



# **SAMUEL HALL**

# **10 YEARS OF IMPACT**

2010-2021

## INTRODUCTION

Samuel Hall's mission is to connect the voices of communities to change-makers for more inclusive societies. Everything that we do – from research and policy design to monitoring and evaluation – works towards that goal.

Like other social enterprises, agencies and organisations working in migration and displacement contexts, we exist to create positive impact.

Our industry is grappling with the best ways to create, capture and evaluate that impact – not least because funding is increasingly tied to measuring it.

It's not a simple question, but as Samuel Hall celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2020, we're exploring what impact really means to us, our ecosystem and the communities we work with and for.

We don't have all of the answers, but we hope that the following pages are insightful and thought-provoking.

Thanks to the experts who have contributed, thanks to you for reading – and please do reach out to continue the conversation!

Hervé Nicolle & Nassim Majidi  
Samuel Hall Co-Founders & Directors

## Q&A: WHAT DOES IMPACT REALLY MEAN?



**DR NASSIM MAJIDI** Co-founder, Director and Research Unit Lead, Samuel Hall

**Q:** *When you think about the impact Samuel Hall has had, what are you most proud of?*

**A:** Our Afghanistan Field Coordinator Ibrahim often says that Samuel Hall has protected the livelihoods of hundreds of Afghan households for the last 10 years and, he says, even if that's our only achievement, it's a lot to be proud of.

Of course, I am hugely proud of the way that we have positively influenced programmes and policies around the world; of our knowledge contribution to our fields of study; of the partnerships we've built over the years; and so much more! But, I keep returning to Ibrahim's statement.

Since our first office opened in Kabul, every day has validated our initial belief that long-term, sustainable impact depends on committing to a presence in country, and developing local expertise and research capacity. It isn't the cheapest or easiest way to operate but we see it as essential – and as a social enterprise, investment in our communities has always been part of the plan. Parachuting into a context that we have no experience of or connection to isn't how we work. Our teams are drawn from complex and fragile environments. They represent communities affected by displacement as well as local academics – and our research is better for it.

I'm also very proud of how we managed to adapt in response to COVID-19. In a way, it has reaffirmed the value of our model. We are "in the field", we have actually expanded our access, and we have kept training local researchers.



**DR OLIVER BAKEWELL** Senior Lecturer, Migration Studies, University of Manchester

**Q:** *How healthy is the drive for impact in migration research?*

**A:** As a researcher, looking to deliver impact tends to push some questions into the background. If you look to improve the lives of migrants, you have to start by adopting the category of migrant as a meaningful unit of analysis. Why focus on migrants, when there may be many others who experience similar deprivation and violation of their human rights? Too often, the answer is because that is the set of people marked out by policy makers or other interested parties (perhaps even migrant groups) who commission the research. The experience of migration is seen *a priori* as a salient factor giving rise to the problem (whether it is abuse of rights, poverty, violence and so forth); research is designed to respond to it.

Over the years we have got better at taking an intersectional approach, recognising the critical role of other axes of discrimination such as race, gender, class, and age, that shape social interactions and outcomes. Nonetheless, if we are framing our study as being about migration, we start with a tendency to prioritise it. It is hard to say migration is irrelevant to our story – and it won't go down very well with our sponsors.

This is the balancing act that organisations such as Samuel Hall have to perform as they move on the tightrope between research and impact. It is a near impossible task but one of the strengths I see in Samuel Hall is an awareness of this paradox, a continuous struggle to deliver robust and rigorous research that not only delivers impact in terms of current policy and programming, but also contributes to reshaping the terms of discussion and even developing new ways of thinking.

# Q&A: WHAT DOES IMPACT REALLY MEAN?



**WILL CARTER** Country Director, Sudan, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

**Q:** *How do you define the impact of research? And has the nature of this impact changed over time?*

**A:** Working in the chaos of humanitarian emergencies and frustrations of restrictive operating environments, with all the piecemeal, politicised, and often contradictory information that emanate from them, can be disorientating for decision-makers. The history of humanitarian action in this way is unfortunately filled with failures, both of design and execution; of either poor decisions or poorly informed ones. However, over time, research has helped us to make better strategic choices, improved our efficacy, and challenged some long standing assumptions and myths.

The research landscape in the sector is changing – both its supply and demand. Previously, medical and scientific analyses dominated research in the sector, often with a strong quantitative foundation, with other political and anthropological accounts nuancing our understanding. It was a polarised landscape between natural sciences on the one hand, and the humanities on the other. The two worlds rarely met, and within this chasm the majority of practitioners still mostly made decisions on little more than gut feelings. In more recent years, however, applied social sciences have increasingly come to the fore. Today there are more rigorous methods and measurements, new technologies for collection and analysis, and improved collaboration between practitioners and researchers. Moreover, nowadays there is a slightly better research literacy, with more staff fielding specialised postgraduate qualifications and greater familiarity with cumulative knowledge of the sector, and its limits.

**Q:** *What more would you like to see in terms of researchers' capacity to support humanitarian actors?*

**A:** Whilst the political economy of knowledge in the humanitarian sector still needs purposeful enquiry, clearly there are still more things that we do not know than we do, and those things all have a bearing on the life chances of millions of people in tough situations. In the future, I would like to see collaborations to align research agendas with humanitarian strategies, for researchers to better understand and influence humanitarian praxis, and to consider not just the academic impact of their research in terms of citation, but of the humanitarian impact of the knowledge they offer, decisions and approaches they improve, and accountability that factual data offers.



