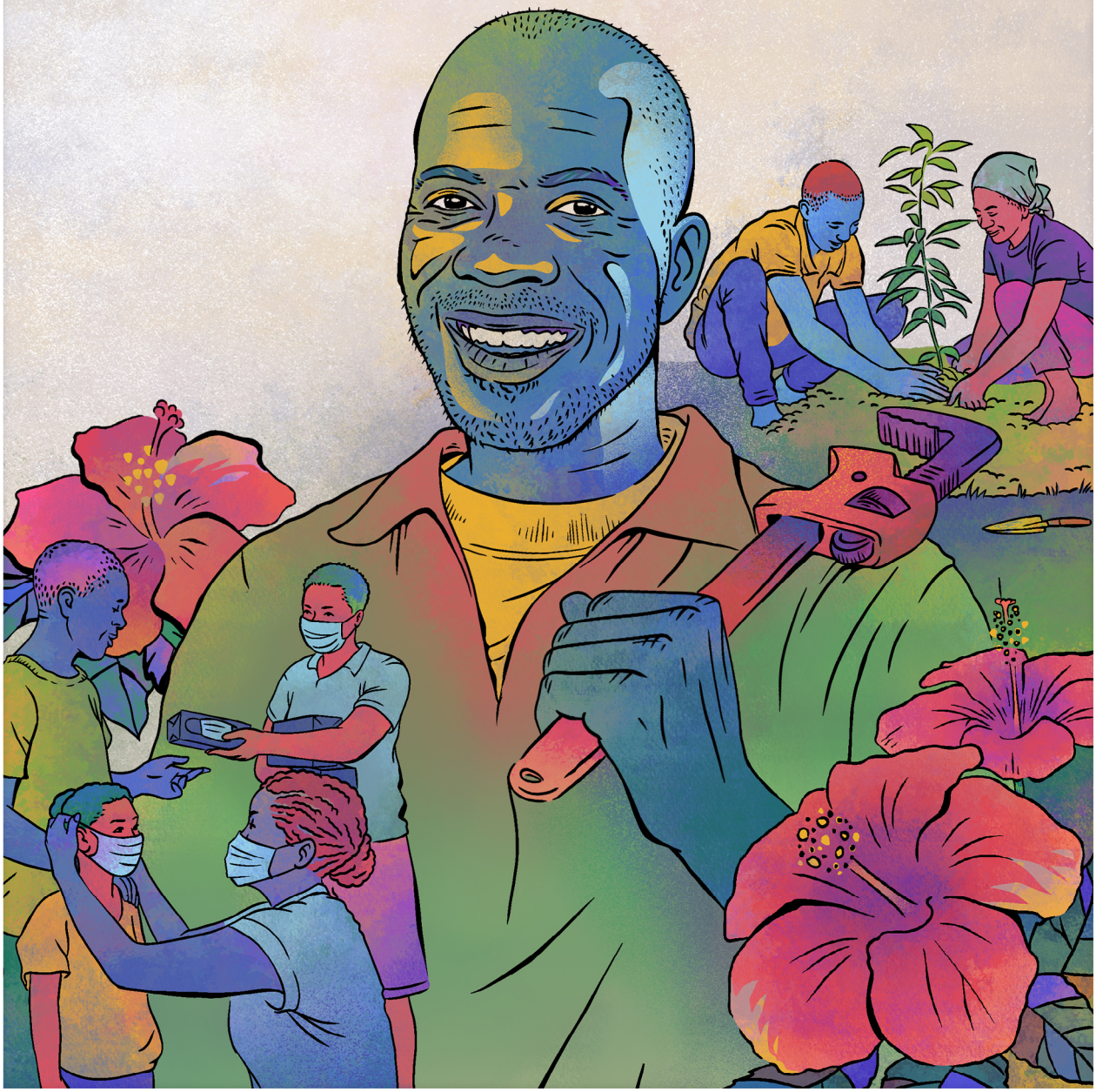
# REFUGEE-LED ORGANISATIONS UGANDA COUNTRY REPORT

Mary Gitahi



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
REFUGEE STUDIES CENTRE
REFUGEE-LED RESEARCH HUB
LERRN

Refugee-Led Research Series
Research Report no. 5

## About the study

This study was supported by the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) at Carleton University, and the Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) at the University of Oxford. The report was prepared by Mary Gitahi, with support from Pauline Vidal (Research Facilitator, RLRH). It was published in February 2023. William Bakunzi, Dyna Roselyne Binezero, and Oliver Waro were engaged as research assistants.

## About the Refugee-Led Research Series

The Refugee-Led Research Series publishes primary and secondary research that has been authored by individuals who have been affected by forced displacement . The Series comprises 'Research Reports' and 'Working Papers'. We prioritise papers that apply ethical and rigorous research methods to capture the priorities of displaced communities. Through the Refugee-Led Research Series, we aim to provide evidence to stakeholders to advance policies and programmes that are responsive to refugee community needs.

## About the RLRH

The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford. RLRH supports individuals with lived experience of displacement to become leaders in the field of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies. We do so by creating opportunities for researchers with displacement backgrounds to lead primary and secondary research studies, from start to finish. Our main research interests relate to 1) livelihoods and self-reliance; and 2) leadership and participation of displaced populations in humanitarian response and policy. RLRH also offers complementary academic programming to a global cohort of students who have been affected by displacement, supporting access to graduate degrees and professional development opportunities. The mission of RLRH is embodied in our leadership structure: the majority of our team have lived experience of displacement. Our offices are in Oxford and in Nairobi at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA).

## About LERRN

LERRN is the Local Engagement Refugee Response Network. We are a team of researchers and practitioners committed to promoting protection and solutions with and for refugees. Our goal is to ensure that refugee research, policy, and practice are shaped by a more inclusive, equitable, and informed collective engagement of civil society. Through collaborative research, training, and knowledge-sharing, we aim to improve the functioning of the global refugee regime and ensure more timely protection and rights-based solutions for refugees.

REFUGEE-LED RESEARCH HUB

LERRN

## Funders

The study is supported, in part, by the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Robert Bosch Stiftung, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Prize, and the IKEA Foundation.

## About the author

**Mary Gitahi:** Mary was the lead researcher for the study in Uganda. Mary is from Kenya and currently lives in the Nakivale Settlement, where she has refugee status. Prior to joining the team, she led the Kuja Kuja Community Feedback programme with Alight. There she supported the exchange of feedback between implementing partners and refugee communities. She holds a BA in Business Administration from Makerere University in Uganda.

The report can be referenced as follows: Gitahi, M. (2023). 'Refugee-Led Organisations in East Africa: Community Perceptions in Uganda.' Refugee-Led Research Series, Research Report (5), February 2023.

# CONTENTS

**Acronyms** 1

**Executive summary** 2

**Introduction** 5
Rationale and objectives 5
Research methods 5
Phase 1 of data collection 6
Phase 2 of data collection 6
A refugee-led study 6

**Nature and scope of RLOs in Eastern Africa** 9
RLO development in Uganda 9
RLO landscape 9
Kampala 9
Nakivale Refugee Settlement 10
Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement 11
Profile of RLO leaders 12
Nationality 12
Gender 12
Education 12
Age 13
Motivation to start RLOs 13
Involvement of the host community 14
Partnerships 15
Dynamics between RLOs 16

**Perceived Impact of RLOs** 17
Knowledge of RLOs among community members 17
Knowledge of RLOs among aid organisations and government institutions 17
Experience of RLO beneficiaries 18
Descriptions of impact 19
Beneficiaries 19
Non-beneficiaries 20

**Variations in response and impact** 21
Networks 21
Regulatory framework 21

**Conclusion** 23
RLO challenges 23
RLO plans 23
Partnership plans 23

**Recommendations** 25

**Annex 1: Profiles of selected RLOs in Uganda** 29

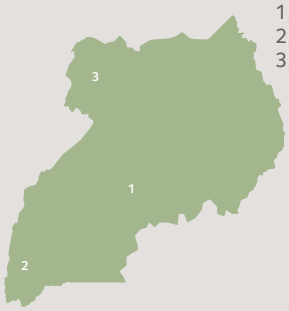
# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **ACBON** | Association of Community Based Organizations in Nakivale |
| **AYAN** | African Youth Action Network |
| **CBO** | Community-based organisation |
| **CTEN** | Community Technology Empowerment Network |
| **FGD** | Focus group discussion |
| **HIV** | Human immunodeficiency virus |
| **IDRC** | International Development Research Centre |
| **INGO** | International non-governmental organisation |
| **IOM** | International Organization for Migration |
| **IRC** | International Rescue Committee |
| **JRS** | Jesuit Refugee Service |
| **KII** | Key informant interview |
| **LERRN** | Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (Carleton University) |
| **LGBTQ+** | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Associated Communities |
| **NGEO** | Nakivale Green Environment |
| **NGO** | Non-governmental organisation |
| **OPM** | Office of the Prime Minister |
| **OSF** | Open Society Foundations |
| **RELON** | Refugee-Led Organization Network |
| **RLO** | Refugee-led organisation |
| **RLRH** | Refugee-Led Research Hub (University of Oxford) |
| **RLSN** | Refugee Life Support Network |
| **RSC** | Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford) |
| **SWA** | Somali Women Association |
| **UNHCR** | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| **VSLA** | Village Savings and Loan Association |
| **VOR** | Voice of Refugees |
| **YARID** | Young African Refugee for Integral Development |

# Executive Summary

This study was motivated by emerging evidence that refugee-led organisations (RLOs) in East Africa play a vital role in meeting community needs. While there was some evidence on the landscape and activities of RLOs in Uganda, no prior study had engaged community members and RLO beneficiaries to understand how they perceive the impact of RLOs on their own communities.

