

Strategic plan 2019-2022





Contents

The context	1
Who we are	2
What we do	6
Vision and mission	8
Key strategies	9
Operational plans 2022	10

The context

With an unprecedented 68.5 million displaced people in the world, the refugee crisis has been a major global story for a number of years. Increasingly it has been used to polarise societal opinion in the countries to which refugees flee.

Refugees¹ are too often perceived as a problem or a burden, as incapable and vulnerable, and as a drain on the resources of their host nations, where there is often a lack of empathy or understanding of the contexts driving the displacement of populations. Further, there is often limited contact between refugees and their host societies, leading to exclusion from societal structures and support mechanisms. This is a missed opportunity on the part of the host nations to capitalise on the human assets in their midst.

Since its foundation, Same Skies has conducted operations initially in Indonesia, and then also in Malaysia. Traditionally, states in Southeast Asia have been described as ‘transit’ countries. Most nations in the region are not signatories to the 1951 United Nations’ Convention relating to the status of refugees and its Protocols, and hence there is no legal way to seek asylum. In the past, asylum seekers have often arrived in Southeast Asia with the intention of either continuing their journey to Australia, or waiting for processing and resettlement to a third country through the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, with the increasing number of arrivals, and the hardening political stance in historically welcoming Western nations, the prospect of resettlement for those officially recognised as refugees is becoming increasingly remote.

For example, in October 2017, UNHCR Indonesia adopted a firm, but realistic public information stance where refugees were informed that their chances of resettlement were extremely limited, and that most refugees in Indonesia would not be granted such an opportunity.² Refugees were informed that they should seek to integrate into the local community if repatriation to their countries of origin remained an implausible option.

Given the weak domestic protection frameworks in Southeast Asian nations, and the limited capacity of UNHCR to manage the volume of those seeking assistance, the region has been a logical setting for the implementation of Same Skies’ work. However, Same Skies no longer regards its potential scope as being necessarily limited to former ‘transit’ nations, nor to states that are non-signatories to the Refugee Convention, but rather remains flexible and adaptable, and open to the possibility of operating in other geographical regions where significant numbers of people fleeing harm or persecution may be found.



¹ For simplicity of reading we will refer to “refugees” only throughout this document. Nonetheless, our projects are open to all displaced people and we do not exclude people due to their legal status. We base our judgement upon the self-perception of people who have left their homelands.

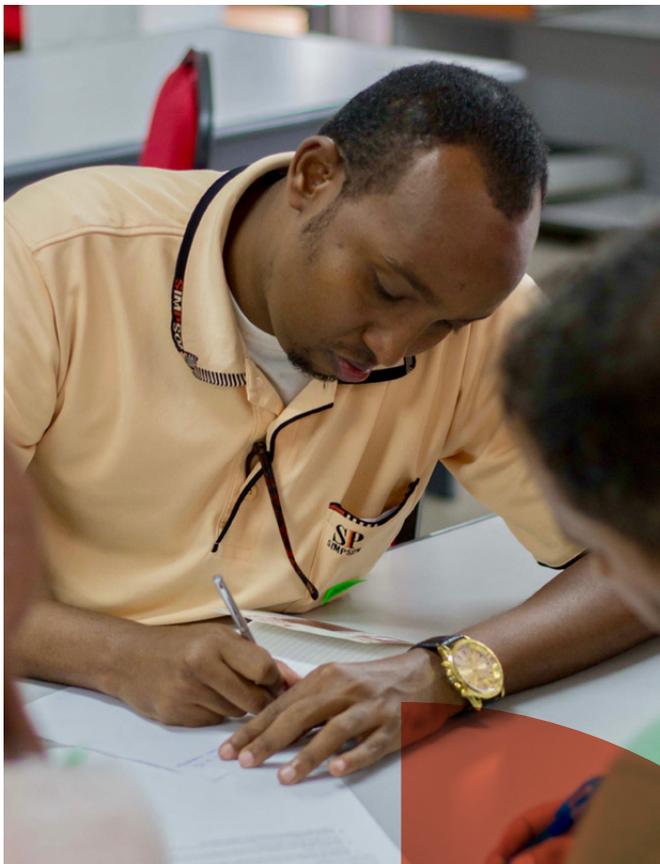
² UNHCR Indonesia: Comprehensive solutions for persons registered with UNHCR in Indonesia, online: <https://www.unhcr.org/id/wp-content/uploads/sites/42/2017/10/Poster-on-Comprehensive-Solutions-ECHO-Oct-2017.pdf> [accessed 12 December 2018].

