

# PROGRAM CELEBRATION CONFERE

14 -15 OCTOBER 2025 - KAMPALA



# Re:BUiLD in Action

Year 5, Quarter 4, 2025 Newsletter





#### MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Priscilla Dembetembe





#### Dear colleagues, partners, and friends of Re:BUiLD,

As we close the fifth and final year of this phase of the Re:BUILD Program, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride on what we have achieved together.

Over the past five years, Re:BUILD has grown from an ambitious vision into a powerful movement—one that has expanded opportunities, strengthened systems, and uplifted the voices and aspirations of urban refugees and host communities across the region.

This final quarter has been especially momentous. In October, stakeholders, partners, and community members gathered in Kampala for the Program Celebration Conference (PCC), held on 14–15 October 2025, the event was co-convened by the Re:BUILD/IRC with the KCCA and the IKEA Foundation, celebrated not only the successful completion of the current program phase but also the deep collaborations that have fueled our impact. It was inspiring to see government leaders, donors, refugee-led organizations, private sector actors, researchers, and clients come together with a shared commitment to inclusive, sustainable livelihoods in our cities.

That same spirit of collaboration resonated at the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul. During a side event on 24 October, Borderless Justice: Advancing Freedom of

Movement for Forcibly Displaced Persons, partners from the EAC, IRC, LWF, ReDSS, IDC, Woord en Daad, among others, championed regional approaches to mobility and protection. The conversations held there reaffirmed that mobility, dignity, and opportunity are inseparable, and that solutions must transcend borders.

In Nairobi, young people showed us what the future of inclusion truly looks like. On International Youth Day, 12 August 2025, nearly 200 young people; 48 refugees and 144 from host communities; filled Ufungamano House with energy, creativity, and hope. Their participation demonstrated the power of youth-led change and the importance of making urban spaces more equitable and responsive to their needs and aspirations.

These stories capture the heart of Re:BUiLD: collaboration, innovation, and a belief that when we invest in people, refugees and hosts alike, we create stronger, more resilient cities for all.

As we turn the page and prepare for the next phase of Re:BUILD named the Re:BIRTH, we carry forward the lessons, relationships, and momentum built over the past five transformative years. The next chapter will challenge us to be even bolder, to scale what works, rethink what doesn't, and champion the rights and potential of displaced and marginalized communities across the region.

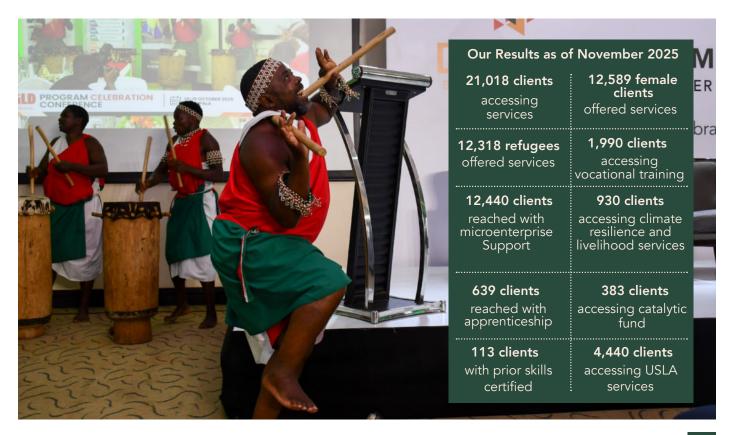
Thank you for walking this journey with us. Together, we are not just Re:BUiLDing livelihoods, we are reimagining what inclusive, dignified urban futures can be.

With appreciation and optimism,

Regards,
Priscilla Dembetembe

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# CELEBRATING LEARNINGS AND PARTNERSHIPS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RE:BUILD PROGRAM CELEBRATION CONFERENCE (PCC)



October 15, 2025, Kampala, Uganda. Re:BUILD clients from both Kenya and Uganda share their personal experiences from the implementation of the program at the Program Celebrarion Conference (PCC) (PHOTO: David Hangi for The IRC)

Stakeholders, partners, and community members came together in Kampala for the PCC on October 14–15, 2025, a milestone event marking the successful completion of the current phase of the Re:BUILD Program.

