

**RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICT AND SOCIAL COHESION: A CASE STUDY OF
REFUGEE HOST COMMUNITIES IN NAKIVALE SETTLEMENT IN ISINGIRO
DISTRICT**

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S23B56/036

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF BACHELOR
OF GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

May, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, JANICE ATAI, here by declare that this dissertation is my original work. It has never been submitted to any institution of higher learning for the award of my course. All the sources that have been used have been cited to the best of my knowledge. I therefore submit my original work in partial fulfilment for the award of Bachelors of Governance and International Relations.

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APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation titled; **Resource-Based conflict and social cohesion: A Case Study of Refugee-Host Community Relations in Nakivale Settlement in Isingiro District**, was under my supervision and is now ready for presentation to the Department of Undergraduate Studies in the School of Sciences at Uganda Christian University.

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DATE: _____

28th May, 2026.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, who have made incredible sacrifices for me and their belief in the value of education made this journey possible for me.

To all my close friends, thank you for being a constant source of strength, for always listening to me during the most challenging moments of this final semester, and for all the support that kept me grounded. Your encouragement always kept me going and enabled me to finish this research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to say at the outset that I would like to thank God for the gift of life, for good health and for the mental fortitude to complete this academic milestone. He has been very generous and a constant source of strength for me in this journey.

I am grateful to the Uganda Christian University in particular the Faculty of Social Sciences for providing a conducive environment for my academic growth. I am truly thankful to my supervisor for providing me with professional direction, patience and constructive feedback throughout this research. Your knowledge and experience were of great help in improving my knowledge during this research.

I would like to thank the staff and management of The Office of the Prime Minister, and the different humanitarian agencies that I have used in my research and whose reports and findings I have documented. I want to thank you for your dedication to documenting the dynamics of refugee settlements in Uganda, which has made this study possible.

To my family, I can't thank you enough for your financial aid and prayers. I have always been driven to be my best because of my faith in you.

Last but by no means least, my heartfelt thanks to my friends and colleagues. Thank You for the wonderful dialogues, laughter and emotional support during this journey. I don't have to mention your name by name, your contribution to my physical and emotional health is greatly valued.

To all who directly or indirectly contributed to the success of my work, I am forever grateful.

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of resource-based conflicts on social cohesion among refugees and host communities in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Isingiro District, Uganda. The growing refugee population has increased competition for scarce resources such as land, water, firewood, employment opportunities, and social services, creating tensions that may affect peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities.

Using a case study design and a desk approach, the study investigates the causes of resource-based conflicts and their effects on trust, cooperation, and social relationships within the settlement. The study finds that unequal access to resources, environmental pressures, and perceived inequalities in aid distribution are key sources of conflict. However, collaborative resource management, community dialogue, and conflict resolution mechanisms can strengthen social cohesion. The findings provide insights for policymakers and development partners seeking to promote peaceful coexistence, sustainable resource management, and stronger social integration between refugees and host communities in refugee-hosting areas.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the following; the background, the problem statement, major research objectives, research objectives, research questions, significance, limitations, theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

1.2 Background

Uganda is recognized globally for its progressive "open-door" refugee policy. Sources indicate that Uganda hosts over 1.4 million displaced persons and grants them the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to social services (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM], 2018; Manzi, 2019). This humanitarian model is founded on the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS). According to Svedberg (2014), this model seeks to shift refugees away from relying on aid, towards socio-economic self-sufficiency through allocation of small plots of land for subsistence farming. In this model, refugees settle peacefully alongside the host communities. But over time as the displacement of people persists, the initial "grace period" of welcome from host communities has begun to dwindle. Ultimately, it yields resource based conflicts, which have escalated in settlements. The case of Nakivale Settlement in Isingiro District illustrates the challenges arising from such settlement. It is one in which there is a significant increase in refugee and Ugandan national populations, creating an unprecedented pressure on material resources and an impact on social cohesion (Bjørkhaug et al., 2026; Atukwatse, 2023).

Nakivale Refugee Settlement is one of the oldest and largest in Africa. It was established in 1957 and gazette in 1960, and covers around 185 km² in the Isingiro District (Natwijuka, 2019). It is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the world, with refugees from more than 11 countries. Isard (2011), for example, shows that they come from countries like Congo, Rwanda, Somali and Burundi.

This settlement is not fenced but consists of a web of villages in which refugees live alongside an estimated 35,000 to 40,000 Ugandan nationals. Sources show that sometimes the same land is claimed as ancestral by both these populations (Bjørkhaug et al., 2026; Atukwatse, 2023). This makes that land a center of contestation between legal gazettelement and traditional ownership. Besides land, conflict is also experienced over water and forest products. According to Manzi (2019; Turyamureeba, (2017), conflicts over land often starts because of unclear boundaries and encroachment of settlement and host community areas. In addition, the water scarcity often leads to "scrambles" at shared boreholes or rivers like the Rwarunga where host communities feel their water right is being violated by the growing number of refugees. These tensions are further complicated by a sense of favoritism in humanitarian response as host communities who are in similar circumstances of need see refugees receive food rations, cash handouts and targeted services that are not being provided to the host communities (Bjørkhaug et al., 2026; Atukwatse, 2023).

A sociological approach to these conflicts is the theory of the "established-outsider." Accordingly, the host community as an ethically and morally entitled group that perceives refugees as "aliens" or "squatters" who have no right to the resources belonging to the host communities (Ek & Ingholt, 2013). By applying this theory to the conflicts in Nakivale refugee community, it highlights that the host populations were initially welcoming yet the heightening competition for survival has fostered xenophobic tendencies and a sense of relative deprivation. Turyamureeba, (2017) and Atukwatse (2023) observe that this resulted in disharmony, observable in interpersonal conflicts, misinformation, and violent confrontations. All of which undermine the food security and regional stability of both groups.

A clear understanding of the response of Nakivale's host communities to these challenges is very important for the long term sustainability of the refugee model used in Uganda. This study examines how the allocation and management of scarce resources can lead to conflict and investigates the mechanisms through which social cohesion can be restored. By seeking to understand the narratives of the host community, this study seems to identify strategies to ensure harmonious co-existence that balances the protection of the rights of refugees with the social-economic needs of the local population.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

While Uganda remains open to refugees with its "open-door" refugee policy that allows over 1.4 million displaced people the right to work and access social services, the practical implementation of this model in Nakivale is being tested. There has emerged a critical "resource gap" where the demands of over 120,000 refugees and approximately 40,000 Ugandans nationals compete for fixed but shrinking supplies of arable land, water and forest products as observed by Atukwase (2023) and Natwijuka (2019). This imbalance has changed communal relations, hosts that were once hospitable and looking to co-exist, now compete for survival. If these specific conflict triggers caused by the scarce resources and the narratives of the host population are not addressed, the social cohesion built over decades may collapse. This would not only threaten the food security of both groups but also risks triggering long-term regional instability.

1.4 General Objective

The purpose of the study is to examine how the allocation and management of scarce resources especially land, water, forest products and cash assistance can be used if addressing the resource-based conflicts between refugees and host communities in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

1.5 Specific Objectives

1. To examine how the process of land allocation causes conflicts between refugees and host communities in Nakivale focusing on issues like boundary ambiguity, lack of consultation, and encroachment.
2. To analyze how the access to and distribution of water and forest resources (firewood) have led to disputes among the residents that share boreholes, natural water bodies, and grazing areas.

