



## HRI Capability Statement 2021

### **INTRODUCTION**

Hunger Relief International (HRI) was established in 2010 to address the immediate and long-term needs of children in countries where large segments of the population suffer from extreme poverty. Haiti had just suffered a catastrophic, deadly earthquake which exacerbated poverty conditions in the poorest country in the hemisphere and one of the 15 poorest countries in the world. Guatemala has a long history of having the fourth highest rate in the world of chronic malnutrition in children under the age of five and a large percentage of the population living in extreme poverty. Over the last decade, HRI programs have made a direct impact in the lives of thousands of children, families, local institutions and communities in both countries.

HRI focuses on building family and community resiliency, strengthening the family unit and establishing household self-reliance with the goal of improving outcomes for children. HRI takes a child-focused, culturally relevant, needs-based approach to this work. HRI utilizes a combination of local capacity building for sustainable impact and direct assistance to address emergent and continuing needs. HRI works to ensure that every child resides in a nurturing, safe and loving environment, supportive of their growth, health, and education, thus creating the conditions to break the multi-generational cycle of poverty experienced daily by so many. This strategy aligns closely with the USAID sustainable impact approach.

HRI serves children where they live, play and learn. This means HRI builds resilience in homes, schools and community-based institutions, which gives both the power and responsibility for child outcomes and protection to family members, caregivers, teachers and local leaders. These individuals and institutions are equipped to properly protect the welfare of the children in their care so they are fully empowered to be the lead actors and change agents in facilitating community progress in child health, welfare, and education. The children and young adults are provided with the tools and knowledge to protect themselves, their peers, siblings, friends and neighbors, fostering an improved longer-term environment in the community as they mature and become caregivers themselves.

HRI understands that achieving sustainable community development requires systemic change in many traditional behaviors and local community policies and laws, as well as a long-term investment in individuals, families and community-based organizations. Simultaneously, HRI recognizes that these change agents that are being capacitated have immediate needs that must be met in order to produce healthy outcomes. On the way to achieving long-term, sustainable objectives, HRI commits human and financial resources right from the start and continues to work alongside the target populations throughout the cooperative engagement. HRI seeks their commitment in return; progress requires an equal understanding and application of the partnership during the engagement and sustained hard work from both HRI and the community throughout the process.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY**

HRI delivers better outcomes for children by building institutional, community and household capacity to independently address immediate and long-term risks to children's health and well-being.

Since 2010, HRI has implemented targeted capacity building workshops for institutions, communities, heads of households, parents and caregivers, and youth. These activities have focused on safeguarding children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect, and equipping those responsible for the care of children with the necessary knowledge and applicable skills to protect and care for them in a safe and responsible manner.

### I. Institutional Capacity Building

HRI has worked with over 30 residential and faith based institutions and schools since 2010 to improve child protection policies and practices. HRI has implemented hundreds of training workshops with over 200 institutional leaders and staff who teach and care for children. The goal in this program is to empower and strengthen change agents in the community and within community institutions. Systemic change can only occur when there is motivated buy-in from the change agents themselves.

More than 3,000 children have benefited from HRI's work with institutional leadership. This is demonstrated in tangible ways with improved facilities such as up-to-date bathrooms or latrines, improved home living conditions, measurably improved health as a result of better personal hygiene, improved access to nutritious food, access to regular medical exams, and increased enrollment and participation in formal education, all facilitated by well-prepared leadership.

### II. Strengthening Family Resilience and Self-Reliance in the Face of Extreme Poverty

Since 2017, HRI has worked with over 130 adult parents and caregivers, 125 of whom are women heads of households, in severely economically under-resourced communities of Port Au Prince, Haiti. All of these parents and caregivers (e.g. aunts, grandparents) were struggling to feed, clothe and educate their children; many had plans to take them to orphanages where they believed the children would receive better nutrition, healthcare and an education.

