



2020 Impact Report

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Our Mission

To enhance access to quality education for underserved and refugee students.

Education means a brighter future

The mission in detail

Simbi Foundation is on a mission to enhance access to education for underserved and refugee students through community-owned, research-driven, solar-powered education technology innovations.

Together with our partnered school communities, the United Nations Refugee Agency, Think Tank researchers, and our donors, supporters, and backers, we aim to positively impact 3.5 million students in UN refugee settlements.

How will we achieve this?

Over the next ten years, our objective is to collaborate with communities around the world in order to install **210 BrightBox solar classrooms** and **1260 BrightBox Micro** portable digital education kits. These partnerships and installations will support these 3.5 million students in accessing quality, relevant educational resources and content that supplement their existing learning goals.

We believe that education is the key to a brighter future, and that every child, no matter their location, deserves the right to access educational resources available in the 21st Century.





A BrightBox Micro is delivered to Valleyview Secondary School, Bidibidi.

Welcome Letter

We live in a world where technological wonders, digital learning, and instantaneous access to information are improving our lives and societies every day. The tragedy is that hundreds of millions of remote, refugee, and under-resourced students around the world have little to no access to these tools, all while facing barrier after barrier when simply trying to learn.

This is the reality that motivates us at Simbi Foundation. Simply put, we believe that all people, regardless of their geography, should and can have access to quality educational resources and tools available in the 21st century.

In 2020, we recognized the need for our identity to more deeply reflect an underlying philosophy in the organization, which we pursue by prioritizing mutually-beneficial relationships between our partner schools, stakeholders, logistical partners, researchers, and those within our community. We also wished to emphasize our iterative and collaborative approach—powered by our Think Tank of talented researchers and implemented by our growing teams in Uganda, India, and Canada—which ensures the continual provision of value and benefit for our partnered-communities.

With all this in mind, we changed our name to

Simbi Foundation, an NGO built on mutually-beneficial, “symbiotic” relationships and ready to transform access to education.

We can all agree that 2020 came with challenges for all, especially for those in under-resourced and low-income contexts, like our partnered-communities in Uganda and India. Like many other organizations, we at Simbi Foundation saw many of our planned projects for 2020 laid to one side in face of the precarious road ahead. While undoubtedly a setback to our global operations, 2020 provided us with a unique opportunity for deep introspection, leading to our name change, growth in our research and development, and new fundraising initiatives. We also took the time to re-engage with our local community, while forging new relationships with global companies. Our goals? Raise enough funds to install multiple BrightBoxes when we are able to; spread the word of our impact; and engage with companies around the world whose employees are working from home and looking to make an impact from their desks.

These goals culminated in a boosted partnership with the Simbi reading app, where we motivated employees at various companies to donate their voice and time by reading aloud into the platform

through a Read-A-Thon; we added 2,589 narrations through this initiative in the final months of 2020, enhancing benefit and choice for readers around the world.

We’re also excited to announce that our efforts in 2020 have resulted in the culmination of funds to install another four full BrightBox classrooms and three BrightBox Micro kits as soon as we are able to get on the ground again - these BrightBoxes will impact up to 28,000 projected learners in UNHCR refugee settlements.

We learned a great deal in 2020, and we’re so excited to learn more. We saw the power of a united and growing community and its ability to make an impact, spread the word, and give just 2 minutes to help someone else learn to read.

Thank you for being a part of this community. We’re proud of our progress so far, and we’re excited to continue on this journey with you to grow our impact. This impact report is a celebration of our work to date, and an invitation to you to join us in creating a **Brighter Future**.

Aaron Friedland and Ran Sommer
Founders

Changing Our Name

A new era for our organization

In June 2020, our organization undertook an exciting pivot: changing its name from **The Walking School Bus** to **Simbi Foundation**.

Born from collaborative research in remote Uganda, The Walking School Bus set out on a holistic mission to work with partner communities to help students get to school, ensure they had good nutrition when they arrived, and make sure their classrooms were equipped to deliver relevant, quality content. This mission saw communities and The Walking School Bus co-creating many programs, including a school bus model and the BrightBox solar classroom innovation. Over the years—the more we began developing the more sustainable, more impactful BrightBox—we came to realize that while TWSB's school bus model was successful in helping students get to school, saving them time and energy, we could do a lot more to help students once they reach school.