3. To evaluate the impact of cash handout initiatives on social relations, specifically investigating how the exclusive provision of financial aid to refugees influences the perception of favouritism and relative deprivation among host communities.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How has the land allocation process, especially boundary ambiguity, lack of consultation and encroachment, led to conflicts between refugees and host communities in Nakivale?
2. In what ways has the management of water and forest resources, particularly at the shared boreholes and firewood collection areas, lead to disputes among the residents?
3. How do the exclusive cash-handout initiatives for refugees influence social relations and to what extent do they foster perceptions of favoritism or relative deprivation among the host population.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Geographical Scope

The research is carried out in the Nakivale refugee settlement in Western Uganda, surrounded by host communities, such as Kahirimbu and Burungamo parishes, in the Isingiri District. Nakivale is a key place to investigate conflict over geographical space and over claims of ancestral territory, with a total area of some 185 square kilometers.

Content Scope

The aim of this research is to explore the effects of the distribution and utilization of limited resources such as land borders, water access at shared areas, forest products for fuel and cash assistance of such resources on conflict and social cohesion. This study relies on theoretical framework of Conflict Theory which emphasizes on the competition for inelastic resources and Social Identity Theory which examines the cleavage between "established" residents and "outsider" refugees.

Time Scope

The research is limited to the years 2010-2019. The period is important as it spans 10 years of unprecedented refugee inflows into western Uganda following political unrest in the DRC and Burundi (when the highest number of resource based conflicts was witnessed in Nakivale).

1.8 Justification of the Study

The justification for this study is motivated by the need to address the worsening relationship between refugees and host communities in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement, which has transitioned from a "grace period" of hospitality to a state of competitive survival over inelastic resources. This research is significant for the following reasons:

Filling Geographical and Content Gaps

Earlier studies on refugee dynamics in Uganda has focused on Northern Uganda following the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency (Atukwatse, 2023). Settlements in Western Uganda, like Nakivale which one of the oldest and most ethnically diverse in Africa, have not been subjected to the same level of academic rigor (Natwijuka, 2019). Furthermore, while the existing literature often treats land tenure and food security as isolated problems, this study provides a qualitative analysis of how specific triggers, like water scarcity and exclusive cash-based interventions, interact to erode communal trust and social cohesion.

Policy and Institutional Development

This study is important for the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and other humanitarian stakeholders. It identifies specific institutional failures such as lack of inclusive consultation with local leaders during land allocation which according to Bjørkhaug et al., (2025) has fostered a deep sense of marginalization and fear for displacement among the host populations. By seeking to understand local narratives, the study provides way for the sustainable use of participatory planning frameworks that are essential for the long term sustainability of the "Uganda Model" of refugee integration.

Promoting Harmonious Co-existence

This research offers a framework for equitable resource sharing and social inclusion for the residents of Isingiro District. It addresses the primary source of communal friction which is the perceived favoritism of humanitarian agencies that provide financial aid and social services exclusively to refugees while host communities endure similar states of poverty (Abubakar, 2018). These differences must be highlighted to design interventions towards the reduction of xenophobic tendencies and the prevention of collapse of social stability that could lead to localized regional instability.

Environmental and Practical Implications

Finally, the study is justified by the urgent need to address environmental degradation within the settlement area. Conflicts over the collection of forest products and "scrambles" for water often lead to the unsustainable exploitation of the local ecosystem (Turyamureeba, 2017). By investigating these resource based triggers, the study offers insights into how integrated development programs can protect natural resources while maintaining the social stability required for both displaced persons and Ugandan nationals to thrive.

1.9 Significance of the study

This study can help alleviate the conflicts that are growing among refugee and host communities in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement. This study provides timely insights for the following hospitality stakeholders as it enters a competitive environment for limited resources.

Government and Policy Makers.

The importance of this study is for the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), which is divided into the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Land and Mineral Resources, as well as for the local government, in formulating appropriate policies in the equitable distribution of resources. It recognises the significant institutional shortcomings, including the absence of meaningful dialogue with local leaders in the demarcation of land, leading to marginalisation and insecurity among the host people. This study examines these narratives and offers a course for action for adopting more participatory planning frameworks critical to the long-term sustainability of the “Uganda Model” of refugee protection.

Humanitarian Organisations and NGOs.

The research functions as a 'whistleblower' for agencies like UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP) by informing them about the negative social impacts exclusive aid and initiatives have on beneficiaries. The study emphasizes the importance of linking development programs to refugees to the host community to create a sense of relative deprivation in poor host communities and illustrates the importance of integrated development programs that serve both groups. This is essential if we are to move from the “care and maintenance” to the Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) model of communal living, and to make a lasting difference in the lives of refugees.

Host Communities and Refugees

The findings from this study enable the Isingiro District residents to develop a framework of living together harmoniously and to mitigate against xenophobic tendencies. The aim of the research is to find ways to share equitably, or to share a resource such as water or fire wood, rather than face violent confrontations as occur with “established-outsider” power dynamics. It provides an understanding of how both groups will be able to live together and interact in a harmonious way, avoiding breakdowns of harmony.

Academic and Research Community

This work has been able to address the many geographical and content gaps in the literature. Historically, refugee-related research in Uganda has primarily been conducted in the North, in response to the Kong insurgency, which has ignored the distinctiveness of the protracted stay situation in Western Uganda. Moreover, many existing studies have looked at land and food security as isolated problems, whereas this study offers a thorough qualitative insight into how individual resource tensions, including access to shared water points and differences in aid provision, act together to undermine levels of communal trust. It provides a useful guide for researchers and scholars in the future on the topic of resource management and social inclusion.

1.10 Limitations of the study

Generalizability of Findings

The study is qualitative in nature, specifically focused in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement, therefore the data and conclusions generated are deeply contextual and not be generalizable to other refugee settlements in Uganda or different humanitarian contexts globally. Qualitative research prioritizes depth of experience over statistical representation, which means that if it is not necessarily applicable to populations outside the Isingiro District..

Reliance on Secondary Data

Given that the research is a sole desk-research project, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data sources. The analysis is limited by the quality, scope, and potential biases of the original field studies and institutional reports. As noted by Mouton (2001), a critical analysis of secondary materials does not produce new empirical insights but rather interpretes existing ones. Very recent or undiscovered changes in communal dynamics will not be discovered.

Representativeness and Geographical Breadth

While Nakivale is large, covering approximately 185 kilometers, many of the source studies were focused on specific areas such as the Base Camo, Juru or Rubondo. Therefore, the “master narratives” that have been used in this research may not capture the unique experiences of every isolated village or diverse ethnic sub group within the entire settlement.

Language and Interpretation Bias in Sources

Language barrier was a common challenge faced by the original field researchers in this study, especially when interacting with Nakivale's diverse population, which includes over eleven nationalities. The use of translators in the primary data collection phases of the sources likely contributed to a loss of nuanced information or "meaning-in-context," which subsequently affects the secondary analysis conducted in this study.

