

Re:BUiLD in Action

2026 Quarter Two



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REBUiLD
Boosting Livelihoods



In partnership with the IKEA Foundation

MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Priscilla Dembetembe



Dear colleagues, partners, and friends of Re:BUILD,

Welcome to the Re:BUILD in Action quarter two newsletter.

As Re:BUILD moves through its sixth year, the program is building on lessons from the past five years and taking proven approaches further. Our focus remains on expanding access to financial services, strengthening partnerships, and using evidence to improve livelihood opportunities for refugees and host communities.

During Q2, Re:BUILD registered 2,528 clients across Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. This includes 1,274 clients in Kenya, 1,111 in Uganda, and 143 in Ethiopia.

The program also advanced its work with financial institutions. In Kenya and Uganda, Re:BUILD worked with Equity Bank to prepare for client recruitment, training, assessments, and referrals. In Ethiopia, the program engaged local financial institutions to explore suitable credit products for refugee and host community entrepreneurs.



Government partnerships also grew during the quarter. In Uganda, Re:BUILD signed agreements with Kampala Capital City Authority, Mukono Municipality, and Wakiso District Local Government. These agreements provide a basis for joint work on refugee inclusion, livelihoods, and local economic growth.

In Ethiopia, the program strengthened cooperation with the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State, the Refugees and Returnees Service, and UNHCR Ethiopia. In Kenya, 13 officials from the Department of Refugee Services and the county governments of Nairobi, Garissa, and Turkana completed refugee management training at the Kenya School of Government.

Re:BUILD also continued to build evidence on what works for urban refugees and host communities. During the quarter, the program completed the analysis of the program RCT Wave 2 study and prepared an endline report and policy brief. These publications provide lessons and recommendations that can guide governments, financial institutions, and organizations working on urban livelihoods.

The stories in this newsletter show how this work is taking shape. They feature refugees and host community members developing businesses, learning new skills, supporting one another, and taking part in decisions that affect their communities. They also highlight the role of government institutions, organizations run by refugees, financial service providers, and other partners in making opportunities and services easier to access.

These results are made possible by the continued commitment of our clients, government partners, financial institutions, community organizations, donors, and program teams. As Re:BUILD moves forward, we remain focused on applying what we have learned, strengthening local partnerships, and supporting refugees and host communities to participate fully in the economies of the cities where they live.

We invite you to read the stories, explore our latest reports and policy briefs, and watch our new videos from Nairobi and Kampala.

Regards,
Priscilla Dembetembe

Re:BUiLD Rebirth Launched to Scale What Works

After five years supporting over 21,000 refugees and vulnerable people in Nairobi and Kampala, Re:BUiLD began its sixth year focused on scaling success.

At the beginning of this quarter, the Re:BUiLD program launched a 15-month extension, focusing on scaling financial inclusion, expanding partnerships for sustainability, and deepening advocacy for inclusive urban livelihoods for refugees and nationals in Kampala, Assosa, and Nairobi.

"This extension showed strong confidence in Re:BUiLD," said Priscilla Dembetembe, Program Director, at the grant opening held recently in Nairobi.

The €5 million extension, funded by the IKEA Foundation, began in April 2026 and aimed to reach about 3,000 refugees and nationals in the three cities.

This brought the total IKEA Foundation investment in urban refugee livelihoods in East Africa to €35 million over seven years from 2021.

"Re:BUiLD was a well-oiled machine. Securing €5 million confirmed the program's strong performance," Priscilla Dembetembe added in her address to partners and IRC staff from Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

Building on What Works

Between 2021 and 2025, Re:BUiLD served over 21,000 clients in Nairobi and Kampala, with 60% women and

59% refugees. Over 88% engaged in income activities, split between 52% self-employed and 48% wage-employed.

USLAs, usually rural, proved effective in urban areas. About 230 Re:BUiLD USLA groups saved €160,500 annually.

Refugee bankability pilots showed urban refugees are reliable clients. Partnerships with Equity Bank and UGAFODE had a 97% loan repayment rate.

Randomized trials helped shape better services for refugees and hosts by showing that small unconditional business grants can help them start, sustain and grow businesses and improve their economic wellbeing.

In 15 months, this will guide work with Nairobi and Kampala authorities to include refugees in urban plans.

Expansion to Ethiopia

In Kenya and Uganda, Re:BUiLD has expanded beyond Nairobi and Kampala. In Uganda, it now covers areas near Kampala, namely Mukono and Wakiso districts while in Kenya, it has reached Garissa and Turkana counties, growing its urban and peri-urban reach.

Building on this, Re:BUiLD launched in Ethiopia with IRC Ethiopia to boost financial inclusion in Assosa, focusing on removing barriers for refugees and vulnerable hosts.

