

# Refugee-led Organisations (RLOs) and the Importance of Self-Reliance



Photo: Action pour les Progres,  
Kakuma Refugee Camp

GLOBAL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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# Chapter 1

## The Importance of Self-reliance

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# The Importance of Self-reliance

By Zehra Abrar

*"Refugees don't want to rely on handouts and humanitarian aid for survival. They want to use their skills, work, contribute to their communities, and make decisions about their lives. They want to be self-reliant. We help refugees move from being dependent on aid to being self-reliant, from living in danger to living in safety."  
(RefugePoint. Self-reliance. 2023)*

On World Refugee Day, we celebrate the resilience, strength, and resourcefulness of refugees worldwide. It is a day to reflect on the importance of empowering refugees towards self-reliance and fostering their independence. By supporting and amplifying the efforts of Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs), we can shine a light on the important work displaced populations are doing worldwide.

Self-reliance can be defined as the opportunity to rely on one's own ability, rather than that of aid, or other stipends. Self-reliance enables an individual to regain their economic or social ability to meet their needs, or that of their family. (RefugePoint, 2023)

By refugees achieving self-reliance, it decreases pressure on host societies, decreases reliance on humanitarian aid, and increases confidence, competence, and self-worth.

When refugees are provided the opportunity to harness their skills, talents, and aspirations, they make positive and long-lasting contributions to their communities and host economies. RLOs are leaders in providing essential support, mentorship, and training for refugees and host populations.

By shifting the focus from traditional aid models to supporting RLOs, we enable refugees to become architects of their own futures. RLOs create platforms for refugees to share experiences, collaborate, and leverage their unique strengths. They offer education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs, fostering economic independence and enabling refugees to build sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families.

When we support RLOs, we foster an environment of self-determination and resilience, empowering refugees to take control of their lives and break free from cycles of dependency. By investing in these organizations, we invest in hope, innovation, and the untapped potential of individuals who have endured immense challenges. Through self-reliance, refugees can rebuild their lives, pursue their dreams, and contribute meaningfully to their host communities.

RLOs foster collaboration and co-leadership with their host communities, initiating positive relationships and integration internally within displaced communities, and externally within host communities. The significance of RLOs extends beyond their specific activities and initiatives.

They provide a space for refugees to come together, share experiences, and support one another emotionally and socially.

In this e-book, we have chosen to highlight a few refugee-led organizations that are promoting self-reliance in refugee-inhabited areas of Kenya. This includes the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana county, The Kalobeyei integrated settlement in Turkana county, and urban areas within Nairobi.

Show your support by donating or sharing the work of these RLOs. Click on their social media handles provided within this article.

# Chapter 2

## RLOs in Kakuma Refugee Camp

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Kakuma Refugee Camp is located in Kenya's northwestern area in Turkana county. The camp was built in 1992 after the arrival of the "Lost Boys of Sudan." The camp is situated outside of Kakuma town, the administrative centre for Turkana County's Turkana West District. Kakuma Refugee camp currently hosts over 200,000 refugees while Kalobeyei integrated settlement hosts over 50,000. Altogether, Turkana hosts over 250,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. (UNHCR, 2023).

Several Refugee-led Organisations (RLOs) and Community-based Organisations (CBOs) in the Kakuma Refugee Camp are working towards empowering refugees and achieving self-reliance through a range of initiatives.



## Action pour le Progres

A certified organization by the county government of Turkana, is focused on enhancing the well-being of refugee youth through various developmental programs. Their initiatives include social and emotional learning in pre-schools, transformative e-learning, providing solar-powered freezers to small business owners for improved livelihoods, digital literacy training, and collaborative research. To date, approximately 200 refugees have directly or indirectly benefited from their services. ([Action Pour Le Progres, 2021](#)).

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## Solidarity Initiative for Refugees (SIR)

Established in 2016, SIR has been at the forefront of equipping youth in Kakuma with skills and tools for refugees to achieve a brighter future. SIR employs digital learning methods to provide education access and livelihood training, partnering with organizations like Cohere, Source Network, and REBANK.

To date, there have been over 2500 young refugees who have been equipped with valuable skills for job placement through their initiatives. ([SIR, 2016](#)).

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## Resilience Action International (RAI)

Focuses on education and economic empowerment of refugees and displaced individuals. (Wehn, D. 2020). By targeting refugee youth in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, RAI aims to foster self-sufficiency and productivity among these individuals, empowering them to make informed decisions about their lives. ([AfID - Accounting for International Development, 2007](#)).

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## **The Initiative for Nurturing Vulnerable & Empowerment for Resilience (INVER)**

Established in 2018, INVER promotes the resilience and psycho-social well-being among refugees in Kakuma. Their programs focus on enterprise development, adult and children's literacy, sexual and reproductive health, sports, and social cohesion. (INVER, 2018). It has conducted a Sexual Reproductive Education initiative and has recruited 100 beneficiaries as part of the project effort. (Brady-Mine, A. 2021),

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## **Conflict Transformation for Development**

Established in 2015, Conflict Transformation for Development promotes positive peace in local communities affected by conflict.

They also focus on vocational and entrepreneurship training for women and youth. Lastly, they provide resources such as clothing, sanitary pads, scholarly materials, and soap women and girls to ensure their well-being and access to education.

(Conflict Transformation for Development – Dialogue Transforms, 2015).