A twenty-four session training curriculum, developed by HRI, helped to strengthen the resilience of these households. The first sixteen sessions focused on child rearing techniques, non-violent communications skills, conflict resolution applicable within the home and community, general life skills, and other child safeguarding techniques. By providing one-year school scholarships to the children of these extremely vulnerable families, HRI has achieved near 100% attendance by parents and primary caregivers. The participants gained the skills needed not only to provide better care for the children, but many went on to become effective leaders within their own communities.

The last eight sessions of the training curriculum focused on improving household incomes - teaching participants basic, albeit essential, business skills. These included marketing, bookkeeping, business planning and the creation of Savings Groups. Those who are successful in the Business Training component of the curriculum may, after submitting a HRI approved business plan (either for expansion of a current business or for a new business) receive a small loan from HRI to pursue their efforts. These adults/heads of household and caregivers are prepared and equipped to earn sufficient income to feed, clothe, and educate their children.

In 2017, 2018 and 2019, 95% of participants repaid their micro-loans (no micro-loans were processed in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic) and all of their children were enrolled in school the following year with tuition paid by the parent.

The family itself is an institution, and therefore, the most fundamental level at which to achieve sustainable impact. Equipping parents to better care for their children will systematically change the cycle of poverty to one of enabling healthy, prosperous lives. From 2017 to the present, HRI has improved the

household incomes of more than 100 families and reduced the risk of abandonment and vulnerability to trafficking for more than 500 children. Not one child of any participant in the program has been abandoned or trafficked. HRI's approaches have consciously offered and tested potential solutions for scaling up with additional resources, in one of the most difficult environments in the Western Hemisphere.

### III. Youth Engagement and Leadership Development

Youth growing up in highly impoverished and dangerous communities face innumerable challenges including lack of prospective employment, lack of access to formal education and few opportunities for economic betterment. HRI Youth Engagement programs combat this tragic reality and demonstrate attainable, attractive alternatives for youth.

At-risk youth benefit from motivational activities that teach life skills, leadership skills, communication skills, conflict resolution skills and more. The goal is to prepare and empower a new generation of engaged citizens and leaders by equipping and encouraging older children and young adults to be active participants and agents of positive change in their own homes and communities. Since 2018, HRI has served over 750 youth through 230 intensive and personalized self-reliance training events.

Through this program, HRI also trains and places young community leaders in Municipal Youth Commissions and community leadership committees. Essentially, HRI is developing a group within the group - young leaders that can responsibly and maturely represent their peers in the larger sector of community, government and municipal leadership.

### IV. HRI's Innovative Modeling Approach

HRI's long-term commitment to children and youth, their families and caregivers requires intensive investment in HRI's work. HRI believes that this is the surest way to achieve a sustainable impact in their lives and to empower them to directly contribute to progress in their own communities. However, we also recognize that donor funding must be efficiently and efficaciously applied by enabling systemic change beyond the household so that newly-introduced behaviors and skills become accepted practice, fully assimilated into individual, institutional and community behavior patterns, that continue to improve lives after HRI programs and external donor funding end.

We do this by modelling our innovative and smaller-scale projects for replication in other communities, expanding our reach while staying true to our culturally relevant, tailored approach to sustainable positive change. Only by capacitating families, institutional and community leaders, and others who have a lifelong commitment to our partner communities can we ensure that the children living there will have a better environment to grow and learn today and into the future.

HRI has program models that are adaptable based on the expressed needs and interests of our partners – the institutional, community and family leaders. These adaptable models enable our partners to learn and apply skills based on their realities, their cultures and traditions, and their future aspirations.

HRI's ability to achieve goals set forth in collaboration with partners and funders reinforces strong programs and partnerships. These positive experiences serve to facilitate the organization's capacity to replicate and/or expand existing programs. The retention of applicable documentation of past performance and lessons learned enables our well trained, professionally led teams to implement robust monitoring and evaluation.

## V. Responding to Emergent Needs of At Risk Children

As previously mentioned, HRI utilizes a combination of local capacity building for long-term, sustainable change and direct assistance to address emergent needs. Today's at-risk child requires immediate responses.

