



RLI-TA Playbook:
Enhancing Refugee Lens Investing
Through Technical Assistance
October 2024

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I. Introduction

Forced migration and displacement is the defining social challenge of our time. The Refugee Investment Network (RIN) creates long-term economic solutions to this challenge through refugee lens investing (RLI) and serves as a specialized intermediary between impact investing and blended-finance communities and the growing ecosystem of refugee-led and refugee-supporting enterprises. With support from the Hilton Foundation, RIN and Acumen are leading Phase II of “Refugee Lens Investing in the Greater Horn of Africa.” The program aims to boost economic opportunities for forcibly displaced people (FDP) by fostering the growth of businesses that engage FDP as customers, employees, or suppliers.

Refugee Investment Lens

	R1: Refugee-owned businesses at least 51% ownership or at least 1 refugee in a key operational role		R4: Refugee-supporting, host-weighted activities source at least 10% from refugee-led businesses
	R2: Refugee-led enterprises at least 1 refugee in senior management or refugee representation on the board		R5: Refugee lending facilities provide debt instruments with 25% of loan proceeds to R1-R4 enterprises
	R3: Refugee-supporting ventures intentionally provide goods and services to or employ refugees		R6: Refugee funds provide equity or alternative financing to R1-R4 enterprises

RIN provided technical assistance (TA) to three locally-based private sector enterprises as a part of the Phase II program, and in partnership with the Hilton Foundation and Acumen, created this playbook, or guide, outlining a TA strategy and an implementation process to provide interested refugee-lens investors and enterprises with best practices, learnings, and recommendations. The playbook thus documents the process and outcomes of these engagements to create a series of enterprise-engagement models that could be applied elsewhere.

This playbook was developed by Selen Ucak, RIN’s Strategy and Learning Consultant, based on the implementation of TA projects for three companies, as well as considerations for its planned expansion. The research has captured the current processes, results, and challenges through semi-structured interviews with RIN team members, TA clients, consultants providing technical inputs, and refugee beneficiaries. Case studies have been included in the playbook to further RIN’s field-building mission and to attract additional companies to receive RLI-TA in future engagements.

Special thanks to the TA clients – Asili, GADC, and Gebeya – for their participation, and to RIN’s Communications Consultant, Patricia Gichinga, for her support creating the case studies.

II. Strategy Development and Planning

1. Rationale for RLI-(TA)

While RIN's assessments in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda during Phase I of the "Refugee Lens Investing in the Greater Horn of Africa" program identified a full spectrum of RLI opportunities, ranging from micro- and small- enterprises to large businesses and local corporations, an important finding was the need for economic inclusion of refugees at scale. Large companies and financial institutions working in areas that host significant FDP populations present an opportunity for scaling, mostly by functioning as refugee supporting ("R3") or host-community weighted and refugee-sourcing investments ("R4"). However, large companies face significant barriers to adapting operations for FDP engagement, even if there is buy-in for these efforts from senior management. Building on the insights and opportunities identified in Phase I, RIN introduced a TA model aimed at unlocking private sector RLI engagement designed to spark systems change.

In the Greater Horn of Africa, business capacity development and advisory services catering to SMEs and large enterprises are available, but access is limited. Furthermore, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities that displacement presents in the region's economy, there is a pressing need for a more specialized approach—specifically, RLI-TA. This tailored support is critical in equipping enterprises with the requisite knowledge, linkages, and comparative practices (e.g., practices on workforce inclusion from other parts of the world) to effectively engage FDP communities and attract investors interested in refugee-supporting investments.

Drawing parallels with and lessons learned from TA in the realm of gender lens investing, RIN's experience affirms that supporting enterprises in the adoption of RLI holds multifaceted benefits. Firstly, RLI serves as a catalyst for enhancing the self-reliance of refugees by creating employment opportunities, improved income, and other positive socio-economic impacts through the private sector. Secondly, by showcasing the tangible benefits of integrating refugees within business operations - as employees, suppliers, and customers - RLI has the potential to encourage more enterprises to follow suit. Lastly, TA helps to create a pipeline of enterprises that specifically align with RLI, attracting new capital, which in turn provides incentives for additional businesses to participate, ultimately growing the RLI ecosystem and sustainably advancing refugee self-reliance.

2. Program Design

The design of the TA program, led by RIN's Nairobi-based staff, was informed by in-depth RLI market assessments (i.e., "Phase I") of Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, was completed in partnership with SDC, JICA, IKEA Foundation, and the Hilton Foundation. Based on these detailed and nuanced inputs, RIN provided strategic and operational capacity-building support to enterprises and financial institutions interested in intentionally engaging and supporting refugees and host populations.

The assistance was used to develop an FDP engagement strategy; hire consulting expertise to execute the strategy; and, when feasible, provide linkages to investors (e.g., for capital needed for the development of a new refugee-specific product line, or building a processing plant located in a refugee settlement). Going forward, RIN will continue to offer an RLI-TA program, leveraging its unique position as a specialized intermediary between refugee-lens companies and interested capital partners and its role as an ecosystem builder and thought leader. Thus, while TA recipients may require direct services from consultants for local and sector-specific technical knowledge, RIN will play a critical catalytic role helping to identify candidate companies and ensuring companies are both investable and impact oriented and their strategies are well aligned with RLI principles.