Convened by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), and the IKEA Foundation, the PCC brought together a community of partners and changemakers. Among them were government and policy leaders, donors, refugee-led organizations, private sector actors, researchers, and Re:BUILD clients, all united by a shared vision: to create inclusive, sustainable livelihoods for urban refugees and vulnerable host communities.

"Today is a wonderful day for the Re:BUiLD team, we get to have stakeholders in the refugee space, our colleagues from the IKEA Foundation and our implementing partners to showcase what we have been doing as the Re:BUiLD team over the past five years. We are super excited that the lessons, the results from our work have shown us what works, what it costs and sometimes what doesn't work for refugees," Re:BUiLD Program Director Priscilla Dembetembe, speaking at the start of the two-day conference.

#### Reflecting on an Inspiring Journey

Over two days, participants engaged in deep reflection, open dialogue, and shared learning on the lessons, achievements, and challenges that have shaped Re:BUiLD's journey.

The conference offered space not just to celebrate, but to take stock of what truly makes a difference in refugeeinclusive urban economic livelihood development.

The Re:BUilD program started in 2021, operating in Kampala and Nairobi. Our target was to reach 20,000 (10,000 in Nairobi, 10,000 in Kampala) urban refugees and host community members—including women, men, and youth. The target has been exceeded, reaching 21,018 clients and achieving an impressive 105% of our goal.

#### Key Highlights from the Conference

**Evidence-Based Reflections on Impact:** Participants explored the latest evidence on Re:BUiLD's outcomes, showcasing measurable progress in improving refugee and host community livelihoods.

For example, 2700 clients supported with wage employment skills, of these 88% are engaged in income generating activities with 48% in wage employment & 52% in self-employment.

These findings demonstrated how data-driven approaches can inform policy and program design, ensuring that interventions are both scalable and sustainable.

Honest Conversations on What Works (and What Doesn't): In a series of interactive learning sessions, stakeholders examined what has worked, what it costs, and what has not worked when supporting refugee livelihoods in urban contexts.

"Flexibility and experimentation weren't just worth the risk, they were an essential part and a real focus for this program, the real risk would have been to stick to the original approach and miss the chance to learn what actually works," Laura Costica, M&E Manager, the IKEA Foundation.

These honest discussions reinforced the value of adaptive learning—the willingness to test, learn, and pivot based on evidence and community feedback.

**Exploring the Policy Landscape:** Another major theme of the PCC was policy dialogue. Government representatives, policy experts, and development partners explored persistent barriers and opportunities for reform to strengthen economic inclusion for refugees in cities.

"We were able to come up with a framework which is the Nairobi County refugee integration and community building strategy - (NCRIS) where Re:BUILD walked with us from the beginning up to the point that we were able to have it ratified by the Cabinet and that helped us be able to see that now we can legally give services to refugees within the county," Susan Kimani, Assistant Director Youth Affairs, Nairobi City County Government Let's invest in carrying out rapid assessments to find out where there are integrational limiting factors within service delivery, policies and guidelines so that we bring them to the attention of the Central government to have them changed," Daniel Kaseregenyi, Deputy Director Gender and Community Services at KCCA added.

**Celebrating Partnerships and People:** Partners, clients, and teams came together during a Gala Dinner to celebrate the resilience, innovation, and determination that have driven Re:BUILD's success.

**Building on Momentum:** As the Re:BUILD program transitions into its next chapter, the spirit of collaboration and learning remains at its core. The collective insights from the PCC will guide the next phase of implementation, ensuring that future efforts are even more inclusive, evidence-driven, and locally owned.

What we have witnessed here, goes far beyond numbers or results, it is a testament to what becomes possible when partnerships are strong, when vision is shared, and when we put our clients, their aspirations and their voices and their potential at the very centre of our work. Scale and replicate ReBUiLD's successes, expanding access to financial inclusion, climate resilience, livelihood and enterprise growth, turning today's entrepreneurs into tomorrow's entrepreneurs, strengthening collaborations with national and local governments to build sustainable systems that enable both refugees and host communities to thrive," said Mohammed El Montassir, Country Director, IRC, Kenya at the conclusion of the PCC.