This study was led by a person with a displacement background from the start to finish




**Uganda**
1. Kampala
2. Nakivale Settlement
3. Bidi Bidi Settlement

**Phase 1: Mapping RLOs**

**63** RLOs identified
**45** stakeholder interviews

**Phase 2: In-depth examination**

**15** interviews with RLO leaders
**11** interviews with external skateholders
**30** focus group discussions (FGDs) with RLO beneficiaries and community members
**15** FGDs with RLOs´managers, staff and volunteers

## The RLO landscape

- In Kampala, most RLOs are registered and have formalised their activities due to support from the larger RLOs and RLO networks. Larger-scale RLOs are registered as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). RLOs focus on livelihood, medical support, education, and special interest groups (e.g. HIV survivors, LGBTQ+ groups). Most rely on volunteers and members, but larger-scale ones have paid staff.
- In Nakivale, most RLOs are informal and of small scale. There are a few outliers that receive funding and are registered as NGOs. Most influential RLOs are located in base camp, while other locations host more informal RLOs and village savings and loan associations. Groups often focus on agricultural livelihood, special interest groups, or access to job opportunities for youths. Most RLOs rely on members or volunteers for support. Some have salaried staff, including Ugandan nationals from Kampala.
- In Bidi Bidi, most RLOs are small-scale, informal, and focus on single issues (e.g. HIV survivors, support for widows) and cultural preservation (due to the shared nationality of beneficiaries). Medium-scale RLOs tend to act as intermediaries between the youth and NGOs for cash-for-work projects.
- The team identified two RLO networks in Uganda: the Refugee-Led Organization Network (RELON) Uganda based in Kampala and the Association Of Community Based Organisations in Nakivale (ACBON) in Nakivale, which were both created for advocacy, access to opportunities, and to address registration challenges. In Bidi Bidi, there is a community-based network based on ethnic affiliation (South Sudanese Union), which focuses on advocacy, peace and reconciliation, and cultural preservation.

- Educated nationals act as enablers for larger RLOs, providing technical support at the managerial level. In Uganda, RLOs are required under the ReHope strategy and the current Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to provide 30% of their services to host community members, maintain good relationships, and promote integration. RLOs nevertheless tend to prioritise refugees in service delivery; they also may not be able to reach this objective in less integrated locations such as Bidi Bidi.

## Perceived impact of RLOs

- Across organisations, beneficiaries speak positively about their interactions and experiences with RLOs. They note that RLOs treat them with more dignity, are better understanding of their needs, provide fairer service delivery, are more accessible and less bureaucratic, facilitate more direct communication, and are more open to serving unregistered refugees. RLOs also provide better paid opportunities for volunteers or staff.
- Beneficiaries note that RLO services have impacted their well-being and self-reliance, regardless of RLO size. This is particularly the case when beneficiaries are in situations of irregularity or marginalisation or when the RLO provides a service which might not be legal. Examples include the provision of micro-loans, emergency support, skills training, orientation and information, COVID-19 safety measures, mental health support, and community cohesion. Negative perceptions pertain to ethnic favouritism and RLOs functioning in a self-serving capacity for leaders.
- Refugees are aware of RLOs and their activities in both urban and settlement settings. Some RLOs are more popular than others due to the influence they have in the community. Influence is attributed to the RLO leader, the sector in which they intervene, their affiliation to aid organisations, their ability to offer visible and regular services to the community, and, finally, their location. Aid organisations and authorities are aware of larger RLOs, but their knowledge is limited when it comes to more informal, smaller RLOs.

## Variations in impact

- There is variation between RLO members/beneficiaries and non-beneficiary community members regarding the impact of RLOs on their community. Non-beneficiaries are generally neutral on RLO impact, but a minority claim there are negative impacts.
- The most significant factor in determining RLO success is the leader's ability to access a range of networks, in particular humanitarian networks. Elite RLOs tend to be led by male refugees with higher qualifications (bachelor's and masters degrees) and who are part of existing networks, including with aid partners and international bodies.
- Women-led RLOs are more likely to remain at the self-help stage and struggle to expand their activities due to structural barriers and self-censorship. While most RLO leaders are under 40 years old, nationality-based RLOs and cultural preservation or cultural support groups tend to be led by older people in the community.
- The regulatory framework has a significant influence on RLOs' ability to access resources and partnerships, but not their ability to operate. The Refugee Act 2006

states that refugees have the right to association for non-political and non-profit making associations and trade unions. RLOs can register as either community-based organisations (CBOs) or NGOs depending on the scale of their activities. Barriers to registration have eased due to support from RLO networks, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and local authorities, but smaller-scale RLOs may still face administrative challenges.

- Many RLOs engage with the humanitarian and development sector in urban and camp settings, but these partnerships tend to be light-touch and short-term. Partnerships bring exposure to RLOs and legitimise them in the eyes of the donor community and, in some cases, the refugee community. Many INGOs start engaging with RLOs as a way to access communities.
- Meaningful engagement remains sparse. While some aid organisations play an active role in transferring funding opportunities for RLOs, the funding models in the humanitarian sector, and larger INGOs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are slow to change.
- Diaspora funding remains a source of support for RLO activities. In Nakivale, RLOs can now apply for bank loan products specifically adapted to their needs. These banks accept dwellings built by refugees on Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)-owned land as collateral, increasing access to loans significantly; and there are indications that support for RLOs and RLO members will be further increased.
- RLOs have plans to work on access to networks and opportunities, gain exposure, and advertise their work through aid networks and social media. Informal RLOs aspire to register in order to access partnerships and funding opportunities.

## Recommendations

- Donors should provide more extensive and tailored funding to RLOs, particularly for marginalised communities; expand their support to unregistered RLOs; engage more directly with RLOs and RLO communities to support activities and facilitate networking; and advocate for policy change at the government level. Government authorities should simplify the registration process and allocate land and resources fairly. RLOs can increase community accountability and inclusivity, expand networks, and set up RLO-to-RLO partnerships on projects.

# Introduction

## Rationale and objectives

Emerging evidence suggests that refugee-led organisations (RLOs) in East Africa play a vital role in meeting community needs.[1] RLOs increasingly took centre stage during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing protection and assistance to refugee communities while other humanitarian organisations struggled to respond effectively. [2]There is some evidence on the landscape and activities of RLOs in Uganda.[3] However, no prior study has engaged community members and RLO beneficiaries to understand how they perceive the impact of RLOs on the refugee response and on their well-being.

This study seeks to fill these knowledge gaps in Uganda by responding to the following research questions:

1. **Nature of the response:** What is the nature, scope, and practices of RLO activities in Uganda?
2. **Perceived impact of the response:** How is the impact of RLOs' responses on the displaced communities they serve perceived by diverse stakeholders (including regional actors, states, local authorities, humanitarian and development service providers, host communities, and refugees)?
3. **Factors that condition the response and impact of RLOs:** What are the common factors that determine the response and impact of RLOs? What factors explain the variations in response and impact of RLOs in Uganda?

## Research methods

To understand the nature and the changes brought about by RLOs in Uganda, the study relies on the perceptions of RLO impact from a range of stakeholders, including the communities they serve and other members of the humanitarian system (including national and local authorities, and traditional humanitarian, and development service providers). The study uses a qualitative approach to triangulate different data sources and ensure that different perspectives are captured and analysed, over two phases.

## Phase 1 of data collection

Phase 1 of the study consisted of mapping RLOs in the four countries of the study through a desk review, an online search, and rapid phone-based interviews. Preliminary mapping was critical to avoid overlooking smaller RLOs that may not have considerable resources, but still contribute to the well-being of their communities. As a result of the mapping, the team identified 63 RLOs in Uganda, including 21 in Kampala, 29 in Nakivale, and 13 in Bidi Bidi.

---

[1] See for instance: Kate Pincock, Alexander Betts, and Evan Easton-Calabria, *The Global Governed?: Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[2] Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria, and Kate Pincock. 'Localising public health: refugee-led organisations as first and last responders in COVID-19', *World Development* 139 (2021): 105311.

[3] See: Kate Pincock, Alexander Betts and Evan Easton-Calabria, *The Global Governed?: Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria, and Kate Pincock. 'Localising public health: refugee-led organisations as first and last responders in COVID-19', *World Development* 139 (2021): 105311; Evan Easton-Calabria, Alexander Betts, and Kate Pincock. 'Refugee-led organisations: collective action for collective assistance', Rethinking Refuge, 17 September 2021; Evan Easton-Calabria and Robert Hakiza. 'In the interest of saving: refugee-led microfinance in Kampala, Uganda', *Development Policy Review* 39, no. 1 (2021): 22–38. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dpr.12500

The team selected 15 RLOs (five in each location: Kampala, Nakivale, and Bidi Bidi) for in-depth examination. The selection of the RLOs was based on a mix of purposive and convenience sampling in both sites and on a set of criteria that reflected the diversity of RLOs. Special attention was given to diversity in the sample, and researchers set minimum criteria for RLOs based on: 1) the RLO setting (camp versus urban); 2) registration status; 3) nationality, religion, gender, social status, education level, or age of RLO leaders; 4) the level of external relations and influence of non-refugee actors (including co-led organisations between RLOs and host community members); 5) their resources and access to funding; and 6) their stated objectives (e.g. social protection, artistic, for-profit)

## Phase 2 of data collection

The research team collected in-depth qualitative data on the 15 RLOs and the actors that benefit from them or are involved in refugee response. See Annex 1 for more details about the profiles of selected RLOs.

- 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) with RLO leaders.
- 11 KIIs with external stakeholders, including state representatives, local authorities, other humanitarian and development service providers, academics, experts and community leaders.
- 30 focus group discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. FGDs took place with both direct beneficiaries – those who have received services from RLOs selected for the study – and potential beneficiaries. Potential beneficiaries refer to community members who fall under the stated mandate of RLOs selected for the study but who had not received services at the time of the study. Each FGD included five to eight participants.
- 15 FGDs with RLO managers, staff, and volunteers

## A refugee-led study

This study was led by a current refugee researcher based in Nakivale. RLOs and beneficiaries reacted positively to being approached about this research project. RLOs were generally enthusiastic to know research was being conducted on their work, especially smaller-scale initiatives and women-led groups that typically felt excluded from broader discussions around refugee participation. They had many questions about the research and what benefits it could bring them. The research team took time to explain the scope and objectives of the study and to mitigate expectations. In Uganda, women-led RLOs were particularly excited about being interviewed by a woman refugee researcher.