3. Objectives and Impact of TA

RLI-TA can achieve multiple objectives ranging from de-risking and lowering the cost for market entry to amplifying the impact of existing efforts. For example, RLI-TA can:

Provide resources to contribute to the effectiveness, scale, and scope of an existing engagement:

For enterprises already engaged in RLI, the objective of TA is to deepen and broaden the impact of their initiatives. TA in this context can include specialized expertise and tools, such as advanced training for refugee employees, better integration of refugee suppliers, or market expansion strategies for products designed for refugee consumers. TA can also support scale by facilitating access to additional capital, including by improving impact measurement and management, and identifying new refugee market opportunities or partnerships. Expanding a refugee-lens enterprise's scope leads to intentionally integrating more aspects of the business operation into the RLI framework.

Catalyze and subsidize first-time engagement by an enterprise:

The reduction of barriers and perceived risks for enterprises is a critical factor for the broad adoption of RLI. Indeed, a business may face inherent challenges, costs, and uncertainties when venturing into refugee markets for the first time without the necessary knowledge or linkages. TA acts as a catalyst by providing the necessary expertise and resources to enterprises unfamiliar with refugee markets or communities. In practice, this can involve market research, business model adaptation, and strategy development. TA support can include financial incentives to offset initial costs in the form of grants, cost-sharing arrangements, or access to subsidized services, making it financially feasible for enterprises to explore and initiate RLI activities.

Indeed, the impact of RLI-TA is two-fold: on FDP and the enterprises that will engage them. For FDP, key outcomes include increased employment and improved income. The improved socio-economic integration of refugees also holds the potential for additional impact, such as enhanced skills and knowledge transfer and increased social capital.

TA also has a potential positive impact on the recipient enterprises. It can positively influence the internal operations and external engagements of businesses, contributing to a company's bottom line, reputation and brand value, and other strategic priorities. Key indicators to be explored include improvements in workplace culture, enhanced diversity and inclusion, increased brand loyalty among external stakeholders, and potential growth in sales and customer base. In addition, enterprises' intentional and measurable impact on the FDP can support their corporate sustainability objectives, such as contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.

RLI-TA will ensure that enterprises are not only equipped to include refugees but also operate in a market where there is a demand for their services or products, as well as investment capital available, leading to sustainable and scalable impact. Taking a systems change approach and focusing on inclusive market development, RLI-TA will directly improve the capacities of private sector enterprises for refugee inclusion by supporting their efforts to employ, source from, or serve them, i.e., "push" a greater number of refugee-lens enterprises into the market. At the same time, "pull" strategies, working with investors and other private sector entities, will aim to incorporate refugee-lens companies into value chains and investment portfolios, thereby creating a market incentive for enterprises to adopt similar practices, ultimately expanding opportunities for refugees.

4. Types of TA

RLI TA is comprehensive and can take many forms, aligning with the categories and principles of the “refugee lens.” Ultimately, TA aims to guide clients toward qualifying for the lens by utilizing the following methods of refugee inclusion and engagement:

Employment of Refugees provides guidance and support to enterprises by creating employment opportunities tailored explicitly for FDP. This involves developing recruitment, training, integration, and recruitment strategies that address the unique needs and skills of refugee employees and underscores the importance of fostering inclusive workplaces;

Sourcing from Refugees focuses on enhancing the procurement practices of enterprises by encouraging the sourcing of goods and services from refugee-owned/led businesses and raw materials produced by refugees (such as agricultural inputs). This type of TA involves building connections with qualifying suppliers and producer groups, offering guidance on supply chain diversification, and promoting collaboration between enterprises and refugee-led suppliers, such as training and financing;