Left: October 14, 2025, Policy makers panel discussion at the Program Celebration Conference in Kampala. Right: IRC's Joyce Mogane and Mohammed El Montassir present a gift to a Re:BUiLD partner at the Gala Dinner later in the evening. (PHOTO: David Hangi for The IRC)

# BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH INCLUSIVE FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS

In Kampala, refugees continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and innovation in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods. Yet, for many refugee entrepreneurs, one persistent challenge remains access to affordable and inclusive financial services.

At a meeting convened by Re:BUILD on September 24, 2025, stakeholders came together to discuss these critical issues, focusing on how to strengthen refugee participation in the financial sector, address barriers to cooperative registration, and promote sustainable economic inclusion.

#### Innovative Pathways: Group Lending as a Lifeline

One of the most inspiring examples of financial innovation highlighted during the discussions was group-based lending. Financial institutions such as UGAFODE have successfully implemented this model, where refugees form savings and lending groups that guarantee each other's loans.

UGAFODE Chief Executive Officer Shafi Nambobi, while revealing that the institution had to adjust internal policies to serve refugees, assured the clients that the model will continue: "UGAFODE will continue to do this because as a business, it is sustainable. Money is there for those who have business."

This approach has delivered tangible impact in form of:

**Increased access to credit:** Refugees who lack collateral or formal banking history can still access small loans

to grow businesses, support families, and invest in community projects.

**Reduced default rates:** Because loans are guaranteed collectively, members hold each other accountable, ensuring a culture of trust and responsibility.

**Strengthened community networks:** Beyond financial gain, savings groups foster solidarity, shared learning, and mutual support.

Group lending is proving that financial inclusion doesn't always require brick-and-mortar banks it can begin within communities themselves.

#### The Challenge

Despite the success of group lending, many refugee-led Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) face daunting challenges when trying to formalize their operations.

Participants at the Re:BUiLD meeting identified several recurring barriers, including:

- Bureaucratic delays and lengthy registration procedures
- Lack of proper documentation, such as national identification or business licenses
- Limited awareness among refugees about the SACCO registration process



September 24, 2025, UGAFODE CEO Shafi Nambobi speaking during a meeting convened by Re:BUiLD that brought together stakeholders in the business environment in Kampala. He said his institution had to adjust internal policies to serve refugees.

These hurdles prevent many refugee-led financial groups from registering officially, restricting their growth, credibility, and access to external financing opportunities.

#### Recommendations

To create an enabling environment where refugees can thrive economically, participants proposed several actionable recommendations:

### 1. Streamline SACCO Registration Processes

Government agencies and financial regulators can collaborate to simplify procedures and make them more accessible to refugee communities.

#### 2. Introduce Mobile Registration Units

Bringing registration services directly to refugeehosting areas would save time and resources while promoting awareness and participation.

#### 3. Simplify Documentation Requirements

Allowing alternative forms of identification and reducing bureaucratic barriers would enable more refugee-led groups to formalize their operations.

4. Provide Technical Support and Capacity Building Financial institutions, NGOs, and development partners can offer mentorship, training, and ongoing support to strengthen SACCO management and compliance.

# Re:BUiLD's Commitment to Refugee Economic Inclusion

The discussions reaffirmed Re:BUiLD's commitment to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees doing business in Kampala and beyond. By addressing systemic barriers and amplifying successful community-based models like group lending, we can unlock the full potential of refugee entrepreneurship. Financial inclusion is more than just access to money—it's about empowerment, dignity, and opportunity. Together, through partnerships and innovation, we can ensure that every refugee has the chance to build, grow, and thrive.



September 24, 2025, Kampala Capital City Authority's Welfare and Community Services Manager Godwin Gumisiriza noted that the Authority has taken deliberate steps like establishing some markets in Kampala where refugees can sell and buy products freely without worrying about paying licence fees during a meeting convened by Re:BUiLD that brought together stakeholders in the business environment in Kampala.

# BORDERLESS JUSTICE: ADVANCING FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR FORCIBLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA



Partners, CSOs, government officials, and panelists at the side event "Borderless Justice: Advancing Freedom of Movement for Forcibly Displaced Persons in the East and Horn of Africa," held during the 85th ACHPR Session in Banjul, The Gambia.