# Nature and scope of RLOs in Uganda

There is no universally accepted definition of RLOs. In this report, we use the term RLO to describe any organisation, association, coalition, formal or informal network, faith-based group or initiative that is led by refugees or asylum seekers in urban, rural, camp, and settlement settings.

| Definition of RLOs |
|---|
| It may include both registered and unregistered groups. |
| Their function is to respond to the needs of refugees and related host communities, whether these are humanitarian, developmental, or cultural. |
| While RLOs generally prioritise their national community or the refugees who live where they operate, RLOs also provide services to host community members in urban locations and settlements where they are more integrated. |
| RLOs may provide direct services or focus on advocacy. They can aim at supporting their own members (self-help groups), their communities (special interest group or ethnic group), other refugees, and the host community they live with. They may have for-profit elements, but those are used (fully or partially) to fund not-for-profit activities. |
| RLOs may include non-refugees in their boards and management teams, but the main decision-makers and founders have a displacement background. |
| We exclude from this definition refugee leadership bodies set up by authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as they were not set up independently, hence their decisions are bound by authorities and UNHCR. In Uganda, we excluded Refugee Welfare Committees, such as child protection committees, water source committees, and gender task forces supported by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). |
| We also exclude groups created as part of international non-governmental organisations (INGO) programmes unless those groups have expanded their activities beyond the original INGO objectives. |

## RLO development in Uganda

At the regional level, we conceptualise RLOs in three main development stages, linked to their funding capacity:

- **Self-help stage**: Informal groups that aim at providing services to their members only. They are dependent on their members' contributions, which can be upon registration or via monthly or annual contribution ranging between UGX 2,000 to UGX 20,000. They may also engage in income-generating activities, where profits are distributed between RLO activities and members (e.g. Umoja mechanics). These groups are not registered. Many RLOs in Bidi Bidi and Nakivale are at the self-help stage. There are more women-led RLOs at this stage compared to male-led RLOs, such as Upendo wa Wamama, Tumaini women group, and Epika. Inactive members or those who are not able to make the required regular contributions may not be able to receive support from their groups. Wamama wa Upendo women's group will only offer full support to active members.
- **Growth phase**: Community-based organisations (CBOs) that have registered and are

national and ethnic lines). At this stage, RLOs are able to engage with diaspora members, individual sponsors, and, in some cases, humanitarian donors. During the growth phase, RLOs rely on a hybrid of self-funding and funding from external stakeholders, although self-funding outweighs external funding as the latter is usually not sufficient and irregular. RLOs are stabilising in this phase and are in a position to attract funding from well-off community members, diaspora members, humanitarian donors, and individual donors. Individual sponsors may include researchers who engaged RLO leaders as research assistants, and international former aid workers or volunteers who developed personal connections with RLOs. In such cases, they either provide direct financial support or support with fundraising and network-building. RLOs at this phase have recently registered or are trying to register. This applies to medium-scale RLOs in Uganda such as Unleash Uganda, Arise and Shine, and Nakivale Green Environment (NGEO).

- **Expansion phase**: Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or larger CBOs that provide services to refugees regardless of their ethnic affiliation and to the host community. They are able to compete with traditional organisations for funding. They are often referred to as 'elite' or 'celebrity' RLOs. In this phase, RLOs are in a good position to lobby and partner with traditional INGOs for humanitarian funding. External funding outweighs membership fees and diaspora support. A few elite RLOs have direct access to humanitarian donors (e.g. Young African Refugee for Integral Development [YARID]). RLOs in this phase engage in high-scale income-generating activities and can bid for contracts from private investors. For instance, Wakati Foundation was contracted to construct offices for two financial institutions in Nakivale. Membership fees are not required at this stage and profits from income-generating activities by members are not shared back to the organisation. In this stage RLOs are fully registered as CBOs or NGOs. Some of the most influential RLOs in the site of study are Wakati Foundation, YARID, I CAN South Sudan, African Youth Action Network (AYAN), and Community Technology Empowerment Network (CTEN).

This report examines how some RLOs have managed to grow into medium-sized groups or expand into elite groups, and what sets them apart from RLOs that remain at the self-help stage. We nonetheless acknowledge that self-help groups and smaller-scale RLOs can play a significant role in their members' lives.

We demonstrate that RLOs get stuck in the self-help stage largely as a result of external factors: if they are unable to access further funding (beyond membership fees) from donors or diaspora support, and/or if they are unable to register. We see that RLO leaders with more personal networks, who are generally educated men who previously worked as incentive workers with aid organisations, are more likely to access funding and expand their organisations.

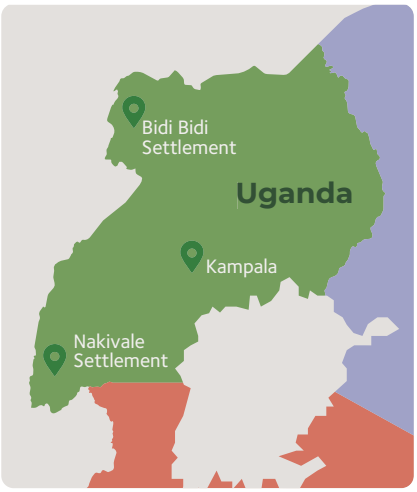
Women-led RLOs are less likely to move on from the self-help stage due to structural barriers and self-censorship. It was a challenge to identify women-led RLOs in Bidi Bidi until a visit to the location revealed informal women-led refugee groups impacting the community that did not advertise themselves as RLOs.

Diaspora funding remains a source of support for RLO activities. RLOs tend to receive diaspora support when their founding member/leader is resettled abroad and continues to

provide support, or when they have the capacity to raise awareness of the RLO's activities online. Refugee Life Support Network (RLSN) in Kampala receives most of its funds from diaspora networks activated by former members who are currently living abroad. CEBUNA, a Burundian-led RLO in Nakivale reports to have received support from Burundian philanthropists based abroad who constructed a hall for the RLO's activities.

In Nakivale, RLOs can now apply for loan products, which have been specifically adapted to their needs, from one of the two banks established in 2021. These banks accept dwellings built by refugees on OPM-owned land as collateral, significantly increasing access to loans. An interview with a staff member from a financial institution suggested that they planned to expand their engagement with RLOs both as clients and as an entry point to the community to provide financial services.

## The RLO landscape




RLOs in Uganda take diverse shapes and sizes. They vary in terms of the services offered to the community, depending on community needs. Livelihood is a key priority for most RLOs in the three site study locations in Uganda. They seek to address low levels of income, the decrease in aid from humanitarian partners, and the general increase in the cost of food items in the country; and to expand opportunities for refugees. Additionally, RLOs offer other services such as education, health, peace and reconciliation, job matching, and referral to NGOs for services that they are unable to offer. RLOs also offer intangible support, for example support in burial ceremonies, cultural preservation (e.g. Adungu), and protection for marginalised groups (e.g. the committee of people living with albinism in Nakivale). Women-led RLOs often engage in arts and crafts as it is a more flexible income-generating activity that allows them to attend to other responsibilities (e.g. Tumaini women's group, Epika women's group).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of RLOs in the refugee community as they were at the forefront of service provision. RLOs offered soap and hand washing facilities, and raised awareness of measures against COVID-19 to the community. For instance, in Nakivale, the Tumaini women's group made and distributed masks to the community and the Wakati Foundation and Opportunigee partnered with Alight to support the Rubondo community during the pandemic. In Kampala, YARID distributed food and masks and supported families to pay rent.

## Kampala

Refugees Refugees in Kampala started setting up groups in the early 2000s, but many did not last due to lack of funds, low literacy levels, and the resettlement of many leaders. YARID is one of the oldest RLOs and was formed in 2008. From 2015 onwards, there has been a rise in the number of RLOs in Kampala because refugees were granted increased access to

education and hence to networks (e.g. AYAN was created by South Sudanese refugee students). This rise in the number of RLOs precipitated recognition from stakeholders and the launch of partnerships between RLOs and aid organisations. RLO leaders were also conscious of continuity challenges and set up structures to ensure that RLOs can continue functioning should a leader be resettled or pass away. Most RLOs in Kampala are registered and have formalised their activities, thanks to support from the larger RLOs and RLO networks. Larger-scale RLOs, such as YARID and AYAN, are registered as NGOs. RLOs focus on a range of issues, including livelihood, medical support, education, and special interest groups (e.g. [HIV survivors; [LGBTQ+ groups). Most rely on volunteers and members, but larger-scale RLOs have staff.

Today, RLOs are highly concentrated in Makindye, which hosts urban refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The concentration of RLOs in one area eases access to services by beneficiaries.

Most RLOs are formal; the team identified few informal groups in Kampala. Unlike settlements, small, medium, and large-scale RLOs in Kampala are all registered as either CBOs or NGOs due to the support of more experienced RLOs. YARID, Bondeko, and Somali Women Association (SWA) are all registered despite their difference in size. A representative of Refugee-Led Organization Network (RELON) Uganda said that support in registration was key to new members of the network: '*We have tried supporting smaller RLOs to get registered because we know the importance of registration*.'

YARID, AYAN, and RLSN are some of the more influential RLOs in Kampala.