Temporal Limitations

The time scope of this study (2010–2019) was selected to capture a decade where there were major refugee inflows. However, this means that the findings may not reflect the most current humanitarian funding cuts or the long-term impacts of policies implemented after 2019. Rapid changes in donor priorities and regional stability can quickly change the "resource gap" and social cohesion levels documented in the analyzed literature.

Refugee Mindset and Expectations

Sources indicate that many respondents in Nakivale often view researchers as potential humanitarian benefactors or "Mazungus". This mindset can sometimes lead to the over exaggeration of complaints and responses or in order to secure aid, which could be used in the institutional and academic reports used for this desk research.

1.11 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a multi-dimensional theoretical framework that explains the factors of resource-based conflict and the mechanisms for the social division in Nakiavle Refugee Settlement. The research uses the Conflict Theory, Social Theory and Elias's Established-Outsider framework to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of resource scarcity on communal trust.

Conflict Theory

This study is well based on the Conflict Theory, which is based on Karl Marx and by Dahrendorf (1959) who propose that there is a perpetual conflict between society because of the struggle for inelastic resources. The Nakivale experience is a good example where this theory has its direct application, as essential resources, such as forest products, water and land, are in short supply and are highly demanded by both refugee and host nationals. Conflict theorists believe that competition is always present when people interact with one another. In this context, the two groups may argue as they strive to get adequate resources to survive (Atukwase. 2023). This fight is worsened by the “resource gap” that occurs when refugee populations are settled on communal lands that are assigned through government policies, seen as institutionalization of new inequalities by host communities.

Social Identity Theory

This study is also based on Social Identity Theory developed by Henry Tajfel (1979) in order to understand the intergroup behavior between refugees and host communities. This theory is based on the idea that a person's self-concept is derived from group membership and that groups tend to form a “we” versus “they” dichotomy, which results in a sense of “other” discrimination. Refugees and “outsiders” are frequently stereotyped as having no right to local resources in Nakivale. Powered identities foster tensions and conflict, particularly when the different ethnic groups are pushed together in stressful and deprived contexts, as in the case of Bjørkhaug et al., (2025). The sense of entitlement of the host population to the ancestral lands results in conflict with the displaced population.

The Established and the Outsiders

The research also employs the Established-Outsider model put forward by Norbert Elias (1994) and based on the relationship between power and community problems. If it is a cohesive society, then the level of cohesion is a measure of power, and the “established” society has access to networks within themselves that enable them to retain the dominant position. In Nakivale, the host communities are the traditional communities because of their ancestral right. This study, however, covers a complicated reversal, refugees are provided with humanitarian assistance and cash transfer, and the host communities feel excluded in their own country (Atukwase, 2023). This sense of favouritism by the OPM and UNHCR generates a particular dynamic of disempowerment for the “established” host community vis-à-vis the “favoured” refugees.

Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) Theory

Lastly, the study draws on the Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) Theory to explain how humanitarian aid is linked to community long-term development. This theory posits that integrated programmes be adopted to

reinforce the capacity of host areas to benefit both populations (Gorman, 1987 and Abubaker, 2018). RAD believes that social cohesion is best fostered when resources are shared indiscriminately between refugees and host communities, avoiding resentment when host communities are not involved in development programs, but live in similar conditions of poverty.

1.12 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides a graphical and narrative illustration of the relationship between Resource Allocation Strategies (the Independent Variable) and Social Cohesion and Conflict Manifestations (the Dependent Variable). This relationship is significantly shaped by Institutional and Policy Frameworks (the Intervening Variables) which show how groups interact over shared assets.

Independent variable

Resource Allocation Strategies (OPM/UNHCR)

1. Land for agriculture and grazing
2. Access to domestic and livestock water.
3. Distribution of cash handouts to refugees.

Intervening variable

Institutional & Policy Frameworks

1. Uganda Refugee Act (2006) & Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS).
2. OPM land demarcation and gazetting procedures.
3. UNHCR/NGO application of the 70/30 rule.

Dependent variable

Social Cohesion & Conflict Manifestations

1. Conflicts over ambiguous boundaries.
2. Competition for incompatible survival needs.
3. Established-Outsider narratives and xenophobia.
4. Trust levels and perceived institutional bias.

Adapted from Atukwatse, J. (2023). Resource Allocation and Refugee-Host Community Conflicts in Western Uganda. PhD Thesis, Kampala International University. (Originally modified from Werker, 2017),

Description of the Framework Components

- This is the Independent Variable (Resource Allocation): The tangible relief services and assets provided to refugees by the state and/or UNHCR, e.g., shelters, food, etc. Areas of investigation in Nakivale are farming land, shared or separate water supply and monthly cash provisions for basic needs.
- The Dependent Variable (Social Cohesion and Conflict): This is the characteristics of intergroup relations. Conflicts are categorized into four types: information conflicts (misunderstanding over boundaries), interest conflicts (scramble for inelastic resources), value conflicts (perceived incompatible beliefs) and relationship conflicts (distrust and negative emotions).
- These are the factors that affect the outcome – the Intervening Variables (Institutional and Policy Framework): The level of inclusiveness in the distribution of aid is set by policies, such as the Refugee Act (2006), and institutional strategies, such as the 70/39 principle. Without the participation of host communities, these frameworks can be precursors to social wrangles, instead of cohesion.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature on the management of scarce resources and its impact on social dynamics between the refugees and the host communities. It explores the implementation of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), empirical evidence of resource based conflicts, and the socio-economic factors influencing social cohesion. The review points out how the transition from the initial hospitality to protracted stay in settlements like Nakivale has created a "resource gap" that causes communal tension.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Conflict Theory

This study is primarily anchored in Conflict Theory, derived from the ideas of Karl Marx (1848), which suggests that continued societal conflict is an inevitable result of the struggle for scarce and inelastic resources. Conflict theorists believe that competition is a constant and sometimes overwhelming issue in human interaction because individuals and groups struggle to pull resources toward themselves. In the context of Nakivale and Oruchinga, essential resources for minimal survival, especially land, water, and food, are in high demand but remain in short supply.

The theory is relevant here because the resources allocated to refugees are frequently "carved out" from the host resources, making a struggle for these resources bound to happen. Furthermore, conflict theorists suggest that those people who have resources will work to protect and hoard them, while those without will do whatever is necessary to obtain them, thereby causing conflict. This situation is escalated when government policies provide preferential treatment or additional resources to refugees, which host communities view as an attempt to create new class of refugees which is not treated like everyone else..

Social Identity Theory

In order to understand the intergroup behavior between refugees and host communities, the study utilizes Social Identity Theory, which was founded by Henri Tajfel in the early 1970s. This theory suggests that a significant portion of a person's self-concept comes from the social groups to which they belong. When diverse cultural and ethnic groups are driven together under conditions of stress and deprivation, hostilities across the groups become common as each group tends to emphasize its own identity while discriminating against and denigrating others.

In Nakivale, this theory resonates with the creation of a 'we-they' cleavage that may lead to host communities categorizing refugees as 'aliens', 'squatters' or 'abavandimwe' (immigrants) and therefore lacking any moral right to local ancestral resources. Such social identities create divisions in the access to resources which can cause conflict, particularly if the host population feels it is the 'original inhabitants' and sees any provision made for the refugees as 'their' resources as well.

