

Building Hope Through Sport in Chad



The Impacts iACT's Refugees United Soccer Academy and 2025 Coaching Symposium



DATE

April 17-19, 2025

LOCATION

Djabal Refugee Camp, Goz Beida, Chad



THE CONTEXT

Since 2003, millions of people from Darfur have been displaced by violence and instability, with many crossing into eastern Chad in search of safety. Over time, refugee camps like Djabal have become more than temporary shelters; they are home to entire generations of refugee families. For thousands of children and youth, life in these camps is the only reality they've known.

Amidst the daily challenges of displacement, the opportunity to play is not a luxury, it is a lifeline. Sports offer a space for healing, connection, and joy. They are a powerful tool for nurturing leadership, restoring dignity, and building community. Through the Refugees United Soccer Academy (RUSA), adults and children can reclaim a sense of purpose, agency, and belonging.

Yet, despite the clear impact of sports on wellbeing and community resilience, such programs continue to be overlooked in humanitarian responses. As global funding priorities shift and governments lack the will to care for refugees, programs that center play and psychosocial support are often the first to be cut. This leaves refugee children without the very spaces that allow them to thrive in the face of adversity.

At iACT, we believe that all children — regardless of their circumstances — deserve the chance to play. Investing in sports is not secondary; it is essential to building a future rooted in hope and human potential.



REFUGEES UNITED SOCCER ACADEMY (RUSA)

iACT's RUSA employs and resources men and women in conflict-affected communities to co-create soccer programs that reflect the needs, hopes, and strengths of children and their families, and fill a critical gap in access to sports and play.

RUSA blends skills, drills, and team-building with a coaching approach grounded in social and emotional wellbeing for girls and boys ages 6 to 13. Developed in collaboration with experienced coaches and child development experts, the program's Kicks & Hope curriculum is adaptable

to diverse contexts. It builds soccer skills while integrating social-emotional learning, helping children make friends, build confidence, develop life skills, and experience joy through daily play.

With a strong emphasis on gender equality, each academy is led by two women and two men from the local community. RUSA is more than a soccer program, through the academy, refugee and conflict-affected children are linked with soccer players and clubs around the world, expanding their sense of possibility and belonging.

RUSA CHAD 2025 COACHING SYMPOSIUM

Held from April 17 to 19 at Refugee Camp Djabal, the RUSA Chad 2025 Coaching Symposium brought together **45 coaches (24 male, 21 female) from 12 refugee camps** dispersed along the Chad-Sudan border to reflect, learn, and have fun together. Rooted in iACT's commitment to resourcing refugees to lead, the symposium served as a collaborative space to celebrate progress, confront challenges, and chart the path forward for community-led sports programming across camps in eastern Chad.

The symposium was designed to:

- ▶ Strengthen how RUSA is implemented day-to-day by creating space for coaches and coordinators to share what's working, troubleshoot challenges together, and build a shared vision and practice across all camps.
- ▶ Deepen the sense of togetherness between coaches, families, and community members – recognizing that RUSA thrives when everyone feels ownership and pride in the program.
- ▶ Grow coach confidence and capacity through hands-on learning, storytelling, and peer mentorship.
- ▶ Pause and reflect on impact, asking not just what's happening, but how it's felt – how the practice of training, the joy of play, and the relationships built through RUSA each week are creating space for healing, belonging, and leadership in refugee communities.



WHY iACT INVESTS IN SYMPOSIUMS

Hosting the RUSA Chad 2025 Coaching Symposium reflects iACT's deep belief in the power of community-led development and the importance of creating space for reflection, dialogue, and shared growth. In humanitarian settings, where program implementation is often top-down and externally driven, the symposium serves as a vital platform for refugee coaches to share their expertise, celebrate successes, and collaboratively address challenges. It reinforces

iACT's commitment to listening first, amplifying local leadership, and ensuring that programs evolve in ways that are culturally relevant, sustainable, and grounded in lived experience. By convening this gathering, iACT reaffirms that meaningful change happens with, not for, displaced communities — and that sports, for adults, too — are not just a tool for healing, but a foundation for agency, connection, and future-building.