**PROF KAREN JACOBSEN** Henry J. Leir Professor in Global Migration at The Fletcher School, Tufts University & Samuel Hall Academic Board Member

**Q:** *What does 'impact' mean and what should we do more of to achieve it?*

**A:** Research impact means that one's research has actually changed the situation for migrants in a positive way: given them access to rights, protection, livelihoods, safety. To make this happen, it's not enough to analyze data and write it up for publication. Researchers must make every effort to work directly with organizations on the ground to ensure that their findings are actionable, i.e. put into practice. These can mean actively engaging with small, local community-based organizations (CBOs), UN agencies, government ministries and everything in between, to support advocacy and programming. Whether a researcher is a practitioner or based at an academic or research organization, it is always possible to go beyond the requirements of your organization and engage with other agencies to increase your research impact. It's best to start this engagement before you start your research, so the other agencies are engaged from the start. This will make them much more interested in your findings and recommendations.

For example: Academic researchers doing a study of urban migration in an informal settlement make an effort to engage the local municipality and local CBOs as well as migrant and local community leaders from the outset. During data collection and before their report is finalized, they meet with these stakeholders and seek their input and perspective. They then recognize and acknowledge the stakeholders in the final report. Such recognition can go a long way to making the final report palatable and actionable!



# IN CONVERSATION: SAMUEL HALL RESEARCHERS

Samuel Hall (SH) has over 50 permanent members of staff representing 18 nationalities based in 8 countries. We sat down with some members of the team to hear their perspectives on what impact means in their contexts and communities.

**IR:** Ibrahim Ramazani, Field Coordinator, Kabul

**JH:** Jawid Hassanzai, Deputy Country Representative, Kabul

**JO:** Jared Owuor, Regional Operations Officer, Nairobi

**TA:** Tewelde Adhanom, Research Assistant, Addis Ababa

**Q:** *Tell me about your background and what you do?*

**IR:** I have been working with Nassim since before Samuel Hall began, and have been with the company from the start. I work as a field coordinator and I have a lot of experience implementing research projects all over Afghanistan. SH has worked in 26 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and we have over 1,000 contacts from different communities. Whenever I leave Kabul to go to a more dangerous province, I can call on this network and ask them about the security and what route to take. In fact, I feel like a local wherever I go and this makes our job much easier.

**TA:** I joined SH full time 6 months ago but I have been working with the team on and off for the last 3-4 years in Ethiopia. I have a BA in Geography & Environmental Studies (Jimma University, Ethiopia), an MA in Gender & Development Studies (Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia) and an MSc in Governance & Development (University of Antwerp, Belgium).

**JO:** Academically, I hold a masters of Public Policy & Administration from Kenyatta University, Kenya. I have been at SH since 2016, starting as a research assistant and recently taking on the role of regional operations officer. My work covers everything from developing tools and methodologies to operations strategies that facilitate our work in Africa – including data collection and analysis.

**JH:** I have worked with SH for over 5 years, now. In 2019, I was promoted to Deputy Country Representative and now manage our research across Afghanistan. I also contribute to data collection myself, and have the pleasure of meeting people from all backgrounds – from internally displaced persons (IDPs) to senior government representatives. It's a role that keeps me very busy, especially as we adapt to COVID 19.

**Q:** *What does 'impact' mean to you?*

**TA:** Impactful research reflects the needs, demands and priorities of the community and informs programmes and policies to address their challenges.

**JH:** People in the community often ask me what the impact of our research will be. I explain that "We are raising your voice so that changemakers can hear you. We know there is a gap, so we are acting as the bridge. We want them to support you and to help you. We will raise your concerns and your ideas and we will make sure that they are listened to." When actors make changes based on our recommendations, we know that the problems described to us are being addressed – I love being able to report this back to people that have taken the time to speak to us.

**IR:** Impact is going back to communities and seeing the results. For example, we interviewed some returnees about their job opportunities. 6 months later when we

went back to the same place for another project, they had received the support they needed from our partner NRC. The information we collect matters – it has impact.

**Q:** *Where has SH had the greatest impact?*

**JO:** A very interesting question! There are so many examples to choose from but they all come back to our mission: connecting the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies. We have trained refugees in data collection and research; we develop inclusive methodologies; and we partner on a local level to make sure that these voices are heard. The partnerships that we build – from educational institutions to community groups – help to create a robust academic atmosphere that leads to sustainable change. With our partners, we act as an evidence-based voice of reason, informing practical interventions.

**IR:** In my opinion, the first thing to mention is the employment we bring for local people. We now have over 25 permanent employees here in Afghanistan and have trained more than 500 enumerators that work with us part time. Paid work is a very valuable thing in Afghanistan, especially for women. I remember one project we did in two of the poorer provinces. I was outside the finance office photocopying some documents when two women we had hired and trained received their first paycheck. They came out of the office with money in their hands and they were just so happy. It was the first time that they had received money for doing a job. That moment had a big impact on me personally, too. We are providing jobs in a wartorn country that has seen over 40 years of conflict. Life is hard and unemployment is a big issue, so I am very proud to be working hard to solve this problem with SH.