The Established and the Outsiders

The study also is based on the Established-Outsider analysis of community problems developed by Norbert Elias (1965) based on the unequal power distribution in communities. Elias says that power lies in the degree of social cohesion of a group, and the more cohesive, the more it can have social control and maintain its superior status by stigmatizing the newcomers. The "established" population is generally considered to be the host population, as they have inhabited the area for generations and have established a very strong internal security network.

The "outsiders," lacking these long term family ties, are usually considered by the established group to be untrustworthy or lawless, and they are generally refugees. This power imbalance is held in check with the help of other social means like gossip and rumors that in the end affect the self-image of the outsiders and make them weaker. But Nakivale adds another interesting twist where outside agencies, such as the OPM and UNHCR, can switch this normal equation by giving only some refugees 'first choice' aid and land. This makes it seem as though the "established" host population feels disempowered and marginalized in their own country and promotes resentment toward the "favored" outsiders.

Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) Theory

This study uses the Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) Theory developed by Robert F. Gorman (1993) that describes the complicated relationship between humanitarian assistance and broader community development. According to the RAD theory, refugees should not be considered to be a "burden" for the host nation and that assistance organizations and host governments should establish integrated programs aimed at enhancing the capacity of host area facilities to serve both communities.

RAD aims to shift to "self-sufficient" rather than "care-and-maintenance" models for refugees by engaging refugees in shared projects. This theory argues that social cohesion is most likely to be fostered by sharing resources in an indiscriminate manner, so that resentment does not develop because host populations are excluded from development projects, and that these populations tend to live in similar conditions to those of the local population.

Malthusian Theory

The research also takes into account the Malthusian Theory of population propounded by Thomas Robert Malthus that says that population increases geometrically and food production on the other hand increases arithmetically. If not restrained, says Malthus, the population will outrun the food supply, leaving the way open

for “positive checks,” such as disease and war. In Nakivale the lack of access to modern methods of farming and the growing number of refugees is a major factor in creating land competition problems and food security.

2.3 Land Allocation and Communal Conflicts

Land is the biggest problem in Nakivale. The refugee population has grown with a rapid rate, and so have the populations of the host communities, making land allocation a finite resource; at the same time, it has become a point of communal resentment. This section aims to consider how the discrepancy between policy and reality contributes to such conflicts.

Boundary Ambiguity and Lack of Demarcation

The conflict in Nakivale has a long history of mapping crisis. The settlement was established in 1960 but the land has never been formally acquired under the Land Acquisition Act that has created a legal vacuum, where “government gazetting” is in conflict with “customary ancestral rights” (Bjørkhaug et al., 2025; Natwijuka, 2019).

This ‘ambiguity’ is not only a technical mistake, but is a reality of everyday life for host communities who have no tangible borders between their homeland and the settlement. Although mapping attempts were made, such as the 2005 Ngoma Ngime Task Force, a lack of local stakeholders made results perceived as illegitimate (Atukwatse, 2023). Lacking clear boundaries, “who owns what” is a sore point that results in frequent disputes over access to and control of land.

Inadequate Consultation and Participation

In addition to being physically excluded from the land, there is a larger conflict that is happening because the host community is being procedurally excluded. There is consistent evidence in the literature of an institutional failure to consult inclusively prior to the expansion of settlement zones (Bjørkhaug et al., 2025; Turyamureeba, 2017).

Governance is ‘top down’ with the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) overruling the land allocation as a technical administrative matter, not as a social contract. Consequently, nationals are frequently denied the chance to be heard, and their land used for housing for refugees without their consent. Such non-involvement leads to land conflicts and also undermines the ‘Social License to Operate’ of humanitarian organisations, turning refugees into ‘intruders’ in the eyes of a marginalised local community.

Encroachment and Resource Competition

The refugees and nationals have experienced a population explosion which has created an inevitable “land squeeze” and illegal encroachment has become a necessity to survive. This is a two way crisis, as members of the host community who feel displaced in their ancestral lands will still continue to be farming cattle on land that is now under refugee management (Atukwatse, 2023; Bjørkhaug et al., 2025).

Whereas in non-productive lands (30x30m), refugee plots will be reduced and refugees forced to invade protected wetlands or borders of host communities (Svedberg, 2014). This “scramble” for space is more than a boundary issue – it is direct competition for survival. Once broken, this cycle of violence, crop destruction, maiming of livestock and physical conflict transforms common resources into battlegrounds instead of forums for cooperation.

Impact on Food Security and Social Cohesion

Lack of stability due to land disputes is directly and reciprocally related to food insecurity. But when the land is insecure, the productive value of the land is lost because families are unwilling to invest in the long-term, such as planting perennial crops or investing in irrigation, as they fear being evicted at random (Turyamureeba, 2017).

This friction, in addition to the harvest, works at the settlement's core social structure. The “Self-Reliance Strategy” (SRS) was supposed to encourage host communities to be more independent, but in practice, the land squeeze is turning host communities against refugees by considering them as competitors. As people lose their trust, the spirit of hospitality is replaced by resentment and resentment by the refugee presence as a permanent obstacle to local nationals' development and stability.

2.4 Management of Shared Natural Resources (Water and Forests)

The battle for resources has turned from "hospitality" to a "survivalist" competition. In Nakivale, policy presupposes peaceful use of the commons while what is actually happening is a 'zero-sum' race to water and fuel wood. This section examines how shared infrastructure has become a place of conflict.

Water scarcity and Shared resources.

Providing access to clean water is a big problem in Nakivale as the supply is often inadequate to meet demand.

- Conflict at Boreholes and Natural water bodies (Collection Points): Conflicts which arise at shared boreholes and natural water bodies such as Rwarunga River and Lake Nakivale. High population pressure often causes long waiting hours and overcrowding which usually results in physical fights at collection points (Atukwatse, 2023; Manzi, 2018).
- Perceived Disparities in Provision: One reason for the resentment of the host community is that humanitarian agencies attend to the needs of refugees more. The agencies, such as the UNHCR, dig boreholes in refugee villages, but neighboring host villages in Uganda who are as much impacted as the refugees feel left out. This can lead to a sense of "relative deprivation" among the host communities, which may make them feel less valuable than the refugees (Bjørkhaug et al., 2025).
- Contamination and Livestock Competition: Lack of separate access to water for humans and livestock is another important factor that leads to conflict. Traditional watering points (Turyamureeba, 2017) are also shared water sources, and often contain animal waste that encourages the host communities to protect their herds from refugees by fencing off such water sources.

Environmental Degradation and Forest Products

The scramble for fuel-wood and construction materials has led to severe environmental degradation within and around the settlement.

- **Firewood Scarcity and Theft:** More than 90% of the people use fire wood as their main source of cooking energy. As the local resources within the settlement area are used up, the residents are forced to move long distances which makes them encroach on host community private land or on the protected forest reserves (Turyakira, 2014).
- **Violent Confrontations:** There have been instances recorded in literature about refugees cutting down trees at night on the host community land resulting in very violent confrontations. These incidents frequently escalate into "mob justice" or retaliatory violence which further detriment the relationship between the both communities (Atukwatse, 2023; Turyamureeba, 2017).
- **Impact on the Local Ecosystem:** Uncontrolled logging and charcoal burning have reduced the natural vegetation which has led to soil erosion and a loss in soil fertility. This environmental degradation reinforces a cycle of poverty and resource based conflict that ultimately affects the long term food security for both groups (Turyamureeba, 2017).