The 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), held from 21–30 October 2025 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre in Banjul, The Gambia, brought together human rights defenders, civil society actors, and state representatives to reflect on the state of human rights across the continent. As the principal human rights body of the African Union, the ACHPR plays a pivotal role in promoting and protecting the rights enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

On Friday, 24th October 2025, a side event titled "Borderless Justice: Advancing Freedom of Movement for Forcibly Displaced Persons in the East and Horn of Africa" was convened. Co-organised by the East African Community (EAC) countries of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, alongside partners including the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), ReDSS, International Detention Coalition (IDC), Woord en Daad, and others, the event brought together diverse voices to address the urgent need for regional solutions to displacement and mobility challenges.

#### The Urgency of Borderless Justice

Forcibly displaced persons in the East and Horn of Africa continue to face legal, administrative, and socio-economic barriers that severely restrict their freedom of movement.

Despite the existence of regional frameworks such as the 2018 AU Protocol on Free Movement and the Kampala Convention, implementation remains weak. Refugees often struggle to access Convention Travel Documents (CTDs), face visa restrictions, and are subjected to arbitrary encampment policies that limit their access to livelihoods, education, and participation in local economies.

As Professor Siobhán Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur and Chair of PIERR, noted in her video intervention, "freedom of movement is not a luxury , it is a right that underpins access to development, education, and dignity." She called for the full implementation of Article 24 of the African Charter, urging states to translate commitments into action.

#### Voices from the Region

The panel featured contributions from refugee-led organisations and regional experts:

- Faduma Abukar (TIB, Ethiopia)
- Robert Hakiza (YARID, Uganda)
- Ndayisenga Jonas (Umoja Refugee Creative, Kenya)
- Dr. Alemu Asfaw Nigusie (ReDSS, Ethiopia)
- Daniel Mahajub Ismail (UNHCR DAFI Scholar, South Sudan)
- Hon. Commissioner Selma Sassi-Safer (ACHPR)

Each speaker highlighted persistent challenges in their national contexts, from delays in issuing travel documents to the use of internal movement passes that restrict mobility. They called for reforms such as the introduction of unique ID numbers at registration, machine-readable documents, and the elimination of bureaucratic barriers that disproportionately affect displaced populations.

In a moving testimony, Daniel Mahajub Ismail shared: "For many refugees and internally displaced people, freedom of movement remains severely restricted due to insecurity, fear of harassment, and lack of official identification documents. Ensuring safe and unrestricted movement is essential for refugees and displaced populations to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to South Sudan's future."

#### **Outcomes and Commitments**

The side event concluded with a strong consensus on the need for multisectoral, rights-based approaches to address mobility challenges. Key outcomes included:

- Recognition that freedom of movement is foundational to accessing rights and opportunities.
- Commitments from the ACHPR, through Commissioner Sassi-Safer, to continue monitoring

and advocating for state compliance with regional instruments.

- Pledges from civil society and refugee-led organisations to document violations and engage in sustained advocacy.
- Reaffirmation by EAC partners to address policy-practice gaps and harmonise legal frameworks.

#### Looking Ahead

The event's closing messages were clear: freedom of movement is a human right, not a privilege. Governments must allocate resources to process identification documents, implement refugee legislation, and remove bureaucratic hurdles such as visa fees and work permit restrictions. There is also a pressing need to include refugees in national development plans and ensure that gender-specific vulnerabilities are addressed.

As the region continues to grapple with conflict, climate change, and displacement, the call for borderless justice is more urgent than ever. Through continued collaboration between governments, civil society, and international actors, we can ensure that no refugee is arbitrarily denied their right to move, thrive, and belong.



Participants of the side event pose for a group photo with Hon. Commissioner Selma Sassi-Safer of the ACHPR during the 85th ACHPR Session in Banjul, The Gambia.

### NAIROBI YOUTH GATHER FOR EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY



August 12, 2025, A panel discussion comprised of the County Government and other stakeholders addressing youth affairs of the city during this year's International Youth Day Celebrations at Ufungamano House, Nairobi. (PHOTO: Edgar Otieno for The IRC)

On August 12, 2025, Nairobi came alive with youthful energy and purpose as hundreds of young people gathered at Ufungamano House to mark International Youth Day 2025. The vibrant forum, themed around empowerment and inclusion, was organized by the Nairobi City County Government's Department of Youth Affairs in partnership with the Re:BUiLD program.