**TA:** SH researchers really know what is happening on the ground. For example, as an Ethiopian, I know my own country and I know these communities. When a child returnee is talking to me about their journey home, I know the places they have travelled through – maybe I have been there myself. I can speak their language and I feel their struggles in my heart. Of course this informs your work. We also have the advantage of being able to collect data in "inaccessible" areas at an "inaccessible" time. We are collecting real data even throughout COVID-19 and despite the conflict. This is only possible because we have networks of local people that are professional, well trained and connected.

**Q:** *How do you think research can have a greater positive impact on communities?*

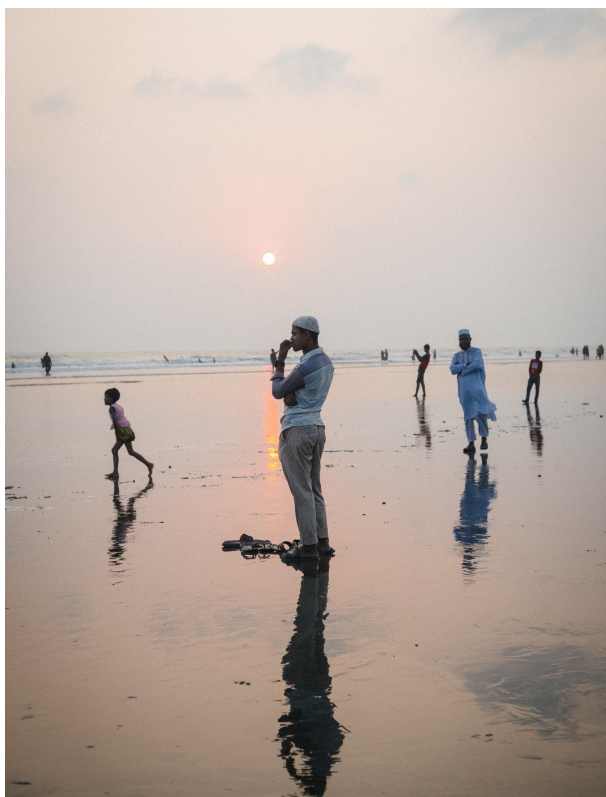
**JO:** There are so many people that are structurally excluded, discriminated against, isolated. Our duty is to reach them. For me, as researchers we are just enablers. The solutions lie within the communities themselves. They know their own challenges, they know what is best.

**JH:** Sometimes, displaced people tell me that other organisations have spoken to them before. Attention comes and goes but they don't see the results – and this reduces trust. Not all impact will be immediate (this is something that researchers need to be honest about) but if someone is going to take the time to talk to you, it only seems fair that what they say goes somewhere. Being selective and choosing to do research that we think will have an impact is very important to me.



# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

These photos were taken by Ivan Flores in May 2019. Ivan accompanied the Samuel Hall research team in Bangladesh for 'Addressing Gender-Based Violence & Economic Flows in the Rohingya Refugee Response', a project commissioned by UNICEF Cox's Bazar and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.





# 10 PROJECTS FROM 10 YEARS

Samuel Hall has delivered over 300 projects in more than 55 countries across Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. As we look to the future, monitoring and evaluating our own impact is one of our goals as an organisation. In the meantime, here is a snapshot of some of the things we are most proud to have worked on with our partners. We explore ten representative projects from the last ten years below, asking ourselves, "What impact did we achieve?"



## IDP PROTECTION CHALLENGES, AFGHANISTAN Norwegian Refugee Council (2012 & 2017)

Afghanistan's long history of conflict has led to complex dynamics of forced displacement that include internal, international and irregular migration. Internal displacement has been a feature of the country's humanitarian crisis for decades, and it is on the rise. In 2012, Samuel Hall conducted the first systematic overview of its kind in Afghanistan. "Challenges to IDP Protection" tackled erroneous assumptions that all too often informed government responses. Its recommendations shaped the National IDP Policy to ensure that IDP voices and concerns were reflected. At the same time, NRC was able to strengthen its core activities and to improve its partnership with national and provincial authorities.

Five years later, a new and updated analysis focused on the causes of prolonged and multiple displacement, presenting the key protection challenges still confronting displacement-affected Afghans today.

*"We do not have any friends or family here. I do not know how to enrol my children in school because they do not have tazkeras [ID documents]. There is war in Shindand so I cannot go back and get tazkeras for them. I had to send them to collect plastic bags and paper, because I cannot buy fuel. We use the plastic bags as heating material."*



## HOUSEHOLD & ENTERPRISE ENERGY, AFGHANISTAN World Bank (2019)

Energy – electricity, heating, and cooking – is of paramount importance to health, education, communications and sustainable development in Afghanistan. Samuel Hall worked with 3,000 households and 250 businesses and organisations across 30 communities and five provinces, to provide the World Bank, Afghan government and policymakers with a better understanding of energy patterns. The study included monthly panel surveys across 2018-2019 with 3,250 participants, to capture seasonality and changes across the year. It also comprised targeted assessments and qualitative research with a range of stakeholders, households and businesses.

From rural agrarian households with small solar sets in Daikundi to SMEs using 3-phase grid electricity in urban Kabul, Samuel Hall developed a holistic understanding of the gaps and prospects in the sector. The study has subsequently informed investments, helped to build capacity at relevant line ministries, contributed to knowledge-sharing and enabled the World Bank to expand sustainable energy solutions across Afghanistan.

