



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

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.

Accordingly, RIN provided technical assistance (TA) to three locally-based private sector enterprises as a part of this program, which resulted in an increased number of FDP incorporated into their operations (see page 4). Based on the demonstrated success of these pilot cases, RIN also 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.

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.

Recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities that displacement presents in the economy of the Greater Horn of Africa, there is a pressing need for a more specialized approach to business capacity development and advisory services—specifically, RLI- TA. This type of 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.

Objectives and Impact of TA

RLI-TA can achieve manifold objectives ranging from lowering the cost for corporate market entry to amplifying the impact of existing efforts.

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.

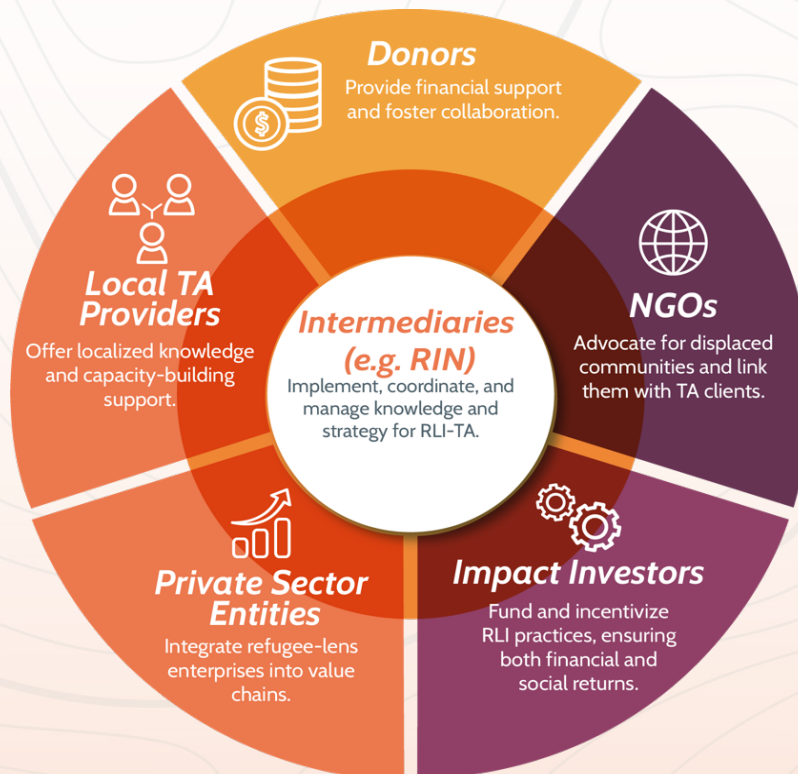
Catalyze and subsidize first-time engagement by an enterprise:

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.

The impact of RLI-TA is two-fold: 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 impact on the recipient enterprises by positively influencing the internal operations and external engagements of businesses, contributing to their bottom line, reputation and brand value, and other strategic priorities.

The RLI-TA Ecosystem

The RLI-TA ecosystem involves key stakeholders, each playing a critical role in ensuring RLI-TA's success and impact.



Types of TA

RLI TA can take many forms, aligning with the categories and principles of the [refugee lens](#). TA aims to guide clients toward qualifying for the lens by utilizing the following methods of refugee inclusion and engagement.

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)

TA Process

The TA process begins with identifying relevant companies through RIN's market assessments. TA clients are expected to be primarily R3 and R4 companies or R5 and R6 funds, however, some R1 and R2 companies might also qualify. Selection criteria 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. These companies are then engaged in a rigorous, structured, multi-step process:

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.

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.

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.

MONITORING & REPORTING

To monitor progress, ensure alignment with objectives and adapt the TA provision as necessary based on evolving needs and circumstances.

CONTRACT

To formalize the engagement, ensuring both parties are clear on their roles, responsibilities, and the terms of the engagement.

CLOSEOUT

To formally conclude the TA engagement, ensuring that objectives have been met and both parties have a clear understanding of next steps.