## Nakivale Refugee Settlement

Nakivale is the oldest refugee settlement in Uganda, opening in 1960. The population increased in 2015 with the crisis in Burundi.[4] RLOs are less active in the Juru and Rubondo sub-base camps compared to Base Camp, which has better public infrastructure, hosts refugees from all the nationalities represented in the settlement, and holds the main offices of aid organisations. Most groups started in the past ten years because of the increase in the number of refugees and general support towards localisation of aid. Some RLOs formed as a reaction to COVID-19 and the resultant decrease in aid support; in some cases, these RLOs adapted their previous services. There are both formal and informal RLOs in the settlements with the majority being informal, small-scale RLOs. These are RLOs that respond to a specific need in the community, with little access to networks and funding. Umoja mechanics, one of the few RLOs based in Rubondo, is a small-scale RLO that trains youths on motorcycle repair. They do not have any partners and their funding is based on members' contributions.

There are a few outliers – 'celebrity' RLOs – such as Opportunigee and Wakati Foundation that receive funding and are registered as NGOs. Most influential RLOs are located in Base Camp, while other locations host more informal RLOs and village savings and loan associations (VSLAs). Groups often focus on agricultural livelihood (e.g. animal rearing, agriculture), special interest groups (e.g. committee of people living with albinism in Nakivale), or access to job opportunities for youths (e.g. Wakati Foundation and Opportunigee). Most RLOs

[4] See: UNHCR. 'Nakivale Settlement profile: Isingiro District, Uganda', July 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/nakivale-settlement-profile-isingiro-district-uganda-july-2020

rely on members (self-help groups) or volunteers (medium and large-scale organisations). Some have salaried staff, including Ugandan nationals from Kampala.

Older RLOs that are still active are more likely to be registered, having been exposed to the process earlier and fostered relationships with aid organisations whose support hastens the process. According to one RLO leader in Nakivale, the OPM had halted the process of issuing recommendation letters for one year for vetting purposes. This delayed the process for many RLOs that had intended to register and had the resources to do so.

## Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement

Bidi Bidi was established in 2016 to host refugees from South Sudan and it is the largest settlement in Uganda.[5] It is made up of five zones; the majority of RLOs are in zones 1, 2, and 3. Refugees from zones 4 and 5 are able to access services by RLOs formed in the first three zones. Most RLOs in Nakivale are small-scale, informal, and focus on single issues (e.g. HIV survivors, support for widows) and cultural preservation.

Some organisations were founded in South Sudan but continued activities in the settlement (e.g. artistic groups). Adungu music group started in the early 1960s by a man named Malemba but was rekindled in the camp in 2016. CTEN is the only refugee-led NGO that provides education and livelihood services: it was established in another district and extended its services to Bidi Bidi. Medium-scale groups tend to be intermediaries between the youth and NGOs for cash-for-work projects. Oxfam partnered with CTEN on a solar kit repair project. Creation and continuity of RLOs is affected by frequent movement between South Sudan and Uganda: *'In case of instability in their country of origin, a lot of initiatives come up to support their community'* (NGO staff, Bidi Bidi).

### Differences between urban and settlement-based RLOs

- The majority of RLOs in settlements are small to medium-size while in Kampala most of the RLOs are medium to large-scale. RLOs tend to be larger in urban settings or in central parts of camps because RLO leaders have more access to networks (external actors and diaspora) in those locations. Refugees in urban settings are also generally more educated and can access more opportunities to attend coordination meetings, to build networks and to access funding.
- RLOs in Nakivale are more diverse in terms of services offered than Bidi Bidi. Cultural preservation is key to RLOs in Bidi Bidi while it is less relevant in Nakivale where communities have different cultural backgrounds.
- RLOs in urban settings tend to include host communities as beneficiaries or staff members more so than those in settlement settings; this is because of the close proximity between the two communities.
- Urban refugee communities are less aware of RLOs than camp-based communities.

[5] See: UNHCR Operational Data Portal. 'BidiBidi Settlement HLP factsheet 2019'. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/71907

## Profile of RLO leaders

### Nationality

In Nakivale and Kampala, educated Congolese refugees take the lead in the creation of RLOs, followed by Burundians in Nakivale and South Sudanese in Kampala. Wakati Foundation, Opportunigee, Unleash Uganda, YARID, and Bondeko are all successful Congolese-led RLOs. Congolese have been in Uganda for longer than other nationalities and have therefore had a greater opportunity to foster better relationships with partners. According to aid organisations, Congolese RLOs are described as being more inclusive compared to RLOs led by other nationalities. In Bidi Bidi, leaders' nationalities reflect the camp demographics, and most are South Sudanese, although one group (SINA Loketa) is co-led by a South Sudanese and a Congolese leader.

There are efforts among elite organisations in Uganda to include other nationalities in their management teams. When RLOs have mixed nationality membership, it tends to be reflected at the staffing or volunteer level but not at the leadership level.

### Gender

There are few women-led groups in all locations of the study. Many of the identified women-led RLOs were small-scale and informal compared to their male counterparts. The Somali Women Union is among the few women-led RLOs that exist in Kampala.

There are current efforts to include women in the management of larger-scale RLOs. Larger male-led organisations in Kampala are also trying to raise the profile of women-led RLOs with funders.

> *'There are not many female-led RLOs that I know of; however, we try to be more inclusive in the management team of YARID to ensure that there is gender balance and equality'*
> - RLO leader, YARID, Kampala

Women tend to lead self-help groups and struggle in gaining resources to expand their activities. Refugee women have lower access to employment opportunities and create self-help groups and VSLA groups (wherein members meet to place small amounts of money into group savings and take out to repay micro-loans) as a means of development. In some cases, these groups are beginning to offer services to more members. There is, however, limited recognition of these types of activities as humanitarian and developmental contributions.

The lack of women RLO leaders can be explained by structural and cultural issues: women have less access to higher education, where leaders often meet; they have competing priorities such as childcare and house management; and they face barriers when seeking leadership positions and might not be seen as legitimate leaders for issues that are not women-specific.

Furthermore, while women undertake important work for the community, they do not always perceive their group's work as an initiative or feel that they are having an impact on the community.

### Education

Elite RLOs are led by refugees with higher education qualifications such as bachelor's degrees (e.g. Opportunigee's leader) and masters' degrees (e.g. leaders of YARID, Wakati Foundation,

AYAN). Small and medium-scale RLOs are led by degree holders, diploma holders, and secondary school certificate holders. Out of the three women-led RLOs studied, one leader had a bachelor's degree and the other two had diploma certificates. More successful RLOs are led by more educated leaders. This can be explained by the fact that educated refugees are more likely to have access to networks and are seen as more legitimate.

### Age

Most RLO leaders are aged between 25 to 35 years, which falls under the category of youths. Male youths take the lead in creating RLOs because they easily adapt to the Ugandan education system and learn the host country language faster due to integration in social activities like sports. They create RLOs to address the challenge of unemployment, access to education, and advocacy.

## Motivation to start RLOs

Most RLOs are created to fill gaps in the provision of assistance by aid organisations in both urban and settlement contexts. Aid has declined in recent years due to a decrease in funds meant to support refugees and an influx in the number of asylum seekers coming to Uganda. In Kampala, refugees have less access to assistance as they are perceived to be capable of taking care of themselves due to their urban refugee status.

> *'We have realised that most of the traditional service providers are becoming weak day after day, which is what makes us decide to create our small organisations in order to help each other survive, as my colleagues have already said'*
>
> – RLO leader, Nakivale
>
> *'First of all the level of youth unemployment is high in the settlement. You know that there are no jobs. The food ratio and support we were getting from UNHCR was not enough to cater for all our needs. Youths could not access formal education and even when they did, they did not perform well due to language differences. We looked at all those factors and decided to form this organisation. Our vision is to see a world where youths are taking leadership positions and also doing well in life. Our mission is to support them to that point to the best of our ability'*
>
> – RLO leader, Nakivale

**Access to employment opportunities**: Unemployment is a major issue in Uganda and the case is worse for refugees who may have no education or lack documents to prove their educational qualifications. RLOs create employment opportunities and train refugees on entrepreneurial skills for self-employment. '*I started being trained about entrepreneurship and now I sell honey and supplement my family's income*' (RLO beneficiary, Nakivale).

**Access to social services**: Refugees in Uganda face challenges in accessing social services such as health and education. In camps where health care services and education are free, refugees have complained of not getting medicine after diagnosis and are therefore forced to buy medicine from local pharmacies. The quality of education offered in the settlement is questionable. RLOs are thus formed to address these challenges by supporting individuals who cannot afford such services through contributing cash for health care supplies or referring the individual to an aid partner that can help. '*Last year we received a very sickly lady who unfortunately passed away because she did not access the right medical attention*

*at the right time. We were called at the last minute to support in transporting her to the hospital and she passed on arrival*' (RLO leader, Kampala).

**Social protection**: RLOs are formed to protect special interest groups, such as people living with albinism and LGBTQ+ individuals.

**Cultural preservation**: RLOs in Bidi Bidi are often created as a means of preserving the culture. This is typically addressed through cultural music, dance, and drama. '*Our children and their children need to know their culture. We encourage all RLOs to see that information on who we are and what we stand for is spread out to beneficiaries*' (community leader, Bidi Bidi zone 1).

**Modelling successful RLOs**: Smaller RLOs are motivated to follow the footsteps of large-scale organisations like YARID. Newly formed RLOs sometimes focus on the same areas of work as more popular RLOs because they perceive this to be a better strategy to access humanitarian funding.

## Involvement of the host community

In Uganda, host communities receive services from RLOs in urban and settlement settings, while educated, experienced nationals from other locations offer technical support to the organisations as consultants and staff. National staff are common in elite organisations like Wakati Foundation, CTEN, and YARID, which have the resources to pay for their services.

| | Setting | Beneficiaries | Co-managers | Enablers | Inhibitors |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kampala | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Nakivale | | ✓ | – | – | – |
| Bidi Bidi | | ✓ | – | – | ✓ |

In Kampala and Nakivale, nationals mostly act as enablers for larger-scale RLOs. They play a role in facilitating access to resources and can be involved as staff, board members, or as supporters. In some cases, nationals who work with NGOs or educated nationals befriend RLO leaders and put them in touch with potential funders or provide technical support.