Who we are

Same Skies is a non-religious, politically neutral non-profit organisation that was established by a team of international professionals with extensive experience working with refugees.

While debriefing on work experiences in diverse international settings, the founding members arrived at the realisation that the humanitarian sector is in urgent need of innovation. We want to drive leadership in refugee work to improve its efficiency, effectiveness, quality and social outcomes.

We are a multidisciplinary and multicultural team of people who believe that through compassion and combined action, we can create a better world. Same Skies demonstrates empathy towards refugees and asylum seekers - those who are displaced due to armed conflict, or fear of persecution, or discrimination; aiming to alleviate the suffering of those affected by it. We are concerned with the real-life consequences of displacement at the community level.



Governance structures

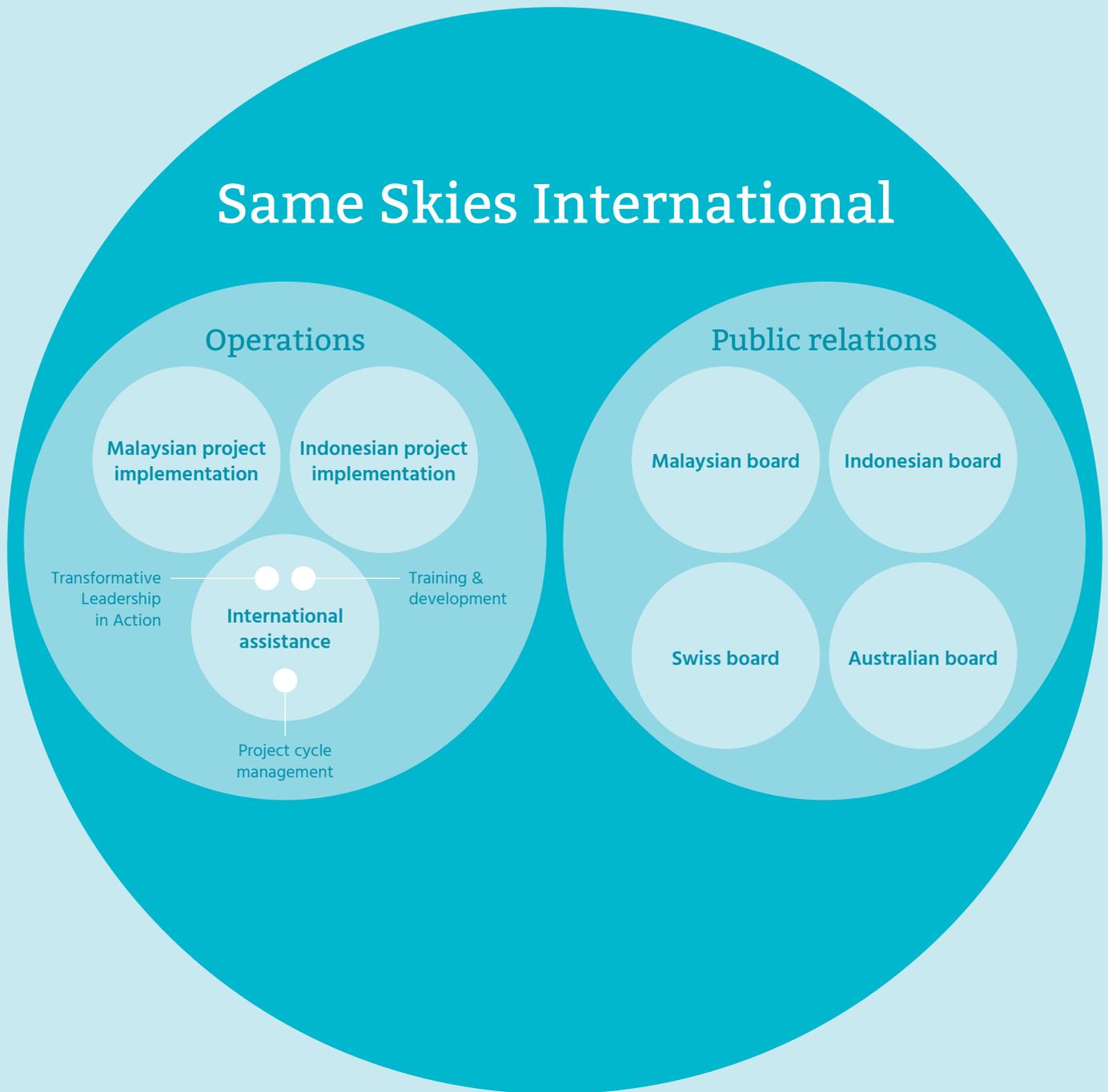
Same Skies is a network of independent organisations based in Switzerland, Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia, managed by national governing boards. Same Skies International, an association organised under the laws of Switzerland, is the umbrella association of the Same Skies network. It acts as the head organisation, and pursues neither commercial nor self-help purposes. The aim of Same Skies International is to:

- provide strategic guidance and direction to all Same Skies branches;
- coordinate the resource allocation between Same Skies branches;
- resolve any disputes and make final decisions in the event of disagreements or controversies between Same Skies branches; and
- strengthen communication, and streamline the governance between the Same Skies branches.

Same Skies has been inspired by Holacracy,³ an innovative, agile organisational structure and management approach that matches our ethos, and serves our vision far more effectively than conventional management hierarchies. Instead of operating top-down, power is distributed, giving teams and individuals more freedom to self-manage while contributing to the overall mission. Holacracy-powered organisations focus on purpose; organisational purpose, team purpose, and individual purpose should all be explicit and aligned to unlock the full potential of the organisation. Static job descriptions become dynamic roles and responsibilities that are transparent, and evolve as the organisation changes.

³ Online: www.holacracy.org

Organisational structure



Core values

Same Skies is committed to the humanitarian principles, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law:

Humanity

Same Skies aims to ensure the dignity and reduce the suffering of human beings. We operate with compassion and respect.

Impartiality

We offer support without discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, class, religious belief, political opinion, gender and/or age. We are motivated by principles of equality and social justice.

Independence

We appreciate working alongside people from different backgrounds. Nonetheless, our first and foremost priority is to act in line with our mission and values.

Neutrality

Same Skies does not work in situations of armed conflicts or hostilities. However, we are politically neutral and it is important to us to not engage in political, racial, religious or ideological arenas.



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 to realise our potential. We act 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.

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.

Ongoing learning & adaptation

We are responsive to constructive criticism, and we share our good practices and lessons learnt with others. 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 community actors to always welcome and be receptive to constructive criticism from their own communities, including members of the local host community.

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 financial supporters.

We asked our team members: What does great work culture mean for you?

These were some of their responses:

“Great work culture to me is having a supportive team, achieving the same goals, following everyone’s passion.”

“A free space where ideas are welcomed, but also really taken into consideration. People are valued for what they bring to the table. Where personal and professional growth is stimulated for, by and with all team members. I think it’s great if people are stimulated, slightly pushed even, to try new things, and not being blamed for failing if they do. Open communication is key.”

“It means having the right mix of management support and the ability to work autonomously. The knowledge that supervisors/senior colleagues are available to offer guidance/troubleshoot, but that you as an employee are valued and trusted to make certain decisions/provide meaningful input individually or in small teams. Management that practices what they preach and is open to new approaches and ideas. A feeling of collaboration and shared goals.”

“To me, a great organisational culture truly listens and recognises the wisdom in everybody. Negative judgement must be off. This requires self-training, the ability to catch oneself thinking negatively before it goes on and on. Then we can listen with an open-heart and understand what the person is really saying. We will also need to understand why we have judgements in the first place.”

“I think the strength of any organisation lies in its human resources, and I would like to see a sense of ‘family’ develop across the organisation internationally, where we all care about one another, and are passionate about what we do. Everything else flows on from there.”

“I like the idea of an “open invitation” for all team members to attend meetings when available; the depth of experience and expertise and wisdom across our four boards is truly amazing, and we have to find a way to harness that.”

“A climate should be created in which employees feel comfortable and valued. You should be allowed to express your opinion without being disadvantaged. People should have a say in as many ways as possible. There should also be generosity as a sign of appreciation to the staff. Petulance annoys employees. I think that when people feel appreciated, they voluntarily invest more time and energy, identify with the organisation, think along...”

