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**RECAN**  
Refugee Change  
Makers Network

# Annual Report 2025

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# Foreword

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In 2025, RECAN advanced its mission to empower refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in Uganda by conducting in-depth research and delivering targeted capacity-building programs. Established in 2023 as a non-profit network of refugee leaders and initiatives, RECAN focuses on leadership training, governance enhancement, research, and advocacy to foster resilience and self-reliance among refugees. The year's core activities centered on Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, where RLOs play a pivotal role in addressing community needs but face significant hurdles in resource mobilization, infrastructure, and legal compliance.

Key initiatives included the Kyaka II RLOs Needs Assessment in July, which surveyed 32 RLO founders to identify barriers and inform strategic interventions. Findings highlighted acute financial constraints and regulatory challenges, directly shaping the RECAN Governance Bootcamp in September—a three-day program that trained 28 leaders from 27 RLOs (96.5% attendance rate) in corporate governance, strategic leadership, and NGO compliance. This bootcamp aligned closely with participant expectations gathered pre-event, emphasizing practical skills in transparent governance, organizational structures, and partnerships.

Through these efforts, RECAN equipped RLOs with tools for sustainable operations, strengthened networks for collective advocacy, and amplified refugee voices. Challenges such as funding shortages persisted, but the programs promoted coping mechanisms like peer collaboration and policy advocacy. Looking ahead to 2026, RECAN will expand follow-up support, advocate for legal reforms, and scale assessments to other settlements to drive broader impact and localization.

We extend gratitude to partners, donors, and stakeholders for their commitment to RECAN.

**Phionah NIYIJENA**  
Country Director

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## About RECAN

Refugee Change Makers Network (RECAN) is a non-profit entity dedicated to reinforcing refugee resilience in Uganda through leadership and governance training, research, and advocacy. Our vision positions RECAN as a hub for authentic, servant leaders driving positive regional change. In contexts like Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, RLOs are essential for community development, tackling needs in education, health, livelihoods, and social cohesion while advancing the localization agenda where local actors lead humanitarian responses.

However, RLOs often grapple with leadership gaps, governance deficiencies, resource limitations, and sustainability issues. RECAN's 2025 activities addressed these by profiling RLO capacities, identifying challenges, documenting coping strategies, and assessing readiness for greater roles in decision-making and resource management. This approach not only builds individual and organizational skills but also advocates for enabling policies, ensuring RLOs thrive as autonomous, impactful entities contributing to refugee self-reliance.



# Our Theory of Change



Leaders at the Center  
of our Mission

Rather than focusing solely on organizations, RECAN centers its efforts on the individuals leading them the dream-bearers of RLOs. We strengthen the capacity of these leaders through tailored training, mentorship, and resources that enhance their skills, confidence, and authenticity. Empowering leaders to embody their vision with clarity and resilience, we enable them to steer their organizations toward greater impact, fostering a ripple effect of change within their communities.



Communicating  
RLOs Impact

RECAN is committed to highlighting the powerful impact of refugee-led organizations by sharing their stories and achievements with a broader audience. Through strategic communication, we elevate the visibility of RLOs' work, showcasing their role in creating sustainable change. While amplifying their successes, we not only celebrate their contributions but also inspire greater support and collaboration, fostering a deeper appreciation for the vital role RLOs play in transforming lives.



Data Driven  
Approach

Research is the heartbeat of RECAN's approach, ensuring every solution we design is grounded in robust data. While systematically gathering and analyzing information on refugee communities and RLO challenges, we create targeted, impactful interventions that reflect real-world needs. This data-driven model allows us to innovate responsibly, adapt to emerging trends, and maximize the effectiveness of our support for RLOs, ensuring our efforts are both relevant and transformative.



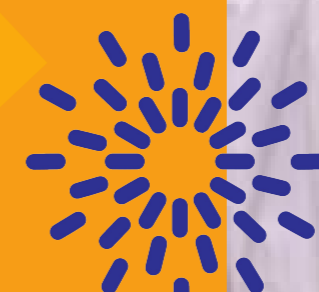
Sustainability

At RECAN, sustainability is the backbone of our mission to empower refugee-led organizations. Fostering efficient resource management, diversifying funding streams, and strengthening internal systems, we ensure our operations remain robust and adaptable. This approach allows us to consistently deliver support to RLOs without interruption, creating a stable foundation for transformative change in refugee communities. Our commitment to sustainability means we can weather challenges and maintain our focus on long-term empowerment.



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# 2025 Operations

## 01. Needs Assessment

This assessment targeted 32 RLO founders in Kyaka II to gather comprehensive data on organizational structures, achievements, community impact, and operational hurdles. It aimed to tailor RECAN's support, design capacity-sharing programs, strengthen governance and leadership, advocate for resources, and elevate RLO voices in dialogues.