In essence, the name 'The Walking School Bus' no longer aligned with the work that we do, nor did it reflect the philosophy and approach we take in collaborating with our partner communities.

Rooted in our approach was “symbiosis”, the very same word behind Simbi, our partner software organization working to make reading and literacy meaningful, and which was born out of The Walking School Bus literacy research.

Symbiosis (noun): 'the mutually-beneficial and collaborative relationship between different organisms, people, or groups.'

Whether it's our Think Tank, our Research TRIPs, our BrightBoxes, or our collaborative approach with our partner communities, our work is rooted in a symbiosis, which sees communities learning from each other and cooperating to make positive change.

We strongly believe that **Simbi-osis** is critical in tackling the current barriers to learning, in ensuring community voices are upheld, and in supporting the next 3.5 million learners as they navigate their education. That's why The Walking School Bus is now Simbi Foundation. Our vision is unchanged. We're still striving for a world where every learner has access to the quality education resources needed for a brighter future — it's just that our vehicle for that journey is no longer a bus. It's a box.



BrightBox by night, Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda



Our work in
Uganda
— 2020 —





BrightBox Micro training at ValleyView Secondary School, Bidibidi

Growing the BrightBox

Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda

In February 2020, the Simbi Foundation operational team traveled to Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Northern Uganda.

The first goal of the trip was to solidify our partnerships with three new partner schools in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement;

- Alaba Primary School (Zone 2),
- Yoyo Secondary School (Zone 3)
- Valleyview Secondary School (Zone 1)

Each of these schools received a BrightBox Micro portable education kit, consisting of reading tablets, a wifi router, a projector, and a microcomputer housing Simbi Learn Cloud - our unique digital curriculum platform providing access to supplementary digital curriculum and software. Further, both Alaba and Yoyo received a solar panel to power the new technology, while ValleyView were able to connect the BrightBox to their existing solar power supply.

These schools were selected by the United Nations Refugee Agency, ensuring that Simbi Foundation provides fair and equitable services across the multiple zones and primary and secondary schools of Bidibidi.

The second goal of this trip was to visit Twajiji Primary school (Zone 1), the site of our first full BrightBox installation in Bidibidi settlement, and conduct key, research-based monitoring and evaluation activities, including:

- Collection of data from a pre-post literacy study carried out by teachers at the school, demonstrating an 80% comprehension boost when utilizing BrightBox-incorporated Simbi reading technology
- Further investigation of the BrightBox's server capacity, wifi reach, and curriculum usability
- Evaluation and optimization of the BrightBox solar performance
- Further discussions with school teachers about supporting girls' access to education.

Finally, the trip also saw Simbi Foundation Uganda trainers delivering a teacher technology training session at ValleyView secondary. These sessions help ensure project sustainability, ensuring teachers are equipped with the skills they need to experience the full benefits of technology integration in their classrooms, helping mitigate high student-to-textbook and student-to-teacher ratios.

Global Impact Update

2020

2

BrightBox

5

BrightBox Micro

6

Core Setups



2

BrightBox

5

BrightBox Micro



IMPACT SINCE 2015

37,000

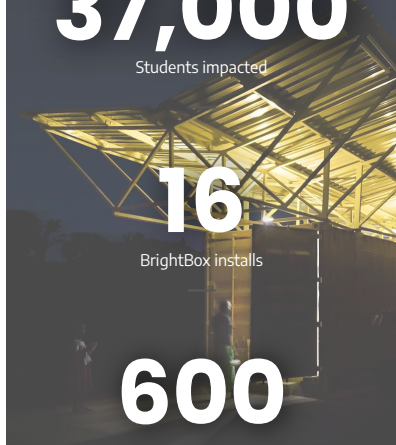
Students impacted

16

BrightBox installs

600

Teachers Technology
Trained



Our Operations

2020



Windle Trust
Uganda

EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PEOPLE



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

**Education is a right
for every child**



ValleyView Secondary School, Bidibidi
Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

Growth in 2020

Our operations

Since its inception in 2015, Simbi Foundation has operated as a non-profit charity headquartered in Vancouver, Canada. The organization has since founded two new operational chapters in Uganda and India, and has developed three global teams of trainers, strategists, communications experts, tech specialists, software developers, solar engineers, and more.

