Technical Brief
Clients at the Heart of Programming:
Re:BUiLD's Client Responsiveness Strategy, Experience and Lessons

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List of Acronyms

CR	Client Responsiveness
CSS	Client Satisfaction Survey
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KCCA	Kampala Capital City Authority
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LRC	Livelihood Resource Centre
MPCA	Multi-Purpose Cash Award
NCCG	Nairobi City County Government
NITA	National Industrial Training Authority
Non-RCT	Non- Randomized Controlled Trial
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
Re:BUiLD	Refugees in East Africa: Boosting Urban Innovations for Livelihoods Development
SMS	Short Message Service
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRGMs	Stakeholder Reference Group Meetings
USLAs	Urban Savings and Loan Associations

1   INTRODUCTION

The Refugees in East Africa: Boosting Urban Innovations for Livelihoods Development (Re:BUiLD) program is a collaborative effort between the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the IKEA Foundation, and local and global partners. It aims to empower urban refugees and vulnerable host residents for economic self-reliance and to enhance the economic, regulatory, and social environments in urban areas with the core pillars being service provision, Evidence and learning, Influence and adoption. From its inception in 2021, the program was intentionally designed to place clients at the center of its implementation. This client-centered approach was institutionalized through the establishment of a dedicated Client Responsiveness docket, ensuring that the voices, feedback, and lived experiences of urban refugees and vulnerable host community members actively informed programming decisions, service design, and adaptation. By integrating the client feedback loops into program governance, monitoring, and delivery, Re:BUiLD fosters inclusivity, accountability, and more context-appropriate solutions.

This is in alignment with the IRC strategy 100   that has one of the key commitments being Client-Centered Programming.

This technical brief outlines the Re:BUiLD program Client Responsiveness strategies, experience and lessons learnt in meaningfully engaging clients in Kenya and Uganda from 2021- 2025.

2   FEEDBACK CHANNELS ESTABLISHMENT

To share and solicit feedback from Re:BUiLD program clients and stakeholders both in Kenya and Uganda, the program put in place the following feedback channels:

Proactive feedback channels: These proactive mechanisms enabled the Re:BUiLD program to actively solicit feedback from the clients; meaning we choose the clients and stakeholders whom to ask the questions and authored the questions to be asked and the timing of when the feedback is to be collected. These channels included; Feedback sessions through Focus group discussions (FGDs), Key informant interviews (KIIs), Stakeholder Reference Group Meetings (SRGMs), Annual Client satisfaction surveys (CSS), Community meetings, Re:BUiLD website, WhatsApp and Short message service (SMS).

Reactive Feedback Channels: The program established these reactive mechanisms to enable the clients and stakeholders to communicate/give feedback at the time and subject they choose. Under these channels, the Re:BUilD program deployed; Toll-free hotlines, Email, Suggestion boxes, WhatsApp, SMS line, Client's office walk-ins.
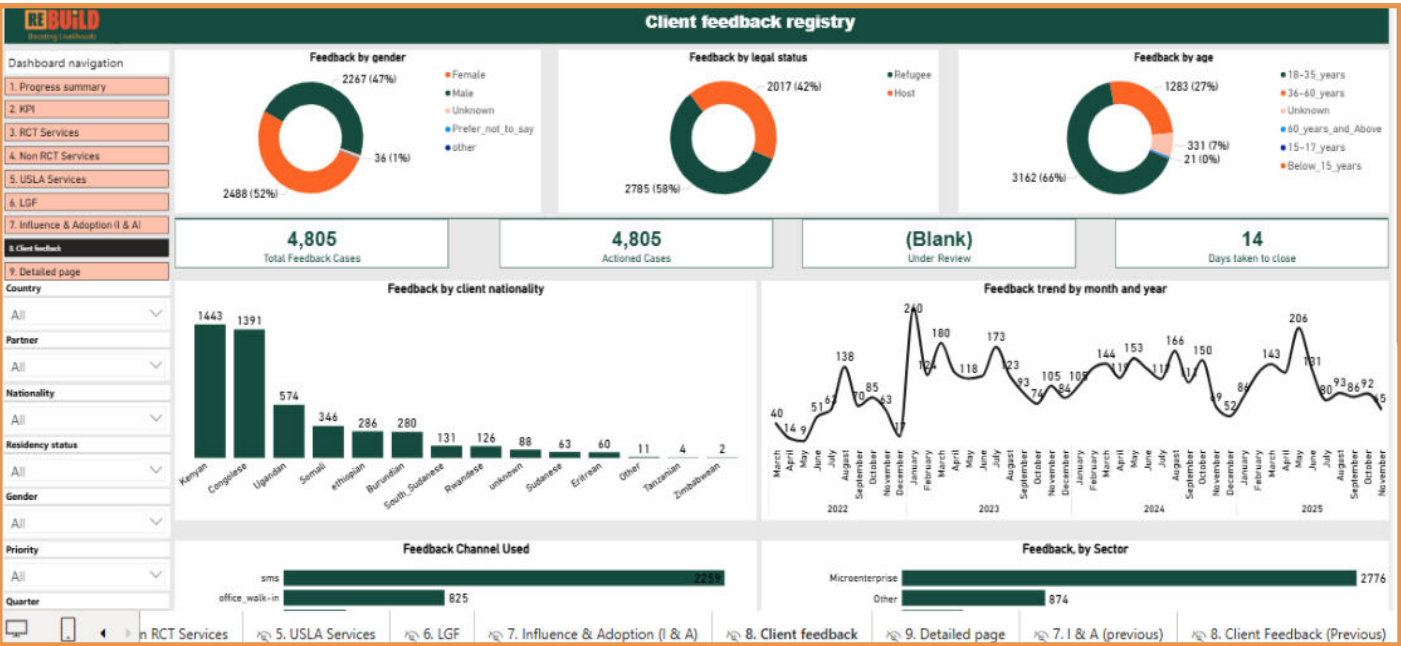
Open feedback channels: Significant Feedback was received by Re:BUiLD IRC and partner staff during their interactions with clients and other stakeholders in the field through informal conversations that staff had with clients and other stakeholders during project activities, field visits and community meetings.