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## Chapter 3

# RLOs in Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, Turkana County

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# RLOs in Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, Turkana County

By Global Rights Defenders

The Kalobeyei integrated settlement was built in response to the influx of South Sudanese refugees from a conflict in South Sudan in 2013. UNHCR requested the allocation of additional land for the expansion of Kakuma Refugee Camp. The Kalobeyei integrated settlement demonstrates refugees abilities to engage in meaningful economic activity through integrating host populations in Turkana County with refugees residing within the settlement.

### **Kalobeyei Initiative for a Better Life (KI4BLI)**

Founded in 2018, KI4BLI has harnessed the power of education to drive change within the community. Their efforts are concentrated in four key sectors.

(KALOBEYEI INITIATIVE FOR BETTER, 2018).

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### **The Wasafi Youth Group**

Established by refugee youths in 2018, focuses on improving hygiene and sanitation, child protection, and youth self-reliance. This dynamic community-based organization is committed to making a positive impact in the Kalobeyei settlement. Their vision is to create a stable and development-oriented community in Kenya by actively contributing to community development, promoting awareness of hygiene and sanitation, and protecting children's rights.

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# Chapter 4

## RLOs in Nairobi

## Chapter 4

# RLOs in Nairobi

By Global Rights Defenders

In Nairobi, Kenya, a vibrant network of refugee-led organizations is working tirelessly to empower refugees and create a sense of community and belonging. These organizations, driven by the determination to overcome adversity, are advocating for refugee rights, fostering collaboration, and providing essential support to those who have been displaced by conflict and war. In this article, we will explore some of the remarkable RLOs in Nairobi, their missions, and the impact they are making in the lives of refugees and the local community.

### **Youth Voices Community, also known as YVC**

Is a refugee-led group that seeks to globalize refugee issues and highlight the successes, challenges, and achievements of refugee youths and marginalized communities. By advocating for support, sponsors, and mentors, YVN aims to promote self-reliance and create opportunities for refugee youths to thrive. By partnering with organizations like Cohere, YVC believes in the power of education and self-realization for refugee youths. ([Global Refugee Youth Network, n.d](#)).

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| [Facebook](#)

## RELON-Kenya

Serves as a national network of refugee-led organizations, providing a platform for RLOs to connect, collaborate, and amplify their voices. By linking RLOs with opportunities, ideas, funding, and networking platforms, RELON-Kenya aims to advocate for the inclusion and meaningful participation of refugees in decision-making processes. Through transparency, integrity, networking, inclusivity, and accountability, RELON-Kenya is transforming the refugee narrative in Kenya. (*Refugee-Led Organization Network of Kenya, 2019*)

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## RefuSHE

Focuses on protecting, educating, and empowering orphaned, unaccompanied, and separated refugee girls and young women. By providing them with essential skills, education, and support, RefuSHE aims to build healthier and more resilient futures.

This community-driven organization understands that investing in refugee girls' potential will not only transform their lives but also create a positive ripple effect within their communities. ([RefuSHE](#) | [ReliefWeb](#), 2023).

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## L'Afrikana

A refugee-run community-based organization, is dedicated to empowering fellow refugees and the local hosting community in Nairobi. By involving refugees in finding solutions to the challenges they face, L'Afrikana maximizes the impact of their services. Through empowerment programs, skill development, and community engagement, L'Afrikana is reshaping the lives of refugees and fostering integration within the local community. (*L'Afrikana, n.d.*)

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## **Nawezaa**

Is a unique organization that supports engagement and collaboration between refugees and locals. They achieve this by providing a media platform where individuals can share their ideas, initiatives, and stories, fostering a belief in the possibilities of their endeavors. Through mentorship and support, Nawezaa empowers refugees and locals to coexist and thrive, nurturing a sense of community and shared aspirations. (*Nawezaa / Reframe, n.d.*)

Through collaboration, community engagement, and a shared vision of inclusivity, these RLOs are not only empowering refugees but also enriching the broader society. As we celebrate their efforts, let us recognize the importance of supporting and amplifying the voices of these remarkable organizations as they strive for a better future for all.

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In the bustling city of Nairobi, a diverse range of refugee-led organizations is driving change and empowering refugees to overcome adversity. From advocating for refugee rights to providing education, skills, and support, these organizations are transforming lives and fostering resilience.



# Chapter 5

## Self-reliance in Practice

## Chapter 5

# Self-reliance in Practice

By Zehra Abrar

The RLOs listed above exemplify the capabilities of all refugees when provided the adequate resources or opportunities. Unfortunately, refugees and displaced populations are perceived as recipients – those who are helpless and incapable of managing responsibilities. The traditional humanitarian model of solely providing aid has deeply stigmatized displaced populations. As humanitarian aid is becoming more limited in funding and in scope, it is more important than ever to re-focused the attention, resources and capacities onto prioritizing self-reliance.

Self-reliance will increase refugees' capacities, self-confidence, self-worth, economic efforts, literacy, and diversify host economies. Refugees should no longer be viewed as solely recipients, but rather as key stakeholders to be included in all aspects of the proposed project such as planning, implementation, and review.

When provided the resources and opportunities,

refugees have demonstrated that they are not only capable of achieving greatness, but that they will overcome any barrier which they are presented with. Advocating for self-reliance is advocating for independence, capacity strengthening, knowledge dissemination, and a life outside of displacement for future generations.

Enabling refugees to achieve self-reliance will be a collective effort from I/NGOs, national and local governments and the international community. By collectively recognizing and fulfilling our responsibilities, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees to achieve self-reliance. This approach not only empowers refugees but also contributes to their dignity, human rights, and overall well-being. It is through shared commitment and cooperation that we can build a more sustainable and inclusive future for refugees worldwide. (Easton-Calabria, E., & Omata, N. 2018).

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