



Executive Summary

Mission

FORGE is a US-based nonprofit organization that works with displaced communities in Africa. We invest in individuals affected by war to pursue education, economic self-sufficiency, and local development solutions in order to build capacity in African communities and lay the foundation for peace, stability and prosperity.

Vision

FORGE's ultimate objective is to restore peace and security to the African continent. In response to the well-established links between poverty and conflict, FORGE works to enable economic stability and self-sufficiency at individual and societal levels. FORGE facilitates community-driven skills training, educational opportunities, and enrichment activities to refugees who are otherwise dependent on international aid. A focus on empowering refugees to pursue their educational, economic, and social goals enables FORGE leaders to guide their countries to a stable, peaceful and prosperous future.

Approach

FORGE believes in the power of individuals to transform their own lives and the lives of those around them. To this end, FORGE works to cultivate and develop the natural skills and talents of emerging community leaders. By investing in individuals to pursue their economic, educational, or social entrepreneurship goals, FORGE allows solutions to arise from within the community rather than imposing solutions upon the community.

Community Served

An official Operating Partner of the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), FORGE works hand-in-hand with refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan. Now in its fifth year of operation, FORGE has implemented over 60 community development projects that have served more than 60,000 refugees in the four sites in Southern Africa FORGE has worked: Meheba, Mwange, and Kala refugee camps in Zambia, and Dukwi refugee camp in Botswana. FORGE projects and programs are run by a staff of 150 refugees.

Organizational Evolution

History

When FORGE was founded in 2003, the operational model was conceived in the spirit of harnessing the potential of American youth as catalysts of social change. FORGE achieved that goal by recruiting, training and supporting teams of college-age volunteers to design and implement community development projects in collaboration with refugees living in camps in Zambia and Botswana. Representing the best of what today's young adults have to offer, these committed volunteers partnered with refugees as they implemented locally-tailored, sustainable projects that were handed over to the leadership of refugees who now comprise members of FORGE's field staff. Through the growth of FORGE's operations and the knowledge gained from 4 years of project implementation, FORGE is ready to take a bold step in its quest to best serve refugee communities.

People-Powered Community Development

In 2008 onwards, FORGE will launch projects under a new model that will enable it to educate, empower, and enrich the lives of refugees more directly. Instead of recruiting volunteers from the United States to implement projects, FORGE has transferred project facilitation responsibilities to the refugees themselves. FORGE's in-camp Project Managers now recruit and train refugees to develop projects they identify as relevant and viable within their communities. FORGE carries out a rigorous application process, looking to find natural leaders who are capable of spearheading new initiatives. First, refugee leaders target the needs of their communities; then, they design projects to meet those needs.

FORGE's new people-powered development model provides refugees with the opportunity to shape their futures and to develop skills instead of remaining dependent on the international aid community to support their needs. Many of the refugees FORGE works with face the opportunity to repatriate in the very near future, making this new emphasis on community development through refugee leadership all the more urgent to FORGE's effort to end the cycle of war and engender peace in Africa.

Programs and Projects

FORGE programs and projects are locally-tailored to fit the needs of each specific community. Refugee staff members coordinate daily activities, advise on financial needs, and maintain records for each project. FORGE's community development activities are comprised of projects in the areas of Libraries, Computer Technology, Preschool Education, Women's Empowerment, Repatriation Centers, Advocacy Resources, Health Education, Adult Education, and Arts, Music and Culture Activities. In addition, FORGE operates two capacity-building programs that focus on investing in promising individuals: the FORGE Education Fund and the FORGE Microfinance Institute. Thus, FORGE's work highlights three avenues for cultivating self-sufficient communities and individuals: social entrepreneurship, commercial entrepreneurship, and education.