The event brought together youth from across the city, from Westlands, Dagoretti, Kibra, Embakasi, Mathare, and Kasarani, to celebrate creativity, exchange ideas, and connect with policymakers and development partners. In total, 192 participants attended, including 48 refugees and 144 host community members, demonstrating the spirit of diversity and unity that defines Nairobi's young generation.

#### A Platform for Youth Voices

The forum provided an importnat space for young people to express their views, share their talents, and engage directly with government and civil society actors. Discussions centered on youth inclusion in policy, mentorship opportunities, mental health, and access to employment, all key pillars for sustainable development and social cohesion.

Stakeholders from organizations such as the National Employment Authority (NEA), Amani Counseling Center, HESED Africa, SDI Kenya, and the State Departments for Youth and Refugee Affairs shared initiatives addressing issues from climate justice and digital employment to youth protection and refugee integration.

#### **Creativity Meets Advocacy**

The day's program blended fun, creativity, and purpose. Icebreakers, film screenings, and performances by rapper Sydne, spoken word artists, traditional musicians from Mathare Umoja Calabash, and fashion models from Sauti Africa kept the atmosphere dynamic and inspiring. These performances not only entertained but also amplified the message that youth creativity is a powerful driver of social change.

#### **Powerful Conversations and Shared Commitments**

In an engaging panel discussion, speakers and participants tackled the challenges and opportunities facing young people today.

"Youth should create their own spaces rather than wait for invitations," urged Merceline Juma, CEO of Mercy Gate Consultant.

Richard Wafula from Amani Counseling Center emphasized persistence and mental resilience: "Keep pushing until the right stakeholders listen."

Dio, representing Youth Community Voices, encouraged collaboration: "Grab opportunities and solve problems together."

Fredrick from the National Youth Council assured participants that their "messages will be passed on to the authorities," while Mr. Mureithi from the State Department of Youth Affairs announced plans for follow-ups and encouraged youth to utilize local offices for direct engagement.

Audience members raised important concerns around accessibility, misinformation, and the inclusion of marginalized groups such as Persons With Disabilities and street youth. One participant voiced pressing frustration:

"Why do youth programs delay so much that we age out before they reach us?"

#### Looking Ahead: Youth at the Heart of Change

The closing session reaffirmed the importance of youth-led advocacy, collaboration, and early participation in public decision-making. Organizers and partners expressed appreciation to all contributors and called for sustained engagement beyond International Youth Day.

The forum concluded on a hopeful note, a commitment to keep the conversation alive and turn ideas into action.

The International Youth Day 2025 Forum in Nairobi was a powerful reminder of the potential, creativity, and resilience of young people. By offering a platform for connection, learning, and collaboration, the event laid a strong foundation for more inclusive, responsive, and youth-driven development across the city.

As one participant summed it up: "When youth are heard, societies move forward."







Left: August 12, 2025, Nairobi Youth entertain the attendees of the International Youth Day Celebrations with dance and belw the participants applause the entertainers. Right: A passionate Nairobi Youth voices what the City can do to improve the lives of community she lives in. (PHOTO: Edgar Otieno for The IRC)

### NAIROBI TRADE FAIRS EMPOWER COMMUNITIES THROUGH BUSINESS AND INCLUSION

Entrepreneurship, creativity, and inclusion; this is what took center stage as two vibrant community trade fairs were held in Embakasi East and Kibra on August 13 and 14, 2025. Organized by the Nairobi City County Government Department of Youth Affairs, in partnership with the Re:BUILD program, the events brought together both refugee and host community members to celebrate enterprise, showcase innovation, and promote economic inclusion.

#### **Creating Pathways for Empowerment**

The trade fairs offered safe, inclusive public spaces where communities could connect, learn, and grow together. Small businesses, particularly those owned by refugees, women, and youth, were given visibility and access to customers, partners, and support organizations.

By highlighting talent and enterprise at the grassroots level, the fairs helped bridge social and economic divides, reduce stigma, and build mutual understanding among Nairobi's diverse communities.

"These fairs give us hope and confidence. We get to meet people who appreciate our work and want to support us," said one exhibitor from Embakasi.