*"When there wasn't electricity, we did not have any cellphones or televisions. We only heard that someone is our President, but when we got access to electricity, that was the time when we saw the face of the President. Through television, we got information about the culture of other countries, we saw news from around the world and our own country."*



## OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN, AFGHANISTAN UNICEF (2018)

Afghanistan's educational system faces numerous structural challenges, with approximately 3.7 million children out of school. This work profiled out of school children in the country, specifically identifying the barriers facing them in accessing schools at various levels, and proposing interventions to address these barriers.

The report garnered the world's attention through 400 pieces of media coverage – helping to place the issue in the spotlight and accelerate efforts towards achieving the target of universal primary education. The data from this report remains the most accurate measurement of out of school children in Afghanistan and is widely accepted and used by the government and other actors to set policy and determining programming.

*"Focusing on our most vulnerable children, including girls, the Ministry of Education will work with development partners, government ministries, and communities to bring out of school children (OOSC) into the education system through cross-sectoral programming. The report highlights that coordination of effort among these stakeholders is paramount to addressing the challenges of OOSC."*

# 10 PROJECTS FROM 10 YEARS



## GIRLS CAN CODE, AFGHANISTAN Womanity Foundation (2019)

Girls Can Code (GCC) is an intensive intro-to-coding program in Kabul developed by education-based nonprofit, The Womanity Foundation. The initiative aims to help galvanize and empower girls to pursue career opportunities in computer science. It is the only programme of its kind affiliated with the public school system, with the Ministry of Education's stamp of approval. Samuel Hall's study evaluated the Girls Can Code programme from 2016 to 2019, conducted a context and market analysis for GCC skills, and developed a strategic roadmap for 2020-2025 and beyond. This roadmap is supporting The Womanity Foundation to forge new partnerships and refine their GCC programming to continue their mission to create meaningful impact and change in Afghan girls' and women's lives.

*"I completed a 3-month internship at an INGO in Kabul, working as an IT assistant. In the future, I would like to study IT, software engineering, and information systems at the Computer Science Faculty of Kabul University. I would like to succeed in line with my aspirations – I want to achieve my goals."*



## STANDARD SETTING FOR RETURNS & REINTEGRATION IOM MEASURE (2018) and ORION (2020)

Samuel Hall worked to revise and operationalise IOM's definition of sustainable reintegration, to incorporate a multi-dimensional approach, such as the psychosocial dimension. Our work sets standards to measure and monitor reintegration, addressing a key gap in reintegration practice. It sets a strong evidence-based approach for reintegration interventions to inform future programming, and allow for greater accountability and advocacy to support returnees. This work provided the foundations for operationalising IOM's integrated approach to reintegration (the ORION project) and was instrumental in the creation of IOM's 'Reintegration Handbook'. Samuel Hall's 2020 follow up analysis proved the positive impact that mentoring activities have on returnees' reintegration.

*"This research highlights the interconnectedness of reintegration dimensions, with the economic dimension being foundational, while social and psychosocial support are needed to consolidate and sustain gains. Psychosocial support cannot be considered an 'optional extra,' rather it is a crucial component to a healthy and sustainable reintegration process."*



## GENDERED MIGRATION PROGRAMMING Swiss Development & Cooperation Agency (2020)

The Gender Assessment provided a rapid, structured review of the Global Programme Migration and Development Division (GPMD)'s portfolio. Its goal was to consider where gender fit into GPMD's work, where it could be improved, and where it was falling through the gaps. The assessment took a holistic approach, considering gender across different levels - from policy and strategy, through to implementation in the field, and how it was captured in monitoring, evaluation and learning. The research identified strengths to build on, as well as areas to develop and improve. Samuel Hall's recommendations for action are helping the Swiss Development Agency's programming provide better outcomes for women and girls across the world.

*"Even when organisations do gender analyses, they don't know what to do with that data, so they just go ahead and do the programme they had planned anyway [...] They're also not using indicators that are actually measuring gender transformation – they're capturing 'how many' but not really getting at changes."*



## SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY, SOMALIA Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs, UN WFP, UNICEF (2019)

Samuel Hall worked with UNICEF and the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in drafting the first policy of its kind in Somalia. The final product of this consultation was a policy endorsed by the Federal Government of Somalia. At the household level, this seeks to protect the basic needs of vulnerable people, prevent the risk of falling into poverty, promote the realization of productive potential, and transform existing societal structures that cause vulnerability. The policy led to an implementation plan supported by WFP, UNICEF and the World Bank – the first phase has already begun. Samuel Hall is currently working with the World Bank on a targeting evaluation of this first ever social protection programme.

*"The extent of need in Somalia – both chronic and seasonal, where over half of the population lives in extreme poverty and large segments remain vulnerable to falling into extreme poverty – is such that a majority of Somalis could be said to be in need of social protection."*



# 10 PROJECTS FROM 10 YEARS



## ZERO HUNGER, SOMALIA UN WFP, 2018

After the famine of 2011, Somalia made a gradual recovery but food security remains under threat. In 2018, 2.7 million people could not meet their daily food needs and required urgent humanitarian assistance. Samuel Hall supported WFP in developing its Interim Country Strategy Plan, shaping the roadmap to Zero Hunger in Somalia. This programme supports Sustainable Development Goal 2 of the same name.