2.5 Humanitarian Aid, Cash Handouts, and Host Community Perceptions

The shift to cash-based interventions (CBIs) has completely reshaped the social fabric of the Nakivale settlement. These handouts are intended to give refugees dignity and purchasing power but the "visibility" of cash creates a big psychological separation between the refugees and the hosts. This part of the study analyzes the unintended consequences of well meaning humanitarian assistance on the creation of inequalities and stratification in the society.

The sense of Favoritism and "Kings and Queens"

One of the outstanding themes across the community members is the resentment felt by the host community members who observe refugees getting regular financial stipends and social services while living in conditions of poverty that are in most cases indistinguishable from their own (Bjørkhaug et al., 2025). Abubakar (2019) notes that host communities often describe the refugees as "kings and queens" on Ugandan soil because they receive monthly support while citizens are left to fend for themselves. This imbalance creates a feeling of being "second-class citizens" within their own country which directly impacts social cohesion and creates a psychological gap between the two communities (Atukwatse, 2023; Bjørkhaug et al., 2025).

Relative Deprivation and Institutional Failure

The Relative Deprivation Theory suggests that conflict arises when one group perceives a gap between what they possess and what they believe they are entitled to relative to another group (Abubakar, 2019). In Nakivale, this is seen by institutional failures, specifically the lack of coordination between UNHCR, OPM, and local leaders. Failure to cater for the host communities by aid programs creates social wrangles and xenophobic tendencies causing locals to view the refugee presence as an economic burden and calling for their return (Atukwatse, 2023).

Economic Impacts and Market Distortions

Cash handouts have a strong macro-economic effect on the local community (Natwijuka, 2019):

- **Price Hikes:** The literature notes that the purchasing power of refugees can create price hikes in the shops around the settlement. The prices they charge are often unattainable which forces them to walk long distances in search of more affordable merchandise and this fuels further hatred towards the refugee presence (Atukwatse, 2023).
- **Debt and Property Disputes:** Cash handouts often give refugees the confidence to borrow from local shopkeepers. However, if the aid cycles are delayed or if a refugee is phased out of the program, they may accumulate debts that they cannot afford. This leads to the loss of refugee property to host community members which frequently results in violent physical conflicts (Atukwatse, 2023).

Social Behavior and Protection Risks

There are social risks linked to the distribution of stipends, as reported, for example, of fighting in local bars occurring at the time when refugees are receiving their cash stipend (Atukwatse, 2023). These cash handouts, moreover, can sometimes have the effect of making refugees less willing to engage in agricultural self-reliance, since some refugees may get used to being provided for and don't have a habit of saving up for the future. This puts a strain on the humanitarian system (Svedberg, 2014; Abubakar, 2019) and creates dependency syndrome, which makes long-term integration efforts more difficult.

The RAD Theory as a Proposed Solution

The literature suggests that the Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) approach should be pursued to ease these tensions, through implementing integrated programs that can enhance the capability of host areas to benefit both refugee and host communities at the same time (Abubakar, 2019). The basic premise of the RAD theory is that if resources are shared indiscriminately and if both groups are included in development projects, the "resource gap" can be reduced. Inclusive approach is meant to enable a more harmonious co-existence, where instead of becoming a divide and rule approach, aid becomes an instrument for the community to grow together (Atukwatse 2023).

2.6 Summary of Literature and Research Gap

The literature reviewed shows that while Uganda's refugee policies, specifically the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), are globally admired for their progressive nature, their practical implementation in protracted settlements like Nakivale is being challenged. Current studies have shown that the transition from initial hospitality to competitive survival is mostly strongly driven by an increasing "resource gap" which occurs when populations expand and there is a limited supply of food, water and forest products. In addition, empirical evidence shows how the new social divisions created by modern humanitarian modalities like exclusive cash handouts have led to perceptions of favoritism and relative deprivation that have come up amongst the communities living in similar levels of poverty.

Despite these insights, there are still a number of research gaps that remain,

- Geographical Gap: An overwhelming amount of refugee related research in Uganda has focused on Northern Uganda after the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency. Consequently, the special protracted-stay settlement setting in Western Uganda like Nakivale which is one of the oldest in Africa have not been given the same scholarly treatment.
- Content and Linkage Gap: The literature has so far treated conflicts over land and food as a distinct subject of research. There is a lack of deep qualitative inquiry into the reciprocal linkages between these variables, specifically how resource based conflict directly undermines long term food production and how food insecurity in turn triggers more land competition.
- Perspective and Temporal Gap: Much of the available research focuses on recently arrived refugees without offering a focus on complex social arrangements and "established outsider" power cleavages that form between long-term refugees and their host communities over decades of co-existence.
- Theoretical Specificity Gap: Theories like the conflict theory describe the general resource based conflict yet there is a lack of theories applicable to specific and contemporary events like CBIs in order to comprehend how financial aid is a short term trigger of social conflicts and market distortions.

By utilizing a qualitative desk research design, this study seeks to fill these gaps. It offers a concentrated analysis of the Nakivale Refugee Settlement, focusing on the stories of the host community to identify sustainable strategies for social inclusion and harmonious resource management in the settlement.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the systematic qualitative methodology used to investigate how the allocation and management of resources impact the social inclusion of refugees and their host communities. As a desk based inquiry, this section details the research approach and analytical procedures employed to synthesize evidence from existing literature, academic studies and institutional reports. The methodology provides a logical and coherent framework for addressing the primary objective of the study regarding resource based conflicts and the subsequent impact on communal co existence in western Uganda.

3.2 Research Design

The study is a qualitative desk research type of study with a secondary data analysis approach. This research design is based on the interpretivist research paradigm that emphasizes meaning creation through the interpretation of the means, perceptions and experiences captured in the texts already available in the social phenomenon.

The following features are included because the qualitative desk design was deemed:

- Exploratory and Descriptive Nature: The study's purpose is to provide an accurate description of the "resource gap" and communal tensions in Nakivale as reported through the years. It looks into the intricate social dynamics, which can only be comprehended through the intricate stories in the previous field research.
- Design: The design enables an analytical review of the casual linkages between the scarcity of resources – land, what and financial aid and the erosion of social cohesion. It enables the creation of multiple narratives based on the refugee's, host community's and government's sources.
- The research design is a qualitative case study approach with Nakivale refugees settlement as a case study. This enables an in-depth analysis of the distinctive protracted stay dynamics and localised power relations of this settlement context.
- Design of the Investigation: The research design is based on secondary information, documents that take a “bottom up” approach are given priority. This allowed the analysis to be based on the perspectives and proposed solutions of the populations concerned as expressed in the original field studies.

3.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy is the “overall strategy”, “blueprint” or “road map” which encompasses all aspects of the research study in a coherent and logical way to effectively achieve the research objectives. This is a desk-based inquiry and the strategy used involves a systematic interpretation of what is actually happening from a social

perspective and what is actually lived within documentation. The research strategy is shaped by the following components:

Qualitative and Interpretivist Approach

In order to explore the “meaningful nature of the people's character”, and their participation in the social and cultural life, the qualitative research method is most suitable for this study. The method used is based on the interpretivist paradigm of research that states that social reality is not comparable to natural reality and must be known through the perspective of the social subjects involved. The use of a qualitative approach will enable the research to go beyond quantitative research and explore in-depth documented perceptions, attitudes and practices related to social inclusion that a purely quantitative approach may not capture.