RLI-TA Success Stories

Asili Agriculture

<https://asili.ag/>

Asili Agriculture was founded in 2012 as a grain aggregator in Masindi, Uganda, aiming to support smallholder farmers and improve agricultural productivity. Asili quickly expanded its operations to Kiryandongo district as well as Northern Uganda, working with over 15,000 small-scale producers and employing trained field agents to offer climate-smart agriculture training, quality inputs, and market access. The TA provided by RIN has significantly boosted Asili's capacity to expand services in refugee settlements. Asili registered over 1,000 refugee farmers and conducted training on good agronomic practices, crop rotation, and the introduction of new rotational and protein-rich crops like mung beans. Looking ahead, there is a significant opportunity to transform Kiryandongo into a major grain production area, with expanded infrastructure, such as grain aggregation and storage facilities, and partnerships with value-chain actors, benefiting the refugee community and the broader agricultural sector.

Registered & Trained 1,000+ refugee farmers



Gulu Agricultural Development Company (GADC)

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

GADC, established in 2009, focuses on cotton and sesame production, working with over 30,000 smallholder farmers across Uganda's West Nile region. The company provides training on agronomic practices, financial inclusion, and environmental standards, sourcing cotton and sesame from smallholders, and selling the lint to international markets. With support from RIN's TA program, GADC has trained over 1,000 new farmers, including refugees, to expand its farmer network and increase the supply of high-quality cotton. The TA also created short-term employment for field officers and coordinators, fostering local economic stability. The training helped improve agricultural practices and cooperation between host and refugee communities. GADC plans to continue supporting both refugees and host communities by aligning training with the agricultural calendar and ensuring participants are committed to sustainable agricultural practices. 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.

Trained 1,000+ new host and refugee farmers



Gebeya

<https://gebeya.com>

Headquartered in Addis Ababa, Gebeya is a pan-African technology platform connecting skilled professionals and service providers with businesses across Africa. Gebeya offers services like software development, graphic design, and digital marketing, while providing high-demand tech training to meet the continent's growing need for skilled professionals. With partnerships across Africa, Gebeya is driving digital transformation by bridging the gap between talent and industry demand. With funding from UNHCR, Gebeya launched the Boundless Skills platform to connect refugees to job opportunities. RIN's TA support ensured the success of this platform by engaging with more refugee communities and employers strategically. Gebeya has worked with 15 talent scouts across Ethiopia and Kenya to recruit 802 refugees, 637 of whom are now ready for job placements. The platform has received commitments from 11 companies and successfully placed one refugee as a freelance graphic designer. Gebeya plans to expand Boundless Skills globally, providing displaced groups worldwide with access to job opportunities.

Recruited 630+ refugees into job placement



Recommendations and Next Steps

With years of research and RLI ecosystem-building in the Greater Horn of Africa, RIN is ready to significantly expand its TA program. Next steps should include:

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 over longer periods, specifically targeting an engagement horizon of 6-12 months. 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.

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. It will delve into case studies of successful refugee-lens ventures, highlighting best practices and lessons learned. Furthermore, it will address the practical aspects of implementing RLI strategies, such as adapting new business models, engaging with refugee communities, and measuring impact.

3 Building a Multi-Donor TA Fund

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.

RLI-TA represents a comprehensive strategy to strengthen, scale, and sustain RLI, not only by supporting individual businesses as TA clients but transforming the ecosystem in which they operate, driving toward a future where enterprises thrive by embracing refugee inclusion as a critical component of their financial and impact outcomes.

4 Cultivating a Comprehensive RLI Pipeline

A key strategy for maximizing the impact of RLI-TA involves leveraging the TA outreach and engagement process to build 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.

5 Increasing RLI Investor Engagement

RLI-TA will support a more active RLI investor engagement strategy. By working closely with investors, it will be possible to articulate clear value propositions for investing in enterprises that have undergone rigorous TA, demonstrating not only their market potential but also their capacity to generate positive social impacts for refugees.

6 Training TA Providers in RLI

A targeted initiative on training TA providers in RLI will leverage a blend 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 the stage will be set for a more informed, effective, and impactful deployment of TA.