“Great work culture is grounded in respect and understanding of culture and personality of unique individuals (valuing differences). It is trained in empathy and inclusiveness to form as a team. A culture that listens actively, works proactively and has fun amidst it all. One where each looks out for another and places each other in high regard. One that learns together and from one another. One that values persons not merely as means to an end. One that communicates effectively, engages willingly, and transparently too. Flexibility with working hours/space and celebration of the workforce!”

What we do

Historically, the approach to refugee assistance and protection has been focused on top-down service-delivery. The limitations of this way of working have become more and more apparent. Top-down approaches often fail to ask refugees themselves what they want or need, and they seldom involve refugees in the design of programmes and projects. The skills and ideas of refugees therefore go unutilised, and this promotes dependency and helplessness, and results in a general lack of agency.

The terminology that accompanies this approach is both a product and a reinforcement of the way vulnerable communities are perceived.

An example of this is *empowerment*. Same Skies has decided to avoid the term, because within the dynamics of empowerment there remains an implicit imbalance. Power flows from a subject, those in power, to an object, those who lack it. The language of empowerment is strongly associated with the idea that those in need of empowerment are beneficiaries, passive receivers.

The same is true for *participation*. Over the past four years, we have experienced that participation can mean different things, depending on one's understanding and objectives. The Participation Handbook includes a typology of participation (adapted from Jules Pretty 1995),⁴ which distinguishes seven degrees of involvement of affected populations in humanitarian responses.

The top rungs of the graphic represent a problematic understanding of participation, often employed to hold on to power by the ones in charge of the planning process. The bottom levels of the graphic are associated with incremental shifts in the power balance.

Same Skies considers local initiatives the most relevant and sustainable option.

Passive participation	The affected population is informed of what is going to happen or what has occurred. While this is a fundamental right of the people concerned, it is not one that is always respected.
Participation through the supply of information	The affected population provides information in response to questions, but it has no influence over the process, since survey results are not shared and their accuracy is not verified.
Participation by consultation	The affected population is asked for its perspective on a given subject, but it has no decision-making powers, and no guarantee that its views will be taken into consideration.
Participation through material incentives	The affected population supplies some of the materials and/or labour needed to conduct an operation, in exchange for payment in cash or in kind from the aid organisation.
Participation through the supply of materials, cash or labour	The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash and/or labour needed for an intervention. This includes cost recovery mechanisms.
Interactive participation	The affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers.
Local initiatives	The affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organisations or institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community; it is the aid organisation that participates in the people's projects.

⁴ Group URD & ALNAP: Participation Handbook for humanitarian field workers, page 41. Online: <https://www.urd.org/Participation-Handbook> [accessed 12 December 2018].