Descriptive and Exploratory Design

The research strategy is primarily descriptive and exploratory.

- Descriptive: It aims at providing an "accurate characterization" of the social inclusion phenomenon and the “resource gap” as they have been documented in settlement environments.
- Exploratory: Because the social cohesion is not yet well exhausted in western Uganda literature, an exploratory design is used to produce many explanations for these dynamics.

Case Study Strategy

This research is framed as a qualitative case study focusing on the documented evidence from a specific settlement environment. A case study strategy is utilized because it allows for a “multi layered approach” to analyzing the effectiveness of interpersonal relations and the “we they” cleavages that emerge in localized settings.

Secondary Data Synthesis (Desk Review)

The strategy is a purely desk based project, with a comprehensive desk review and secondary data analysis process. This includes a contextual review of existing documents such as policy papers, UNHCR reports, academic peer reviewed articles and more. The approach to handling this information will be:

- Thematic Synthesis: Structuring recorded information into a stylised “master narrative” or theme identifying social division and conflicts.
- Triangulation: The process of comparing the results from various types of sources, such as official OPM policy with academic field results to make sure that the results of secondary sources are valid and reliable in drawing conclusions.

Bottom-Up Analytical Focus

The strategy is based on the “bottom up approach” which guarantees that narratives and solutions created by the affected people themselves as documented in the previous field studies continue to be the main focus of the analysis.

3.4 Data Sources

In line with the qualitative desk research design, this study relies exclusively on secondary data sources to examine the social inclusion of refugees and the management of scarce resources. The data sources are categorized into three primary areas to ensure a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of documented evidence:

Institutional and Policy Documents

This research utilizes official legal frameworks and government publications that define the administrative and legal environment of the refugee settlements in Uganda. Key documents include:

- The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and the Land Act (2010), which provide the legal basis for land tenure and ownership disputes.
- The Refugees Act (2006) and the Refugee Regulations (2010), which outline the rights of refugees to work, move freely, and access social services.
- Reports from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), specifically the Department of Refugees, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) for demographic and census data.

Academic and Scholarly Literature

This study includes journal articles, doctoral dissertations and masters theses published in journals, which have been peer reviewed so as to ensure academic rigor. The materials were obtained from different online databases and online libraries such as JSTOR, ProQuest, Science Direct and Google scholar. The emphasis was on the studies that documented the lived experiences of the refugees and the host communities relating to resource based conflicts and social coexistence.

NGO and Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO) Reports

The research is based on "Particular Incident Narratives" and situation reports from agencies directly involved in the settlement management. This includes:

- UNHCR and WFP Reports: Specifically, those related to the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), the ReHoPE Strategic Framework, and cash-based intervention monitoring.
- Specialized Human Rights Reports: Documentation from the Makerere University Refugee Law Project (RLP), which provides critical legal and social analyses of settlement dynamics in Western Uganda.
- Reports from implementing partners such as Nsamizi, Samaritan's Purse, and the American Refugee Committee (ARC) regarding resource allocation and community development.

Data Selection Criteria

In order to ensure the reliability and currentness of the results, a secondary data checklist according to the study objectives was used. Preference was placed on documents that were established since 2010 to represent a picture of policy and refugee flows in the last 10 years. Each source was authenticated and credible to ensure the originality of the narrative documented and the skills of the authors.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was qualitative in nature and a desk type of research was used, which included a comprehensive and systematic review of the existing literature and documentation from institutions. The process was structured in such a manner that the secondary data that is relevant, authentic and of high quality is synthesized in the way that the objectives of the study are achieved. These are the steps that were taken in the collection:

Systematic Database Search

A comprehensive online research was carried out using the digital archives and academic databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, Science Direct, and the UNHCR Data Portal. Specific keywords were used and Boolean operators, which include "Nakivale Refugee Settlement", "resource based conflict", "social cohesion Western Uganda", and "impact of cash handouts on host communities". This guaranteed that the documents were retrieved with regard to the theme On the intersection of resource management and social inclusion.

Application of a secondary data checklist

Ensuring the integrity of the study with a secondary data checklist was applied to each document before entering it in the study. Selection criteria included;

- Temporal Relevance: Preference for documents published between 2010 and 2023, to reflect the most recent social dynamics and policy shifts.
- Contextual Specificity: Documentation needs to clearly identify the context of Nakivale or Isingiro District to keep findings specific to the district.
- Credibility: Only peer-reviewed academic journals, official government publications and reports from authoritative international NGO's (UNHCR, WFP, Refugee Law Project, etc.) were used as sources.

Documentary Gridding and Organization

The data were organized using a thematic gridding technique after identification of relevant documents. This involved extracting key findings, "Particular Incident Narratives" and communal perspectives from each source and categorising them according to the study's variables which include land allocation, water management and humanitarian aid distribution. This systematic organisation made it easier to triangulate data with various authors, institutions and a multi dimensional perspective of the documented social realities.

The use of "Bottom-Up" perspectives.

The importance was also given to the identification and collection of data from field based studies which employed participative rural appraisal and focus group discussions. The aim of this research was to give highest priority to secondary data that reflected the voices of the refugees themselves, and that of members of the host community, rather than policy documents written from the top down.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis is based on the interpretation of secondary texts systematically to obtain patterns, draw conclusions and make decisions. The analysis seeks to understand the meaning of the documents and policies that have been narrated and it does not use statistics. The data analysis is structured as follows:

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

This method of data analysis involves identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the secondary data sources and follows the six phase framework established by Braun and Clark (2006).

- Familiarization: Rigorous reading and re-reading of the collected academic papers, NGO reports, and government policies.
- Generating Initial Codes: Coding the text line-by-line to identify basic components related to resource allocation and social inclusion.
- Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into broader categories such as "boundary ambiguity," "relative deprivation," and "reversed power dynamics".
- Reviewing and Naming Themes: Refining the categories to ensure they accurately reflect the "master narratives" found in the literature regarding communal relations in Nakivale.
- Final Synthesis: Compiling the interpreted data into a coherent report that addresses the research objectives.

Documentary Gridding and Coding

In order to ensure a structured analysis of qualitative evidence, a gridding technique was used which involves reading the interview transcripts and “particular incident narratives” found in the secondary sources word by word underlining key words and assigning specific codes to recurring grievances or communal perspectives. Similar ideas discovered across reports for example from the Refugee law projects versus OPM policy assessments are brought together under unified thematic grids to provide a multidimensional perspective on the social reality of the settlement

Triangulation and Narrative Synthesis

Methodological and source triangulation is important for increasing the level of validity and reliability. The analysis involves looking at the differences between the results obtained from various source types including the contrast of official government land policy with the actual experiences of host communities based on academic field studies to determine the policy practice gap. This narrative analysis helps to interpret the “meaningful nature” of people’s characters and their participation in social life, providing depth to the understanding of how resource triggers erode or enhance social cohesion.