In Uganda, RLOs are required to provide 30% of their services to host community members and to maintain good relationships with the host community. RLOs nevertheless tend to prioritise refugees in service delivery; they may also not be able to reach this objective in less integrated locations such as Bidi Bidi (although some host community members benefited from RLO services in Bidi Bidi, in particular women). Women of the host communities are more likely to receive RLO services since they share common challenges and meet in food markets.

Land conflicts, language barriers, and cultural and religious differences led RLO members to describe some host communities as inhibitors in Nakivale and Bidi Bidi. In Nakivale, there has been conflict between herders and NGEO, which lost three nursery beds to host communities' cattle. This resulted in questions over who has the right over allocated land. In Bidi Bidi, one RLO complained that they had planted crops but lost the harvest to the host community after they claimed the land just before the harvesting season. RLOs say they are actively thinking about the best ways to ensure social cohesion and involve the host community in their activities to avoid future incidents.

## Partnerships

RLOs engage with the humanitarian and development sector in urban and camp settings, but these partnerships tend to be light-touch, project-based, and short-term. Partnerships bring exposure to RLOs; they also legitimise them in the eyes of the donor community and, in some cases, the refugee community.

- **Mobilisation and access to the refugee community:** INGOs often initiate engagement with RLOs as a way to access communities. Many described the main contribution of RLOs as an access point to the community or as an intermediary between INGOs and the community. *'I can say that for us, we use them as a gate for entry to the community. Without using the community and RLO leaders, I used one example which was in the Somali community. I can assure you that if you mobilise the Somali community for an activity without the leader getting aware, you'll get issues with your implementation'* (INGO staff, Kampala).
- **Light information-sharing and (two-way) referrals:** Some RLOs have established linkages with INGOs that allow them to refer community members to services. For example, one RLO in Uganda sometimes refers their members to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) for further medical diagnosis; and Voice of Refugees (VOR) passes information from aid organisations to the Eritrean community in Kampala.
- **Implementation:** RLOs implement projects on behalf of INGOs on a short-term basis. In those instances, RLOs act as intermediaries between the community and aid organisations. RLOs often report that those partnerships are not sustainable. Typically, larger RLOs with more networks and that are more structured act as implementers on projects set up by aid organisations. The parameters of those programmes are often pre-defined by aid organisations, although there are a few exceptions. For example, in Nakivale, Opportunigee and Wakati Foundation were involved in the development and implementation of a project to supply sanitary material and raise awareness about COVID-19 – an initiative funded by Alight Uganda. RLOs that have access to humanitarian funding reported that some policies make it difficult for them to make independent decisions. *'We sometimes apply for funds to implement projects and we are given conditions to get our projects accepted. For example, they tell you "It's okay, your project will go through but will be implemented with another organisation because as a refugee you are not allowed to manage a big amount of money even if the funds were given to you'* (RLO leader, Nakivale).
- **In-kind contributions:** According to most aid organisations, in-kind contributions are more preferable than direct funding because of issues linked to accountability across RLOs of all types and sizes. For example, in Nakivale, Umoja Mechanics received working overalls from Alight Uganda but have never received funds from aid partners.
- **Capacity building:** Enhancing the capacity of RLOs is the objective of many aid organisations. The IRC in Bidi Bidi mentioned that they work with RLOs to enhance their capacity as a sustainable strategy to ensure their continuity even after the exit of the aid organisation. Cohere is in partnership with SWA on enhancing capacity for management and English literacy students. There are several other initiatives to build the capacity of RLOs (e.g. Oxfam, Refugee Law Initiative).

RLOs of smaller sizes in Kampala have relatively better access to partnerships while only few elite RLOs have access to partnerships in Nakivale and Bidi Bidi. For instance Somali Women Association, a small RLO in Kampala, has a partnership with IRC.

There are mixed community perspectives on RLO collaborations with the traditional aid sector. Some refugees consider such collaborations as a sign of success because they suggest that RLO activities are legitimate, while others perceive them as a loss of independence in their activities.

## Dynamics between RLOs

There are varying degrees of coordination between RLOs at the local level. RLOs tend to coordinate more when two conditions are met: 1) they are in the same formal RLO networks; and 2) they are in the same personal networks.

RELON Uganda effectively coordinates RLOs in Kampala. RELON is a network of RLOs which was originally created in Uganda in 2015 by a group of Congolese leaders with the intention of linking RLOs all over Uganda; it was then replicated in Kenya in 2021. These national networks were created to coordinate the activity of RLOs, share opportunities, help with registration, advocate on behalf of RLOs, and gain legitimacy in the refugee response. RELON networks face challenges related to outreach and trust-building with RLOs given their limited resources, especially with RLOs that are not in urban centres where networks base their offices. RLOs pursue membership in those networks to get access to opportunities but are likely to cease engagement if they do not see benefits or if they feel that advocacy does not reflect their specific needs, which may alienate camp-based RLOs or RLOs led by marginalised groups. In an environment of scarcity, RELON networks are sometimes perceived as gatekeepers to resources. This puts networks in a challenging position as they have limited resources to operate, which impedes their ability to redistribute.

Beyond the role of RELON Uganda, leaders of RLOs in Kampala, regardless of RLO size, tend to know each other because they belong to the same elite refugee networks – they have received similar scholarships, worked together, are part of the same steering committees, and attend the same conferences. This pre-existing kinship plays a key role in supporting coordination.

The Association Of Community Based Organisations in Nakivale (ACBON) is a network founded by a foreign supporter to advocate for RLOs and increase their likelihood of receiving funds from donors. It is mostly composed of small to medium-sized groups from the Congolese community, with limited inclusion of other groups due to language barriers. Larger organisations in Nakivale, such as Wakati Foundation, are not part of ACBON due to its focus on smaller-sized CBOs.

Bidi Bidi refugee leaders often have a research background, for example with experience as research assistants for international researchers. While they meet regularly due to their personal and professional connections, they do not coordinate their RLO work because they lack resources to implement joint projects. Women-led RLOs in Bidi Bidi tend to coordinate more and meet up regularly to refer members in cases of need and to organise joint events.

# Perceived impact of RLOs

## Knowledge of RLOs among community members

Refugees are aware of RLOs and their activities in both urban and settlement settings. Some RLOs are more well-known than others due to the influence they have in the community. Influence is attributed to the RLO leader, the sector in which they intervene, their affiliation to aid organisations, their ability to offer visible and regular services to the community, and, finally, their location. Refugees are more likely to know of RLOs in the areas in which they live; more marginalised settlement zones typically have fewer RLOs and refugees who reside in these areas therefore know less about RLOs. For example, Umoja Mechanics in Nakivale is one of the better known RLOs in the sub-base camp but it is hardly known in Base Camp.

| | Setting | High | Mixed | Low |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kampala | | ✓ | - | - |
| Nakivale | | - | ✓ | - |
| Bidi Bidi | | - | ✓ | - |

Large-scale RLOs tend to be known among refugee communities regardless of their location, especially if they are partnering with aid organisations, granting them more visibility. For example, the vast majority of refugees interviewed in Nakivale knew about Wakati Foundation, and most refugees in Kampala knew about YARID. Leaders of these RLOs are often 'celebrity refugees' who are well-known among the community for their achievements, both with their RLO and beyond.

Depending on their activities, some RLOs are more visible than others. Moreover, refugees are more likely to know the RLOs that target them. Young people in Nakivale are familiar with Opportunigee and Unleash, which focus on youth needs such as free internet access within the settlement. Wamama wa Upendo women's group is more popular with its members to whom it offers burial ceremony support. RLSN offers health, education, and entrepreneurship skills, but it is better known for its health services.

The nationality of refugees influences knowledge of RLOs in Kampala. Generally, Congolese, Burundian, and South Sudanese participants were more conversant with RLOs compared to Somali and Eritrean participants. This is because there are fewer RLOs led by Somali and Eritrean nationals.

## Knowledge of RLOs among aid organisations and government institutions

Aid organisations have detailed knowledge of elite RLOs, but limited knowledge of the smaller, informal organisations. Aid partners know more about RLOs that work in their sectors. Aid organisations and RLOs meet in sector coordination meetings.

Government and local authorities have knowledge of RLOs in all the three locations; however, they know more about the elite RLOs than the small, informal RLOs. In Nakivale, a staff member of Isingiro district confirmed knowledge of three out of the five organisations under review, all of which were larger and medium-sized registered RLOs. Local authorities (including OPM and local chairmen) are generally aware of larger RLOs that operate in their

zone and they maintain databases of the RLOs that approached them for registration (a requirement to get registration is to get a letter from the local OPM office). For instance, a national chairman in Gogonya in Kampala mentioned YARID, which is among the elite RLOs; and a member of OPM staff in Bidi Bidi identified more than 30 formal and informal RLOs from his database.

## Experience of RLO beneficiaries

Across organisations, beneficiaries and external stakeholders largely spoke positively about the interactions and experiences with RLOs. The main arguments they gave in favour of RLOs, compared to aid counterparts, are:

- Beneficiaries were treated in a more dignified manner and with more respect by RLOs. *'When people go to them and are well received, listened to, even if they don't get direct support. When they promise to call someone, they keep their word. That is a successful organisation for me'* (RLO beneficiary, Kampala).
- RLO services are more adapted to their needs and detail-oriented because they know the community better. Beneficiaries noted that RLOs involve them in problem identification before proceeding to provide support. '*[The RLO] comes to the ground and if they identify a problem then they support us*' (RLO beneficiary, Nakivale).
- RLOs are more accessible and less bureaucratic; there is less waiting time and paperwork to receive their services. Interactions are more direct because of shared experiences of difficulty in accessing aid. Wamama wa Upendo women's group was founded after a family lost their relative and could not access aid for a week, prompting women to coordinate the burial procedure. According to beneficiaries, refugees seeking support in aid partners' offices may have to wait for a scheduled appointment for over two weeks, making RLOs a better option.
- RLOs are more accountable to communities because beneficiaries feel able to give them direct feedback on activities. RLOs are also more likely to communicate clearly, particularly if they cannot help in a given instance, unlike INGOs/NGOs which might not deliver a clear message. '*[The RLO] is successful because it attends to everyone without partiality. They may not have the resources to satisfy everyone but at least they will receive you and explain to you regardless of who you are*' (refugee community member, Kampala). RLOs that access resources and implement activities as per their set objectives tend to be more successful and have a longer lifespan in their communities. In instances where an RLO misappropriated funds, they face rejection and in some cases are even forced to stop operating in the community.
- Communication with RLOs is easier due to cultural understanding and shared language. Beneficiaries gave examples where they felt messages were miscommunicated or misinterpreted, and that translators for aid organisations could distort their words. '*These organisations are important because we speak to them directly and we do not translate. We realised some of the translators also do not translate the right thing, making some of us miss out on the right services. Like now, I am very happy because you speak our language and you won't miss anything we are saying in the report*' (refugee community member, Kampala).