3   FEEDBACK TRACKING AND ACTIONING

All feedback received through the various channels is recorded in a centralized feedback register hosted on **CommCare**, an online data collection platform. This register captures key details about the person providing the feedback, including age, gender, nationality, and legal status (refugee or host community member), along with information such as the feedback channel, priority level (critical, high, medium, or low), and feedback category for example, requests for assistance or information, minor or major programmatic complaints, and general feedback. Based on the priority level and category, feedback is either acted upon directly, escalated to the appropriate internal teams, or referred to external agencies when requested support is better suited to their mandate. Sensitive cases involving sexual harassment, corruption, or bribery are handled confidentially and reported to safeguarding focal points for further investigation and action.

The **feedback register** is linked to the **program's live dashboard**, which enables real-time tracking of all cases based on age, gender, legal status, and nationality. The dashboard monitors the status of cases whether actioned or under review and tracks the number of days taken to respond, among other key metrics. A snippet of the dashboard is showcased below:

Figure 1:Snipped of feedback registry dashboard

4   KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FEEDBACK REGISTRY

- A total of **4,805 feedback cases** were received across Kenya (3,231) and Uganda (1,574), all of which had been actioned by November 2025. Over half of these cases **2,488 (52%) were submitted by female clients**, while **2,785 (58%)** came from **refugee clients**. The youth demographic (18–35 years) accounted for most of the engagement, contributing **3,162 (66%)** of all cases.

- The **top five nationalities** represented in the feedback included Kenyans (1,443), Congolese (1,391), Ugandans (574), Somalis (346), and Ethiopians (286).
- SMS was the **most used feedback channel** with 2,259 entries, followed by office walk-ins (825), Stakeholder Reference Group meetings (318), website submissions (299), and WhatsApp (288).
- The program **sectors** that received the most feedback were Microenterprise (2,776), Vocational Training (874), Influence and Adoption (222), Protection (126), and Apprenticeship (122).
- The most frequent **feedback categories** were Requests for Assistance (1,664), Requests for Information (1,177), General Feedback (555), and Minor Complaints (266).

5   SUMMARY STATISTICS FROM CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEYS

March 25, 2025, Nsambya, Uganda. Feedback sharing session with clients supported to access loans from UGAFODE Microfinance Limited. Photo: David Hangi for the IRC.

In addition to the feedback registry, Re:BUiLD program conducted client satisfaction surveys (CSS) to understand how the program performed at meeting the clients' needs/expectations and identify areas of improvement. Cross-sectional surveys were conducted using a semi structured questionnaire developed by IRC as a CR toolkit, along with tailored questions specific to the Re:BUiLD program. The table below provides the number of clients sampled over the years.