- (1) Nutrition: Fortified, nutritious food is essential to the cognitive and physical development of infants and toddlers aged six months to three years. HRI has provided fortified food supplements to over 2,000 children living in both traditional households and alternative care facilities since 2010. This has been implemented in partnership with local, governmental, and international partners, committed to and tasked with strengthening the nutritional health of vulnerable children.

Key components to ensure the success and sustainability of this strategy:

- Children at risk of, or already suffering from, any degree of under- or malnutrition immediately receive the assistance they need for survival.
- Parents and caregivers are required to participate in workshops designed to teach them effective ways to prevent under- and malnutrition within their limited budgets.

Results:

- Over 95% of our past child participants no longer require supplemental nutrition programs.
- Follow ups with the children over 3, 6 and 12 months and their mothers demonstrated improved nutrition in the home and/or residential facility.

- (2) WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene): Diarrhea and respiratory illness are among the top killers of children under the age of five years in developing countries. HRI created the “Trifecta Program” to ensure vulnerable children and families have access to three critical resources that address these health and safety risks: water filters, latrines/bathrooms, and safe cookstoves. Providing all three improves child outcomes by decreasing water-borne and respiratory illnesses and burn injuries in children and adults of all ages.

Key components to ensure the ROI and sustainability of this strategy:

- With a financial contribution from each recipient, 200 water filters, cookstoves, and latrines and bathrooms were installed in homes and residential facilities since 2014.
- All recipients participated in an obligatory training where they learned about construction, proper usage, and maintenance of equipment or facilities.

Results:

- Over a period of 6 years nearly 100% of these resources are still in use and other families, institutions and communities have built and installed many more on their own. This is a testament to the capacity of our local partners to directly contribute to improved child outcomes.
- Illnesses including diarrhea and respiratory illness have decreased by over 90% in children living in project supported homes with these three critical resources.

- (3) Equitable Access to Education: HRI has ensured access to education to over 4,500 children in slum communities, rural villages and institutions where free education is not available or comes at a prohibitive cost for poor families, especially for girls. For example, the cost of required school supplies, uniforms or shoes is beyond the means of the parents.

Key components to ensure the ROI and sustainability of this strategy:

- Through the provision of breakfast or lunch programs by HRI, school enrollment and attendance increased to 100% of school aged children in participating communities, ensuring access to education to all children – girls and boys.

Results:

From our original beneficiary group of 4,500 children, 90% are regularly enrolled in school, over 80% attend school on at least 90% of school days, and 85% have already graduated from at least primary school.

#### VI. Financial Capacity

HRI has put in place strong, transparent financial internal controls and reporting systems that meet the highest standards of accountability. HRI has received outstanding audit reports in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Since 2010, all required financial statements and tax filings required as a 501 c 3 organization have been submitted annually, including audited financial statements for 2018, 2019 and 2020. Financial statements are available upon request, or they can be viewed on HRI's GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency, which HRI has maintained for many years.

### APPENDIX I

#### **BOARD AND LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY:**

Leadership in HRI Headquarters and Field Offices shares over 100 years relief and development experience. Our country directors in Haiti and Guatemala have extensive experience with INGOs, USAID and the UN, and have formed highly skilled teams. Because we consistently deliver impact to our clients and we pride ourselves on being easy to work with, our strong in-country networks allow us to tap into a wide variety of high-quality professional services and technical support on behalf of those we serve. Most importantly, we have developed solid, long-term, and trust-based relationships in both Haiti and Guatemala with grassroots organizations, community leadership, teachers and other community service providers and, of course, with the children, families and communities with whom we work.

HRI employs and contracts only host country nationals to implement our programs in their respective countries. We believe that over the last 50+ years of international development work, local professionals have received significant training and gained the expertise to lead sustainable development efforts. They are by far the best and most respected role models within their own countries and cultures.

Our headquarters team has worked on and directed development, assistance, and refugee programs in North America, South America, Africa, Europe and Asia.