The Program Director Priscilla Dembetembe called this a strategic step to build a strong livelihood presence in Ethiopia, using proven methods to promote economic inclusion and self-reliance in new areas.



16 July 2026, Assosa Ethiopia. A group photo of IRC staff, Government stakeholders, refugee and host community clients at the launch of the Re:BUiLD in Ethiopia. Photo by: Hermela Alemneh for the IRC.

In Kawempe, Mushrooms Are Becoming a Business



23 June 2026, Kampala. KUUFU members harvests mushrooms. KUUFU makes weekly harvest of about 5 kg of mushroom.

Photo: Nathan Ijjo Tibaku for the IRC

Edward Lodu never thought mushrooms could help him feed his family.

For years, the South Sudanese refugee ran a small shop selling items like soap and sugar. Then he joined Kawempe United Urban Farmers Association (KUUFU) and learned mushroom farming.

Now, Edward has his own mushroom garden and has earned at least UGX 1 million, (€222). This money helps him buy food and school supplies for his kids.

"Putting food on the table is very important, as is buying school materials," Edward says. "The shop is there, but mushrooms bring quick money."



18 August 2026, Kampala. Edward Lodu harvesting mushrooms from his garden. Photo: Nathan Ijjo Tibaku for the IRC

With the income from mushrooms, Lodu was also able to rent two acres of land in Bweyale for maize cultivation, paying UGX 150,000, (€33) per acre.

KUUFU is supported by IRC's Re:BUiLD program. In 2025, IRC and Kampala Capital City Authority helped 500 urban refugees and vulnerable Ugandans in Kampala earn income through mushrooms, briquettes, and black soldier fly farming.

KUUFU started with KCCA training. Members began growing mushrooms together, keeping harvest records, selling produce, saving money, and buying more materials.

"We have the skills. Some members now have their own mushroom gardens, and as a group we are saving and reinvesting," says Bonsuku Jane Moi, KUUFU's treasurer.

Bonsuku says the group has produced about 1,000 kilograms of mushrooms since November and earned around UGX 1.5 million, (€332). They save about UGX 100,000, (€22) monthly. For Bonsuku, the records show more than harvests and sales. They show the group is learning to run a growing activity. Some members now grow mushrooms at home, others help find customers.

KUUFU has 25 members: 13 refugees and 12 Ugandans.

For Victoria Ndawula, a Ugandan member, KUUFU is more than business. It's a place where people support each other. Members stand together during hard times, including funerals. When she was sick, members visited her.

Victoria helps KUUFU find customers by going door to door and making calls to market mushrooms and gardens.

Through KUUFA, Victoria has learned from refugees. She admires how they organize to support each other.

"We are people of the same blood; we need to live, work, and encourage each other. Tomorrow we may be in their countries," Victoria says.

KUUFA now sells mushrooms and gardens to individuals and groups. They also link customers to members with gardens ready for sale, helping members earn independently.

The group wants to grow. Bonsuku hopes to produce 1,000 gardens and reach more customers in Kampala and beyond.

But challenges remain. They need more materials to increase production, water tanks for dry periods, and a solar dryer to preserve mushrooms during rainy season.

KUUFA's story is still unfolding. Refugees and Ugandans work together, find customers, save, and support each other in hard times.



23 June 2026, Kampala. KUUFA members prepare harvested mushroom for packaging. Photo: Nathan Ijjo Tibaku for the IRC

Fresh Start for Kenya Officials Serving Refugees

"The value of learning does not lie in what we know. It lies in what we do with what we know."

Emmanuel Kisiangani, Acting Director, Kenya School of Government

"Before attending this training, I actually knew nothing about refugee rights or inclusion. Today I understand that we need to integrate with refugees rather than isolate them," says Ifrah Ali Ibrahim, a Trade Officer from Garissa County Government.

For Ifrah, the Refugee Management Programme reshaped how she views refugees and government duties. It taught her inclusion involves policies and daily public service.

With Kenya implementing the Refugee Act 2021 and Shirika Plan, officials now play a larger role aiding refugees and host communities. IRC's Re:BUiLD partnered with Kenya School of Government, Department of Refugee Services, JICA, and VNG International for the second Refugee Management Programme cohort.

The two-week course brought officials from refugee-hosting counties and national agencies. Topics included refugee rights, protection, conflict prevention, mental health, coordination, and better service delivery.

Daniel Karingiti, Deputy Camp Manager at Wajir Refugee Complex, believes the training reinforced the importance of empathy in leadership.

"We should first look at refugees and empathize with them because they are people like us. They have simply experienced difficult circumstances," he says.

Participants were also encouraged to take the lessons back to their institutions and communities.

Ifrah believes host communities need to better understand refugee rights.

"We should educate people who live with refugees. Refugees have rights, and host communities should understand that they should not exclude them," she says.