A key component to the work was bringing together stakeholders who are not often around the same table to break down barriers for an open discussion. Despite different viewpoints, everyone agreed that a band aid approach was not sufficient – systemic change was required, involving actors from different sectors and across political, social, and economic dimensions. Operating in a silo can be ineffective at best, if not counterproductive. Building links to coordinate action – and to facilitate learning and understanding – is necessary for long-sighted, sustainable solutions.

*“Creating the enabling conditions for the shift to more sustainable food systems will require systems-based approaches that can consider the range and complexity of interactions (...) between food production, distribution, consumption, and nutritional health and the underlying social, economic, biophysical and institutional elements, (as they) ultimately affect the quantity, quality and affordability of food, as well as health and wellbeing’*



## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES, KENYA Aga Khan Foundation, 2020

The 2013 Technical and Vocational Training Act sought to provide pathways for youth to enter the labour market where the traditional educational system was not an option.

Despite a national effort to promote vocational training, enrolment numbers have by-and-large remained low, with youth in rural and marginalised areas especially excluded. This issue is particularly critical in the Northeast region, close to the porous border between Kenya and Somalia, which is targeted by extremist groups for trafficking and recruiting efforts.

SH conducted an evaluation on AKF's 3-year youth empowerment project on 'Improving Social and Economic Opportunities for Youth in Northern Kenya', funded by the EU. This work has strengthened the institutional capacity of local civil society organisation (CSO) networks to deliver effective, inclusive socio-economic programming; enhanced the quality of curricula to deliver value-based education, and market-led skills; and improved dialogue, engagement, and understanding between county government, youth, and market actors.

*“People had the mentality that technical and vocational training is for failures. But I can say the project has really challenged this mentality by showing that it is not only for failures and you can go there to get skills.”*



## CHILD RETURNEE PROTECTION, AFGHANISTAN Save the Children, (2018)

Returnee children face specific needs, and hold specific rights – yet, little information exists as to how these returns are happening and the situation faced by child returnees.

Samuel Hall has worked closely with Save the Children using their Child Sensitive Durable Solutions Framework to assess situations for returnee children. We first did so, by documenting the lived experiences of child returnees from Europe before, during and after returning to Afghanistan. The findings demonstrate that durable solutions are not likely in a country that continues to see active conflict, where returnees rarely go back to school and where child marriage and other negative coping mechanisms are not uncommon.

This research provided evidence for advocacy efforts with European governments that have positively impacted policy – although returns continue from many European countries. There is much work to be done to better protect child returnees and build durable solutions, both in Afghanistan and beyond.

*“No one asked me or my younger brother if we were satisfied with the idea of going back to Afghanistan. If they had asked me, I would have told them I did not want to go back... I did not want to live in war anymore. I don't want to not be able to study peacefully. I do not want to constantly be scared of the risk of kidnapping if I leave my home – or of being killed.”*



# PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

These photos were taken in Afghanistan in 2017, in the field for the World Bank / Samuel Hall Household and Enterprise Energy Study. From top right, clockwise: Jawid Hassanzai, our Deputy Country Representative (Research) in Langar, Kabul Province; verdant valley in Daikundi Province; travelling down the road in Daikundi Province; satellite-powered home in Daikundi; sheep on a hillside in Dawlatabad; Mount Talkhaki. Most of these photos were taken by our Project Manager Nicholas Ross.





## IN CONVERSATION: GENDER & RESEARCH

It is a common myth in research that being a female researcher is a disadvantage for field research in countries like Afghanistan and Somalia. But, our team has a different take on the impact of gender and identity in research, as our co-founder has argued:

*"Tsuda (1998) spoke of 'numerous selves' being engaged in the field. Vathi (2012), in her doctoral dissertation speaks [...] of the advantages that numerous selves can bring to the researcher: the opportunity to see the world from different vantage points. My identity as an Iranian in Afghanistan, as a woman, and an educated professional were assets for my research. I was viewed by respondents as close enough to them to be able to understand their lives of migration and experiences of return; yet distant enough so that they could speak to me without feeling they would be judged by their peer."*

*(Majidi, 2016, doctoral thesis: "Managing Migration Remotely: Return, Reintegration and Re-bordering Afghanistan")*

**Two Samuel Hall researchers reflect here on the way that their "numerous selves" have shaped their work and experiences.**

**FA:** Fatuma Ahmed, Regional Field Coordinator, Mogadishu

**SA:** Saida Azimi, National Researcher, Kabul

**Q:** *Tell me a little bit about your backgrounds?*

**SA:** Access to education in Afghanistan is low – especially for women – but my mother is literate and has worked for the government, and she supported my education. I was studying at the Kabul medical university when I was 17.

I lost my father when I was 9 years old, though, so my mother had to provide for the family. I have older brothers but one was outside Afghanistan and another one was unemployed – and I didn't want my mother to struggle alone, so I started working whilst I was still studying. I had established and was leading an organisation investigating the situation of women without access to healthcare – but this was all unpaid. So, in 2016, I started working as a sales executive for a private company.

My brother believed I should be focusing on my studies instead of working – and my mother agreed. There is a misconception in Afghanistan that girls are unable to do more than one thing at once. We have a saying, "you can't hold two watermelons in one hand" – it means that if you try to focus on too many things, you will achieve nothing. In my experience, it is usually said to women! There is still a belief that women are less suited to work than men. No one believed that I could do things until I proved that I could.