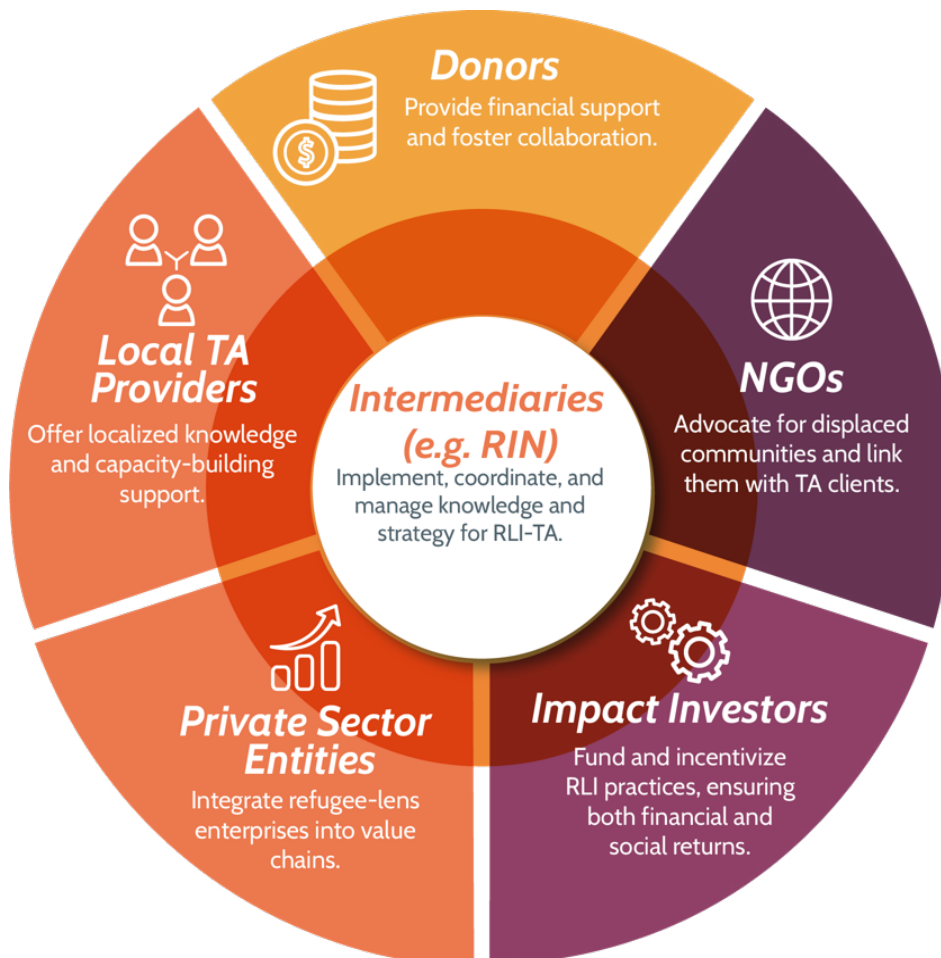
Creating Products and Services for Refugees guides enterprises in developing and offering products or services (including financial services by R5 enterprises, such as microfinance institutions) that align with the needs and preferences of refugee communities and expanding production, sales, and service delivery in refugee-hosting regions. This includes market research, product and service adaptation, marketing and pricing strategies, and building the right teams and community linkages to ensure that businesses contribute meaningfully to meeting the needs of refugee communities while realizing new business opportunities.

Types of Technical Assistance				
Category of Refugee Engagement	Internal TA Recipients	Resources Needed	Indicative Topics	Key Success Metrics
Employment of Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resources Corporate sustainability/CSR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linkages to employment and vocational training agencies Linkages to refugee serving/ refugee-led NGOs and CBOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of refugees in the workforces Recognition of credentials and skills Mentorship to refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business growth Number of jobs Job retention Impact on income Impact on refugees (based on self-reported refugee employee satisfaction) Workforce satisfaction
Sourcing from Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement Corporate sustainability/CSR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplier lists Capacity development for producer groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a diverse supplier base Financing and payments for suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business growth Number of refugee-led suppliers \$ value of contracts
Products and Services for Refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant product development & marketing teams Corporate sustainability/CSR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refugee-serving/ refugee-led NGOs and COBs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs of refugees Marketing, financing, and distribution to refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business growth Number of refugee customers/ units/\$ sold to refugees Impact on refugees (based on self-reported refugee customer satisfaction)

5. The RLI-TA Ecosystem

The RLI-TA ecosystem consists of many actors, in addition to the companies that receive TA and the displaced communities they target. As an RLI intermediary and field builder, RIN defines the broader strategy and builds the toolkits and linkages necessary for effective TA projects. Donors not only provide the necessary funding for TA programs, but also help convene and support the entire ecosystem. In addition to their participation as TA clients, the private sector, both local and international, incorporates refugee lens companies into their value chains and offer partnerships to grow the overall market. Impact investors offer RLI-TA to ensure their investees are not only financially successful but impactful in supporting displaced communities. NGOs facilitate the private sector's connections with refugees and advocate for these communities, as well as offering knowledge and wrap-around services to make RLI-TA successful (e.g., soft skills training to support refugee employee retention at a private sector enterprise.) Local TA providers, including consultants, work directly with TA clients to offer specialized support and localized knowledge within the RLI framework.

Effective collaboration among these stakeholders is essential for ensuring RLI-TA's impact on clients and refugee communities as well as capturing and sharing best practices to improve, expand, and codify this type of assistance to the private sector. For example, RIN works with local TA providers to enrich the ecosystem with practical insights and with investors to mobilize capital, along with RLI-TA, to enterprises. The advocacy and community linkages provided by the NGOs ensure that TA projects are informed by the needs of displaced communities. The participation of the private sector and investors validate the economic viability of RLI, pulling in others and building the markets necessary for sustainable refugee inclusion.



6. Criteria for TA Clients

RIN identifies companies that demonstrate potential and willingness to expand their level of FDP engagement as prospective TA clients. Companies' engagement may take the form of hiring additional FDP; opening new markets in FDP-hosting regions; modifying or innovating services to make them relevant to FDP; or sourcing raw materials and goods and services from FDP. TA clients are expected to be primarily R3 and R4 companies or R5 and R6 funds, however, some R1/R2 companies might also qualify. Company sizes range from medium (\$500K-1M annual revenue, 50-249 employees), to large (\$1M-10M, 250+ employees), to very large and multinational companies (e.g., Safaricom). Companies can be either purely for-profit entities or profit-making social enterprises, provided that they demonstrate willingness from senior management to pursue greater engagement with FDP. Selection criteria also include the willingness and buy-in from senior leadership; a track record in refugee engagement; additionality of the TA project on the company's refugee engagement; and potential for scaling and sustaining impact on refugees.