12 June, 2026, Nairobi. KSG Refugee Programme participant awarded certificate by Ismahane Mohamoud, IRC Officer, after training. Photo: Nancy Mwangi for the IRC.

At the close of the programme, Emmanuel Kisiangani, the Acting Director of the Kenya School of Government, reminded participants that learning must lead to action.

"The value of learning does not lie in what we know. It lies in what we do with what we know," he says.

For the participants, the real test is not classroom learning but changes when they return to serve their offices, counties, and communities.

Through Re:BUiLD, IRC strengthens people and institutions to improve refugee inclusion and services for refugees and hosts.

Refugees Helping Shape Nairobi's Plans

"RLOs work with refugees and host communities. They have the capacity to understand how refugees and hosts can live together." Msafiri Francois, Msafiri Foundation

Nairobi's refugee inclusion plans succeed only if refugees are involved.

Nairobi City County Government and IRC's Re:BUiLD program held a workshop for refugee-led groups. It helped them grasp the Refugee Integration Strategy and explore ways to apply it locally.

Msafiri Francois of Msafiri Foundation stresses involving refugee organizations since Nairobi hosts most urban refugees in Kenya. These groups know refugee needs and can make the strategy work in trade, health, education, protection, and services.

"For true refugee inclusion, RLOs must help implement the strategy. Nairobi hosts 80% of urban refugees, so their role in shaping supportive rules is vital," says Francois.

The workshop highlighted the crucial but often ignored role refugee-led organizations play in their communities. These groups are deeply connected, sharing accurate information, linking people to services, building trust, and helping governments grasp community needs. Their role is vital for inclusive support systems.



12 May 2026, Nairobi. Msafiri Francois, RLO Leader at Msafiri Foundation, discusses refugee inclusion and integration during the workshop. Photo: Nancy Mwangi for the IRC.

"RLOs work directly with refugees and hosts, understanding how they can live peacefully," Msafiri said, stressing their lived experience and cultural insight as key for social cohesion.

The IRC's Re:BUiLD program supports refugee-led groups to ensure refugees have a voice in decisions affecting them, empowering them to lead and shape policies.

As Nairobi develops its urban strategy, refugee-led groups remain vital partners to meet refugees' and hosts' needs. Also, 15-month trials have improved evidence-based services, aiding collaboration with Nairobi and Kampala to include refugees in urban planning.



12 May 2026, Nairobi. RLOs at the workshop in a group photo. Photo by: Nancy Mwangi for the IRC.

Q2 Moments: World Environment and World Refugee Days

World Environment Day and World Refugee Day showed refugees as neighbours, business owners, climate actors, and community leaders.

On 5 June 2026, Nairobi City County Government, IRC through Re:BUiLD, NEMA, KEPRO, refugee-led groups, youth groups, faith-based groups, and community groups marked World Environment Day under the theme “Global Call for Climate Action.”

The day included a flag-off at City Hall, a climate awareness walk through Nairobi’s central business district, an electric-bus roadshow along Thika Road, tree planting, the launch of waste sorting bins, and a public exhibition at Small Axe Riparian Area in Kasarani.

At the exhibition, refugee-led groups and community organizations shared practical ideas on recycling, waste management, protecting rivers, and keeping Nairobi clean. The day showed that refugees are also part of local climate solutions.



5 June 2026, Nairobi. Youth groups display products at World Environment Day event in Gatharaini, Githurai 45. Photo by NCCG.



5 June 2026, Nairobi. World Environment Day participants plant a tree to support carbon capture and urban greening at Gatharaini, Githurai 45. Photo by NCCG.

World Refugee Day: Celebrating Talent and Belonging

“It is time to change the narrative about refugees. Beyond the challenges they face, many are leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and human rights advocates who contribute to the development of society.”
JeanPaul Kasika, Executive Director, RELON Kenya

Re:BUiLD also joined government offices, refugee-led groups, partners, universities, and host communities to mark World Refugee Day 2026 through a week of activities.

The week opened on 17 June with a sports tournament at Uhuru Sports Complex. Refugees and host community members played football and basketball in mixed teams, using sport to build friendship and understanding.

IRC Kenya also hosted a product showcase where refugee entrepreneurs displayed and sold their products and services. The showcase presented refugees as business owners, workers, and innovators.

The week ended with the national World Refugee Day event at the University of Nairobi’s Taifa Hall under the theme “Until Everyone Is Safe.”



19 June 2026, Nairobi. Panel with Nairobi City County, Pamoja Trust, Kituo Cha Sheria, refugees, and Gender Dept on refugee inclusion at WRD event. Photo by Nancy Mwangi for IRC.