In 2020, our team grew to over 50 staff, volunteers, and researchers, all passionate about and dedicated to making access to education a reality.

We are also excited to announce a new funding partnership with the Gupta Family Foundation and Simbi Foundation's

\$100,000 win of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Global Prosperity Initiative for Peace & Justice.

Since COVID-19 affected our global operational capacity, our staff focused on internal and outreach organizational development. These efforts culminated in two new core projects that allow the organization to connect with more people than ever before:

- Virtual Simbi Foundation **Read-A-Thons** with organizations, helping to populate and diversify the Simbi library with more voices, accents, and languages.
- A social impact podcast called **Impact in the 21st Century**, which has featured Alex Honnold, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Ndileka Mandela, and more.

Key Program Areas



BRIGHTBOX



TRAINING



RESEARCH




SCHOLARSHIPS





BrightBox at Twajiji Primary School, BidiBidi.


Research in 2020


Key Project Developments


Project	Literacy.	
Goal	To innovate literacy-boosting tools and analyse the BrightBox's capacity to enhance literacy.	
Progress	In July 2019, literacy researchers collaborated with school teachers at Twajiji Primary School to collect comprehension and Words Correct Per Minute data from students. A 10-week study was then carried out by teachers, in which 85 students (56% girls, 44% boys) used Simbi "reading-while-listening" software in the BrightBox for a 10-week period. After another closing comprehension test, results were collected in February 2020 and demonstrated a comprehension boost of up to 80% after using Simbi in the BrightBox for x minutes per day over the 6 month period.	

Project	COVID-19 Classroom Response.	
Goal	To support communities with optimizing learning spaces during the pandemic.	
Progress	This project began in response to COVID-19, with the goal of supporting low-resource partner communities in refugee settlements in Uganda with safely using learning facilities. The project has been developing a digital tool which teachers and other school staff could use to quickly calculate how many students can safely occupy a classroom space in accordance with social distancing measures.	


Project	Gender-Based Analysis.	
Goal	To analyse and understand intersectional barriers preventing girls from accessing education.	
Progress	After an initial July 2019 focus group study with women in Block 10, Zone 1, Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, and February 2020 collection of school attendance data and teacher surveys, the GBA team penned a comprehensive report outlining recommendations for furthering Simbi Foundation programming to better support girls' access to education. Key recommendations include pursuing a menstrual health support program and providing girls' health digital content through BrightBox.	

Project	BrightBox Server.	
Goal	To expand the reach and capacity of the BrightBox Intranet connectivity system, allowing more connections to Simbi Learn Cloud from further away.	
Progress	Following the July 2019 BrightBox installation at Twajiji Primary School, February 2020 saw researchers testing the connectivity system, recording the distances between BrightBox and surrounding school classrooms, and identifying obstacles in order that enhancements to the system's reach could be pursued.	

Project	User Experience/User Interface.	
Goal	To better understand digital learning challenges faced by students and teachers in Simbi Foundation partner schools, and optimize the Simbi Learn Cloud curriculum platform design to be as accessible as possible.	
Progress	This project began in spring 2020, after field observations and discussions made clear that the existing Simbi Learn Cloud curriculum platform was not providing the most accessible learning experience for teachers and students who use the platform to supplement their existing goals. After an in-depth review of the challenges, as well as virtual surveys with teachers at Twajiji Primary School, a new design was finalized for development in December 2020..	

Project	BrightBox Solar Charging Revenue Optimization.	
Goal	To understand all externalities of this model, and recommend optimizations.	
Progress	The BrightBox enables community members to charge a device for a locally-matched fee. This fee is split between the community and Simbi Foundation (for future BrightBoxes). A new research project began in late 2020 to analyse this model's positive and negative externalities, its impact on the immediate community and other ventures in the vicinity, and the distribution of funds. A report outlining recommendations is expected in 2021.	



 Collaborative research at Twajiji Primary School, Bidibidi.

Research & Development

Simbi Foundation Think Tank

2020 was a year of significant progress for the Simbi Foundation Think Tank. The year saw a record number of new members join the Think Tank, as well as the start of many new research projects that will provide enhanced value for our partnered communities.