Table 1: Sample of clients engaged during client satisfaction survey (CSS) in Kenya and Uganda

	Uganda		Kenya		Total
Survey Year	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2022	71	81	55	107	314
2023	145	268	180	395	988
2024	147	257	110	224	738
2025	184	394	241	480	1,299

Level of satisfaction with the program: Findings revealed that client satisfaction levels with Re:BUiLD services have remained relatively stable over the years, averaging 70%, with the lowest rate recorded at 65% and the highest at 77% in 2024. Over 80% of satisfied clients attributed their positive experience to the training, skills development, and financial inclusion services received.

Access to services: Accessibility to service locations also improved steadily over time. In the first year, 61% of clients reported that accessing service delivery points was easy, increasing to 69% in year three, and further to 75% in years four and five. This improvement can be linked to feedback-driven adaptations, such as relocating micro enterprise training venues to more centralized and convenient locations in response to complaints about long distances and traffic challenges in both Nairobi and Kampala (see Table 2).

Program meeting expectations: By June 2025, 86% of surveyed clients felt that Re:BUiLD services met their expectations and adequately addressed the needs of both refugees and host communities. Among the 14% whose expectations were not met, the main concerns included: limited employment opportunities post-vocational training, lack of start-up capital or business kits, and inability to start or complete training due to various personal or contextual challenges.

6   PROGRAM ADAPTATIONS MADE BASED ON THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED

Clients' inputs directly informed changes in how services were designed, delivered, and communicated ranging from adjustments in training schedules/content, improvements in measurement processes, enhancement and expansion of livelihood support options. The examples below illustrate how feedback drove tangible improvements and contributed to more inclusive, responsive, and context-sensitive programming.

Table 2: Highlight of adaptations driven by feedback

Client feedback	Program adaptation based on feedback
1.Concerns from clients and employers that the training content in some vocational training institutes/courses did not always align with market demands or employment opportunities.	Vocational training in Kenya was refined by introducing NITA certification, enhancing credibility and relevance for both clients and employers. By June 2025, 42% of the vocational training clients were employed up from 16% in year 2.
2.Client feedback led to adjustments in the learning schedule. Initially, clients attended classes five days a week, but many, particularly those who were primary breadwinners, reported difficulties balancing the intensive schedule with their livelihood activities. Some would be called for work and end up missing the learning sessions, which affected their progress.	Following discussions during client feedback sessions, the clients requested the learning schedules to be adjusted to at least three days a week, which was done thus allowing them to participate more consistently while still meeting their family and work responsibilities.
3.Clients felt that Skillings services alone was not enough and requested business start-up support.	In Year 2, start-up kits were provided as pilots for some clients who completed vocational, apprenticeship training but struggled to transition into a wage job. An example is this client from Uganda who benefited from the startup support-clients' story.
4.Clients expressed challenges with the measurement process, noting that surveys were too frequent, lengthy, and sometimes difficult to	In Year 5, clients were actively engaged in the measurement process from the design stage. They contributed to tool development by helping to refine

	understand due to language barriers. Additionally, some questions particularly those related to sensitive issues were perceived as intrusive or inappropriate.	questions, improve language clarity, and suggest appropriate approaches for handling sensitive topics. The tools were streamlined to focus only on relevant questions. Enumerators received training on how to approach sensitive topics respectfully, including seeking consent before asking personal questions such as those related to household vulnerabilities or decision-making. As a result, response rates to sensitive questions improved significantly, increasing from 60% to over 80%.
5.	During stakeholder meetings, young clients and people with disabilities raised concerns about the gaps in financial literacy, job placement, and social integration support, especially for youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs).	Services were expanded to include more inclusive and tailored offerings, with targeted outreach to register PWDs for Re:BUiLD services.
6.	Through client feedback, a service gap was revealed in the divisions of Nakawa and Kawempe in Uganda, where refugee populations were growing, but these divisions were not part of Re:BUiLD's initial geographical scope.	The program expanded its services to these divisions in partnership with KCCA, enabling more clients to access climate-smart livelihood opportunities across three pathways (black soldier fly rearing, mushroom farming, and briquette production). Over 300 refugees and host community members have been enrolled to benefit from these interventions.
7.	Clients in Uganda reported a concern regarding a loans officer who was serving them at the UGAFODE bank and did not fully understand their unique challenges as refugees and recommended the appointment of someone with lived refugee experience to better address their needs.	The complaint was escalated to the authorities at IRC and the bank and eventually UGAFODE made staffing adjustments and recruited a refugee staff member specifically designed to handle refugee-related concerns.
8.	Regular recording and analysis of client feedback revealed a high demand for English language lessons, a service that was not previously offered at the LRC	English classes were introduced to complement the existing computer lessons and addressed the clients' needs.
9.	In Uganda, client feedback led to the adjustments in service delivery during the COVID-19 period. Due to the high cost of living, clients reported that the transport refund of 100,000 UGX was insufficient enough to facilitate their movements while commuting for their learning sessions.	In response, the transport refund was increased from 100,000 UGX to 180,000 UGX per client to better support their mobility. More so, clients with young babies were provided with an additional child-care allowance of 100,000 UGX to ensure their children received proper care while parents attended learning sessions, allowing them to participate fully without distraction.
10.	Limited accessibility of communication channels due to language, literacy, and technology barriers.	Communication channels were expanded to include SMS, WhatsApp, and in-person forums, enabling clients to use their preferred platforms.