The proposal from a prospective RLI-TA client requires answers to the following questions:

- What is the company's current model and level of refugee engagement, if any?
- How will the TA program expand the company's engagement with refugees, and how will refugees benefit?
- What type of TA expertise does the company need in order to address this challenge?
- What will be the impact of the TA on the company's operations? What are the impact indicators measured?
- What are the project activities and outputs?

Going forward, RIN recommends developing a more detailed rubric for evaluating proposals from prospective TA clients, aiming to answer additional key questions on project design, process, and sustainability:

- Is the company adopting refugee inclusion as a core long-term strategy versus treating it as peripheral or short-term?
- Does the company have the resources required to implement the project? Is the initiative financially sustainable in the long term and aligned with the company's financial objectives?
- Is the company able to make quick decisions to respond to immediate needs of refugee communities and business needs, or is there a need for longer-term strategic planning for refugee inclusion? What are the steps needed for the latter (e.g., market assessments, feasibility studies, additional investment, etc.)?
- What are the varying influences of internal and external stakeholders on the decision-making process, and how does this affect the adoption and implementation of RLI initiatives?
- Will the project aim for immediate impact (e.g., direct employment) or focus on gradual integration of refugees (e.g., support training)?
- What will be the time, effort, and competencies required to establish strong linkages with refugee-led organizations, local communities, and other partners? What role will refugees play in implementation?

7. Financing RLI-TA

While grant-funded TA is important for companies that might not otherwise afford or be inclined to receive such assistance, there is a risk that grants could lessen a client's buy-in and commitment to long-term outcomes. Performance-focused TA grants that release funds based on achieving specific milestones (which RIN's pilot phase has incorporated) can reduce this risk. Additional options include matching funds and cost-sharing, where TA clients contribute to the project cost along with investors. By contributing financially, companies can show a stronger commitment and a more meaningful engagement with the TA provided. Overall, RLI-TA requires a strategic blend of funding sources and the models need to reflect the diversity of companies engaged in refugee inclusion (e.g., their sector, size, and stage of growth) and the markets in which they operate (e.g., availability of affordable TA providers), while carefully considering the implications on client accountability, project ownership, and continued financial growth and viability.

III. Implementation

TA Process and Client Experience

The initial step of identifying relevant companies started during RIN’s initial market assessments and field-building activities (“Phase I”) that included creating a pipeline of refugee-lens enterprises and funds. Identified candidates were invited to RIN’s Refugee Investment Summit in Nairobi in October 2022 for further engagement. The companies that met the RLI criteria were then pre-selected by the local RIN team, who reached out to their senior management to explain the TA offer, process, and benefits to assess their interest.

In addition to efficient project management, this step requires the comparative RLI expertise of RIN to effectively advise companies on their proposed RLI strategies and to together shape a TA project that will generate intentional, sustainable, and measurable impact.

Following this step, the TA clients go through a rigorous process of consultations, proposal evaluation, contracting, and monitoring and reporting before their project completion. Each of these steps include activities and responsibilities on the part of both RIN and the clients to achieve desired outcomes.

Responsibilities of the TA clients and RIN		
Client	RIN	Both
Signing a consultancy agreement with a proposed consultant/expert at the beginning of the program;	Advising the company on their RLI strategy and TA project progress to ensure sustainable impact;	Monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of activities up to 1 year after project completion to assess its long-term impact;
Day-to-day management of the program and consultant, keeping RIN informed of emerging issues;	Providing financial support to the client based on the program deliverables agreed upon by both parties in a formal contract/grant agreement;	Reviewing project activities at regular intervals and agreeing to iterate, as needed.
Providing RIN with a final report on the program, capturing lessons learned and assessing progress against objectives;	Vetting and approving experts/consultants needed for the project;	
Updating RIN of any factors that may affect the implementation and/or smooth running of the program against its originally intended aims and objectives.	Designing technical aspects of impact measurement and metrics.	