Libraries

As part of an organizational commitment to educational empowerment, FORGE has built and equipped libraries in each of the three camps where FORGE works. Together, these libraries serve more than 50,000 people, and welcome several hundred visitors a day. Beyond providing the largest source of reading material for the camps in languages including French, Swahili, and English, FORGE libraries host several programs to encourage refugees of all ages to visit. The libraries reserve special days for women to come check out books, and place a special emphasis on African writers and African history. A music listening library complete with eight portable CD players draws many to the library in Kala Camp. The Meheba Friendly Library in the Meheba Settlement is considered the largest library in any refugee camp around the world and has been hailed by the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) as "a miracle in the middle of the bush."

Computer Technology

In order to equip individuals with the job skills necessary for an evolving economy, FORGE operates computer training centers in all its sites. Drawing upon state-of-the-art technology designed specifically for rural settings, these solar-powered computer labs house dozens of laptop computers and offer full schedules of classes ranging from basic computer usage to more advanced programming skills. Using the resources of a computer center, refugees produce community newspapers and gain valuable job skills. In total, FORGE's network of computer centers has trained over 1500 people in less than 3 years. Former students who have repatriated to the Democratic Republic of Congo have already been able to procure jobs using the skills they gained at FORGE's computer centers.

Health

In recognition of the inextricable link between community health and economic stability, FORGE places a primary focus on health care and education throughout its camp operations. While each project is designed for each camp, the main objective of FORGE's health projects is to provide individuals with the knowledge necessary to make healthy life decisions. General education topics include HIV/AIDS prevention and care, sexually-transmitted infections, family planning, first aid, anatomy, nutrition, sanitation & hygiene, and reproductive health. In both Mwange Camp and Meheba Settlement, women enroll in Women's Health workshops regularly. In Kala Camp, refugee children participate in after-school

health education classes. FORGE partners with the Zambian Prevention Care and Treatment project (ZPCT) to provide HIV/AIDS testing and care services to some of Zambia's most marginalized occupants in the Meheba Settlement.

Preschools

FORGE currently operates a total of twelve preschools. In Meheba Settlement, FORGE operates two preschools that serve more than 200 children. In Kala Camp, FORGE partners with other NGOs to manage four community preschools that serve more than 1,250 children ages 3-5, and in Mwanze Camp FORGE support 6 preschools that provide classes to 1,500 preschool students daily. The preschools are in high demand, and parents continually encourage FORGE to open additional facilities in new locations.

Women's Empowerment & Safety

FORGE has always prioritized empowering refugee women through women's rights education, skills training and health education. The Women's Center in Mwanze Camp offers refugee-lead health education workshops in maternal health and women's rights advocacy. In the Meheba Settlement, the Women's Center holds discussions on domestic violence that combine with skills training in knitting and tailoring. FORGE has also started a women's lending circle that allows women to save financial resources to develop a local business collectively. To date, FORGE has welcomed more than 4,500 women to its women's programs and also encourages men to participate in all non-exclusive women's empowerment opportunities.

Repatriation Centers

In anticipation of the return of refugees living in Kala and Mwanze Refugee Camps back to the Democratic Republic of Congo, FORGE built and opened two Repatriation Information Centers in 2007. The primary purpose of these centers is to provide refugees considering repatriation with accurate, myth-dispelling information about the logistical details, migration requirements, and services refugees can expect to receive upon arriving back home. Additionally, the two centers conduct classes in non-violent communication, business skills, and community development. FORGE Project Managers attend regular Repatriation Task Force meetings with UNHCR in order to communicate updated and accurate information to the Kala and Mwanze Refugee Camp communities. Unfortunately, given the recent outbreaks of violence in the eastern provinces of Congo, repatriation efforts have halted. However, both FORGE Repatriation Centers are still active resource and education centers for the 40,000 Congolese refugees who remain in Kala and Mwanze.

Advocacy

In 2007 FORGE launched its first rights-advocacy project, the Refugee Advocacy Initiative. Established as a resource center to connect refugees with existing services, the Refugee Advocacy Initiative also helps refugees who encounter discrimination file the relevant reports to document their problems. The Refugee Advocacy Initiative also conducts workshops on refugee rights and human rights, and collaborates with UNHCR and Zambia's Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure that refugees receive the services they deserve. Well into its first year of operation, FORGE's Refugee Advocacy Initiative has already filed several hundred reports and assisted many refugees to attain the services afforded them by international law.