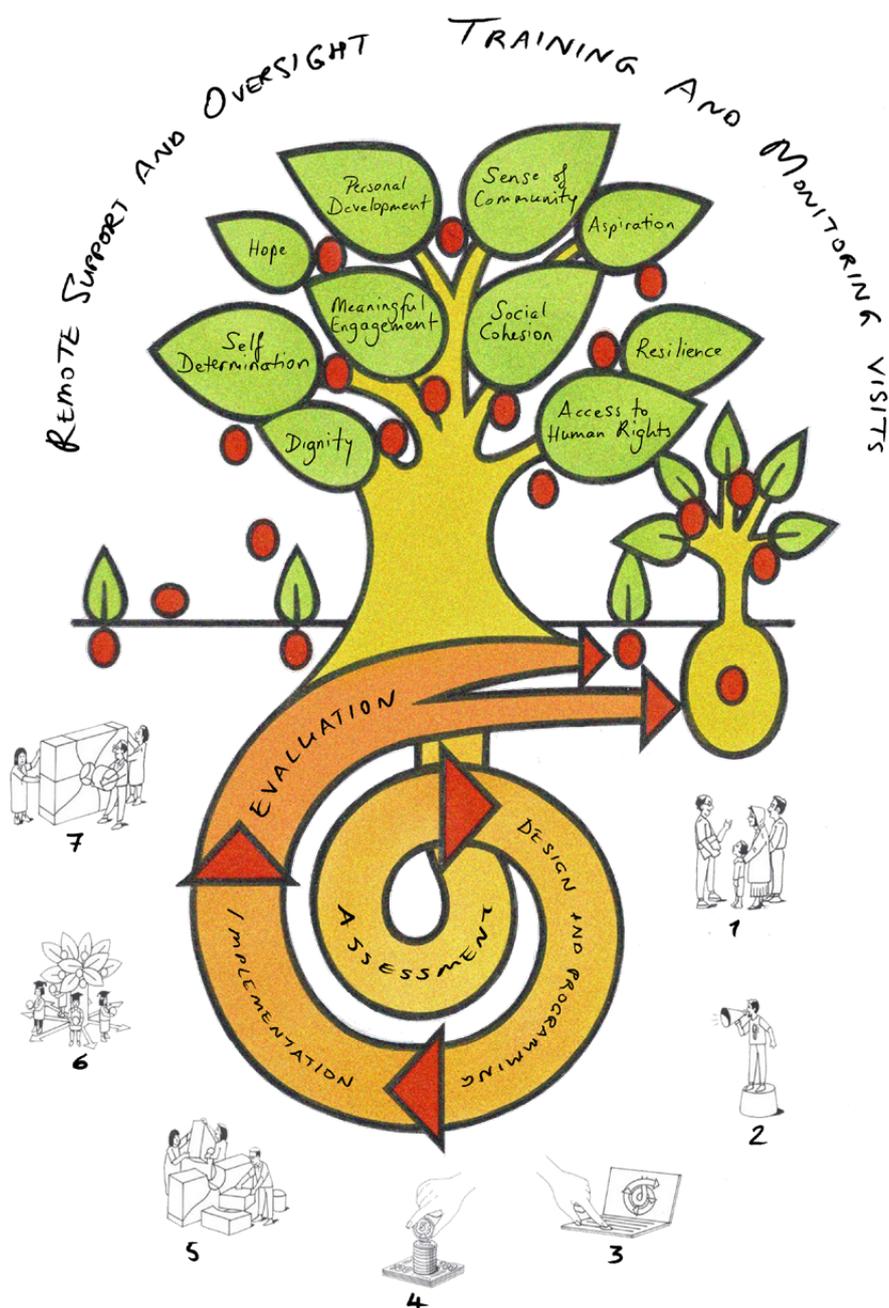
In response to the limitations of these top-down approaches to assistance, Same Skies has developed its Refugee-Led Action approach. This is the result of four years of testing, evaluating and adjusting our work with refugee communities.

Refugee-Led Action is a community-based approach emphasising strengths, resilience and access to human rights. It gives the right and responsibility for leadership back to communities themselves. Community actors take ownership - conceiving, designing, implementing, and evaluating their own initiatives.

Instead of delivering pre-established projects, Same Skies creates the basis for dialogue, helping communities to identify and prioritise their needs, and to define the best

means of responding to them. We provide guided project cycle management to conceptualise and implement context-specific, culturally sensitive and sustainable ideas that shift traditional power dynamics.

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 cycle management.





Vision and mission

Vision:

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

Mission:

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



Key strategies

Strengths-based approach

Same Skies recognises that certain individuals/groups can be more marginalised and therefore more vulnerable than others. At the same time, we do not see vulnerability as a fixed condition that cannot be overcome. We honour resilience over vulnerability, and therefore focus on strengths and access to human rights. Underutilised skills and capacities in communities are an important asset in countries where formal duty bearers such as government officials are weak in delivering their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil universal human rights. Same Skies works with refugees as rights holders, helping them to identify obstacles and find solutions to claim their own rights and strengthen their relationships with duty bearers. At the same time, we work with refugees as duty bearers in order to strengthen their ability to deliver obligations towards their children and other community members.

Remote oversight & support

This management approach is usually 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 to not permanently base staff in the field, and all of our projects are refugee-led. Financial and strategic oversight is retained remotely. Same Skies' role is to advise, mentor and coach. 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 & flexibility

Our approach reflects the manner in which community-based initiatives grow organically over time, and is therefore flexible and adaptable to different technical areas. We make a point of remaining focused on our objectives while staying flexible in our processes, and continuously evaluating progress. Our approach further necessitates the use of creative strategies to maintain communication and oversight. To this end, we make use of current technology, such as social media groups and online conferencing technologies.