#### STAFF

**CEO Rachel Zelon** has been working in the field of humanitarian assistance and development for over three decades. Rachel was a founding member of HRI in 2010. Her energies have been focused on child protection, promoting the rights of children, and working towards a world where children's rights include having access to all basic needs. Her leadership has resulted in the promotion of expanded access to critical nutrition, clean water, decent sanitation, health care, and education for vulnerable children living in extreme poverty. In recent years, the scope of her work has expanded to include the fight against child

trafficking within institutionalized care facilities in Haiti through the development of programs directed at keeping families together and decreasing abandonment and trafficking by desperate parents or caregivers. Rachel spent 15 years working in the refugee field and she was featured on CNN Newsnight in 2004 for her accomplishments evacuating many of the last remaining Jews from Baghdad. Rachel has her Master's Degree in Social Work.

**CFO, Steve Whetstone**, has dedicated a nearly 40 year career to serving low income and vulnerable families through nonprofits. He began working with small businesses to create jobs for low income households and then transitioned to working in the nonprofit sector, focusing on nonprofit accounting, legal compliance, board development, strategic planning, logistics & distribution, partner development, special projects, disaster response, communications, media, fundraising, program development and more. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance.

**Senior Consultant, Ken Patterson** has been developing and directing international development projects since 1997 in South Asia, West and Central Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. Much of his work focused on creating projects that respond to refugee and forced migration crises caused by war or internal political strife. Ken has also designed and directed several agriculture business development and microfinance projects, as well as the first comprehensive anti-trafficking project in the Balkans. He received his Juris Doctorate in 1993.

**Director of Donor Relations and Communications, Jennifer Jones** has worked in international development and organization management since 2003. She is recognized for growing nonprofits through partner development, fundraising, grant and foundation partnerships, communications, volunteer management, and more. Jennifer has improved and expanded development projects and monitoring and evaluation in the field across multiple continents. She has worked with local and federal law enforcement and other agencies to identify and serve victims of child trafficking in the U.S. and abroad and is credited for opening a successful rehabilitation home. Jennifer has her Bachelor's Degree in Communication.

**Country Director, Haiti, Dr. Dominique GEORGES** has worked for ten years in the field of public health with a focus on program management and implementation. In Haiti, she worked for eight years in the public and private sectors through the Ministry of Health and international NGOs. She has expertise in community health, health system strengthening and emergency response. She worked for two years in the United States on a health system strengthening project supporting local ministries of health in three West African countries and on a project involved in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among vulnerable populations. In 2010, following the devastating earthquake and cholera epidemic in Haiti, Dr Georges supported a project in Petite-Rivière de l'Artibonite aimed at improving the education and hygiene of children seriously affected by poverty. She obtained her medical degree in Haiti and her Master's Degree in Public Health in the United States through a Fulbright scholarship. She obtained a Masters of Science in Tropical and Infectious Diseases in the UK. She also holds a certificate in HIV / AIDS Program Management from Galilee International Management Institute, Israel.

**Country Director, Guatemala, Hector Alay** is a Guatemalan professional that has been working in the development sector with churches, NGOs, and local organizations for more than two decades. Hector brings to HRI new ideas, a wide array of diverse partners, versatility and growth that has called the attention of government institutions and other NGOs in the country. His efforts focus on developing social capital, opening opportunities for leadership within the communities, especially youth and women, and engaging these leaders as the main protagonists of their own agents of change, contributing to the autonomy of the communities. Hector has a Master's Degree in Education for Development and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A strong and committed Board of Directors is vital to HRI's continued organizational development. From a still-active core of founding members, the board has methodically and carefully brought on new professionals with directly applicable professional skills and demonstrated commitment to our mission of service to the most vulnerable. Two board members are career international development professionals with over 80 years of collective experience, including executive level positions within INGOs, USAID, and international agencies.

The other Board members include a medical doctor who advises our child nutrition and health-related programming, a successful business owner who contributes to our entrepreneurship initiatives, the head of a family foundation with expertise in marketing, and one Orthodox priest who provides direct insight into relationship building with faith-based partners.

