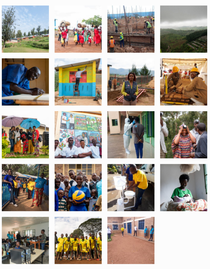
EMBRACING NEW POSSIBILITIES

OUR WORK RWANDA

With over two decades of consistent presence and experience, Alight has been playing a critical role rebuilding lives and responding to the refugee crisis in Rwanda. Today, Alight Rwanda is the one and only agency that works in all six refugee camps in the country, serving mostly Congolese and Burundian refugees, while also supporting displaced communities in three urban areas and three refugee reception and transit centers.

We partner with key stakeholders to provide core services—like the Rwandan Government, agencies of the USA, and the UN—but we also look to partner with like-minded humanitarians, businesspeople, and institutions doing incredible things and embracing new possibilities. The team is channeling Rwanda's abundant energy for change, building on the work we began over twenty years ago and emerging as a leader in innovative approaches.

As part of Alight's Changemakers 365 program, this group of students at Mugombwa Host community school received volleyballs for their school's team and recess, allowing an outlet to play, grow, and thrive.



MOVING TOWARD THE FUTURE

While Alight Rwanda works to ensure that refugees' basic needs are met, we also recognize that in order to help displaced people fully regain a life of dignity and fulfillment, we must think and act beyond the status quo. This includes seeking out partners in the private sector. Like our partnership with MeshPower, piloting technologically driven humanitarian assistance such as Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems for pregnant mothers, solar street lights, and charging kiosks and energy saving stoves. Or our partnership with kLab, pioneering world-class coding schools for talented refugee and host learners. We also actively collaborate with leading agencies like global telecommunications company MTN, training MTN agents who work with Rwanda's refugee communities on a daily basis.

The Rwandan people and government, with their dedication to economic growth, stability, and building world class systems and solutions, provide an ideal environment for our experimentation and innovation— including piloting Kuja Kuja. In Rwanda, we've collected more than 600,000 ratings of our services and over 200,000 ideas for how to do better. Kuja Kuja allows us to consistently improve and iterate on all of our programs, helping to fulfill our promise to do more—to never settle.

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH & NUTRITION

Rwanda's health team is formidable—our medical team including technicians, managers, and doctors both respond quickly in emergencies and provide the highest quality services in more stable environments. They lead with compassion and creativity, consistently improving Alight's health programming in the country.

We currently manage health infrastructure for three refugee camps (Gihembe, Nyabiheke, and Mahama) in Rwanda, providing human-centered health and nutrition services, including primary healthcare to more than 56,000 refugees quarterly. Our primary healthcare program has expanded in recent years to include a comprehensive immunization program, palliative care, outpatient consultations, minor surgeries, inpatient services, mental health, and dental care.

A comprehensive nutrition is part of and is key to well-rounded healthcare, anywhere. In Rwanda, we practice regular monthly nutrition screenings, identifying malnourished cases and getting them the support they need. This is of particular concern for malnourished children, who are immediately treated in our supplementary or therapeutic feeding programs, or referred to hospitals for higher levels of treatment. We also take great care to support pregnant and breastfeeding moms, ensuring that they receive supplements like iron, if needed, and that they have the tools required to maintain a healthy pregnancy and birth.

Chantal, Alight Rwanda's Protection Manager, is pictured standing in front of a women's safe house and counseling space in Kigeme Refugee Camp.

SHELTER & BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Constructing shelters in refugee camps is sometimes thought of as an emergency response. It can be, as was the case for the emergency construction of the Mahama Refugee Camp after an influx of refugees in 2015. But for the Rwanda team, "shelter" also means making a deliberate decision to maintain and improve the built environment in the places we work, whether that be roads, modern hospitals, or repairing dilapidated buildings.

Rwanda's mountainous landscape can make infrastructure a challenge. But our engineers have worked diligently to construct over 41 kilometers of road (and counting), 38 bridges, over 12,000 permanent shelters for refugee camps, as well as social halls, banks, health facilities, maternity units, dental units, safe houses, nutrition centers, soccer fields, youth centers, and even cinemas! It's all a part of making refugee camps and host communities not only safe, secure places, but places where people can build a meaningful life, too.

BUILDING COMMUNITY ECONOMIES

Strengthening one's livelihood—the way someone creates, learns, contributes, and supports themselves and their family—is key to helping people, refugees included, to build a life full of meaning. The Alight Rwanda team knows the power of a thriving, confident livelihood. And through multiple approaches, they do their best to help refugees get there.

The Stepped Approach to Improved Livelihoods program (SAIL) is one way. SAIL is a competitive business grant program designed to empower entrepreneurs through small business grants. Budding refugee and host entrepreneurs also receive training to support their small businesses, which provide services like hairstyling, mobile phone services, shoe repair, masonry, carpentry and transportation.

Through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), communities can pool money into a group-managed trust, enabling members to invest in small businesses, school fees, and social events that are crucial for displaced persons to regain a sense of normalcy.

Technical and vocational training is also key. We've partnered with several accredited Rwanda academies to provide training in high-demand skills for the local and national labor market, like electronics repair, tailoring, carpentry, masonry, engine repair, and hairstyling.

SAFE WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Getting safe drinking and household water to families is vital to maintaining a healthy, thriving community. Right now, Alight is providing essential water, sanitation infrastructure and hygiene services in three refugee camps in Rwanda—Kiziba, Gihembe, and Nyabiheke. This includes managing the camps' water supply through boreholes and natural sources, maintaining water infrastructure like showers, taps, pipes, reservoirs, and purifications, as well as regular water testing and quality control.

Sanitation and hygiene go hand in hand with safe water and healthy living. Alight teams ensure that there are clean and safe latrines available for both men and women, manage waste disposal, and build knowledge of best hygiene practices to prevent the spread of diseases.

Under Umuganda (Rwanda's country-wide community clean-up initiative), the Rwanda team continues to train refugee communities to contribute to the maintenance of the water and sanitation systems. Every month, we work with refugee volunteers to test and purify water sources, monitor water points and latrines, and participate in hygiene promotion campaigns. It's a group effort!

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES & PREVENTION OF SGBV

Life in a refugee camp, unmoored from the routines and structures of your old life, can present a whole new level of challenges for already-vulnerable people—especially women and children. Across all refugee camps and in urban settings in Rwanda, Alight teams actively work to reduce the risk of gender-based violence through a community-led approach, promoting resilience, fostering community activism, enabling survivors and those at risk to access care and support.

Providing case management and psychosocial support, our teams care for those who have experienced trauma such as rape, emotional abuse, physical assault, and sexual assault, including for children. We actively practice survivor-centered care, focusing on a holistic approach that provides clear, coherent pathways for continuing support and using trained staff to provide the safety, security, and confidentiality they need to survive.

NEW! RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During COVID-19, refugees and other low-income communities are at high risk—camps can be crowded, and equipment like ventilators are not always in abundance. And, limited access to water, soap, and handwashing facilities makes it a challenge to practice frequent and thorough hand washing, a key preventative practice. Early on, as the dangers of the pandemic became clear, the Rwanda team took action to make refugee camps and host communities as safe as possible. This included extensive COVID-19 screening for both Alight staff and community members, extensive outreach and health messaging that detailed how to prevent and detect the virus, handwashing stations, and isolation areas for positive cases. Managing the supply chain and logistics for critical protection equipment like masks, soap, and medications was also key both for the team's protection and for keeping people safe and healthy.

For several months, many team members like nurse Theoneste Bugingo stayed at their posts in refugee camps, many of them in remote rural areas far from their families, to continue to serve patients and lower the risk of spread. As the needs and challenges of COVID-19 continue to change in Rwanda and around the world, the work is ongoing—now, the team is ready for anything.

RWANDA: RELATED INFORMATION

STAYING STOCKED— There's no denying that COVID-19 means an upheaval for so many industries, and tragedy for so many families. But with any momentous upheaval also comes opportunity for change— lasting change, and that sometimes pushes us toward the future. Read More

SAVING LIVES IN GIHEMBE REFUGEE CAMP— The spread of COVID-19 challenged the world to change the way things work, and quickly. This was especially true for medical facilities and the health workers who needed to continue their everyday care for people in need, but who were also called to respond to the pandemic. In Rwanda, and for Alight, this also meant a re-think of healthcare systems that serve some of its most vulnerable—refugees living in camps. Read More

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN GASHORA— In 2019, Rwanda welcomed hundreds of asylum seekers, who had previously been living in Libya, to take shelter within its borders. Most of them had been en route to Europe, planning to try their hand at the dangerous sea crossing. They were seeking desperately to start a new life for their families. Read More

ADJUSTING TO A DIGITAL WORLD— A lot of us take things like online banking, PayPal, and Venmo for granted these days. And in many African nations like Rwanda, digital financial activity is even more pervasive—many people pay their electric bills, water, and other utilities straight from their cell phones, using mobile credit and never interacting with a bank at all. Increasingly, digital finance is becoming the way of the future. That's why it's vital that refugees and displaced people aren't left out of it. Read More

HOW ALIGHT TEAMS ARE PROVIDING MEALS FOR MOMS— No matter where you live, giving birth can be both a joyful and stressful time—in the minutes, hours, and days after birth, it's critical that both mom and baby get the care they need to heal and grow. But in resource-limited refugee camp settings like Rwanda and Sudan, that time just after birth can often be shortened, sending moms home without even a hot meal. Read More

> *The changing dynamics of displaced persons demands deeper reflection and a shift to more meaningful engagement of affected populations as principal parties, contributors and shapers of their futures and destiny..*
>
> – BERNAD OCHIENG, COUNTRY DIRECTOR