Process Step & Purpose	Activities	Objectives	Recommendations
<p>1. Consultation: To introduce the TA program to the prospective client and establish a foundational understanding of the prospective TA client's interest in RLI and their specific needs.</p>	The RIN team conducts one or more meetings with the prospective client to discuss their business model, current refugee engagement, interest in RLI, and how they envision incorporating refugees into their workforces, operations, or value chain.	A clear articulation of the client's objectives, potential areas for TA, and an initial assessment of their commitment to RLI principles.	Develop and use an intake questionnaire or simple diagnostic tool to help the prospective client identify areas of needs and opportunities for refugee engagement.
<p>2. Proposal: To refine and agree on the specific activities the TA client will undertake with TA support from RIN, tailored to their unique needs and objectives.</p>	Based on the initial consultation, the TA client team develops a proposed engagement plan that outlines TA scope, objectives, and expected outcomes. This plan is then discussed with RIN and iteratively refined in collaboration with the client.	A finalized engagement plan is agreed upon by both parties, detailing the TA approach, timeline, and expected deliverables.	Use a standard rubric with evaluation criteria to assess proposals and determine selection.
<p>3. Contract: To formalize the engagement, ensuring both parties are clear on their roles, responsibilities, and the terms of the engagement.</p>	Drafting and reviewing a contract that includes the scope of work, confidentiality agreements, conflict of interest policies, and financial terms (e.g., payment schedules). Legal teams may be involved in this process to ensure compliance and mutual agreement.	A signed contract that binds both parties to the agreed terms of engagement, providing a formal framework for the collaboration.	Develop a simplified contract template that allows for solid mutual understanding and accountability while maintaining simplicity for scalability.
<p>4. Implementation: To identify and onboard a TA provider or consultant who possesses the expertise required to meet the client's specific needs; to build connections to the targeted refugee communities; and to execute the engagement plan.</p>	The TA client develops a Scope of Work and recruits a TA provider (or uses internal resources). The selected provider(s) is then onboarded, which includes briefing them on the client's objectives, the RLI framework, and expected outcomes of the TA.	A TA provider who is fully briefed and ready to engage with the client, equipped with the necessary background information and resources to begin their assignment.	Develop and provide TA clients with a roster of qualified RLI consultants, while recruitment, final selection, and supervision responsibility continues to rest with the TA client.
<p>5. Monitoring & Reporting: To monitor progress, ensure alignment with objectives and adapt the TA provision as necessary based on evolving needs and circumstances.</p>	Regularly scheduled check-ins between RIN and the client to review progress, discuss challenges, and make adjustments to the engagement plan if needed. Data collection on KPIs and other metrics to track outcomes. Preparation of interim and final reports summarizing progress, outcomes, and lessons learned.	Ongoing adjustment and refinement of TA activities to ensure they remain aligned with objectives, culminating in comprehensive reporting on achievements and impact.	Simplify the outcome reporting process, allowing companies to choose from impact indicators that fit their business model and type of TA. Provide a simple template for a final report that ensures necessary questions (e.g., sustainability) are answered while leaving room for creativity. Provide training on any required indicators and reporting process at the beginning of the engagement.
<p>6. Closeout: To formally conclude the TA engagement, ensuring that objectives have been met and both parties have a clear understanding of next steps.</p>	A final meeting to review the engagement's outcomes, discuss the sustainability of implemented changes or initiatives, and outline any recommendations for the future.	A successful closure of the TA engagement, with clear documentation of outcomes and learnings, and the foundation for ongoing engagement or future collaboration.	In addition to the final report on results, include a formal closeout and a feedback session to gather insights on the TA process from the client's perspective. Include the TA provider in at least one conversation.

Asili Agriculture

<https://asili.ag/>

Registered & Trained 1,000+ refugee farmers



Asili Agriculture delivers agricultural land management and marketplace solutions that empower farmers and food system stakeholders in East Africa to sustainably increase profitability, resilience and nutrition. It was founded in 2012 by two volunteers who were supporting a local NGO. Their journey began with a mission to support an orphanage, which faced challenges securing grain for their pigs. Seeing an opportunity to find a sustainable solution, they decided to aggregate grains from small-scale producers, clean, handle, and supply them in bulk. This marked the birth of Asili Agriculture, starting as a grain aggregator in Masindi, Western Uganda. One of Asili's first significant customers was the World Food Programme (WFP), which played a crucial role in their early growth as well as marked the beginning of their involvement with the refugee community.

Asili Agriculture's operations expanded significantly over the years, expanding to Kiryandongo district as well as Northern Uganda. The company has been operating commercial farms as well as numerous village-level grain aggregation centers in the proximity of the Kiryandongo refugee settlement in Western Uganda, and it is one of the largest employers in these host communities. Asili's network of trained field agents registers and maps farmers to provide access to climate-smart agriculture training, quality inputs, finance, crop monitoring services and premium markets. The company works with more than 15,000 small-scale producers, supporting them to improve their agricultural practices and yield quality. However, operating within the Kiryandongo refugee settlement presented

Working in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

Despite quality control challenges, high costs of working with individual farmers, and infrastructure limitations, the company has successfully engaged with refugee communities by leveraging existing organizational structures and support from UNHCR, NGOs, and CSOs active in the area. One of the biggest challenges in working with refugees is their limited access to land. Asili's services aim to support refugees who have at least one acre of land, but obtaining this can be difficult. This is further complicated by a perception issue, where the host community sometimes feels that refugees receive preferential treatment, creating tension and complicating Asili's efforts to support both groups effectively. Another significant challenge is ensuring continuity. The company's goal is to empower refugees for the long term, helping them become self-sufficient farmers and businesspeople, which requires consistent engagement.

Technical Assistance and Its Impact

The Kiryandongo refugee settlement is characterised by many farmer groups, some supported by NGOs and CSOs. Most farmers in the camp grow maize as the main crop, both for income and self-consumption. While they all demonstrated a strong interest in working with Asili, the level of engagement, planning and coordination required to scale up activities in the camp called for a trained and dedicated team to coordinate onboarding campaigns and deliver training and producer services.