- RLOs create opportunities for volunteers and staff that are better paid than aid organisations, as they do not follow incentive work requirements. For example, an RLO worker could be paid up to USD 300 per month, compared to USD 80 as an incentive worker.
- While some RLOs provide services that are similar to aid organisations, others might cover the same sectors using more localised approaches (e.g. traditional discussions for psycho-social support in Bidi Bidi by the Together We Can women's group). In some instances, RLOs provide services that communities consider important but that are not considered key priorities among aid organisations, such as cultural preservation (e.g. Adungu Malembe music group in Bidi Bidi, which educates and entertains the community through traditional music).
- Refugees are generally understanding towards RLOs and understand their resource limitations. Participants from the community stated that RLOs would have more impact on the community if they had more resources. For example, NGEO beneficiaries indicated that they would have further benefited from the organisation if it had more resources. They still cited visible positive impact with the available resources.

The majority of non-beneficiaries said they knew of someone who has received an RLO service and had a good experience. However, refugees who had not received services were less positive about their experiences with RLOs. This is because some did not want to access RLO services as they expected RLOs to only provide services to members of their national or ethnic group; or because they had been rejected from service provision. Those who had not been selected for service delivery spoke negatively about RLOs and the fairness of their assistance: '*When I registered my name, there was another lady who was with me and she also registered hers. After some days she told me that they called her and she has got food. I rushed there, still they told me that my name is still pending. For her she got a bar of soap, ten kilograms of kaunga, five kilograms of beans and two kilograms of sugar*' (non-beneficiary, Kampala). Some refugees raised concerns that RLOs would favour their own group over the general community: '*You cannot benefit unless you have contributed the membership fee. I tried joining but I didn't have money for the fee*' (potential beneficiary, Nakivale).

## Descriptions of impact

### Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries gave specific examples of how services had impacted their well-being and self-reliance. This applied to both self-help groups and groups that provided services to wider members of their community.

- Beneficiaries of self-help groups talked about how they gained entrepreneurship skills, start-up capital, job matching services, and employment assistance to support their self-reliance. *'Like me, I have spent two years with UMOJA, I joined without even having a plot but with them I managed to buy a plot of two hundred Ugandan shillings, which I have already used to construct a house for my family. This organisation helped me so much, as well as I also bought some livestock, I have started a good piggery project, I have already five pigs'* (beneficiary, Umoja mechanics, Nakivale).

- Medium-sized and elite RLOs support refugees to access services not available elsewhere; they fill gaps left by humanitarian organisations and authorities. RLOs also help beneficiaries with referrals to aid organisations they otherwise would not be able to obtain. *'RLSN referred me to JRS, and I was supported with medicine for diabetes which I had suffered with for a long time'* (beneficiary, RLSN, Kampala). In Kampala, beneficiaries often talked about the importance of RLOs in providing them orientation and related information upon arrival in the city.

RLOs have been at the forefront of aid provision to refugee communities during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their ability to access communities compared to aid organisations.[6] They distributed soap, masks, water, and information about the virus. In Kampala, beneficiaries noted that they received foodstuffs and money for rent from YARID.

## Non-beneficiaries

Community members who had not benefited from RLO services discussed RLO impact as neutral; a minority noted RLO impact as negative.

Some potential beneficiaries cited the neutral impact of RLOs in the community. They claimed that the resources available to RLOs were not used for their original purpose, thus having no impact in the community. '*There is selfishness. People steal the funds that are allocated to the beneficiaries. Once the funds come, one person takes everything and disappears. And it brings no change to the community*' (community member, Nakivale).

Potential beneficiaries who could not access RLO services due to a shortage of resources described the impact of RLOs as neutral since they did not solve any of their problems. *'These organisations to me are not helpful enough because they target only one zone. Also they offer services to only the same people, like the vulnerable, forgetting [other types of groups], so their activities are limited'* (community member, Nakivale).

Image 1: Rice harvesting, Nakivale Green Environment Organisation, Uganda.
© Mary Gitahi

[6] During the COVID-19 pandemic, RLOs have frequently found themselves as default providers of assistance and mutual aid, but usually without additional or effective support from international organisations and NGOs. See: Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria and Kate Pincock. 'Localising public health: refugee-led organisations as first and last responders in COVID-19', *World Development*, 139 (2021): 105311.

# Variations in response and impact

## Networks

The most significant factor in determining the success of a given RLO is the leader's ability to access a range of networks, in particular humanitarian networks. Access to networks by RLOs is influenced by the leader's personal and professional connections, gender, and level of education. Male RLO leaders have better access to networks in all three sites; women leaders struggle to access information on opportunities.

**Networks with the aid sector:** RLO leaders tend to have had experience as staff or incentive workers with humanitarian organisations; this is the case across all three locations. Such professional experience enables leaders to access information first-hand, creating platforms for them to present their ideas to potential donors and learn the desirable qualities of an organisation for partnership. This gives them an advantage over leaders who may not have had prior engagements with aid partners. In some instances, this experience legitimises the RLO to the community, but other community members associate it with less independence for the RLO. '*Successful organisations always have access to donors, and also they have recognitions, so CTEN, ICAN, and SINA are good examples, they are known by the government though not yet internationally*' (community leader, Bidi Bidi).

**Networks with the diaspora:** Resettled RLO leaders act as a medium between RLOs and donors, soliciting funds for their organisations back in Uganda: *'We have some Eritreans abroad that help mobilise funds in our community and even connect us to other donors'* (beneficiary, VOR, Kampala). RLSN in Kampala relies on Burundian diaspora networks: *'During COVID-19, one of the Burundians linked us to a group of volunteers who taught children over the internet'* (RLSN leader, Kampala).

**Networks with authorities:** RLOs that maintain good relationships with authorities are able to implement activities unimpeded. They have better access to information on policies, can obtain security for their events, and may even collaborate on some projects, allowing them to expand their activities. One RLO leader said they had worked with the Kampala Capital City Authority on a project.

**Networks with nationals:** Elite organisations often include professional nationals to help with professionalisation of activities, registration, and to enable access to networks.

## Regulatory framework

The regulatory framework has a significant influence on RLOs' ability to access resources and partnerships. In Uganda, the Refugee Act 2006 states that refugees have the right to association for non-political and non-profit making associations and trade unions. RLOs can register as either CBOs or NGOs depending on the scale of their activities. Most RLOs in settlements preferred the CBO status and did not want to attain NGO status to avoid additional taxes, which would reduce resources available for beneficiaries. Refugee-led NGOs like CTEN and YARID have a larger scope of operations cutting across settlements and urban areas. However, there are several bureaucratic challenges that RLO leaders encounter in the process of registering an organisation compared to their national counterparts, including delays, excessive scrutiny, limited access to information, and registration costs.

The impact of the regulatory framework affects access to networks by RLOs but not necessarily their ability to deliver services. Informal RLOs in Uganda may not be able to access funds and partnerships but can still operate safely. Together We Can women's group, Tumaini Women Group, and Umoja Mechanics are all informal RLOs operating in settlements without being registered.

Uganda has flexible policies on movement of refugees in the country, which eases access to registration offices that are not located in the settlements. There is evidence that bureaucratic challenges are easing thanks to the support of more experienced RLOs and of aid organisations, and with stakeholders' common goal of registering organisations. RLOs in Kampala tend to be able to register more easily than RLOs in the settlements because of the support from experienced RLOs. Oxfam Uganda supports informal RLOs to register before offering any partnerships to them.

However, smaller RLOs still face administrative challenges due to low literacy levels or limited education, leaders' limited networks with area chiefs and refugee supporting institutions, and limitations on movement due to lack of funds. A woman RLO leader in Bidi Bidi stated that their RLO was not yet registered in part because of the transport costs required to make the multiple trips to the relevant office as part of the registration process. Despite their activities in the community, smaller RLOs are less likely to attain funding and meaningful partnerships due to their informal nature. Informal RLOs are not able to open bank accounts as organisations, which makes them ineligible to obtain loans.

Informal RLOs reported that they aspire to register in order to unlock opportunities to increase their impact.

Image 2: Women members of the Tumaini Group, Nakivale, Uganda.
© Mary Gitahi

# Conclusion

## RLO challenges

The key challenges identified by RLO leaders and members include:

- **Access to funds:** There was a consensus by all categories of participants that access to funds remains a major challenge for RLOs. Limited access to diversified, sustainable sources of funding – whether it comes from the aid sector, diaspora, income-generating activities, or individual sponsors – prevents RLOs from operating, scaling up their activities, and providing quality services. *'We really do face a big challenge of accessing funding; we only rely on ourselves. Whatever we have achieved, so far from ourselves as NGEO, we have received nothing from external funds. If we had any funding source we could not be crying due to transportation issues we have mentioned, or that electricity we said; we could even be getting some salary as we told you that we work on a voluntary basis'* (staff member, NGEO, Nakivale).
- **Lack of meaningful partnerships:** RLO leaders expressed challenges in forming meaningful and longstanding partnerships. They reported light-touch, project-based partnerships with aid organisations whereby they would get invited to ceremonial days, support access to communities, and receive in-kind support for their projects. *'Yes, we tried to pass through them, but they always tell us that what they can do is what we have seen them helping with. OPM says that beyond giving us land to use they can do nothing else; and [others] say that they can't do anything else than supporting us with transportation arrangements or refreshment to workers'* (staff member, NGEO, Nakivale). Existing partnerships rarely allow RLOs to raise their profiles and gain credibility to approach humanitarian donors for direct funding.
- **Lack of capacity:** Capacity development was identified as a significant need by RLOs to meet the requirements of a credible actor in the humanitarian set-up. Identified gaps include proposal development, financial management, and operations. Women-led RLOs reported more capacity gaps compared to male-led RLOs.

