

Abstract Title: **Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: Empowering Refugee Women Through Youth-Led Innovation**

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**Abstract**

Refugee women and girls face intersecting barriers of gender-based violence (GBV), economic marginalization, and limited access to education and mental health resources. These challenges not only hinder their personal development but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality. At RefuCare Zambia, we address these issues through the Refugee Resilience and Empowerment Network (RREN), a youth-led initiative that empowers refugee women as leaders, advocates, and changemakers.

Our innovative approach combines peer-led interventions, technology-driven solutions, and community-based advocacy to break systemic barriers.

The RREN Initiative establishes "Resilience Circles" safe spaces where refugee women access trauma-informed mental health support, leadership training, and skills development. These circles are co-designed by refugee youth leaders to ensure cultural relevance and inclusivity.

Since its inception, RREN has reached over 500 refugee women across Zambian settlements, reducing reported cases of GBV by 30% and increasing access to mental health resources by 40%. Our work demonstrates that empowering women not only transforms individual lives but also strengthens entire communities.

The RREN Initiative is a scalable and sustainable model for addressing GBV and building resilience in conflict-affected areas. By equipping refugee women with leadership skills, economic opportunities, and mental health resources, we aim to reduce instances of GBV by 50% in targeted communities within the next five years.

This project underscores the importance of youth-led, community-driven solutions in achieving gender equality and sustainable development. At the Global Women's Empowerment & Leadership Summit 2025, we will share our findings, lessons learned, and vision for scaling this work globally.

**Short Biography of Presenter (100 words)**

F. Akekelwa Catherine Chitonka is the founder and director of RefuCare Zambia, a youth-led organization dedicated to empowering adolescents and young people through mental health awareness, suicide prevention, and education advocacy. With a background in social work and community development, Catherine has led innovative initiatives such as the Refugee Resilience and Empowerment Network (RREN), which empowers refugee women and girls in Zambia. Her work focuses on breaking systemic barriers and fostering resilience in marginalized communities. Catherine is a passionate advocate for gender equality and youth empowerment, and her leadership has been recognized both locally and internationally.