COACH PARTICIPATION

45 Coaches

24 Male

21 Female

12 Camps Across Chad

4,000

Children reached each week, ages 6 to 13



SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW



KEY FOCUS AREAS

- ▶ The role of sports in refugee wellbeing and development
- ▶ Safeguarding children in sports settings
- ▶ Social-emotional learning through play
- ▶ Monitoring & Evaluation tools for program improvement

Team Building and Interactive Training

To build team cohesion and transferable coaching skills, each day included energizers and group games and dance moves and rhythm like Rumba, Zumba, Salsa, Rabsa; promoting engagement, positive ambiance, and shared joy.

Community Participation and Engagement

Throughout the symposium, the heartbeat of RUSA was on full display. Each day began with coaches leading warm-ups, skill-building drills, and creative play activities — not just to showcase curriculum, but to model the energy, love, and intention they bring to every session. Both male and female coaches stood side by side, sharing their approaches and cheering each other on. Their leadership reflected the inclusive spirit of RUSA, where every voice matters and every contribution counts.

The sessions concluded with short practice matches that invited laughter, learning, and connection. One special moment came during a live training led jointly by iACT staff and Djabal's RUSA coaching team. It was a powerful example of co-leadership — with local coaches guiding while making space for their peers.

The event culminated in a series of friendly matches, including a crowd favorite: a spirited game between the womens' coaching team and the U14 players. The sidelines were filled with parents, elders, and community leaders, whose presence and encouragement reminded everyone why RUSA matters. This wasn't just a demonstration of skills — it was a celebration of community and sports.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT



The RUSA Program in Chad:

- ▶ Operates in 12 refugee camps
- ▶ Reaches more than 4,000 children weekly
- ▶ Is led by 48 refugee coaches (24 male , 24 female)
- ▶ One coordinator.

Key Achievements

Builds local coaching capacity and leadership:

We see this in the confidence and consistency of our coaches — many of whom now lead full sessions, mentor new coaches, and co-facilitate training and symposiums. Their ownership shows in how they adapt sessions to meet the needs of their players, offer peer support, and speak with pride about their role. iACT staff conduct regular check-ins, and coaches reflect on their growth in journals, group discussions, and field visits.

Provides structured activities and mentorship to children aged 6 to 13: Each week, RUSA coaches lead scheduled, age-based sessions attended by hundreds of children. Attendance logs, session reports, and direct observation by iACT and coordinators confirm consistent

participation. Parents and teachers also share stories of how children’s behavior, confidence, and cooperation improve after joining the program.

Improves hygiene practices and wellbeing:

Hygiene messages are integrated into daily warm-ups and team huddles. Coaches report improved handwashing habits and increased awareness of personal care, especially among younger players.

Enhances soccer and life skills among children:

Children show visible improvements in teamwork, focus, communication, and conflict resolution as reported by coaches and parents. Coaches assess progress informally through observation and feedback circles, and iACT gathers stories and quotes that highlight personal growth.

Promotes peaceful interaction and cohesion:

RUSA teams are intentionally mixed across ethnic and tribal lines. Coaches share stories of children who once avoided each other now laughing and playing together. Parents and elders frequently note how the program has helped reduce tensions, especially among youth.

LOOKING AHEAD: EXPANSION TO ALACHA REFUGEE CAMP

In response to the arrival of over 90,000 new refugees from Sudan in 2024-25, iACT will launch a new Academy in Refugee Camp Alacha, prioritizing girls' inclusion in soccer and handball.

Call for Collaboration

At iACT, we know that meaningful change is never done alone. It is a collective effort — rooted in respect, shared vision, and a deep commitment to children's dignity and wellbeing. That's why we warmly welcome collaboration with partners who share our belief in refugee leadership and the power of sports to transform lives.

We invite:

- ▶ Sports organizations that bring expertise, innovation, and passion for inclusive, trauma-informed programs that center refugee voices and leadership. Together, we can expand access to quality sport opportunities and nurture the next generation of coaches and changemakers.
- ▶ Education and child protection agencies dedicated to safeguarding children's rights and holistic development. By aligning sports with learning and psychosocial support, we can create safe spaces where children grow in body, mind, and spirit.
- ▶ Donors who are driven by more than charity; those who see men and women in refugee camps, and the children in their communities, as agents of change and invest in community-led solutions.

**If you believe in the power of play
to heal, unite, and uplift, join us.
Together, we can nurture hope
near and far in a time when we all
need it.**

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