

## Our vision

A humanitarian system based on refugee participation, leadership and self-determination.

## Our mission

To recognize, enhance and fund refugee initiatives and leadership.

## Why

The global refugee response is entrenched in a 'top-down' system that views and treats refugees merely as 'recipients of aid' and 'beneficiaries', instead of problem-solvers, contributors, and leaders.

There are over 70.8 million displaced people in the world today. Over 25 million are refugees, driven across borders by conflict and persecution. While the media focus on the minority who attempt to reach the West, in actuality, the majority of refugees remain in their region of origin, taking refuge in often poor and insecure neighboring countries. As conflicts are becoming increasingly protracted, the duration of displacement for refugees has grown to 17 years. The vast majority of refugees are trapped in limbo—in camps and urban settings—with limited rights and freedoms, and opportunities to manage their own affairs and to achieve their own well-being.

While the formal humanitarian sector, including multilateral bodies like the UNHCR, national governments and international organizations, recognizes the importance of increasing refugee participation, less than 0.1% of available funds go to refugee organizations. Investing in and building upon the resources, talents, and initiatives of refugees would foster a more dignified and sustainable global refugee response.

"The way they give us aid is discouraging. They treat us like refugees, not like human beings."  
- A 25 -year-old, refugee from CAR in south Chad

## Our approach

Our grantmaking follows a deliberate strategy aimed at devolving power and resources to refugees so that they can do things for themselves rather than have them done by others. Here's how:

### **Identify opportunities**

Through our network and with guidance from Advisory Team members, we identify individual refugees, informal and formal groups engaged in their communities.

### **Establish local collaboration**

We collaborate with local actors to coordinate various aspects of our grantmaking. The level of collaboration with each local actor varies by context and community.

### **Call for proposals to the refugee community**

We distribute grant opportunities in relevant languages and in ways that ensure broad awareness and participation among refugee community members.

## **Fund refugee initiatives**

After review from our Advisory Team and local collaborators, our Board of Directors select refugee initiatives to fund. Selected individuals and initiatives are announced and showcased across our platforms.

## **Implementation**

We provide the individuals and groups we fund a “Welcome” packet including a congratulatory letter from our team, grant guidelines and agreement, an introduction to other refugee-led initiatives in their community and the world, opportunities to connect with experts and peers, and management and leadership resources.

## **Share results and insights**

Our approach is documented every step of the way; we work with each refugee individual and group to collect baseline and follow-up information. Insights and results are shared with refugee groups and community members, partners and stakeholders, and our donor community.

## **Who we are**

Our team – Board of Directors, Advisors, Executive Director, and a network of partners – identifies and supports promising refugee ideas, initiatives, and leadership.

For twelve years, the Fund for Refugee Initiatives (formerly the Chad Relief Foundation) operated as an all-volunteer operation supporting refugees from the Central African Republic living in camps and villages across southern Chad through partnerships with international organizations. In total, FRI raised and disbursed \$1.3 million in cash, donated medical supplies, and financed projects in health, agriculture, food, education, recreation, and supported women’s higher education. In 2020, FRI made fundamental changes in its operations, shifting its grantmaking to directly support indigenous efforts in refugee communities.

“Since we have arrived, partners have helped but we are still poor. Nothing has changed. The little we receive doesn’t allow us to advance ourselves.” – a woman refugee during meeting with community members in refugee camp Belom, south Chad

## **Get Involved**

There are many ways to be part of our grantmaking efforts. Whether you donate, share our work, volunteer, or join our Advisory Team, we welcome your involvement and support in advancing our mission. To volunteer or join our team, please send us a note at [team@refugee-initiatives.org](mailto:team@refugee-initiatives.org). We look forward to connecting with you.

## **Partner with us**

Partnership is the foundation of our work in the U.S and across refugee contexts. If you’re interested in collaborating with us to support refugee-led impact, send us a note at [partner@refugee-initiatives.org](mailto:partner@refugee-initiatives.org).

### Key Assumptions:

- Many refugee problems need refugee-led solutions
- Refugees have personal and permanent connections to their communities; they are highly motivated to develop outcomes that last.
- With direct grants, community members benefit from process as well as outcomes. Project leaders advance their skills while identifying opportunities and creating change in which they believe.
- Small grants contribute to a more equal relationship between grantor and grantee.
- Giving control to refugee-led organizations and groups immediately reduces the administrative and logistic costs so often incurred by larger NGOs.
- Traditional funding mechanisms often undermine refugees' sense of self-determination and does not allow for local ingenuity, innovation, and practical knowledge.
- Community members better understand the needs and priorities of their communities and are more likely to create tailored solutions with long-term sustainable outcomes.

### INPUTS

- Direct and flexible small grant funding
- Non-financial support such as technical assistance and connections to peer refugee organizations, networks, and leaders
- Relationships with peer organizations and grantmaking partners

### INTERMEDIARY STEPS

- FRI identifies early-stage refugee initiatives and organizations, supports their efforts to secure the change they want for their communities, and promotes groups that have not received recognition or assistance. There are no specific thematic areas.



## MIDTERM OUTCOMES

- FRI systematically evaluates its grantmaking process and the results of the refugee initiatives and organizations it supports.
- Refugee initiatives and organizations achieve project objectives and improve organizational aspects such as leadership, monitoring and evaluation, and community organizing.
- FRI makes public the results of allocating resources and power to refugees.



## LONGTERM OUTCOMES

- Refugee initiatives and organizations sustain and expand their efforts.
- Refugee initiatives and organizations achieve greater visibility and influence within the humanitarian and development response.
- The network of refugee leaders, initiatives, and organizations is expanded and strengthened.