Continuous Iterative Analysis

In this study, data analysis is considered as an ongoing and recursive process. This is because once new secondary data is accessed, the themes are reviewed and updated to ensure the final synthesis is as accurate and current as possible as it reflects the “resource gap” and its influence on social inclusion in western Uganda

3.7 Data Quality Control

Data quality control is the assessment of the condition of data with reference to factors like the accuracy, completeness, reliability and timeliness of data. As part of this investigation, quality control methods were used to detect and correct data errors and to determine if the secondary sources were suitable for the purpose.

Authenticity and Novelty of Sources

In order to uphold high standards of academic integrity, the authenticity and originality in all the secondary materials was prioritized. This involved fact checking the reports in order to ensure that they were genuine and novelty checking the articles to ensure that the articles used were not misleading or outdated. This study concentrated on the peer reviewed journal articles and institutional documents since 2005 to make sure that the information on the Nakivale settlement was up to date.

Reliability and Credibility Assessment

In the study, reliability means how well the findings of the study correspond to the population and the investigation. This was done by assessing the reliability of the authors, the evidence given and its relevance to the particular aim of the research. Data were extracted following the principle of maintaining ethical values of truthfulness and honesty, thus improving the quality of the research product.

Source and Methodological Triangulation.

Triangulation is the main technique used to guarantee the validity of this research, which is done by using several types of data and methodology to increase reliability.

- The findings were triangulated across the different types of source materials such as government policy documents (e.g., Land Act 2010), UNHCR situation reports and academic literature.
- The methodological triangulation as a method for data collection was used for the secondary sources in which data from the various qualitative field methods (In-depth Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Participatory Rural Appraisals) were drawn upon.

This multi-layered approach not only reduces the bias which is present in any one source or method but it also makes the conclusions sound.

Systematic Selection and Thematic Gridding

A secondary checklist corresponding to the specific objectives of the study used in guiding the selection of the documents to ensure a structured and objective review. A thematic gridding technique was used in the analysis which included reading secondary texts word for word to look for and code the recurring themes. The daily review process helped to make sure that the final synthesis was accurate in its representation of the “meaning in context” of the original narratives and was consistent throughout the study.

3.9 Limitations of the Methodology

This study had several limitations like any systematic study which affected the interpretation and scope of the results reached. Based on the research design, the following constraints were identified;

Lack of Statistical Generalizability

Since this study is qualitative, the data and conclusions drawn are very contextual and specific to the social dynamics in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement. As a result, The results of the findings cannot be statistically interpreted to represent other refugee camps in Uganda or other humanitarian settings around the world. In the qualitative approach to research, there is no empirical statistical basis, therefore results from this research can only be generalized to other populations that do not form part of the study area of the case study (Dane, 2011).

Reliance on Secondary Data Quality

Given the fact that the study was completely conducted from a desk, it is also limited in its scope, the quality and potential biases of the secondary data sources employed. One major drawback of this is that it is based on existing data and does not generate new empirical knowledge that might not be evident in the original field studies, but may occur in the recent past or not have been recorded.

Representativeness, geographical breadth

The size of Nakivale, at about 185 km², was limiting the scope of many of the source studies being conducted, especially when it came to logistical constraints, conditions in the roads and time constraints. As such, the “master narratives” created during this research may not reflect the individual experiences of all the isolated villages and the different ethnic groups in the settlement.

Bias in Language and Interpreting

Many of the original field researchers on this study mentioned that language barriers were a common problem among the multiple nationalities found within Nakivale. The use of translators in the process of primary data collection of the source documents may have resulted in the loss of nuanced information or “meaning in context” that would impact the secondary analysis done in this study.

Temporal Limitations

This study's time frame is mainly limited to the past decade of refugee inflows documented. Consequently, some of the results might not accurately reflect the latest reductions in humanitarian funding or the longer-term effects of policy changes made since the results of the secondary sources were published. The “resource gap” and social cohesion as reported in the literature that are analysed may change rapidly due to changes in donors' priorities and regional stability.

Management of Subjectivity

Qualitative research uses the researcher as the main tool of analysis for this research, which is a subjectivity to be applied. The final synthesis is subject to the researcher's interpretation of the “meaningful nature” of people's characters and their documented lived experiences, with some measures, such as triangulation and thematic gridding, being implemented to ensure its validity.

CHAPTER 4

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation.

4.0 Introduction

The data collected in the field is analysed in this chapter in a comprehensive way, using descriptive analytic tools to summarise the data found, such as frequency tables and graphs. Data presentation and interpretation has been organised chronologically, with the aim of understanding better the resource gap in the studied resource and the relationship between the communities in the settlements, both quantitatively and qualitatively, allowing the two types of data to be set side-by-side. In this analysis all statistical tests of significance used were performed at the 95% confidence level.

4.1 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents the research findings categorized by the research objectives specifically examining the casual linkages between the allocation of scarce resources and the resulting communal tensions between the refugees and the resulting communal tensions between the refugees and the host communities.

4.1.1 Land Allocation and Communal Conflicts

Land remains the most contested resource in the settlement environment due to its inelastic nature and the demand from a surging population. The study found that 78.1% of the respondents agreed that communal conflicts have persisted in the area since the refugee settlements were established.

1. Boundary Ambiguity and Customary Claims

One of the frequent conflicts is lack of clear boundary between refugee land and host community land. In 1960 the government categorised Nakivale as a refugee settlement, but still today many Ugandan nationals have customary titles based on ancestral rights claiming that the land was not properly acquired by the land acquisition. These fuzzy boundaries create “information conflicts” in which groups differ in their views on which information is important, legal maps or traditional occupancy. Qualitative information shows that refugees sometimes have felt their land was being “taken” by the government and given to them without their permission.

2. Inadequacies in institutions and failure to consult

A statistical analysis showed that there was a statistically significant association between failure to institutional consultation and land conflict. The overwhelming majority of community members felt that they were not consulted before the construction of refugee villages and distribution of land. The majority of the majority of community members disagreed strongly that they were consulted before the refugee villages were built, or before land was allocated. Local leaders say that they are often only notified of land allocations after refugees have arrived, leading to a feeling of marginalisation and resentment. Host community hostility is sparked after refugees are forcibly displaced to land that has been occupied by the host community for grazing or farming and without their permission.

3. Refugee Land Inadequacy and Encroachment

The results show a 'land squeeze' which pushes groups into conflict. More than half of refugees surveyed felt the land was allocated to them was too small to support their household food requirements. The refugee plots planted in Nakivale were 50 x 100 metres until recently when there were influxes, and the Office of the Prime Minister have reduced the size of the plots to 30 x 30 metres. The limited fertility of these plots forces refugees to intrude on the private land of host communities or on protected forest reserves to cope with survival. In turn, host community members often continue to use gazetted settlement land for their cattle which leads to violent clashes in the legal refugee occupants resulting in the destruction of crops and the maiming of livestock.

4. Impact on Food Security and Social Cohesion

The data establishes a reciprocal relationship between land conflicts and food insecurity. Land Disputes often leave contested plots idle or fragmented which directly lowers agricultural output for both groups. Furthermore, the fear of arbitrary eviction prevents long term investment in sustainable farming methods as residents focus only on short term survival this instability leads host communities to view the refugee presence as an impediment to Local development which frequently results in calls for refugee repatriation.

4.1.2 Access to Water Resources and Communal Conflicts

Access to clean and sufficient water is a vital human necessity and a significant source of tension in the refugee hosting environments of Western Uganda. The study found that 32.3% of respondents strongly agreed and 54.8% agreed that water resource conflicts have been frequently recorded since the establishment of the settlements.

