

# THE 2021 REGIONAL CO-WINNER OF THE UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD IN AFRICA

## BIOGRAPHY

### Chief Diambendi Madiega



Chief Diambendi Madiega of Burkina Faso is this year's joint regional winner for Africa of UNHCR's 2021 Nansen Refugee Award, an award he shares with Roukiatou Maiga, a fellow Burkinabé. When violence escalated in Burkina Faso in 2019, Madiega took the initiative to host and look after thousands of people who had been forced to flee their homes.

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Madiega, who is commonly referred to as Naba Wogbo, which means Chief Elephant in the Mure language, is a small-scale farmer and practitioner of traditional medicine.

In a country where competition for land and resources fuels conflict, Madiega, 67, managed to negotiate land to house thousands of internally displaced people. He works closely with humanitarian organizations to provide access to shelter, water and other essentials on the occupied land.

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*“When I saw the displaced people arriving, I thought to myself that there must be something we can do as a community to take care of them.” Chief Diambendi Madiega.*

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Madiega makes it a priority to advocate for the rights of the displaced and raise awareness about their plight. This includes working with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to protect those vulnerable to gender-based violence and provide psychological support to those who need it. His actions have inspired neighbors and people in his community to do the same by opening their homes to internally displaced people.

For his initiative and vigor in advocating for people, particularly those with special needs and survivors of gender-based violence amongst the forcibly displaced, Madiega has been named the “Traditional Chief of Bollé”, a multi-ethnic district of Kaya of over 35,000 people. His role has strengthened the fast inclusion of IDPs within the cities. By honoring Madiega with the Nansen Refugee Award for his efforts, UNHCR aims to shed light on the plight of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso and the worsening displacement situation in the Sahel region.

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*“I feel a certain happiness being useful in helping others. I cannot look the other way in the face of such suffering from my fellow human beings. My altruism leads me to always want to do something for people in distress.” Chief Diambendi Madiega.*

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*Chief Diambendi Madiega providing medical counselling to a community member. Renowned as a traditional healer and leader, many community members, including internally displaced people, often come to him for herbal medicinal treatment or divination.*

## Background of the displacement problem in Burkina Faso and the Sahel region

Since 2012, an uprising that began in northern Mali has ignited violence across the Sahel region. Extremist armed groups have swept across borders, exploiting ethnic tensions, poverty and weak governance to terrorize local populations. The violence reached Burkina Faso in 2015 and has since forced hundreds of thousands of Burkinabés to flee for safety, both internally and across borders.

By May 2021, there were over 1.2 million internally displaced people in Burkina Faso - almost double the number in 2019. The country is also hosting over 20,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Mali.