## IMPACT

Refugees have the resources and partnerships to achieve the impact and change they want for their communities.

## IMPACT

# Building upon and investing in the strengths and capacities of refugees.

Funded projects ↘

*Image above: A woman from the Central African Republic photographed at the border of Chad waiting to be registered as a refugee. Photo cred: Bill Felstiner.*

From 2008 to 2020 FRI funded projects originating with the UN Refugee Agency, local and international NGOs, refugee groups or FRI itself. Beginning September 2020, FRI will fund only initiatives originating from the refugee community.

### **COVID-19 Response**

In April, we transferred funds to ACRA to provide hygiene kits with soap, buckets, and masks to more than 800 refugee and local families in the Moissala area. Silvia Fregoso, the Director of ACRA, our partner in Chad, expressed her concern that refugee and Chadian communities in remote areas will not be included in the regional humanitarian response. While the UNHCR is mobilizing resources, it is only targeting refugees living in the camps under its control—leaving a large number of refugees and locals in southern Chad outside of their COVID-19 response.

### **The Beureuh School**

Founded by a consortium of CARE, UNICEF and FRI, the Beureuh School is a community-led middle and high school in Beureuh village in south Chad. Over 700 students from two UNHCR refugee camps and six local villages attend per year.

“This school is a center of excellence in the region. I see that the teachers are motivated to walk a far distance to come help and work here.” — Mbainarem Phares, Director of the Beureuh School.

We’ve been supporting the initiatives of the school staff, students and parents to maintain the quality of the school.

### **Advancing leadership through University Scholarships**

In partnership with ACRA, FRI provides scholarships for refugee and local students. To date, three women have graduated with degrees and six students are enrolled. Prisca and Madjiressem Asnat to attend



university in Chad. After completing three years, both became teachers. Today, Asnat teaches high school biology, and Prisca serves as an interpreter for UNHCR. Both women beam when talking about their university experience.

Prisca is passionate about encouraging girls in her community. "Education is made for girls and boys. Girls should be in school with the boys. There should be equality. I encourage a lot of girls. Some girls tell me, 'oh, I cannot because I'm already married and have children. What will I do in school?' But I tell them no, it is your right to go to school. Look at me, I'm married, and I have children and I still went to University."

### **Wheelchairs and tricycles**

Though a partnership with CARE International, we've funded wheelchairs and tricycles, and their repairs to help ease the lives of people with disabilities in camps and villages across southern Chad. Caring for people with disabilities is a community-led effort. Across refugee camps in the south, community members volunteer their time to ensure people are living dignified lives and accessing the services they need.

### **Helping families keep their daughters in school**

Refugee families have lost a lot in crossing the border. As they try to rebuild their lives, for some it's a daily struggle to provide for their families. In these difficult circumstances, girls are often the first to drop out of school to help with household chores, work, and reduce the burdens on their families by getting married early. However, with a little extra monthly support, refugee families have been able to keep their daughters in school. To date, the Fund for Refugee Initiatives has supported the school fees for 707 refugee girls.



*Images above (left to right): A refugee woman sits proudly in her new tricycle; local and refugee primary school students sit under a mango tree in the village of Ngakoria; and University student Prisca speaks with young women in Gore about the importance of education. Photo cred: Bill Felstiner.*

### **Girl Guides for the protection of women and children**

The FRI financed a three-step program of the Association des Guides du Tchad (AGT) that initially trained women members of AGT from six areas in Chad in the rights of women and children and in techniques of female empowerment. Once trained, these volunteers sensitized women and children in the refugee camps about gender-based sexual violence and the rights of women and children. Finally, the instructors

conducted extensive training of a smaller number of women so that they can continue the effort after the project is completed. Refugees trained by the Girl Guides continue the effort to reduce domestic violence.

### **Additional border structure**

Refugees from the CAR tend to cross into southwest Chad at two points where tracks suitable for vehicles cross the border. The refugees must then wait at the border, sometimes for weeks, until the UN can send trucks to pick them up. In early 2008, one of these crossing points had a structure to shield the refugees from the sun and rain as well as latrines and a well producing potable water. The other crossing, near the tiny village of Bitoye, had no facilities. Refugees lived in the bush plain and simple. CRF financed the construction by CARE of a shed, four latrines and well.

### **Livelihood support**

The priority needs of the 13,000 refugees who were living at Yaroungou was to increase agricultural production. In cooperation with COOPI, an Italian NGO, FRI supported groups of farmers to buy oxen and plow units that increase production by bringing additional land under cultivation as well as making more efficient use of land already in production.

### **Supplemental food**

Among the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict in the CAR in 2013-14 were hundreds of people with special needs. Using an anonymous \$15,000 donation from a multi-national company operating in Chad, CRF provided 5,000 kg of rice, 12,500 kg of beans, 800 kg of salt and 1,575 ltr. of oil to such people over a four-month period beginning in April 2014.

### **Electricity for health centers**

FRI, in partnership with CSSI, funded solar power for health clinics serving Amboko, Gondje, Dosseye and Belom refugee camps to replace the use of kerosene, which is expensive, dangerous and not always available. The solar facilities provide light for the clinics and power for refrigerators in which medicines and immunization materials are stored.

### **Supporting youth soccer**

Local and refugee students expressed a strong desire for soccer fields. The FRI provided the funds so that the community could build two soccer fields in refugee camps and one in the host village of Gore. The Gore field was a step toward integrating the CAR refugees into local activities, a long-term UN Refugee Agency goal.