## RLO plans

RLOs intend to address their challenges through developing further networks. Elite RLOs plan to expand their networks even further to ensure sustainability of partnerships. Elite organisations are keen to extend their services to more locations within Uganda. Some spoke of operating across borders: AYAN's leader mentioned their intention to have more projects in South Sudan.

Smaller RLOs seek to increase their visibility in order to access networks and build their credibility to attract potential donors and even partnerships. They also intend to register in order to unlock access to funding and the opportunities that come with legal status.

## Partnership plans

Many organisations plan to continue engaging with RLOs in Uganda, but cited challenges related to funds that prevent them from providing longer-term support and funding. Meaningful engagement remains sparse. While some aid organisations play an active role in transferring funding opportunities for RLOs (e.g. Cohere, Oxfam), the funding models in

the humanitarian sector, and larger INGOs and UNHCR, are slow to change. RLOs are often involved in projects already set up by aid organisations as a way to promote localisation, but there is no associated transfer of power or resources that they could use as core funding for sustainability.

Some organisations are considering making use of RLOs in their exit strategies. *'Our projects have a lifespan and these RLOs are already established in the community, so as we exit as people are managing these projects, RLOs are able to continue with some of these initiatives. So for me, what is key would be to figure out how we transition'* (INGO staff member, Kampala).

Image 3: Members of Together We Can, Bidi-Bidi, Uganda.
© Mary Gitahi

# Recommendations

## To donors

- **Provide direct funding to RLOs.** Donors should prioritise core funding and long-term projects. Long-term or start-up funding is needed to allow RLOs to become sustainable and equal partners in the aid sector. Donors should consider funding consortia of RLOs to raise the profile of more marginal groups to ensure that both elite and more marginal RLOs can meet their objectives, and to facilitate RLO-to-RLO learning.
- **Adapt funding requirements to the specific needs of RLOs.** RLOs often cannot apply for bilateral and multilateral funding due to their size, reach, or registration status. Donors should engage RLOs to set performance indicators jointly and continuously engage in conversation with RLOs on key community priorities.
- **Consider funding unregistered self-help groups led by marginalised refugees.** Many women and minority groups remain at the self-help stage and are not able to provide services beyond their own members, despite their aspiration to do so. Promoting women-led RLOs requires supporting those groups to help them expand their reach and activities in early stages of development.
- **Consider setting up refugee-led monitoring groups to keep RLOs accountable.** Accountability to the community and to donors is a critical component of humanitarian support but monitoring and evaluation models that are applied to aid organisations might not be appropriate for RLOs. Donors should support refugee-led monitoring groups to keep RLOs accountable. These groups could include a donor representative, community members, and community leaders to track the progress of RLOs and raise any potential flags to the donor. Participation in those groups should be funded and facilitated.
- **Advocate for policy change at the government level.** The regulatory framework can hinder the realisation of RLOs' potential, limiting their access to resources and ability to implement projects. Donors have a key role to play in advocating for ease in the registration process, recognition of existing initiatives, and on refugee documentation and access to infrastructure (e.g. banking).
- **Create space for RLOs to influence the humanitarian sector.** Participation in humanitarian fora is limited to a small group of elite RLOs and is often tokenistic. Smaller RLOs and RLOs led by less popular leaders are not involved in these meetings. Donors should involve all RLOs in donor meetings and humanitarian coordination meetings. Donors could ensure that RLOs are involved in the cluster system and are able to take leadership in clusters. In the short term, there could be co-leadership between an aid organisation and an RLO at the cluster level, and subsequently RLO leadership. For the sake of inclusivity, donors should fund costs associated with participating in those coordination meetings and implement translation mechanisms and childcare costs to encourage women participants.

## To governments and authorities

- **Simplify and communicate on the registration process.** RLOs are able to register as CBOs and NGOs, but several barriers remain in terms of information and access. Governments should make access to registration systematic and straightforward and communicate on the steps needed to register.
- **In settlement settings, allocate land fairly to RLOs to set up their activities.** In Bidi Bidi and Nakivale, camp authorities have granted access to land for some RLOs to set up their offices or to implement their activities. Authorities should continue providing land to RLOs as it is critical to their sustainability. Authorities should also develop clear criteria for what activities and under which conditions RLOs can access land.
- **Promote the work of both smaller and larger RLOs in consultations.** . Elite RLOs are recommended for most of the available partnerships and funding, leading to scarce resources to be shared by the small and medium-sized RLOs. When they are consulted, authorities should promote the work and value of having a diverse range of RLOs in their locations.

## To UNHCR

- **Improve communication channels with RLOs.** UNHCR should develop a database of RLOs, which includes registered and unregistered groups, in line with the definition developed at the global level. To ensure inclusion and diversity, it is crucial that information is disseminated to RLOs about opportunities in ways that are appropriate to their needs to avoid self-exclusion. RLOs in non-central locations in the settlements have limited access to information. UNHCR should consider dedicating a staff position to RLO engagement in all settlements. This position should be held by a member of the refugee community who has networks across nationalities. This staff position would allow UNHCR to be more consistent in their communications with RLOs and to implement a communication strategy that is adapted to the needs of RLOs (e.g. WhatsApp, calls for illiterate leaders or those who have no internet access). This position would also allow UNHCR to meaningfully involve RLOs when planning their annual operations, beyond consultations and assessments.
- **Implement and adapt global UNHCR policies towards RLOs at the field level.** U UNHCR in Geneva has made significant progress in developing guidelines on how to engage RLOs. UNHCR should set up regional advisory boards to promote the implementation of these policies and to adapt them to regional specificities. Once those are approved, UNHCR should ensure that policies are communicated to UNHCR staff at the regional, national, and field levels.
- **Advocate for policy change at the government level.** UNHCR can partner with donors to advocate for changes on RLO registration, recognition of existing initiatives, and on refugee documentation and access to infrastructure with local and national authorities. Recognising and promoting the role of existing initiatives can raise the profile of RLOs and encourage the government to facilitate their activities and donors to fund them.

## To aid organisations

- **Involve RLOs in decision-making through equal-partner consortia.** RLOs are often involved as implementers only, which does not give them power to make decisions or gain valuable experience in decision-making. Aid organisations should set up equal-partnership consortia that engage RLOs meaningfully from the project development phase onwards as co-owners of the project.
- **Embed capacity development with funded projects.** Capacity development is a key need for many RLO leaders in terms of project development, implementation and proposal writing. However, current models of capacity development – which mostly consist of short-term training sessions – are unlikely to yield long-term results and gains for RLOs.[7] Capacity-building activities that are embedded with project delivery are more likely to yield long-term results. Aid organisations should include capacity development as a core activity in the design of consortia.
- **Support the operationalisation of a remote one-stop service centre for RLOs.** RLOs have limited access to support systems unless they have a personal relationship with professional aid workers. This deepens inequalities between RLOs and penalises women-led groups who remain at the self-help stage. Aid organisations should gather resources to set up a team of mentors that all RLOs, whether registered or not, can access in-person or remotely. Mentors should assist RLOs to articulate and develop their projects and ensure they align with requirements.
- **Be long-term allies.** RLOs have significant value-added qualities to assist in the refugee response, but are hindered by structural weaknesses due to the displacement status of their leaders. Aid organisations should manage expectations of what RLOs can achieve and engage in long-term support and partnerships. They should also promote the ideas of refugees, give credit and recognition, and make space for RLOs to participate in decision-making at the policy and project levels.
- **Support leadership activities in locations with fewer RLOs.** There are few RLOs in more marginalised areas such as Nakivale, Juru, Rubondo, and Bidi Bidi zones 4 and 5. Aid organisations should support emerging leaders by facilitating community conversations and the identification of priorities and existing resources.

## To RLOs

- **Set up RLO-to-RLO partnerships on projects.** Larger-scale RLOs can play a critical role in raising the profile and increasing the capacity of marginalised RLOs. RLOs with better access to networks should consider including smaller RLOs in the delivery of services and to set up equal partnerships with them in order to unlock access to partners and resources.

[7] For a discussion on the pitfalls and weaknesses of capacity building training sessions in the humanitarian sector, see: Ian Christoplos. 'Institutional capacity building amid humanitarian action', in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2004* (ALNAP, 2005), pp.29–72.
https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/rha04-ch2.pdf

- **Ensure that networks are inclusive.** RELON Uganda was created with the objective of joint advocacy for RLOs in the country. Currently, the network's active members are based in Kampala with few activities in settlements. RELON and ACBON should take transparent steps to include RLOs in settlements, RLOs in marginalised locations, minority nationalities, and special interest groups.
- **Take steps to ensure consistency in community accountability.** While RLOs tend to be seen as more accountable to refugees themselves, there are concerns that they might not stay accountable to the community as they access more resources. RLOs should set up systems for record-keeping and record-sharing at the community level (e.g. use of social media, public consultations, events)
- **Extend information about services to refugees living beyond concentrated areas.** Refugees living in less refugee-populated areas have limited information about RLOs and the services they offer. RLOs should use avenues like social media and community leaders to inform refugees of available support.
- **In Bidi Bidi, initiate a network or join existing networks in the country.** Networks create useful advocacy platforms for RLOs, leading to access to networks and funding. RLOs in Bidi Bidi should work towards joint advocacy which can create opportunities for the smaller RLOs prevalent in the settlement.