In February 2020, Simbi Foundation researchers and staff were able to further our projects in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement. This includes our Gender-Based Analysis project, our literacy research, and our BrightBox server enhancement.

After February 2020, the Think Tank research cycle, a strong component of which is data collection and community collaboration, was forced to pivot due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent inability to make assessments in the field with school closures. To advance our research, creativity was required, and focus was shifted away from on-the-ground data collection and towards projects requiring

foundational and background research, results analysis, or future planning. Despite this pivot, the Think Tank was pleased to welcome 20 new researchers to the team, coming from a variety of universities, including the University of British Columbia, Queen's University, Vanderbilt University, and more. This pivot of focus in our research approach also saw nine new projects commence, including:

- Optimization of the BrightBox water catchment design.
- An analysis of the BrightBox's device charging revenue model.
- A e-waste project seeking to determine the most sustainable and feasible e-waste program for Simbi Foundation.

We sincerely thank our researchers for their continued dedication, commitment, and creativity during these uncertain times. We look forward to restarting research and collaboration activities with partner communities when safe to do so.

130

Researchers since 2015

9

New Projects in 2020

Leadership Team

2020



Co-Founder, Director of Operations

Ran Sommer

With a Master's degree focusing on social justice, communication, advocacy, and community involvement, Ran has worked with non-profit organizations throughout his career and will lead Simbi Foundation's 5-year collaboration with the UNHCR to support students in refugee settlements in Uganda.



Founder, Executive Director

Aaron Friedland

Aaron Friedland is a National Geographic Explorer, Founder, and PhD candidate. His research in the field of econometrics is focused on the intersection of economics and education. Dedicated to enhancing access to quality education for all, Aaron will continue to set the vision for Simbi Foundation and its work.



Director of India Operations

Sukriti Sachar

Sukriti is a founder, entrepreneur, and is passionate about social impact. In 2016, Sukriti founded the India Chapter of Simbi Foundation. Collaborating with communities in Uttarakhand, India and Think Tank researchers, Sukriti continues to adapt the BrightBox model to this context.



Director of Uganda Operations

Mukasa Moses

Mukasa is an experienced Humanitarian Programming Director in the non-profit emergency response and development settings in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on SGBV and child protection, mental health, and psychosocial support. Mukasa has an MSc in Public Health, and BA in Social Sciences.



Technology Coordinator - Uganda

Aaron Tokwaro

Aaron is a marketing and tech enthusiast passionate about influencing change and impact through marketing. Over the past years, he has built experiences working in the renewable energy industry. Finalizing his Economics degree from Makerere University, Aaron will support Simbi Foundation's BrightBox training program.



Technology Coordinator - Uganda

Earnest Baguma

Earnest is a passionate IT professional. A bachelor of Information Technology from Makerere University, he has been actively engaged in the ICT sector for the past five years, and established KIDCO, a computer training project for children and women in his community. Earnest will transfer these skills to the BrightBox training program.

Upcoming Projects

2021



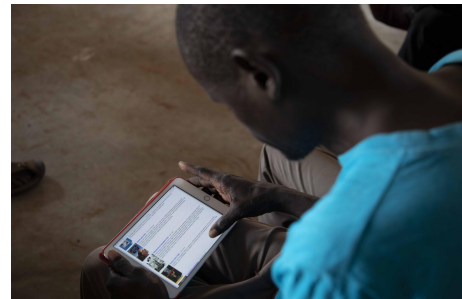
BrightBox: Bidibidi

As one of the winners of the Global Prosperity Initiative 2020, and thanks to the generosity of the Gupta Family Foundation, Simbi Foundation will be partnering with four new schools in Bidibidi and the UNHCR to install **four new BrightBox classrooms**, providing relevant and supplementary content, teacher technology training technology and hardware, and renewable energy to communities.



Bike Share Expansion


Simbi Foundation began a pilot Bike Share program at Twajiji Primary School, Bidibidi settlement in July 2019. Since then, sufficient funds have been raised through the new 1000M Cycling Club to install the next 100 bikes in Bidibidi Settlement in late 2021. The Bike Share is a community-led and -organized rotational model that sees new students using the bikes each school term to reduce hours of long walks to school and back every day.



