context-specific and relevant by allowing refugee community actors to actively be in charge of all phases of project cycle management.
- Community-based initiatives fill a gap in humanitarian action by providing others with access to information and human rights.
- Community-based initiatives provide displaced communities with a much-needed sense of belonging and community.
- The facilitation of meaningful engagement, personal development, self-confidence, hope and aspirations is critical to the coping strategies, resilience and overall mental wellbeing of the community actors themselves. Our projects help community actors to add purpose to their lives and make displaced communities more self-reliant. Often, we help community actors, and consequently the wider refugee communities, to lift themselves out of a state of inactivity, situational depression and trauma.

## Financial independence

We help teams to establish a lasting donor base and partnerships. While community-based activities can be run with small financial input (e.g. from communities themselves), the ability to generate some revenue helps to achieve greater results more effectively. After our support is phased out, community initiatives continue to run independently and efficiently.

The teams in our pilot projects in Indonesia successfully source their own funds. They are supported by an international network of private donors, including refugees, who have already been resettled.

## Impact on host communities & paradigm shift

Since community actors are responsible for all steps involved in planning and implementing community initiatives, there are frequent examples of positive interaction, growth of relationships and trust, and mutual understanding between refugee community actors and members of the host communities. In previous Same Skies projects, informal authorities have participated in special events, local community groups have been allowed to use community spaces when they were not being used, and individuals from the host community have assisted in many practical ways.

Community initiatives demonstrate to host communities in a very visual way that refugees are serious and passionate about contributing to the community and making themselves useful. Ultimately, this will help us to change the global perception of refugees, and shift the focus of assistance and support efforts.





**[www.sameskies.org](http://www.sameskies.org)**

**Non-religious, politically  
neutral, not-for-profit**

### **Same Skies International**

Switzerland (2014)

Australia (2016)

Malaysia (2017)

Indonesia (2017)

### **Pilot projects**

[www.refugeelearningnest.com](http://www.refugeelearningnest.com)

[www.refugeelearningcenter.com](http://www.refugeelearningcenter.com)

### **Get in touch**

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