The RLI-TA provided by RIN has significantly boosted Asili's efforts with these refugee farmers. With TA support, two agronomists, two Field Technical Advisors (FTAs), two Village Transformation Entrepreneurs (VTEs), and four other Asili team members were trained and equipped to engage with and support groups of farmers. VTEs are crucial in purchasing grain and linking farmers with FTAs, who evaluate farmers' skills, establishing their credit worthiness, reputation and permanence by engaging with local leaders, as well as gather references from established farmers to qualify them for producer services. As a result of this expanded team, Asili installed demo farms, conducted mass training events, and delivered producer services, empowering over 1,300 refugee and host community farmers. These sessions focused on good agronomic practices, crop rotation, and the introduction of new rotational and protein-rich crops like mung beans.

Success Stories and Lessons Learned

- **Increased Refugee Engagement:** The number of registered farmers grew from 300 to over 1,000, demonstrating the effectiveness of mass registration at training events in reaching, profiling, and serving more refugees. This strengthens Asili's grain aggregation strategy and will enable the purchase of more maize from a broader range of farmers.
- **Improved Agricultural Practices:** Training sessions have equipped farmers with better farming techniques, which will lead to higher yields and improved grain quality.
- **Strategic Focus on Nutrition:** Emphasizing the nutritional benefits of crop rotation has helped in gaining farmer buy-in. In addition to enhancing livelihoods and income, adding mung beans as a rotational crop promotes better nutrition, healthier soils, and income diversification.
- **Need for Expanding Infrastructure:** Infrastructure, such as grain aggregation and storage facilities, remains a critical bottleneck. Addressing this gap is essential for scaling operations and ensuring the sustainability of the business model and impact.

Future Aspirations

There is a significant opportunity to transform Kiryandongo into a major grain production area, benefiting the refugee community and the broader agricultural sector. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to expand Asili's impact in Kiryandongo and replicate its successful business model across other refugee-hosting districts in Uganda. Asili is optimistic the project's success proves that private-sector-led initiatives can drive meaningful change and should be scaled up to support and partner with value-chain actors in refugee and host communities.



Gulu Agricultural Development Company

<https://gadc.co.ug/>

Trained 1,000+ new host and refugee farmers



Gulu Agricultural Development Company (GADC) was founded in 2009 by Bruce Robertson as a Ugandan agribusiness that buys cotton and sesame from smallholder farmers, processing and exporting the end products to premium European markets. Today, GADC operates in West and East Acholi sub-regions of Uganda as well as West Nile. GADC arose from the devastation caused by LRA-instigated war in Northern Uganda, when local farmers were forced out of their homes and farmland. A generation of farmers grew up in refugee resettlements; farming knowledge and practices were lost; and market networks were destroyed due to the insecurity.

GADC sources cotton and sesame from over 30,000 smallholder farmers across West Nile, which the company continuously supports with technical assistance, delivering much-needed cash to rural and remote regions of the country. Training includes good agronomic practices (GAP), such as principles of organic farming, tillage, integrated pest management, marketing, and environmental standards. The company gins the cotton and sells lint to international buyers, providing farmers with much-needed market access.

GADC sees a strategic business need for expanding its farmer network and increasing the amount of high-quality cotton it can sell to international markets. In particular, GADC has recently worked with a Japanese customer to develop a marketing and specialty branding for clothes whose raw material was grown by refugees. As the volumes required by this project are expected to increase, GADC will work directly with refugee farmers to ensure a continuous and growing supply.

Expanding Reach with Technical Assistance

RIN's TA has positively impacted GADC's operations and farmer engagement. This support enabled GADC to recruit and train over 1,000 farmers, as planned, including both host communities and refugees, on GAP. The training sessions were comprehensive, covering six modules over a span of two months, and were conducted in accessible locations such as churches and hired halls. Training also included financial inclusion to help farmers realize the potential of agriculture as a business and equip them with the basic skills in business as well as how to combat gender-based violence.

TA from RIN also provided crucial inputs such as seeds, equipment for integrated pest management, spray pumps, and jerry cans. This support was instrumental in overcoming initial challenges, particularly in engaging refugee farmers who were new to cotton production and often had limited access to land. GADC recruited two Area Coordinators, five Field Officers and 50 Lead Farmers to lead and implement the field extension, which facilitated short-term employment opportunities.

Challenges

Refugees were largely unfamiliar with cotton farming and needed extensive training and support during the TA project implementation. Compounding this issue was the frequent movement of refugees between Sudan and Uganda, which made maintaining consistent training schedules difficult. To complicate matters further, multiple NGOs were conducting overlapping training sessions, causing participants to miss some crucial lessons. Coordinating training sessions for women, who had numerous household responsibilities, presented an additional hurdle. Distance and accessibility also posed significant challenges. Many refugees had to walk long distances to reach the training sites, often arriving tired and less engaged.

However, the most critical issue was the lack of sufficient land. Refugees were typically allocated small plots, which were inadequate for meaningful agricultural production. This limitation hindered their ability to fully apply the new skills and knowledge they were acquiring through GADC's training.