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. Certain strategies may not work as expected, or may even fail entirely. The crux in this is that any failure or deviation from what is expected is documented, and the lessons learned are applied so that any factors that did not work are considered in subsequent strategic decisions. This learning also reduces the costs of replication, and assists with the identification, mitigation and management of risks.

Operational plans 2022

Same Skies recognises that it is important to keep up with the ever-changing world around us. Technology is exponentially exploding in its development and influence across all institutional spheres, and multi-year project design and roll-outs are no longer an option for many organisations. Same Skies is a proponent of efficient human-centered design, implementation, and iteration. The situation regarding the displacement of people is ever shifting, and Same Skies believes that in response we should be a flexible organisation with an adaptable approach.

Goal: Over the next four years, we aim to facilitate and promote Refugee-Led Action, and strategically challenge negative perceptions of refugees.



Throughout Phases 1 & 2 of our previous Strategy (2015-2018), Same Skies designed and tested an approach for establishing, supporting and strengthening refugee-led initiatives. We also invested in partnerships with like-minded people and organisations that are attempting to rethink and revolutionise approaches to refugee protection. We raised local awareness, and connected people from various backgrounds across borders, while creating a network of peer support. We are and have been committed to sharing information and knowledge through involvement in professional networks, as well as learning from the experience and expertise of other actors to maximise joint outcomes and reach common goals.

While further working on the quality of our existing activities, we are also looking into the future. Through the extensive testing and monitoring we have undertaken so far, and because of the expansion of our network over the past four years, we are ready to move forward. We aim to widen and deepen our impact by systematically replicating our approach of Refugee-Led Action throughout larger geographical areas.

The emphasis in Phase 3 will be on developing intermediary structures. Our aim will be to design simple, effective and coherent management structures and processes between numerous refugee-led groups, other stakeholders and Same Skies.

Over the next four years, we have defined one internal and three external priorities:

Priority 1: Enhancing governance, human resource & people management practices

Priority 2: Strengthening branches & operations in Malaysia & Indonesia

Priority 3: Scaling-up Refugee-Led Action

Priority 4: Conducting assessments for further expansion into other regions

Internal plans

Priority 1: Enhancing governance, human resource & people management practices

Our compassion starts in our own circles. We understand that community work can be challenging, and we are committed to looking after one another and ourselves, while helping others. We invest in team building and social after-work activities to foster strong bonds and friendships. We debrief, and we keep a well-balanced work-life ethic to preventing vicarious trauma and burnout.

Career analyst Dan Pink, like many others, argues in his TED talk “The puzzle of motivation”⁵ that employees are driven by intrinsic motivators as they are looking for autonomy, mastery, and purpose. We believe that true happiness – that is not to be mistaken with superficial “feel good” moods and egoistic striving for personal and short-lived pleasures – can be achieved if people have the opportunity to learn how to:

- develop their full potential: knowledge, competencies, skills, talents and creativity;
- live in harmony with others: creating meaningful relationships, becoming responsible citizens and thus contributing to a happy society; and
- respect and protect our fragile environment, and live in harmony with nature.

We believe that supportive leadership is particularly essential to prevent burnout in humanitarian work because employees are often asked to empathise with and respond to the needs of people in distress.

In their 2013 book “Primal Leadership, Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence” Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee argue that the main task of leaders should be to prime good feelings in those they lead by creating resonance - positivity that frees the best in people. It has been acknowledged by many that resonant leaders – those who exhibit attributes of emotional and social intelligence – are able to connect with others most effectively, and thus lead well.

Goleman writes: “Resonant leaders can, for example, listen to workers’ negative feelings, and respond empathically and supportively, a crucial skill during chaotic times. In general, resonant leaders build positive work climates, while dissonant leaders are out of synch and out of touch, creating disharmony”⁶.

Based on the above, it is our goal over the next four years to invest in our governance, human resource and people management practises in order to create a flatter, more agile and purpose-driven organisation that uses unique decision-making processes, and gives autonomy to teams and individuals. We want to be a team of happy people in a fair organisation, taking care of each other, the future generation, and the planet.



⁵ Online: www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation?language=en [accessed 12 December 2018].

⁶ Daniel Goleman: Leadership. Online: <http://www.danielgoleman.info/resonant-leaders/> [accessed 12 December 2018].