Adult Education

Upon repatriation, it is the adults of the community who will be expected to rebuild their war-torn countries. Unfortunately, within the context of a refugee camp, adults have limited access to educational opportunities. Therefore, FORGE runs programs specifically for providing adults with the skills they need to be productive members of society. In the Meheba Settlement, FORGE offers language classes for adults in French, English, and Portuguese, three languages that will help refugees gain and integrate into society when they repatriate. In Mwanze and Kala Camps, writing programs offer opportunities for refugees to practice formal essay writing, letter writing, resume writing, and handwriting. A volunteer poetry group also provides refugee youth and adults with opportunities for written self-expression.

Arts, Music, and Culture

FORGE recognizes that creative arts are a fundamental tool for overcoming post-traumatic stress disorder and establishing a sense of normalcy in the disrupted lives of refugees. Embracing this position, FORGE proudly operates the only existing arts and music programs in the three camps where it works. Skilled musicians teach classes in guitar and piano to dozens of adults and children every year, and a performance group in Mwange Camp connects dancers with musicians for live performances that draw crowds of hundreds throughout the year. Painting, drawing, and crafts-making activities are also available to children in Meheba Settlement and Mwange Camp. In Kala Camp, a storyteller gathers children every week to narrate stories originating in the Congo. FORGE is committed to the enrichment opportunities these arts projects afford refugees who would otherwise have severely limited access to formalized educational activities in the arts and music.

FORGE Microfinance Institute (FMI)

The FORGE Microfinance Institute (FMI) provides small loans to individuals who wish to create social and economic change through self-reliance and self-employment. Operating in all eight zones of the Meheba Settlement, FMI serves as the community's financial keystone, providing the only lending, savings, and business education services available to the more than 13,000 individual community members. Individually tailoring its loans to the needs of each borrower, the FORGE Microfinance Institute serves as an invaluable financial resource for refugees who would not otherwise be able to establish credit. Since FMI was established in 2006, it has provided more than 200 loans totaling \$40,000 to men and women living in the Meheba Settlement. FMI sees a 93% repayment rate on these loans in Meheba. Loan by loan within this 13,000-member community, FMI has steadily reduced poverty and alleviated dependence on international aid.

FORGE Education Fund

The FORGE Education Fund provides educational sponsorships to refugee youth and young adults who are otherwise unable to afford schooling. Believing strongly in the power of education to inspire and empower, FORGE aims to provide refugees with their right to learn. Scholarships are available for 8th to 12th graders, as well as for those who have been accepted to tertiary education programs and vocational training schools. Sponsorship is limited to those students who wish to receive an education but for reasons outside their control cannot meet the financial requirements of the school or institution. The scholarships cover the cost of tuition, school-related expenses such as books, pens, and uniforms, transportation to and from school, and a small amount of pocket money for miscellaneous expenses. To date FORGE has enabled dozens of secondary and university students to continue their education.

Organizational Structure

FORGE is comprised of over 162 field staff and 3 domestic staff. In addition to the more than 150 staff members who are refugees, FORGE supports twelve volunteer Project Managers and International Communications Managers who help facilitate project sustainability throughout the year. These international staff members monitor all FORGE programs, conduct annual evaluations, and document activities. A team of three full-time directors and twelve part-time volunteer Program Associates work from the United States to raise awareness about FORGE's work, expand donor support, and manage administrative tasks.

Fiscal Efficiency

In 2007 FORGE operated on a budget of approximately \$406,000, more than 95 percent of which was allocated directly to program expenses. Furthermore, all of FORGE's activities to date have been accomplished on a total of less than \$1,000,000. All of FORGE's activities have been achieved without reliance on government funding, through the support of over 3000 individual private donors. Poised for growth, FORGE is launching an innovative website in 2008 that will revolutionize the capacity for interaction between donors and communities on the ground in Africa. In the coming years, FORGE will expand its people-powered development model into other camps and communities of repatriated refugees.