Success Stories and Future Aspirations

Notwithstanding their many challenges, farmers have reported increased interest in cotton farming and better agricultural practices. They have also expressed aspirations to improve their livelihoods, pay for education, and become self-reliant through farming. For example, one farmer emphasized increased crop yields due to new planting techniques, and another expressed desire to become an extension officer, leveraging the knowledge acquired to support their community further. The knowledge gained from GADC's training has not only improved their current agricultural practices but also equipped them with skills they plan to utilize back in South Sudan. The training sessions have also fostered cooperation between host and refugee communities, promoting land sharing and GADC aims to continue supporting refugees and host communities beyond the current TA project. The company plans to align training schedules with the agricultural calendar to enhance the effectiveness of training sessions as well as seek continued support for tools and materials to equip farmers better. They also intend to ensure that future training participants are genuinely committed to improving their agricultural practices, thereby fostering long-term sustainability. GADC's relationships with buyers that tell the story of cotton grown in refugee areas have the potential to drive further demand from these farmers in the future. Farmers are expected to achieve better yields over time; meet high quality standards; and, notwithstanding international price fluctuations, increase their incomes from cotton farming over time.



Headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with operations across Africa, Gebeya positions itself as a pan-African source for freelance professional talent, aiming to expand the African continent's technology industry by offering a self-sustained ecosystem. Gebeya champions a mission to elevate the African technology landscape, emphasizing its commitment to nurturing talent and providing cutting-edge, market-relevant training. Gebeya has demonstrated growth through its expansion across Africa and partnerships with international organizations.

Gebeya offers a platform that connects skilled African professionals and service providers with businesses seeking to scale their operations through flexible and vetted talent. Services include software development, graphic design, and digital marketing, among others. Additionally, Gebeya uses its Talent Cloud Solution in providing access to world class training programs to develop high-demand tech skills in the African workforce. The demand for tech talent in Africa is burgeoning, driven by digital transformation across sectors. Gebeya is well-positioned within this trend, addressing the critical gap of connecting trained professionals with industry

Expanding Boundless Skills Platform and Planning for its Sustainability

The company has received funding from UNHCR to build an online gig platform (Boundless Skills) to connect 300 refugees to job opportunities in Ethiopia and beyond. With TA support, since its launch in January 2024, the Boundless Skills Digital Livelihood Pilot has demonstrated promising initial engagement from refugee talent. To date, the company has successfully onboarded over 600 refugees, surpassing the initial target of 300. This strong early traction underscores the potential of the Boundless Skills initiative, reinforcing Gebeya's expansion plans to extend their offerings to a broader audience in need across Africa and globally.

Platform Services

The Boundless Skills platform comprehensively facilitates talent onboarding, vetting, matching, and community engagement. It also offers detailed mentorship, talent support, full-time client and talent support, and skilling opportunities. Joining the platform is a straightforward three-step process: talents click on the link www.boundlesskills.com, register, and are vetted immediately. Clients, on the other hand, access using the same link and, through a guided search, they are able to find talents that meet their specific needs. This seamless process ensures that both talents and clients have a streamlined and efficient experience, fostering successful engagements and sustainable livelihood opportunities for displaced individuals.

Refugee Talent Acquisition & Placement

The talent acquisition phase began in January, with the team working closely with 15 talent scouts who have been trained by Gebeya—10 in Ethiopia and 5 in Kenya. These scouts have spearheaded the onboarding exercises using various channels such as Telegram, WhatsApp groups, word of mouth, and referrals. Eight hundred two refugees signed up on the platform and, following screenings, 637 talents from Kakuma, Addis Ababa, Awabarre, Jijiga, Shedheer and Gambela were fully onboarded and are now matchable on the platform. Sixty-two percent of the talents are based in Ethiopia, which is the pilot country, with a significant surge observed among Kenyan-based refugees in Kakuma (38%). The gender ratio among the refugees registered on the platform was 36% female and 64% male. This representation ensures participation and inclusivity, crucial for the pilot's success and scalability. In addition, a thorough skills gap analysis was conducted among the refugee pool, leading to targeted digital training programs offered to 250 platform participants.

Although initiated later in the project, the jobs and placements exercise was off to a solid start. Eleven companies have committed to utilizing the platform and hiring refugee talents and placed 53 job openings on the platform. To date, 89 refugees have been undergoing screening placements, with 21 active job interviews in progress and one job placement: one refugee talent has secured a freelance Graphic Designer position with Western Brook Oloika Group.

Gebeya is currently collaborating with companies and startups in Ethiopia and Kenya that are keen on integrating refugee talents into their workforce. Notable partners include Daf Technology, Abedulselam Import Export, Violet General Business PLC, Simple Advertising, JY Tour and Travel, and Shebelle Bank. This growing interest from employers highlights the platform's potential to bridge the gap between talented refugees and employment opportunities. Gebeya has found that inter-organizational collaborations are the fastest way to facilitate both talent and client acquisition. The company is also proactively addressing soft skills training needs to support high retention rates for placed refugees.