The assessment revealed interconnected challenges in resource mobilization and infrastructure, which severely limit RLO growth and scalability. For instance, insufficient financial resources (reported by 81.3% of respondents) often stem from limited donor access and high competition for funds, preventing RLOs from expanding programs or hiring skilled staff. Similarly, restricted grant access (87.5%) highlights systemic biases where refugee-led entities are overlooked due to perceived risks or lack of formal registration. Legal barriers, such as restrictions on refugees' rights (18.8%) and complex regulations (12.5%), further constrain operations by limiting movement, employment, or partnership opportunities. Social issues like stigma and language barriers, though less prevalent, erode community trust and engagement, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive strategies.

These findings emphasize that without addressing financial and legal gaps, RLOs cannot fully contribute to community resilience. Respondents stressed diversifying funding, investing in technology and personnel, policy reforms, and community-building initiatives. RECAN's role as a platform for capacity building and advocacy is crucial here, enabling peer learning and strategic alliances to overcome these barriers.



Lack of Access to capacity Strengthening Opportunity

86.5%

Use social media like WhatsApp for communication and Visibility

96.9%

Limited skills about compliance and Tax regulations

53.1%

Lack of Inclusion in Governance and Formal Decision-making process

71.9%

Formally Registered up to District Level

71.9%

Use paper-based records

65.6%

Insufficient infrastructures

59.4%

Limited staffing capacity

56.3%

Rely on Membership fee and Income-generating activity to implement programs

75%

Lack of access to funding and grant opportunity

83.8%

Limited access to Technology

71.9%

RLOs in Livelihood

75%

RLOs in Education

65.6%

Limited knowledge about data-driven strategies hence they refer to informal information pathways

Youth-Led RLOs in Kyaka II

62%

## 02. RECAN Governance Boot camp

The RECAN Governance Bootcamp, held from September 10th to 12th, 2025, at the AYAN Centre in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, was a three-day intensive training program designed to equip leaders of Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) with essential skills in corporate governance, strategic leadership, and NGO compliance in Uganda. Facilitated primarily by **Mawa Alatawa**, the bootcamp featured interactive sessions, video presentations, and discussions to enhance participants' understanding of effective organizational management and legal frameworks. It attracted 28 participants (8 females and 20 males) representing 27 RLOs, **achieving a 96.5% attendance** rate among the 29 applied organizations. The program addressed key topics such as governance structures, team dynamics, strategic management, and partnership building, fostering networking and collaboration among RLO leaders. Expected outcomes included enhanced governance, strengthened leadership, increased awareness of RECAN's mission, and a robust network for advocacy in Kyaka II.

The bootcamp was designed based on a needs assessment conducted in July 2025, which revealed significant gaps in governance compliance among RLOs in Kyaka II, with only 87.5% practicing basic constitutions or articles of association while other mechanisms were lacking. This prompted RECAN to create a targeted three-day capacity-sharing initiative to help RLOs manage their organizations effectively, ensure legal compliance, and promote sustainable leadership. The program incorporated consolidated expectations from RLO participants, emphasizing practical skills in transparent and inclusive governance, organizational structures, leadership development, and advocacy. It aligned with RECAN's mission to empower refugee leaders through tailored training, drawing on predictions for skill-building, networking, and logistical support like transport refunds and certificates. The curriculum was modular, covering principles of effective governance, operational frameworks, team building, and partnerships, with interactive elements to address real-world challenges in refugee contexts.

The bootcamp was structured over three days with a detailed agenda. Day One focused on foundational governance, where participants gained insights into structures, leadership responsibilities, and board management pitfalls through sessions led by Mawa Alatawa. Day Two explored strategic leadership and team-building, including video presentations on effective management and evaluation sessions that highlighted actionable insights. Day Three delved into Uganda's NGO legal framework and compliance, with discussions allowing practical application to participants' organizations. Key highlights included high engagement in forums, praise for Alatawa's contextual facilitation blending into the Ugandan refugee setting, and collaboration with stakeholders like UNHCR's Julius Muhenda and OPM's Daniel Kisaamo, who emphasized RLO compliance and invited future partnerships. The event was supported by AYAN for the venue, ensuring accessibility near the settlement.



## Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Challenges and Lessons Learnt Several challenges emerged during the bootcamp, including time constraints that limited in-depth discussions on complex topics like NGO compliance, and participant diversity in prior knowledge levels requiring additional clarifications. Technical issues, such as inadequate public address systems, affected audibility. Lessons learnt highlighted the need for robust preparations to accommodate varying expertise and ensure smooth delivery. The program also underscored the importance of addressing logistical hurdles in refugee settings, such as balancing session depths with participant needs. Overall, these insights reinforced the value of adaptive facilitation and stakeholder involvement to enhance training effectiveness.



## Recommendations

RECAN recommends extending session durations for complex topics, conducting pre-training assessments to tailor content, improving technical setups, and organizing follow-up workshops or mentorship programs for implementation support. Future iterations should incorporate participant suggestions like financial management training and invite more partners, including OPM and UNHCR. Long-term plans include quarterly webinars, peer networks, and progress measurements via metrics such as new partnerships and governance policies implemented, aligning with RECAN's vision to amplify RLO voices and foster self-reliance in refugee communities.