19 June 2026, Nairobi. Refugee performers at World Refugee Day at Ufungamano House. Photo by Nancy Mwangi for IRC.

Client Voices



Fidel Rodine, 29, Congolese.

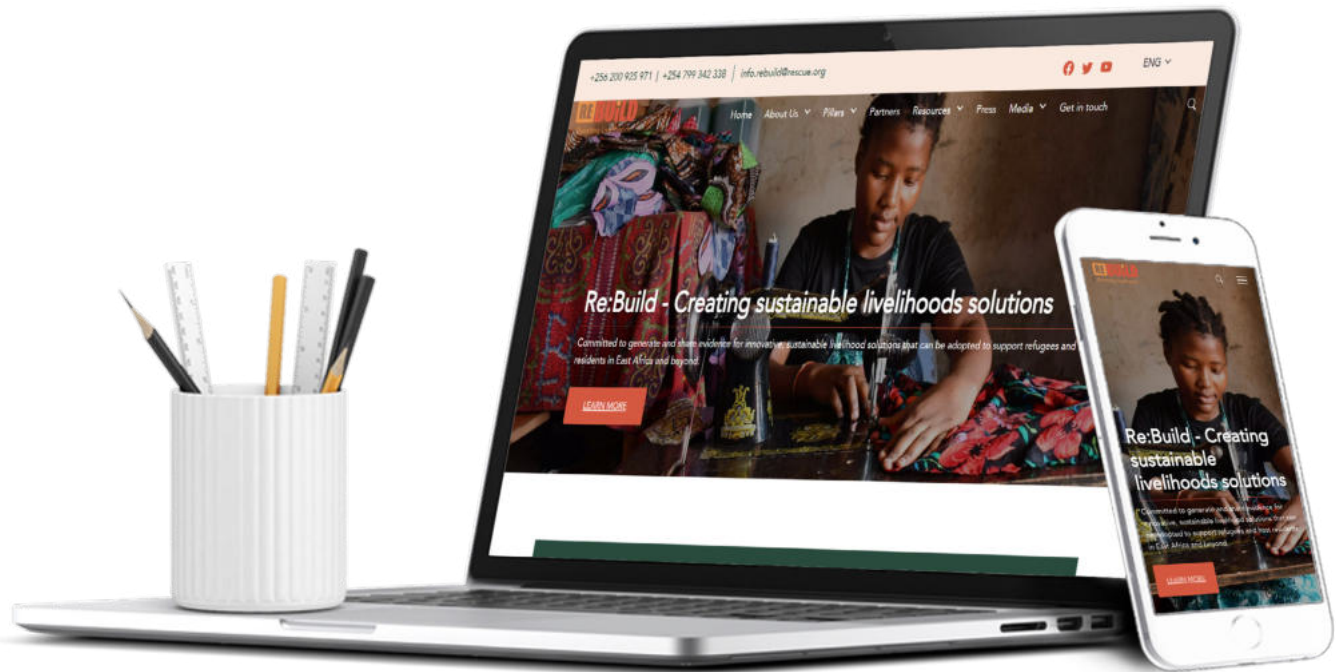
"The main challenge we are currently facing is the increasing food prices, which has become more and more difficult to manage. This is directly affecting our business and reducing profit margins." Fidel Rodine on Uganda's increasing fuel prices. Since February, refugee entrepreneurs in Kampala experience high food costs due to fuel price rises linked to the Strait of Hormuz closure.



Edward Lodu, South Sudanese

"The shop is there, but mushrooms give me the quick money. Because of earning from the mushrooms, I hired two acres of land at UGX 150,000, (€33) each in Bweyale where I planted maize." Edward Lodu on earning from mushroom.

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 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

- **The 2026 Evidence to Policy Symposium: Advancing Refugee Economic Inclusion in East Africa - 11-12 November, 2026.**
- **Launch of the Refugee Documentation Information Pack for Uganda**

KEY PUBLICATIONS IN THE QUARTER

Reports

Seeking the newest Re:BUiLD learning and evidence? Here are our latest reports and briefs offering insights from work with refugees, communities, governments, and partners to aid better decisions and programs.



Year 5 Annual Report

By November 2025, Re:BUiLD had directly reached 21,171 clients across Nairobi and Kampala, while indirectly benefiting more than 100,000 people through stronger services, systems, markets, and community structures.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)



Re:BUiLD Securing Documentation Campaign (2025) Report

East Africa's refugee documentation has improved, with countries like Kenya and Uganda aligning laws and reforms. However, refugees still face challenges obtaining IDs and travel permits due to political, logistical, and bureaucratic hurdles. These barriers affect refugees' stability and violate regional human rights commitments.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

Re:BUiLD Videos

Meet urban refugees living and working in Nairobi and Kampala. Our latest videos show their contributions to city economies and why refugee inclusion creates opportunities for everyone.



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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.