#### **Vibrant Participation Across Communities**

In Embakasi, the fair brought together 44 participants - 16 men and 28 women, including 5 refugees and 39 host community members. Kibra also hosted a dynamic mix of exhibitors, shoppers, and community leaders, reinforcing the power of inclusion and collaboration in local development.

The atmosphere at both venues was electric. Registration ran seamlessly, and exhibitors were quickly guided to their stalls. Music and entertainment helped attract visitors and sustain excitement throughout the day.

Embakasi featured a DJ, MC, and a surprise dance performance by local street children, while Kibra showcased acrobatic groups whose energetic routines captivated the audience and drew large crowds to the exhibition stands.

#### **Reflections and Recommendations**

Participants celebrated the fairs' success and shared valuable feedback for future editions. Many recommended extending the events to three days to allow more exposure and customer interaction. Others suggested enhanced signage, greater involvement of youth groups, and partnerships with organizations like UNHCR to mobilize even more refugee participants.

#### Building Inclusive Economies, One Fair at a Time

The Embakasi and Kibra trade fairs are part of the Re:BUiLD program's broader mission to strengthen urban resilience and create economic opportunities for refugees and host communities across African cities.

By connecting entrepreneurs to networks, customers, and supportive ecosystems, these fairs exemplify how collaboration between local government, development partners, and communities can translate into meaningful livelihood impact.



August 13, 2025, Nairobi Kenya. The setup for the Nairobi Trade Fair where small businesses, particularly those owned by refugees, women, and youth, were given visibility and access to customers, partners, and support organizations. IN-SET: Customers interacting with the small businesses at the Trade Fairs in Nairobi. (PHOTO: NCCG)

"Economic empowerment goes beyond income - it builds dignity, inclusion, and shared prosperity," noted a representative from the Department of Youth Affairs.

As Re:BUILD continues to invest in local enterprise and social cohesion, these fairs stand as powerful reminders that when communities trade together, they grow together

Through innovation, participation, and partnership, the fairs showcased how inclusive public platforms can transform lives, strengthen trust, and help communities thrive together.







August 13, 2025, Customers interacting with the small businesses at the Trade Fairs in Nairobi. (PHOTO: NCCG)

## **Re:BUILD IN ACTION VOICES**



"When it comes to banking services, especially for us refugees living in Kenya, banks often don't trust us because they believe we cannot repay loans. Yet many refugees are eager to work and simply need support through partnerships with banks".

Ndashimiye Bujambi, a Congolese refugee running a Nail Salon in Nairobi.

"I would tell other refugees to join groups because it really helps. At first, before I joined a group, I couldn't access the bank. But once I joined, I got to know IRC and learned about how the bank works".

Ntabazonkiza Denise, a Burundian refugee and fish monger in Nairobi





Watch Re:BUiLD clients share their journeys of resilience, growth, and self-reliance. Through the Re:BUiLD Program, refugees and host community members in Nairobi and Kampala have built sustainable livelihoods, gained new skills, and strengthened their economic independence. Their stories reflect the power of opportunity, inclusion, and partnership in transforming lives and communities.

#### Re:BUILD ONLINE



We are excited to share the latest updates, news, and resources from our program with you.

To stay connected and informed, we encourage you to follow our social media accounts and visit our website regularly.

By doing this, you will receive engaging content and valuable insights about the program. We share key program visibility materials, change stories and events that we get to be involved in.

#### Connect with us on:

Website: https://rebuild.rescue.org

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/@ReBuildEastAfrica

Rescue.org: https://www.rescue.org/topic/irc-partners-ikea-foundation-build-opportunities

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to engaging with you on our platforms.



## **KEY MOMENTS/DAYS**

• 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence - 25th November - 10th December

# NAIROBI, KENYA International Rescue Committee Merchant Square, 4th Floor, Block C Riverside Drive, Nairobi

KAMPALA, UGANDA International Rescue Committee Plot 7 Lower, Naguru East Road, Kampala



www.rebuild.rescue.org

#### Re:BUiLD brings together

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Center for Global Development (CGD),
Open Capital (OC), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)

Nairobi City County Government (NCCG) and local partners. Re:BUILD is committed to generate and share evidence for innovative, sustainable livelihoods solutions that can be adopted to support refugees and host residents in other cities in East Africa and beyond.