



Fund for Innovation  
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For Immediate release June 6, 2023 - International Albinism Awareness Day is June 13, 2023

# **“We are changing the narrative around Albinism. We are giving hope.”**

## **Albinism Royal Foundation partners with University of the Fraser Valley to restore agency for people living with Albinism.**

CANADA, SIERRA LEONE – In an effort to reduce stigma and discrimination against people living with Albinism in Sierra Leone, Albinism Royal Foundation (ARF) and University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) are using innovation to empower one of the country’s most underserved groups.

Funded by the Fund for Innovation and Transformation, the two organizations tested an innovative solution that engages people with albinism, especially women and girls, to be leaders in their community, advocate for their rights, improve their livelihoods and attain financial literacy. Currently, people with albinism experience discrimination, violence, and exclusion from society in most parts of Sierra Leone. Women and girls living with Albinism face a compounded lack of opportunity and economic empowerment due to their gender and albinism.

**Sarah Ngaiwa, the head and founder of ARF in Sierra Leone**, drew from personal experience when designing this innovative approach alongside UFV. As a woman living with Albinism, she is keenly aware of the need to not only empower people with Albinism, but also engage and educate the communities they are a part of.



Sarah Ngaiwa (on the right, in blue and wearing glasses) with ARF participants.

**“In my life there was bullying, there was hardship. A woman living with a disability has two strikes against her. But my personality is bold. I am someone who speaks out. Creating ARF and helping others who have the experiences I had has really been a healing experience.”**

Sarah Ngaiwa  
Head and founder of  
ARF in Sierra Leone

As part of this innovation, people living with albinism participated in workshops that taught practical skills (in traditional weaving and tailoring), as well as financial, leadership, advocacy, and gender equality training. The organizations and innovation participants also engaged and educated local leaders and stakeholders with the aim of changing the community’s attitude toward and perception of people living with Albinism.

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) is a national program that supports small and medium-sized Canadian organizations and their partners in the Global South who are testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality. Director of Innovation Christina MacIsaac said the project was compelling to FIT because it was locally driven and specific in its approach. This is the first time a project of this nature has been implemented in Sierra Leone.

**“ARF had been doing on-the-ground, grassroots work for years. They understood the scope of challenges faced by people with Albinism, and how to address stigma and community-wide discrimination. This solution is innovative, gender-focused, and puts those directly impacted by the issue in the driver’s seat. As a result, the impact of this innovation has the potential to reach across the borders of Sierra Leone and beyond.”**



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Ngaiwa said what moved her the most was seeing people come together to support this cause. She met Catherine Liao, Associate Professor of Nursing at UFV, when Liao was volunteering with Voluntary Service Overseas, where Ngaiwa's husband Bernard worked. Partnering with Liao and Geetanjali Gill, Assistant Professor of Global Development Studies at UFV, has enabled ARF to access funding to bring their work to the next level.

**"Seeing persons with albinism, especially those with intersecting inequalities on the basis of gender, age, class, and marital status, advocate for their rights was inspiring for everyone involved in the project," said Gill. Liao added that she was "deeply moved by the profound unity among the community members, as the project created an empowering environment for them to advocate for their rights and amplify their visibility and voice in Sierra Leone."**

This innovative solution was tested over 15 months (ending August 2022). By the end, 35 participants (26 women and 9 men) were trained in sewing or tailoring and completed workshops in finance and marketing. In addition, the vast majority of the 59 women and 36 men participants, 8 women Gender Equality Champions, and 4 men Gender Equality Champions expressed confidence in their ability as leaders in their communities to advocate for the rights of people with albinism. Of the 22 community stakeholders involved in the innovation's engagement events, all indicated that they were committed to integrating the rights of people with albinism in their work. The recognition of ARF has increased, with several media appearances and invitations to participate on government committees, networks, and councils.

"We are changing the narrative around Albinism," said Ngaiwa. "We are giving hope. We are seeing massive change in the lives of participants and the community at large."

Moving forward, ARF plans to implement this innovative solution in all 16 districts in Sierra Leone. In the future, they would also like to begin address health care access for people living with Albinism, mainly skin cancer screenings.

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Details and stories about FIT-funded SMO  
and local partners collaborating in the Global  
South are available on [FIT's website](#).





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The Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) is a 5-year, \$16.5 M initiative of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils, funded by Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC). FIT is designed to support Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South. The program is open to civil society organizations, social enterprises, post-secondary institutions and the private sector.



The **Inter-Council Network** of Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation is a coalition of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation. The independent Councils are committed to global sustainable development, social justice and social change. They are rooted in communities across Canada and represent over 350 diverse civil society organizations from across Canada. Council membership varies from locally based cultural community civil society organizations to highly recognizable international organizations.



The **Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC)** is a coalition of Manitoba-based organizations involved in international development. Its mission is to support, connect and amplify the work of its members and partners, while directly engaging and collaborating with Manitobans for global sustainability. MCIC encourages dialogue on global issues and helps empower Manitobans to become active global citizens — individuals who understand that their actions here make a difference around the world. MCIC is also responsible for distributing Government of Manitoba and Government of Canada funds designated for international development and humanitarian projects.



**Global Affairs Canada** manages Canada's diplomatic relations, provides consular services to Canadians, promotes the country's international trade, and leads Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance. FIT is a program undertaken with the financial