## Feedback from Participants

Participants provided positive feedback on the bootcamp's structure, organization, content, and facilitation, noting that it met or exceeded their expectations for gaining skills in governance, leadership, and operations. They appreciated the interactive format, practical insights, and relevance to RLO challenges, with many highlighting the actionable tools for transparency and team dynamics. Suggestions for future topics included financial management and resource mobilization. External stakeholders, such as UNHCR and OPM representatives, commended RECAN's unique approach for building sustainable impact and trust within the Kyegegwa District community.



## Program Structure and Outcomes

Day	Key Topics	Explanatory Details and Outcomes
<b>Day 1: Foundations of Governance</b>	Corporate governance principles, leadership responsibilities, board management pitfalls.	Participants gained a foundational understanding of structures like boards vs. staff roles, analyzing common errors (e.g., poor resource allocation in settlements). This built awareness of ethical decision-making, directly tackling the assessment's governance compliance gaps (only 87.5% had basic mechanisms). Outcomes included improved ability to develop inclusive policies, enhancing organizational credibility.
<b>Day 2: Strategic Leadership and Team Building</b>	Leadership roles, team dynamics, strategic management, partnership strategies (video session).	Explored transformational and servant leadership suited to RLOs, with role-playing for conflict resolution and team motivation. The video provided real-world examples of effective management, addressing expectations for "team building and cooperation." Evaluation feedback highlighted appreciation for actionable insights, fostering confidence in leading diverse teams amid resource constraints.
<b>Day 3: NGO Compliance and Legal Frameworks</b>	Uganda's NGO legal requirements, compliance, practical applications.	Covered registration pathways, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, allowing participants to apply knowledge to their RLOs. This responded to calls for "registration pathways" and "convincing strategies for partnerships," equipping leaders to navigate regulatory barriers (e.g., 12.5% cited in assessment). Discussions emphasized sustainability in refugee settings.



# 2025 Reflections and Lesson Learnt



## Reflection 1: The Power of Data-Driven

Programming 2025 marked a significant step in RECAN's maturation as an organization. The July Needs Assessment in Kyaka II, which profiled 32 RLO founders and quantified critical gaps (e.g., 81.3% facing insufficient funding, 87.5% limited grant access, and low governance compliance beyond basic constitutions), provided a solid evidence base for action. This directly informed the design and success of the September Governance Bootcamp. The key lesson is that investing time in rigorous, participatory needs assessments pays off, it ensures interventions are relevant, reduces assumptions, and builds credibility with partners and RLOs alike.

## Reflection 2: Listening to Community Voices

Enhances Relevance and Ownership By consolidating pre-bootcamp expectations from RLO participants covering everything from weekday scheduling and transport refunds to practical modules on governance, leadership, and partnerships, RECAN demonstrated genuine responsiveness and training procedures. Rescheduling to mid-week and incorporating interactive elements like role-playing and case studies resulted in high attendance (96.5%), active engagement, and positive feedback. The lesson learned is clear: when refugee-led voices shape program design, participation increases, trust deepens, and outcomes become more sustainable.

## Reflection 3: Targeted Capacity Building Yields Tangible Organizational Strengthening

The Governance Bootcamp equipped 28 leaders from 27 RLOs with practical tools in corporate governance, strategic leadership, team dynamics, and NGO compliance. Participants left with actionable checklists, refined organizational understanding (e.g., executive vs. management roles), and certificates to boost credibility. Stakeholder endorsements from UNHCR and OPM further validated the approach. The overarching lesson is that short, intensive, context-specific training blended with real-world refugee examples can rapidly elevate RLO professionalism and position them better for partnerships and funding.

## Reflection 4: Resource and Systemic Constraints Remain the Biggest Hurdles

Despite successes, persistent challenges surfaced: funding shortages, regulatory barriers for refugees (e.g., registration complexities), infrastructure limitations, and varying participant knowledge levels. Time constraints in sessions and technical issues also highlighted operational realities in settlement settings. The lesson is that while capacity building is transformative, it must be paired with broader advocacy for policy reform, diversified funding streams, and stronger infrastructure support to enable true RLO scalability and localization.

## Reflection 5: Stakeholder Collaboration Amplifies Impact

Engagement with UNHCR, OPM, and venue partner AYAN enriched the bootcamp and opened doors for future collaboration. Representatives praised RECAN's data-oriented, refugee-centered approach and invited ongoing involvement. Participant suggestions for next topics (financial management and resource mobilization) further guide planning. The key lesson for 2025 is that RECAN's role as a neutral convener and advocate strengthens when it actively bridges RLOs with institutional actors, creating a

## Overall Lesson of the Year

2025 taught RECAN that combining evidence-based assessment, community-driven design, and focused capacity sharing creates a powerful cycle for empowering refugee-led organizations. While direct training delivers immediate skills and networks, long-term impact requires sustained follow-up, policy advocacy, and resource mobilization support. Moving into 2026, prioritizing these interconnected elements will help RECAN scale its influence and truly advance refugee self-reliance and localization in Uganda.



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