But, I knew that I could handle a part-time job and still do well at university. So, I didn't listen to my family. I was in my fourth year of university and still working in sales when I met SH. I came to the office to see if they were interested in buying from my company. Zabih [Deputy Country Representative (Admin)] asked me if I was interested in becoming a researcher – I had proved that I was able to talk to people and collect data through my sales experience. After graduation I worked somewhere else for a year and then I came to SH.

Travelling to different parts of the country and meeting girls who have the same problems I once had – who are being asked to choose between family or study or work – is amazing. I have trained over 50 enumerators, who now have the skills to help with data collection and research.

Last year I applied for a Chevening scholarship to study in the UK. I worked hard and with support of the full SH team I have been able to achieve this dream.

**FA:** My mother is not educated, but everything I am is because of her. She has struggled for as long as I remember. I am the oldest girl and my sisters always say that I was a guinea pig. My mum was determined for me to go to school even though lots of people, including my father, did not understand why.

I remember when I was in my first year of high school I got into an accident on the way to school and some of my classmates, young boys, would come by to see how I was doing. My father pulled me aside and said, "Don't get too excited by the attention – you are already promised to a man." I cried and cried. I didn't even recognise my father – I didn't understand why he would do that to me. Luckily, my elder brother stepped in and spoke to my dad to convince him of my point of view. By the time I finished high school the man was married anyway – ha!

As a Somali woman I have had to learn to raise my voice, to be louder, to say no. It hasn't always worked... I wanted to be a journalist but both my father and my brother told me "that's not a career!" A few years later I wanted to do law – I was obsessed with understanding different arguments, with finding evidence to back them up. Even my classmates said I would make a good lawyer. But, my dad said that it was against Islam and so I couldn't do it. I then said I would do marketing, because I love to talk and thought it would be good for meeting people. But, no again. I did some social work for a while, which was my brother's choice. I got to a point, though, where I had to rebel. For months my dad didn't speak to me because I refused to live with my brother. I supported myself working as a receptionist. It was a good feeling.

My father has now come around to the idea that his daughters should be educated – and all 7 of my sisters have gone to school. If my mother did not fight for me or if I had just got married straight after high school my life would have been different. And the life of my sisters would have been different too.

**SA:** You are their role model!

**FA:** Yes, I am very proud. And one of my sisters is even studying law – the very thing that I was not allowed to do! It takes one person making a stand to inspire another. We can all make a difference in this way.

**Q:** *What challenges have you faced as a female researcher?*

**FA:** Every conversation starts with someone asking my age and whether I am married. I have had a lot of people ask me where my husband is, where my children are, why I am not at home looking after them, saying "That's the problem with girls these days, too much ambition – it's not right".



# IN CONVERSATION: GENDER & RESEARCH

**FA:** Lots tell me, "You don't look like a married woman", but what *does* a married woman look like? I am doing it a different way! Another thing I have to deal with is all of the Somali men who ask my number – they want to "get to know me", they want to "have a coffee", they want to "keep in touch". Of course, I turn them down. Sometimes it gets annoying.

**SA:** Most people in Afghanistan think that being a researcher is a male job. Because of the security problems and the bombings people are scared – and they are even more worried about their daughters. People have told me to be careful and to wear a full hijab so that "if something should happen at least you will be covered by your clothes". Aside from security concerns, people are sceptical that women can possess the technical skills or the courage required.

**Q:** *Could you explain why people think that you need courage to interview people?*

**SA:** Because of the conservative culture, women are not granted many opportunities to express themselves – even at home in the family setting. Men are able to say what they think and women are not – this is what people believe. They think that women are not suited to the job because they will be scared to travel, scared to talk to people they do not know. But travelling has been one of my favourite parts of the job – and being a researcher has boosted my confidence. I meet girls who are very deprived of basic rights like education and I realised how lucky I am. I am constantly learning, I have a good salary and I have security.

**Q:** *Are you granted access where men would not be, or do you feel as though women open up to you in a way they would not to a man?*

**SA:** Yes! I remember in Samangan province once, Ibrahim and I were interviewing a family. We were speaking to returnees and if they had returned to their place of origin more than 3 years ago, they were not to be included in the survey. The woman told me that she had returned with her family about 10 years ago – but the man said to [SH Field Coordinator] Ibrahim that they had been there for less than 3 years. Their daughter agreed with her mother. The man started swearing and saying that his wife was an idiot and did not know the truth – it wasn't very nice to be honest. But, the point is that if you do not speak to women, you miss half of the story and sometimes you miss the truth.

Girls and women are more open around me because I understand the barriers they face. In Afghan culture, they might not share their thoughts to a man for fear of being judged or called a liar or because they worry that the researcher will share their responses with their family.

**FA:** There is a big difference between the Somali and Afghan culture, then. Women will open up more to a woman than to a man, yes I suppose that's true – but almost everyone is so used to sharing their stories with strangers because there have been so many organisations that have done research in Somalia.

The older Somali women get, the more they will open up but even younger girls are usually comfortable talking to a male researcher.

Although I should point out that Somali culture really internalises things; sometimes you face the idea that "it's normal, why would you want to hear about that?". For example, it is relatively easy to get information about the danger from Al Shabab but things that are entrenched in the Somali culture, like FGM, are hard to talk about even amongst women.