External plans

Priority 2: Strengthening branches & operations in Malaysia & Indonesia

In the coming years we will further strengthen the way our existing projects in Indonesia and Malaysia operate. This will entail the continued support of Refugee Learning Nest and Refugee Learning Center in Indonesia, as well as the Refugee Network Centre and the Refugee Collaboration Network in Malaysia.

In line with that, we want to invest in building strong local teams that can manage operations on the ground effectively and efficiently. Our International Director has been based in Malaysia for the last three years to support the establishment of these branches. Long-term our aim is to hand Asian operations over to local coordinators in both countries. This will mean that we need to continue to recruit and train local staff. The Malaysian branch has been hiring local staff for over a year. Unfortunately, staff retention has been difficult due to several challenges. First of all, it has been challenging to find qualified and experienced candidates who meet Same Skies expectations. This could be due to the fact that most humanitarian workers are based in the Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, whereas the Same Skies office is located in the much smaller regional city of Melaka. More time will have to be taken to determine the factors and develop the ability to recruit sustainably.

In addition, lessons have been learned from this experience, and a need to refine our recruitment strategy has been identified. Regardless, Same Skies is committed to identifying passionate and dynamic local professionals, and to providing support and opportunities for them to develop themselves and the organisation in line with our internal value statements laid out above.

Another focus will be placed on further raising local awareness of the plight and rights of refugees, and developing local partnerships to increase the fundraising capacity of the branches on the ground. This will involve the civil society, local businesses, and institutional donors. This step should include the development of a more efficient and effective board engagement strategy so that it can largely be driven by the local boards of the respective countries.

Furthermore, suitable local work spaces will have to be sourced in both countries. Currently the Malaysian branch operates out of a free space provided by the co-founders of Same Skies, while the Indonesian branch does not have an office at all. Over the next four years, sustainable solutions will have to be found.

Priority 3: Scaling-up Refugee-Led Action

An important step in preparation for the scaling up of Refugee-Led Action was the development and piloting of our Transformative Leadership in Action programme. The programme was developed under the very generous mentorship of Ashoka fellow Mr PhD Carsten Ruebsaamen, and based on the successful BOOKBRIDGE Capability programme.⁷

For Same Skies the rationales behind the creation of the programme were threefold:

- Dissemination and large-scale replication of our approach
- Deepening and widening of our impact through replication by others
- Development of more financial independence, stability and sustainability

Transformative Leadership in Action is a professional development programme that is offered by Same Skies with the support from experts at UNHCR, Monash University, HOST International, BOOKBRIDGE, Beyond the Fabric, KYS Business School and others.

The programme brings together leaders from a variety of contexts – including participants with refugee backgrounds – and helps them to strengthen their leadership approaches.

The theoretical part of the programme comprises four online modules for self-study and one residential session, supported by expert lecturers from our partner organisations.

Most importantly, this is a learning-by-doing programme in which participants take on responsibility for the establishment of a new refugee-led initiative to meet the educational, health and/or social needs of the larger refugee community. Their practical work is guided and supervised by Same Skies project mentors.

In addition, participants are supported by leadership coaches to translate their new knowledge and experiences into their own professional contexts.

Once the seven-month programme has officially ended, the newly established project will be led and managed long-term by the refugee participants. Same Skies will continue to support the team with training and mentoring for another twelve months to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Over the next four years, Transformative Leadership in Action will be systematically utilised to establish new projects by replicating Refugee-Led Action.

Priority 4: Conducting assessments for further expansion into other regions

As a last step in the process of scaling-up, and at the end of this four-year strategy, we will conduct in-depth assessments to determine the need, relevance and feasibility of Same Skies' expansion into other regional contexts. This should first and foremost include our existing branches in Switzerland and Australia, where we currently do not have operations. These branches could potentially manage projects across Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. Assessments can also include other regions that host large displaced communities, such as Middle-Eastern and African countries.



⁷ Online: www.bookbridge.org



www.sameskies.org

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

Same Skies International

Switzerland (2014)
Australia (2016)
Malaysia (2017)
Indonesia (2017)

Transformative Leadership in Action

www.sameskies.org/leadership

Refugee Learning Nest

www.refugeelearningnest.com

Refugee Learning Center

www.refugeelearningcenter.com

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