7 KEY LESSONS LEARNED ON EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

1. Joint feedback review meetings with clients, stakeholders and staff enhanced accountability and ensured rapid response to clients' concerns. They also promoted shared responsibility for Client Responsiveness, with all partners appointing focal persons for client feedback, strengthening responsiveness and ownership across organizations.

2. Client responsiveness was a new concept with implementing partners in Kenya and Uganda. Through various trainings, partners understood the importance of client feedback in achieving successful and impactful outcomes. As a result, client responsiveness was embraced, and partners adopted different feedback mechanisms based on their capacity to collect and respond to clients' concerns. These include feedback channels like WhatsApp groups with designated focal persons to address feedback, regular feedback meetings, and customized tools designed specifically to gather and respond to clients' feedback.

3. When staff and partners view the feedback mechanism as a supportive learning and accountability tool rather than as monitoring or scrutiny, they engage more openly and respond more effectively to client needs/feedback.

4. Establishing SOPs enhances data quality, accessibility, and the overall effectiveness of feedback systems. Without clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the use of feedback mechanisms varies across teams and partners, leading to inconsistent data management and limited use of CR insights.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING, IMPROVING OR STRENGTHENING FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

1. **There is need to define the standard operating procedures (SOPs):** Before getting started in collecting and using client feedback to inform decisions, there is need to establish the SOPs for client feedback mechanisms. This will provide guidelines on the process of collecting, grading, sharing, referral to other partners and closing the feedback loop. Integration of the feedback mechanisms with other programs and partners systems should also be clearly outlined to ensure quality data management, accessibility and effective use of client feedback data for program improvement and decision making.

2. **Consult clients about their preferred feedback channels**: whenever possible ask clients about their preferred engagement preference and the type of feedback channels they would like to use. If working with partner organizations as in the case of Re:BUiLD, these questions could be integrated into a survey conducted at the design or start-up phase of the program.

3. **Have at least one reactive and one proactive feedback channel:** Based on the challenges experienced in **the** Re:BUiLD program, it is advisable that a program or partner organization collects requests, feedback and complaints from their clients through at least one proactive and one reactive feedback channel. The program or partner does not necessarily need to select and design new feedback channels. They can improve existing feedback channels if they are appropriate for their context and accessible for diverse clients, ensuring that feedback channels are accessible to all groups of clients, including women and girls, persons with disabilities and other minority or vulnerable groups. Access

barriers for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups and risks of feedback channels need to be addressed before you start collecting feedback.

4. **Educate all staff on how to handle different feedback**: From Re:BUiLD experience, most of the open feedback was lost because staff/partners were not well informed about handling referrals or sensitive feedback. Therefore, systems should be set clearly in the SOP that ensure that different types of client requests, feedback and complaints are presented to appropriate staff with relevant skills and level of authority to interpret and decide on how to respond to clients in a timely manner. There is need to define feedback categories[1] and roles and responsibilities for handling and responding to feedback, paying particular attention to the handling of sensitive complaints and ensuring staff have the appropriate training and knowledge to safely and ethically respond to clients.

5. **Embrace the feedback system as a learning and accountability tool**: This ensures that clients' communication, participation and feedback is integrated in all the phases of the project cycle thus enhancing the relevance, effectiveness, safety, accessibility and quality of services being delivered. Clients' feedback should not be perceived as monitoring or scrutiny, but rather as accountability to affected persons (AAP) which will enhance client-responsiveness programming and build stronger client-partner relations.

"Thanks, IRC, for giving me a business grant which I used to make a deposit to buy an Uber taxi………"

Male client, Kenya

"I thank IRC, RE: BUiLD Project and IKEA foundation for the support given to me. I can now pay school fees for my children and feed them"

Female client, Uganda

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[1] *Categories for the different types of client's requests, feedback and complaints. Examples, request for assistance, request for information, minor/major programmatic complain, breach of code of conduct, allegations of abuse, general feedback etc.*