On the other hand, most men (especially in rural areas) do not want to talk to me because I am a woman. I always travel with a male colleague who will need to be the one that speaks to the community leaders, heads of families, business owners, whoever.

Traditional men – and traditional women too – do not think that a woman can help them with anything. So yes, the advantages are sadly few compared to the disadvantages in terms of access. I hope this will change when people get used to the fact that there are lots of Somali women who are educated and capable – the truth is, many of these women are in Kenya, and there aren't so many in rural Somalia.

**Q:** *How can companies support female researchers?*

**FA:** Give more women the chance! Especially minority women. We need to normalise the idea that they can be researchers. At SH, whenever we are hiring a field team we make sure there are female researchers and enumerators – not just one, but three or four or more. And once you have women in your team, mentor them. Finally, if you have become successful, like me and Saida, don't forget where you come from. Encourage the girls that you have left behind to realise their true potential too.

**SA:** I would say, recognise that family opinion matters to most people. SH did, and this really helped me. My brother visited [our co-founder] Nassim and they talked – he could ask the questions he wanted and that was a kind of earning of the family's trust.

Remember that families probably don't know what "being a researcher" means. So, help your employees to clarify the terms and responsibilities of the job – this is very important. Of course one of the main things that families are worried about in Afghanistan is girls travelling to dangerous provinces. I remember my mum talked to [Field Coordinator] Basir the day before I first travelled with SH. All she wanted was to ask him to look after me and to trust that he would do his best – that was enough for her. An organisation should be happy to go to these lengths to discuss the security and safety of their employees with their families.

In 2019, we had an event where everyone's families could come together. This was a really good thing – exchanging dishes and culture. Foreign colleagues visiting local families where possible is also brilliant. The behavioral exchange is really important.

It is also helpful for women – and their families – to see role models in male dominated industries. This gives girls someone to look up to but it also helps mothers, brothers and fathers to understand why being a researcher is a great job. Stories of female researchers should be shared across platforms like social media for this reason,

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

## CHALLENGES TO RESEARCH

As the world grapples with its response to COVID-19, research has been thrown under the global spotlight and there is an almost unprecedented demand for monitoring and data analysis. The need for evidence-based humanitarian decision-making and prioritisation is great. Nonetheless, despite the attention, the impact of COVID-19 on the finances of actors in the humanitarian and development world cannot be overstated. There is a challenge now to ensure that funding for both research and aid is not blinkered and keeps the world's most vulnerable populations in mind.

The danger that donor governments turn inwards feels very real as the "race" to vaccinate populations heats up. In January 2021, head of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the world faces a "catastrophic moral failure" because of unequal vaccine policies, saying that over 39 million vaccine doses had been given in 49 richer states – but one poor nation had just 25 doses.

Our own research in Afghanistan has highlighted the terrible impact of the pandemic and associated lockdown measures on vulnerable populations such as IDPs and refugees. At the same time, our latest Ethiopian research is a reminder that the pandemic is not the only crisis deserving of attention. It's our collective responsibility to ensure such voices are not forgotten.

As the global community looks to prioritise new pursuits, or to defend the worth of what is already in motion, it will be more important than ever to demonstrate what works and what is needed. In this sense, understanding of the impact of research has never been more critical.

## SAMUEL HALL ADAPTATIONS

Like businesses all over the world, Samuel Hall adopted new health and safety measures to protect both the team and members of our communities – many of whom are particularly vulnerable due to poverty, overcrowding and a lack of access to healthcare.

This meant far fewer face-to-face interviews and a shift towards remote data collection via text messages, WhatsApp voice messages, video meetings and phone calls. We pride ourselves on our access to complex and challenging contexts, where remote data collection is at times the only viable option, so many of these processes were already in place, but COVID-19 was a catalyst to their implementation.

Conducting research remotely rather than in person brings its own challenges – from connectivity to an unwillingness to talk to a stranger over the phone – and for these reasons, our teams are keen to be "in the field" whenever it is safe to do so. With tighter border controls and travel restrictions in much of the world, access to "the field" has been more limited than ever before – but Samuel Hall's vast network of local enumerators, researchers and partners means we are not reliant on international travel to continue our work.

## FILLING KNOWLEDGE GAPS

We are proud to have self-funded a series of COVID-19 research briefs in Afghanistan last year, in response to an urgent need for research and advocacy. Samuel Hall partnered with HelpAge, War Child and the Afghanistan Protection Cluster to draw attention to how the virus is understood and perceived, and its current and likely implications.

## "HIDDEN" PANDEMICS

There are growing concerns about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are not so clearly in focus – including mental health and domestic abuse.

The UN has described the worldwide increase in domestic abuse as a "shadow pandemic", whilst a WHO study revealed that the pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing.

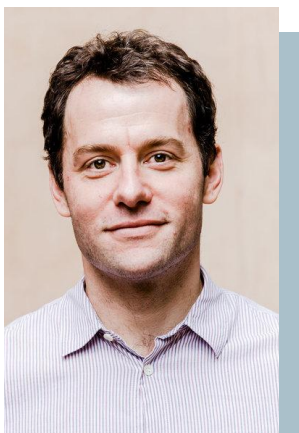
The legacy of the isolation and reduced access to vital services may not be fully understood for years, but the implications will certainly be wide reaching. Greater research is needed to ensure that effective protection mechanisms are in place.