## APPENDIX II

### DONOR & VOLUNTEER TESTIMONIALS

Our work has significantly evolved as HRI works to improve and protect the lives of desperately poor children and families by building resiliency, fighting hunger, promoting family unity, and increasing self-sufficiency and household incomes – even during times of crisis including the COVID-19 pandemic. HRI has provided more than 14.7 million meals to date, but it is the transformational change in families, institutions and communities we are most honored to facilitate. The following testimonials help to illustrate our approach, values, and commitment to this work:

*1.) Testimony of Donor: It can be difficult when choosing the right organizations to support but Hunger Relief International was an easy choice for our family. My husband and son have both been a part of mission teams with HRI and seeing the work first hand was incredible. HRI looks for unique ways to not only meet the needs of the people they serve but they also look for ways to help people and villages become self-sustainable to strengthen future generations. We receive regular updates on the impact past projects continue to have on the communities supported by HRI and new projects in the works.*

*2.) Testimony of Donor and Mission Trip Participant: I've had the privilege of donating and volunteering with HRI in its support of several villages in Guatemala. HRI goes far beyond being a charity. HRI is a fully committed partner in empowering the impoverished villages in rural Guatemala. They have taken strategic steps in choosing projects that build infrastructure of health, safety, sanitation, and education. I witnessed firsthand how HRI empowered families with the supplies and support to build latrines. Providing families with a necessity for everyday life, improved living conditions, and dignity. Projects like that along with water filters and safe cook stoves, allow a family to raise their children in a safe and healthy environment. Children that can thrive and learn instead of being sick and hungry. HRI is giving hope to the hopeless with these projects led by local staff who are committed and dedicated to improving the lives of their neighbors. A staff that is passionate for and familiar with the struggles of the villages they serve. I highly recommend HRI as a great organization.*

*3.) Testimony of Donor and Mission Trip Participant: It is an honor and a blessing to partner with HRI, an organization which not only meets the immediate needs of those in crisis, but also helps to provide them a path to self-sufficiency. Yes, they feed the hungry. But they also work toward long term nutrition. Yes, they provide healthcare to the sick. But they also engage in long term wellness efforts. Yes, they provide education; education which leads to employability. Yes, they provide child care; child care which reduces child abandonment and provides parents the opportunity to work. I know this because I've been*

*allowed to participate in many of these programs. I've seen it first-hand. And I've seen the people at HRI working humbly, sacrificially, and graciously toward these goals.*

*4) Testimony of a Volunteer Nurse: Last year when we did the clinic in Los Chilitos, we saw so many infants and children with profound respiratory issues. When we listened with a stethoscope to the breaths of babies and young children, it was like we were listening to adults who had been long-time smokers. We treated multiple kids and adults for pneumonia and restrictive airway disease. I'm thrilled to say this year we had no respiratory issues in Los Chilitos! It is very clear to me that the stoves we installed work! By venting the smoke through the chimney, infants, children and adults are able to breathe clean air resulting in healthy lungs. I wish we could quantify the return on the investment - but how do you put a dollar amount on breathing easy and having healthy lungs?! Priceless.*

## **BENEFICIARY TESTIMONIALS**

*1.) Testimony of a 37-year old, single mother who shared the impact of HRI programs in her own family living in the slum community of Delmas 33, Port Au Prince:*

*“Before Naila was enrolled in school through the HRI program, the atmosphere in our home was chaotic. Naila was struggling with poor behavior, she was acting out, being disruptive and sometimes even shouting to draw attention to herself. I did not know what to do, and often became angry. I was making a tough situation worse and the angrier I became, the more she acted out.*

*After attending the HRI-sponsored parenting workshops, I felt able to address the chaos in our household from a position of knowledge and understanding instead of anger. The workshops helped me to reassess my own core values, which I also understood are reflected in my children's behavior and the values they are adopting as they grow. I wanted to teach my children better values!”*

*2.) Testimony of a 14 year old participant in HRI's Youth Engagement and Leadership Program in Guatemala:*

*“The HRI program helped me to understand that there are good people in this world, people that do not ask for anything in return. I was made to feel special and that my words and opinions matter. I learned to not always think about everything bad all of the time and that family is the most important and that school is the most important. I dream of becoming a doctor and going with HRI to help other countries in need just as they have helped us in Guatemala.”*