Challenges

Gebeya has experienced challenges in the refugees' ability to participate in the job matching process, even when they expressed interest in the jobs. For example, they experienced several no-shows for pre-set and confirmed interviews, indicating more dedicated support needs toward interview handling and preparation as well as wrap-around services to ensure transportation availability for long distances (especially in Ethiopia). On the client side, limited years of experience of the available refugees hindered multiple placements; despite being skilled, there was hesitation from clients to hire candidates with less work experience. The pilot also highlighted the need to build a larger roster of potential clients to draw from as employers. Gebeya will continue to operate the platform and bring new client partners onboard to hire from the available refugee talent pool created by the TA project.





Future Aspirations

With a proven Africa-wide program, Gebeya's ultimate vision is to provide platform access to displaced groups globally by opening access to its tools for NGOs serving refugee communities in regions like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia. For example, expanding to aid agencies focused on major Palestinian refugee populations in Jordan, Lebanon, and elsewhere would fall under this phase. Partnerships with major international aid agencies could help achieve global refugee participation. Gebeya's goal would be for the platform to ultimately serve refugees of all national backgrounds - whether Congolese, Syrian, Palestinian, or other displaced groups needing economic opportunities, based on the tremendous untapped potential in these vulnerable communities when provided the right skills training, mentorship, and job-matching tools.



IV. Recommendations and Next Steps

Armed with the confidence and experience gleaned from several years of research and RLI ecosystem-building work in the Greater Horn of Africa, RIN is poised to embark on an ambitious expansion of its TA program. Expanding the scope of the program will require several modifications and corresponding resource needs:

- 1 Expanding TA Scope and Duration**
 A core objective of RIN's strategy is to broaden the reach of its RLI-TA, extending support to a greater number of companies and over more extended periods, specifically targeting a 6-12-month engagement horizon. By committing to longer-term partnerships, RIN seeks to provide more in-depth, customized support, allowing enterprises to fully embed RLI principles into their strategies, cultures, and ongoing operations. Such sustained engagement is crucial for achieving lasting impact, enabling companies to transition from initial RLI efforts to deep, systemic integration of refugees into their workforces, supply chains, and communities. Longer engagements also generate deeper learnings, offer impact measurement and management, and create better tested models for refugee-lens companies.
- 2 Creating RLI-TA Core Curriculum**
 This curriculum will cover the basics of RLI, including understanding the legal, social, and economic contexts that affect refugees and their private sector inclusion. It will delve into case studies of successful refugee-lens ventures, highlighting benefits and best practices. Furthermore, it will address the practical aspects of implementing RLI strategies within businesses, such as adapting business models, engaging with refugee communities and refugee-led organizations, and measuring impact, and assessing readiness for RLI. As a first step, this resource will aim to help scale RLI-TA, but the steps thereafter will continue to be customized to the unique needs of selected companies.
- 3 Building a Multi-Donor TA Fund**
 Recognizing the importance blended finance for RLI, RIN aims to spearhead the creation of a multi-donor TA fund. With an anchor investor aligned to lead the initiative, there is a call to action for other donors and investors to join forces in supporting RLI. The fund will not only provide the resources for RLI-TA delivery, as well as tools and activities needed for its wider adoption, but also signify a collective commitment among philanthropic and investment communities to refugee inclusion.
- 4 Cultivating a Comprehensive RLI Pipeline**
 A key strategy for maximizing the impact of RIN's TA program involves leveraging the TA outreach and delivery process to build and grow a pipeline of RLI opportunities. A pipeline will serve as a critical resource for identifying and nurturing potential investments, ensuring a steady flow of high-potential enterprises into the RLI ecosystem. By systematically and proactively engaging with companies at various stages of readiness for RLI, RLI-TA can accelerate their progress, moving from initial interest to intentional and lasting impact.

5

Increasing RLI Investor Engagement



With an expanded RLI-TA program and a robust pipeline in place, RIN is well-positioned to develop a more active RLI investor engagement strategy. In addition to building the private sector’s capacity for refugee inclusion, the ultimate aim of TA is mobilizing capital by articulating clear value propositions for investing in refugee-lens enterprises. This will include showcasing the successes of TA recipients, highlighting their investment potential and impact, and facilitating connections with aligned investors. In addition, investors interested in increasing their refugee impact can benefit from offering RLI-TA to their portfolio companies in partnership with RIN.

6

Training TA providers in RLI



The effectiveness of RLI-TA hinges on the providers’ understanding of RLI principles, the unique challenges faced by refugees, the opportunities they present to businesses, and the stakeholders involved. RIN envisions a targeted initiative on training TA providers in RLI through a combination of online and in-person training sessions to maximize accessibility and participation. Upon completion, TA providers will receive certification, recognizing their RLI expertise and distinguishing them within the broader TA sector. By focusing on the training of TA providers in RLI, RIN will set the stage for a more informed, effective, and impactful deployment of TA at scale.

RIN’s recommendations and goals for its RLI-TA program represent a comprehensive strategy to strengthen, scale, and sustain private sector practices and investments with an intentional and lasting impact on refugee self-reliance. They underscore a commitment to not just supporting individual businesses as TA clients, but supporting and growing the entire RLI ecosystem. Building on the best practices and ideas presented in this playbook, RIN invites companies, investors, donors, and other stakeholders to implement and benefit from RLI-TA, driving toward a future where companies thrive by embracing refugee inclusion as a critical, intentional, and sustainable component of their financial and impact strategy and outcomes.