# Annex 1: Profiles of selected RLOs in Uganda

## In Kampala

1. **African Youth Action Network (AYAN)** was founded in 2015 by three South Sudanese refugees with the aim of congregating young South Sudanese students for peace and reconciliation in East Africa. It is among the elite RLOs operating in Kampala and Kiryandongo refugee settlements. It focuses on peace and reconciliation, access to education and leadership skills for young refugees with the aim of having them actively participate in policies and decision-making. It is a member of RELON Uganda and involves members of host communities as beneficiaries and enablers at the managerial level. AYAN has a project running in South Sudan which aims to facilitate integration of returnees in their communities. AYAN has a mixed funding system comprising self-funding and external funding from aid organisations..

2. **Refugee Life Support Network (RLSN)** is a Burundian-led RLO with offices in Nsambya and near Makerere University. It was established in 2016 to address the challenges of unemployment through training on entrepreneurship skills, start-up capital for businesses and education. It is, however, more well known for its health clinic based opposite Makerere University, which receives refugees from all nationalities two to three times per week. Refugees are a priority to its intervention but it also supports vulnerable host community members, especially at the clinic. It is registered as an NGO and is a member of RELON Uganda. RLSN has mixed funding with external funding coming from community members in the diaspora.

3. **Somali Women Association (SWA)** is a women-led RLO based in Kisenyi, Kampala. It was established in 2018 and registered as a CBO in 2019. SWA was formed to address challenges faced by Somali women in Kampala and extends its services to Somali women in Nakivale settlement on a termly basis. It consists of 20 members with two men in its management team. It trains members on livelihood skills and its most popular activity is event management. Members are trained on English literacy and computer literacy, and they also receive referrals to aid organisations for services like counselling. It is a member of RELON Uganda and has a few beneficiaries from the host community. SWA is a self-funded RLO with event management, catering, and tailoring as its income-generating activities.

4. **Voice of Refugees (VOR)** is an Eritrean-led RLO based in Kabalagala, Kampala. It is an informal RLO created to address the information gap between aid partners and refugees. It supports information exchange between humanitarian organisations like UNHCR and the community. It educates Eritrean community members on the laws of Uganda and liaises with local authorities to reduce the crime rate in the community. It is a member of RELON Uganda, comprises ten members, and beneficiaries are mainly from the Eritrean community. VOR is a self-funded RLO that generates income through membership contributions

5. **Young African Refugee for Integral Development (YARID)** was founded in 2007 by Congolese refugees. It is described as one of the most successful RLOs in East Africa due to its ability to attract donors, partnerships and researchers. YARID intervenes in education, offering services like vocational training and computer literacy. It has

job readiness training and connects refugee employees to employers. It is among the leading members of RELON Uganda and serves beneficiaries from both refugee and host communities. YARID is an externally funded RLO through its partnerships with donors and aid partners.

## In Nakivale Refugee Settlement

1. **Green Environment (NGEO)** is an environmental RLO based in Nakivale Base Camp. It is registered with its offices based in Kitshyaza junction. It comprises 30 members from the three sub-locations in Nakivale. It was formed in 2016 and focuses on conservation of the environment through afforestation and reforestation in the settlement. It creates awareness on the dangers of environmental degradation, grows food crops to supplement members' income and shares harvest with vulnerable members of the community. Its beneficiaries are both refugees and host community members. NGEO is a self-funded organisation that generates income from membership fees and agriculture alongside its environment conservation activities.
2. **Opportunigee** is based in Nakivale Base Camp with its offices in Kashojwa Village. It focuses on empowering youths in the community with leadership and entrepreneurial skills. It was established in 2016 by a Congolese leader and supports youths of all nationalities in the settlement. It is among the elite RLOs in Nakivale, extending its services to Rubondo sub-location. It is popularly known for its creative house construction designs that incorporate recycled plastic bottles. It markets products from its beneficiaries' activities to clients within and out of the settlement. It supports both refugees and host community members. Opportunigee is externally funded through its partnerships with aid organisations and donors.
3. **Tumaini for Refugee Women Group** is a women-led RLO based in Nakivale Base Camp. It was established in 2018 by a Congolese woman whose experience as a refugee influenced her decision to work with women of different nationalities represented in Nakivale. It has ten members and supports up to 200 refugees annually. It is an unregistered RLO that trains women on handicraft skills to empower them financially. It provides sexual health education to teenagers, makes and distributes sanitary towels to the community, and advocates against gender-based violence in the community. It promotes peaceful coexistence of women from different nationalities through seminars and has an anti-female genital mutilation programme for women in affected communities. It is a member of ACBON. Tumaini is self-funded and relies on income from its handcraft work.
4. **Umoja Mechanics Group** is an unregistered RLO based in Rubondo sub-base camp with its offices in Karintima B. It brings together older males in the community with mechanical experience to teach the young males motorcycle and bicycle repairing skills. It is an informal male-only group that focuses on ensuring the young males in the community are engaged in an income-generating activity that deters them from drug abuse and other criminal activities caused by unemployment. It is also involved in agriculture to supplement the income generated from mechanical repairs. The group was formed in 2013 and has 25 members training around 20 youths annually. It is not a member of any RLO network. Umoja mechanics group is a self-funded group and relies on income from its mechanical activities.

5. **Wakati Foundation** is a refugee-led NGO based in Nakivale Base Camp with its offices in Kashojwa Village. It is described as one of the most successful RLOs in the country and is led by a Congolese refugee. It seeks to provide social and economic solutions to refugees through training in house construction, supporting emerging artistic talents, and providing psycho-social support to its beneficiaries. It has partnered with a financial institution to offer financial literacy to the community. The beneficiaries are from both the host and refugee communities and its services extend beyond Nakivale settlement to Oruchinga and Kyangwali settlements. It is among the few RLOs in the country to partner with the private sector and is contracted to construct offices for Opportunity Bank in Nakivale. Wakati Foundation has a mixed funding system through its partnerships with aid partners and income-generating activities.

## In Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement

1. **Adungu Malembe** is a traditional musical RLO based in zone 1, village 4. It is informal with no offices but meets at Ebenezer Church. It is made up of 30 members and annually trains at least 20 youths on playing traditional instruments. It initially started in South Sudan in 1963 but was revived in Uganda in 2016. Its main focus is cultural preservation and entertainment through music, and its members perform in social events such as weddings. It also raises awareness on emerging issues in the community such as early pregnancies, COVID-19, and sexual and gender-based violence. The group members contribute part of their food ration as buffer stock for new members in need and share profits from entertainment activities among members. Adungu Malembe is a self-funded cultural music group that generates income through paid performances in social events in the settlement.

2. **Arise and Shine** is a youth-led RLO registered as a CBO with an office in zone 2. Established in 2019, it focuses on cultural preservation, peace-building, leadership, livelihood, and creating a safe space for youths in the community. It engages in agriculture as an income-generating activity through marketing and sale of food produce to host and community members. It creates fora for youths and the elderly in the community to address conflicts and to ensure that culture is transferred to the younger generation. It practices environmental conservation by planting trees and building awareness on the importance of preserving the environment.

3. **Community Technology Empowerment Network (CTEN)** is a refugee-led NGO initially started in Rhino camp in northern Uganda to enable refugees to become informed through access to technology. It extended its services to Bidi Bidi, where it acts as a medium of information between refugees and aid partners, trains refugees on information and communications technology skills, and more recently worked with the International Organization for Migration on a solar kit repair project. It also supports cultural preservation through music and dance activities in the settlement. It is among the more successful RLOs and offers its services in all the five zones of Bidi Bidi. CTEN is externally funded through partnerships with aid organisations. Arise and shine is self-funded, generating income through agricultural activities.

4. **SINA Loketa** was created in 2017 by a South Sudanese and a Congolese refugee. Its offices are based in zone 2 and it has extended its services to zone 1. It is registered and affiliated to SINA Academy in Kampala. It offers training on entrepreneurship and loans

for business start-ups. It provides mental health counselling using traditional methods that fit with the cultural norms of the community. fosters peace and reconciliation and trauma healing through unleashing youth talents. It aims at encouraging youths to be self-reliant by identifying and becoming part of the solution to issues within the community. It works with youths from refugee and host communities. Sina Loketa is externally funded through its mother organisation SINA Academy and partnerships with aid organisations.

5. **Together We Can** is a women-led RLO based in zone 1. It is an unregistered RLO with no office and meets in a church or at the food distribution point. It started in 2021 as a savings group for women who receive attendance allowance from training by aid partners. It has 40 members from host and refugee communities. The leader identified challenges faced by women in the community, such as cultural preservation, unemployment, conflicts between different ethnic groups, loss of property from the country of origin, gender-based violence, and HIV, and initiated the group to address these challenges. It meets on a weekly basis and collects contributions from members to buy household items like utensils and mattresses for distribution to needy community members, such as widows. Members have access to low interest loans for business start-ups. It provides mental health counselling using traditional methods that fit with the cultural norms of the community. Together We Can women group is a self-funded RLO through membership fee and member contributions.

**Refugee-Led Research Hub**
at the British Institute in East Africa
Laikipia Road,
Nairobi, Kenya

Department of International Development
University of Oxford
3 Mansfield Road,
Oxford, OX1 3TB, United Kingdom

**Tel:** +44 (0)1865 281720 **Email:** info@refugeeledresearch.org
**Web:** www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/refugee-led-research-hub
**Twitter:** @RLRH_Oxford

**Designed by:** Habesha Media
**Published by:** Refugee Studies Centre, February 2022
**Citation:** Gitahi, M. (2023). 'Refugee-Led Organisations in East Africa: Community Perceptions in Uganda.' Refugee-Led Research Series, Research Report (5), February 2023.