Virtual Training

COVID-19 lockdowns and distancing measures in 2020 resulted in an inability to conduct the in-person Simbi Foundation teacher technology training in Uganda. Given our plans to scale our services in refugee settlements in Uganda, pre-installation training is essential for community ownership and sustainability. 2020 saw a new Simbi Foundation Uganda-based team of trainers developing a new suite of built-in BrightBox training videos for school teachers in partner communities.



 Deputy Headmaster Akena Baptist narrates his story into Simbi in the BrightBox classroom at Twajiji Primary, Bidibidi.

Financial Model 2020

Simbi Foundation generates revenue through the following primary methods:

- General Donations
- Corporate/Private Funding
- Grants
- Fundraisers and other initiatives

As a research-driven, impact-centric non-profit organization, Simbi Foundation is committed to putting every dollar it can towards supporting schools, teachers, students, and the wider community to overcome barriers of access to education.

As for many charities, 2020 made this goal a challenge. With an inability to conduct work on-the-ground beyond February 2020, further BrightBox installations and collaborative research initiatives had to be postponed. While this has undoubtedly been a setback to our impact and mission, this period of introspection did allow us to increase our efforts on vocalizing our work, projects, and challenges faced by learners in our partner communities through many virtual channels.

Through grants, donations, fundraisers, and corporate engagements held throughout 2020 -

most notably our win of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Global Prosperity Initiative's Innovation for Peace & Justice and a generous donation from the Gupta Family Foundation - Simbi Foundation successfully secured the funds for four additional BrightBox classrooms and three BrightBox Micro kits in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Yumbe, Uganda.

While a cornerstone success for Simbi Foundation, this receipt of funds - in combination with the inability to conduct work on the ground - has resulted in our 2020 financial statements demonstrating a far lower spend on impact activities (BrightBox installations) than we would hope.

To mitigate this, spending was increased on Research & Development to best prepare Simbi Foundation for scaling its work and impact in Uganda and India in 2021. This mitigation is reflected in the statements provided.

We sincerely thank our donors, supporters, and partners for their continued trust and backing during this uncertain year. We look forward to scaling our impact with you in 2021.

Financials

January 1st 2020 – December 31st 2020

Revenues

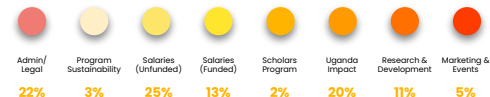
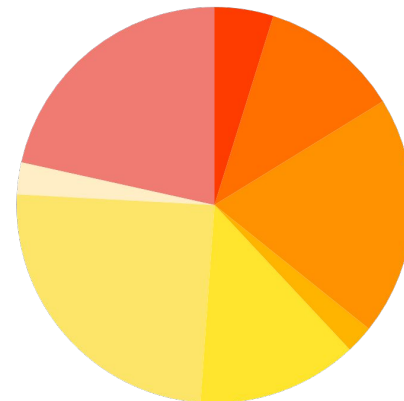
General donations	2,500.00
BrightBox Micro Purchases	20,700.00
Scholarship donations	3,500.00
Sponsorships	25,000.00
Grants & Contribution Agreements	126,300.00
Salary grants (students)	42,500.00
Fundraisers	27,050.00
TOTAL	247,500.00 CAD

Income minus expenses*	\$93,858.84
Accounts receivable	\$114,800.00

*Capital is earmarked for BrightBox installations which were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and are now slated for install in 2021.

Expenses

Uganda Impact	30,000.00
Marketing & Events	7,400.00
Research & Development	17,542.00
Salaries (Funded Students)	20,149.16
Salaries (Unfunded Students)	38,000.00
Program Maintenance & Sustainability	4,000.00
Scholars (India & Uganda)	3,500.00
Admin/Legal/Contractors/Technical Expenses	33,100.00
TOTAL	153,691.16 CAD





Major Donors

2020

We sincerely thank our donors for their support this year. Your contributions continue to make our work enhancing access to education possible.

Gupta Family Foundation

Global Prosperity Award

Greygates Foundation

Zacks Family Foundation

Sterling Floor and Tile

Fish Cafe

WELL Health

Des Friedland and Associates

GET IN TOUCH

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V5Z 1S7 Canada



MAKE AN IMPACT

Make an impact and support access to education by giving. Click below to learn more:

[Donate >](#)