Ethical considerations under COVID-19 should also factor in the impact of participation in research that are specifically contextualised to the pandemic – for instance, it has been suggested that research on gender based violence (GBV) is currently too dangerous to conduct using standard approaches given the uptick in domestic violence.



Above: A socially-distanced key informant interview (KII) in Pulka, Nigeria, for a SH / IOM Labour Market Assessment in 2020.

# LIGNES DE VIE



## HERVÉ NICOLLE Co-founder, Director and Development Unit Lead, Samuel Hall

If you can forgive my use of metaphor, I see Samuel Hall as something like a train. For the last ten years, people have arrived and departed – each from somewhere different, each bringing something new. Everyone meets and travels together for a while; exchanging ideas, agreeing, disagreeing, and sometimes even arguing. In French we say “lignes de vie” – lifelines. It is fascinating to think about how many people have influenced Samuel Hall, and been influenced by it, too.

Some people have been here with us for over ten years, and some are only just embarking – but everyone is shaping who we are and helping to determine our direction. Nassim and I have been on the train from the beginning, but it's not true to say that the company is 'ours' because we founded it. The journey, so to speak, has been impacted not just by team members past and present but also by a list of friends, partners, consultants, academics, and survey respondents that is too long to count. In this sense, the impact of Samuel Hall has been built, sustained and amplified by a vibrant ecosystem.

Our community enriches and inspires us. We can only endeavor to do the same to others.

### ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with universities and academic research groups are key to designing robust theoretical and academic analytical frameworks and indicators, which lead to better quality outcomes for vulnerable populations. At Samuel Hall, we work to be an inherent part of the research landscape in the regions we study. Our experience has taught us the value of hiring and training local academics and experts; building research capacity not only helps to build sustainable solutions, it also allows us to draw on local knowledge and lived experience so that our analysis really does reflect what's going on. For this reason, we're equally proud of the work we do with world-leading, country-leading and local level institutions – from MIT to Maseno, Kenya.

### A LONG-TERM APPROACH

Unfortunately, the short-termism seen in business is often present in the research sector too. Nonetheless, there are some brilliant initiatives to counter the issue, and Samuel Hall is proud to be working on some of them. Longer-term collaborations and commitments are a necessity for effective outcomes. Despite our best wishes, change rarely happens overnight, and we're grateful for long-standing partnerships with the likes of NRC and Save the Children in Afghanistan; or UNICEF, IOM and the ILO in East Africa.

### CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

An area we believe is rife with promise for impact-creation is cross-sector collaboration – and we hope to facilitate more of this in the coming years. We're inspired by the likes of Techfugees, which is helping to connect actors to work towards a common goal. We are a proud founding member of Techfugees Kenya, helping to relaunch this chapter in 2021.

### STANFORD UNIVERSITY'S SEED TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Samuel Hall was selected by Stanford Seed to be part of its 2020 Leadership Program to scale the impact of migration research. Our leadership team is spending 12 months with the Stanford Graduate School of Business to apply private sector approaches to migration challenges globally. With social entrepreneurship at the center, we are paving the way for collaboration between academia/private sector Sustainable Development Goals collaboration to focus on migration research that matters.

### SOME RECENT HIGHLIGHTS:

#### MIGNEX – Migration and Development

The nine-body consortium contributes to more effective and coherent migration management through evidence-based understanding of the linkages between development and migration. SH leads research in Afghanistan and Ethiopia on the causes and consequences of migration.

#### IIED Protracted Displacement in an Urban World

This project convenes experts and practitioners to improve the self-reliance and wellbeing of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people (IDPs).

#### R3 – Recovery, Reintegration, Resilience

Norwegian Refugee Council-led consortium seeking to address the challenge of recovery, reintegration and resilience in Afghanistan – connecting humanitarian response to longer-term development issues. A multi-year project is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

### ACADEMIC LINKS

#### Past collaborations:



#### Ongoing collaborations:



#### Research affiliations:





# THANK YOU FOR READING...

Thank you from the whole Samuel Hall team. We would love to continue the conversation, so please don't hesitate to get in touch with us using the contact details on the following page. NB: Not all of members of the Samuel Hall team are photographed for security reasons.



# ABOUT SAMUEL HALL

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research, evaluates programmes and designs policies in contexts of migration and displacement. Our approach is ethical, academically rigorous and based on first-hand experience of complex and fragile settings.

**Our research connects the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies.** With offices in Afghanistan, Germany, Kenya and Tunisia and a presence in Somalia, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates, we are based in the regions we study. For more information, please visit [www.samuelhall.org](http://www.samuelhall.org).



## REGIONAL OFFICES

Afghanistan,  
Germany,  
Kenya, Tunisia,  
United Arab Emirates

## SATELLITE OFFICES

Ethiopia,  
Somalia

## OUR RESEARCH PILLARS

1. MIGRATION &  
DISPLACEMENT

2. RESILIENCE

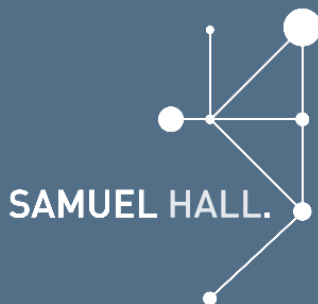
3. CHILDREN &  
YOUTH

4. IMPLEMENTATION  
RESEARCH

5. DATA  
STANDARDS &  
ANALYTICS

10.

2



Our research connects the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies.