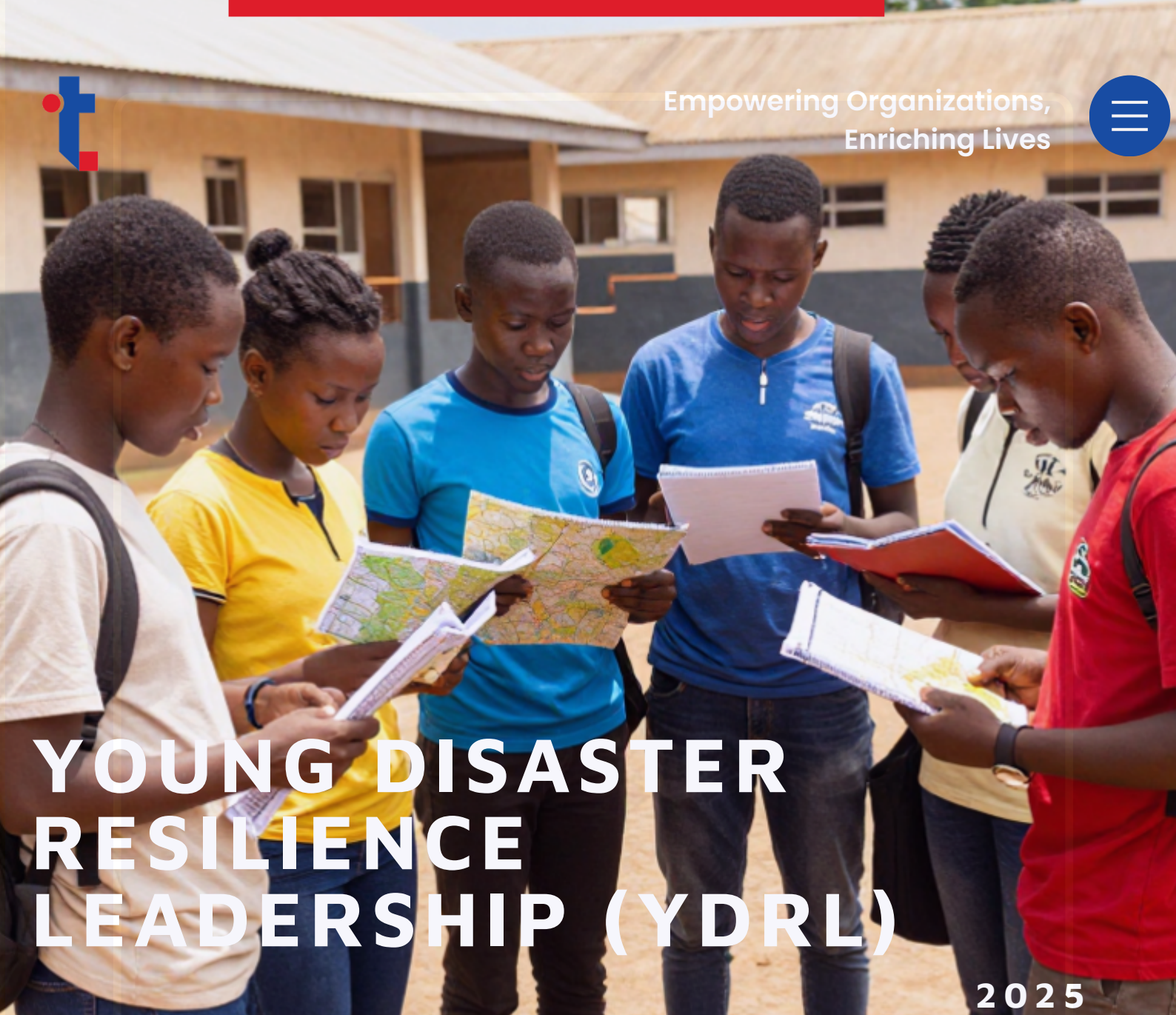




Empowering Organizations,
Enriching Lives



YOUNG DISASTER RESILIENCE LEADERSHIP (YDRL)

2025

BRIEF

Table of Contents

	List of Tables	2
	List of Figures	2
	Acronyms	3
01	Executive Summary	4
02	Problem Statement	7
03	Our Approach	9
04	Impact & Results	11
05	Next Steps	14
06	Conclusion	16

Table of Figures

	Figure 1. The six-step participatory mapping tool.	10
	Figure 2. How a single failure cascades across all systems.	11

Acronyms

CLIM	Climate Linked Infrastructure Mapping
-------------	---------------------------------------

ICE	Institution of Civil Engineers
------------	--------------------------------

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
-------------	--------------------------------

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
------------	---------------------------------

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
------------	-------------------------

GWU	George Washington University
------------	------------------------------

IDFR	Institute for Disaster and Fragility Resilience
-------------	---

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
---------------	--------------------------------

yDRL	Young Disaster Resilience Leadership
-------------	--------------------------------------

Executive Summary



THE CONTEXT:

Adolescents in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts face growing risks from disasters such as floods, disease outbreaks, and resource conflicts. Despite being among the most affected, young people have traditionally been viewed as passive recipients of aid, with limited opportunities to develop the knowledge, leadership, and practical skills needed to contribute to disaster resilience in their communities.

WHY IT MATTERS:

In partnership with UNICEF and George Washington University's Institute for Disaster and Fragility Resilience (IDFR), thinkIT co-designed and piloted the Young Disaster Resilience Leadership (yDRL) program. The three-month, youth-centered initiative combined leadership development, disaster risk reduction, peacebuilding, and climate adaptation through experiential learning. The curriculum was co-created with young people from five countries and delivered through interactive activities including hazard mapping, simulations, community action planning, mentorship, and youth-led resilience projects.

WHAT WE DID:

The yDRL pilot demonstrated that when equipped with the right skills and opportunities, young people can become effective resilience leaders rather than passive beneficiaries. The program strengthened disaster risk awareness, leadership, and problem-solving skills, empowered youth to implement community resilience projects, and fostered collaboration between refugee and host communities. By providing a scalable model for youth engagement, yDRL offers a practical pathway for integrating youth leadership into disaster resilience programming, education systems, and national policy, contributing to more resilient and inclusive communities.



Introduction



5

**COUNTRIES CO-
DESIGNED THE
CURRICULUM**

3

**MONTHS: PILOT
TRAINING
PROGRAM LENGTH**

90%

**POST-TRAINING
DISASTER RISK
AWARENESS**

Adolescents in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts live daily with the threat of floods, disease outbreaks, and resource conflict yet had no systematic way to build the skills to cope, let alone lead. The Young Disaster Resilience Leadership (yDRL) initiative, led by UNICEF and George Washington University's Institute for

Disaster and Fragility Resilience (IDFR) with thinkIT's support, piloted a 3-month, youth-centered training program to change that proving that adolescents can become genuine resilience leaders in their schools and communities, not passive recipients of aid.

Problem Statement

Young people in Uganda's refugee settlements and host communities are among those most affected when schools close due to disasters or families are displaced yet they have traditionally been seen only as victims or passive recipients of aid. While programs existed for adult disaster management, there was no systematic approach to empower adolescents as resilience leaders in their own communities.

Youth as Bystanders, Not Leaders

No systematic program existed to build adolescents' disaster risk knowledge or give them a voice in community planning and response.

Youth lacked training in disaster risk reduction, had little voice in community planning, and weren't connected across communities to share solutions. Compounding issues such as hunger, poverty, and conflict made it hard for many to prioritize education, with some disengaging or dropping out entirely, feeling that schooling was not relevant to the crises around them.

Disengagement from Education

Hunger, poverty, and conflict pushed many adolescents to disengage from or drop out of school, seeing it as disconnected from the crises they faced.

The challenge, in short, was to develop a youth-focused resilience curriculum, adaptable across refugee settlements, disaster-prone rural areas, and urban slums, that could prove young people can become effective change agents in reducing disaster risk.



Our Approach

The yDRL pilot took a highly participatory, youth-centered approach, combining education with practical action across five key components.

Co-Design with Youth

The curriculum was co-designed with input from adolescents in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Rwanda, and Kenya. Workshops and consultations surfaced the threats youth felt were most urgent: hunger, school dropouts, flooding, and shaped how the content was taught. Where hunger emerged as a barrier to school attendance, for instance, the curriculum included discussions on community gardening as a resilience strategy.

A Holistic Curriculum: Knowledge, Skills, Action

The curriculum interwove leadership training, disaster risk knowledge, and peacebuilding skills with hands-on activities: hazards, vulnerabilities, conflict resolution, and climate adaptation taught through games, stories, and peer discussion rather than lectures, alongside problem-solving, teamwork, and project planning. Resilience Action Planning exercises anchored the learning: youth mapped their school and community for risks, then designed mini-projects to address a priority challenge.



Figure 1. The yDRL learning cycle from hazard mapping through to a lasting peer and community network.

School-Based and Inclusive

The pilot targeted both in-school and out-of-school adolescents aged roughly 15–19 in refugee-hosting districts. Schools were the primary entry point, with additional activities arranged so out-of-school youth wouldn't be left behind while community-based organizations, local NGOs, and teachers were engaged throughout to build institutional buy-in and sustainability.

Experiential Learning, Mentorship & Reflection

Sessions were interactive rather than lecture-based hazard-mapping walks, role-plays, and drought-response simulations and mixed refugee and host-community youth to build cross-community peer networks, including exchange visits between schools. Each youth team received mentorship from local NGO volunteers or university students, presented their projects to community forums for validation, and worked through pre- and post-assessments with reflective journaling to track their own growth.

Impact and Results

The yDRL pilot delivered a marked improvement in disaster risk knowledge and problem-solving skills. Where many students began with little understanding of disasters beyond a term like "flood," post-training assessments showed they could identify hazard types and articulate how those hazards interconnect with issues like conflict or education disruption a sophisticated systems-thinking outcome for their age group.

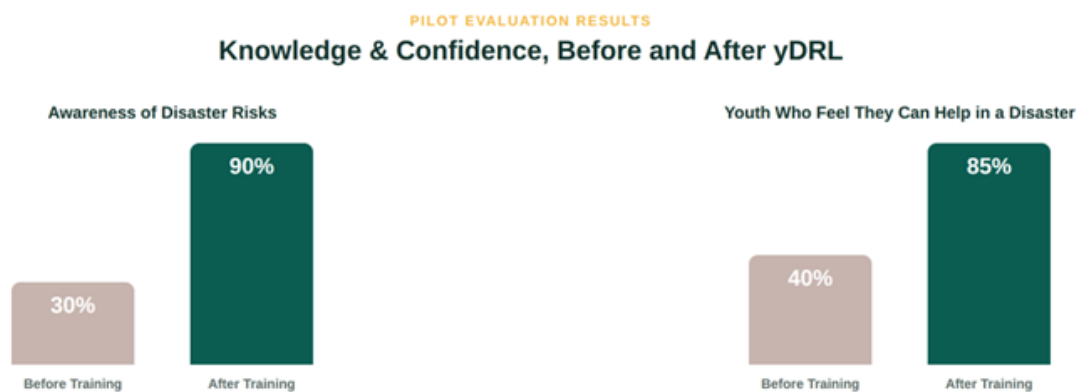


Figure 2. Pre- and post-training gains in disaster risk awareness and youth confidence to respond.

Crucially, the youths' mindset and confidence shifted. Where many initially believed that solving community problems was the job of adults or external agencies, this empowerment showed up in concrete projects: one school designed and implemented a rainwater harvesting system to reduce flooding and provide water in dry periods; another launched a tree-planting campaign around the school perimeter to act as windbreaks and shade low-cost, locally sourced solutions executed by students with minimal adult help.

We realized that we could find the solutions ourselves and work with others to carry them out. — **yDRL Program Participant**

Teachers and community leaders noted that participating youth became more proactive and vocal, speaking up in community meetings about issues like the need for a village disaster committee. Local authorities in the pilot district invited youth representatives to join their disaster planning committee as observers a strong validation of the youths' new role. The program's mix of refugee and host-community adolescents also broke down barriers: mutual sharing of top concerns built empathy, and by the program's end many considered themselves part of a single "young resilience leaders" cohort transcending ethnic or refugee-host divides, sustained afterward through a youth WhatsApp network.

Teachers reported a ripple effect beyond disaster topics too improved problem-solving in other subjects, more questions in class, and student-initiated clubs such as a Health & Hygiene club. A district official who watched adolescents present a disaster risk reduction action plan for their school called it "eye-opening," and said he now wants every school to have a club like this a sign that yDRL is beginning to change how adults view youth engagement, not just how youth see themselves.



Next Steps

Building on the pilot's success, UNICEF, GWU, and thinkIT recommend a coordinated set of actions to scale yDRL horizontally to more youth and vertically into policy.

Expand through a Training-of-Trainers model

1. Replicate the training in more refugee-hosting and hazard-prone districts, adapting content for context for example, mudslide preparedness in mountain regions or drought resilience in Karamoja.
2. Train standout youth graduates, teachers, and local NGO staff from the pilot as facilitators for new cohorts, creating a multiplier effect that stays true to youth leadership.

Integrate the curriculum into formal education

3. Work with the Ministry of Education and Sports to formalize yDRL modules such as school hazard mapping and student-led action planning into the extracurricular manual for secondary schools, establishing standard Resilience or Leadership Clubs countrywide.

Mobilize resources and sustain youth engagement

4. Prepare evidence from the pilot to present to potential funders, including international NGOs, government programs, and private-sector CSR initiatives.
5. Continue mentoring pilot graduates as a first cohort of "yDRL Fellows" through periodic refresher workshops and a moderated peer network, and explore links to internships or scholarships in disaster management and community development.

Monitor impact and document learning

6. Revisit youth-led projects such as rainwater harvesting and tree planting after 6–12 months to assess maintenance and lasting benefit, and identify how communities can continue supporting them.
7. Document and publish the yDRL approach as a case study or toolkit for global learning, building on early interest already expressed by other UNICEF country offices.

Pursue regional expansion and national policy

8. Share the yDRL toolkit with regional partners to localize and run their own programs in similarly affected countries.

9. Advocate for a national youth resilience policy, building on the pilot as proof of concept for youth sub-committees within district disaster planning and youth-inclusive school disaster drills.

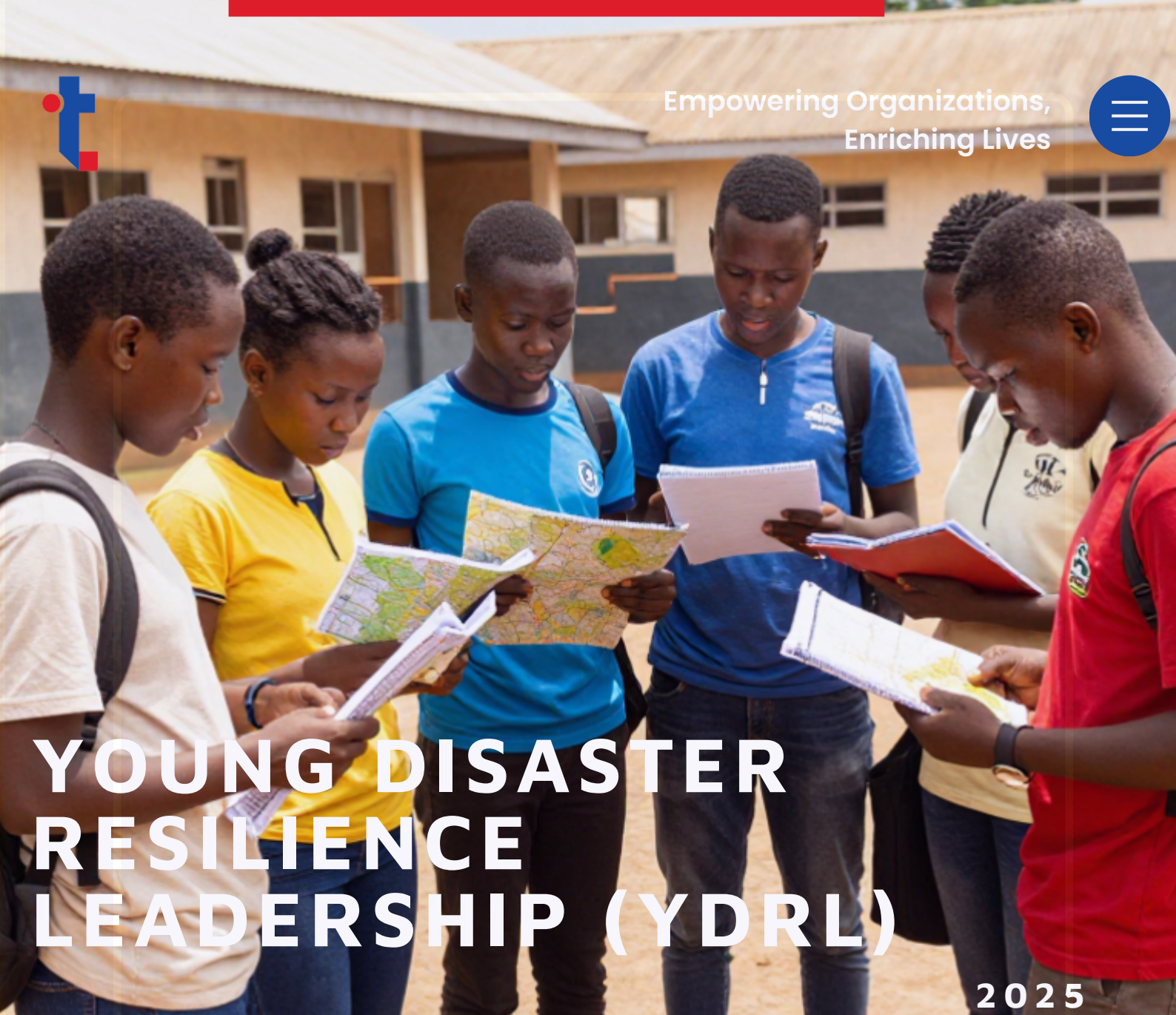
Conclusion

The yDRL pilot shows that when given the right tools and platform, adolescents in even the most disaster- and conflict-affected communities can become knowledge holders, knowledge creators, and knowledge sharers not passive recipients of aid. By combining co-designed curriculum, experiential learning, and genuine community validation, UNICEF, GWU, and thinkIT have demonstrated a model that shifts how both youth and adults see young people's role in resilience. As the program scales into more districts, formal education systems, and eventually national policy, yDRL offers a template for a generation of young Africans who can face disasters not with fear, but with leadership and ingenuity.

Ready to build youth resilience leadership in your community? Contact us via we@thinkit.africa to discuss how the yDRL model can be adapted to your organization's youth and disaster resilience programs.



Empowering Organizations,
Enriching Lives



YOUNG DISASTER RESILIENCE LEADERSHIP (YDRL)

2025

BRIEF