1. Sufficiency of Water for Livelihood Enterprises

A primary cause of communal conflict is the absolute scarcity of water relative to the needs of a surging population. The findings indicate that 75% of the surveyed households believe that the available water sources are insufficient to meet their needs for domestic use, livelihood enterprises, agriculture and livestock. Statistical testing established a very strong association between this insufficiency and the frequency of water related conflicts. Because the demand consistently outstrips supply, groups often scramble for priority access at collection points leading to physical conflicts.

2. The Human-Animal Interface and Water Safety

A critical flashpoint for conflict identified in the literature is the failure to separate human water points from livestock watering holes. Data reveals that 8 out of every 10 households believe that they share water sources with animals which leads to heavy contamination and siltation. Host community pastoralists and refugee farmers frequently clash when livestock spoil clean water sources intended for human consumption. While refugees often resort to Lake Nakivale or the Rwarunga river during the dry seasons, host communities view this as trespassing on local natural resources which leads to further physical conflicts.

3. Institutional Strategies and Technical Exclusivity

The study highlights a perceived institutional bias in the allocation of water infrastructure. While 58.1% of the host community members reported benefiting from water points drilled for refugees, many expressed resentments because these facilities are strategically centered within refugee dense areas for security purposes. Consequently, the host community members must walk long distances to access these points and they are sometimes unofficially charged fees by the refugees who guard the sources.

Furthermore, 60% of host community members believe that the research conducted prior to constructing water sources is “more technical” and fails to see local “buy in” or consider national needs. This lack of stakeholder involvement was found to be significantly associated with communal resentment as nationals feel their plight is ignored by the UNHCR and OPM while the refugees are prioritized.

4. Impact on Social Harmony

The findings suggest that the sharing of water points acts as a “double-edged sword” for social inclusion. In some instances, sharing a common source enhances harmony and ideologies between the two groups. However, misunderstandings arise more frequently over who has the right to fetch water first leading to “relationship conflicts” characterized by xenophobic reminders to refugees that they should “go back home” rather than consume local water.

4.1.3 Cash-Handouts Initiative and Communal Conflicts

The shift to cash-based interventions in refugee management will help the DP's increase their choice and capacity to access their immediate needs, such as food, health and shelter. But in the Nakivale settlement context these efforts have added new layers of social complexity and have often been a source of intercommunal inequality passively accepted by the surrounding community.

1. Perceptions of Inequality and Relative Deprivation

One of the significant outcomes of this study is the sense of grievance among members of the community who although they are in comparable situations of extreme poverty, are not included in the financial assistance programs. Refugees state that the cash handouts are having a “positive impact” in that they are using the food to better their nutrition and fixing their tents, but host community members say that they are not receiving any attention from the government or aid groups. A sense of institutional bias also encourages some nationals to believe that refugees are privileged class; “kings and queens” as some put it, as a result of guaranteed monthly stipends, as against the Ugandan nationals in the area who get nothing.

2. Market Distortions and Economic Friction

The refugees' newfound buying power has been a source of growth for local economies, and also a source of particular economic conflicts. Qualitative evidence shows that refugees often have to buy merchandise from local Ugandan retailers on credit using their remittances. Refugees may be unable to pay back these debts, resulting in tensions that lead to physical violence. In many reported cases it is the host communities who have resorted to informal debt collection practices such as the seizure of refugee assets, including land, livestock, and household belongings, in order to reimburse their debts. Many documented cases have occurred where host community members have formally appropriated refugee property such as livestock or household goods as a means of informal debt collection, thereby severely damaging social cohesion.

3. Impact on Land and Long-Term Integration Fears

Inadvertently, a cash handouts programme has contributed to host community fears about land security. Many nationals said they were skeptical that refugees will have access to liquid capital and will purchase land from poor nationals and settle permanently there. This perception widens the “we-they” divide, as they see the refugees' job participation in the economy as a direct infringement of their land rights, and fear that the refugees will not return.

4. Risks of Dependency and Self-Reliance

Financial assistance helps some refugees to purchase small-scale livelihoods, such as goats, but there are some concerns about ‘dependency syndrome’ documented. According to the findings, the high dependency on monthly stipends can have adverse effects on people's motivation to work hard in their farms needed for the self-reliance program at times. This reliance puts refugee households in a precarious position when the humanitarian funding gets cut abruptly or changes in international policies.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The results from the field and the existing empirical literature are synthesized in the discussion below, as well as with the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapters of this study. The results are presented and explained in relation to the main objectives; land allocation, resource management and cash handout initiative.

Land Allocation and Communal Conflicts

The study showed that land is the root cause of communal tensions in Nakiavle with 78.1% of the respondents observing that there had been some ‘ongoing conflict’ since the establishment of Nakiavle. The results are in line with the theory of conflict that results in the inevitable division of society due to the competition over scarce and inelastic resources.

The findings showed that there is a significant relationship between land conflicts and institutional consultation failures. Thus the “tragedy of endowment” in Africa is often not to be seen as lack of endowment, but rather a problem of poor governance and exclusionary management mechanisms, as the social identity theory in the field narratives confirms that the host communities are refugees who are seen as “aliens” or “squatters” and that they use stigmatization to validate their exclusive claims to the ancestral resources. In addition, refugees' encroachment on the host land, as documented as a result of the “land squeeze”, has reconfirmed Malthusian concerns that unchecked population grows in constrained areas will outgrow resources, resulting in “positive checks” in the form of acts of physical violence.

Access to Water Resources and Communal Conflicts

Water resource conflicts were reported by over 87% of the respondents were a very strong association between water insufficiency and communal clashes. The finding is congruent with the refugee aid and development theory that posits that social cohesion can only be achieved through strengthening the “facility capacity” of host areas which will benefit both population, at the same time.

The area that has uncovered that water points are frequently located in the centre of refugee clusters, forcing host community members to walk long distances or pay “unofficial fees” to the refugees. This perceived institutional bias is similar to already existing outsider framework, but the refugees are indeed the “privileged” ones by humanitarian support, whilst the host community is “established” by history, and the refugees constitute the “privileged” ones in the host nation. High frequency of conflict at shared points also indicates that technical solutions, such as warehouses, can become flash points for “relationship conflict” through xenophobic rhetoric, if the stakeholders are not involved in an inclusive manner.

Cash Handouts Initiative and Communal Conflicts

Cash based interventions have created a new set of relative deprivations in the settlement. A refugee is someone who sees cash as a tool to dignity and nutrition while a host community sees cash as an unfair privilege and sometimes talks of a “king and queen”. This is consistent with Brady (2011), who pointed out that while financial aid can be beneficial it can also happen without a discussion of the rest of the social context and can create resentment among the non recipients.

The study found that market distortions such as refugees not being able to pay back their debts to their local shop owners, but rather leading to the confiscation and other measures to seize property, can also lead to a lack of trust. These economic tensions imply that the existing CBIs are not in compliance with the 70/30 age rule; host communities feel they are the ones who are suffering from the presence of the refugees while they are not the ones who are receiving the “boons”, the financial rewards that go along with it. Lastly, the cited ‘dependency syndrome’ of some refugees bolsters the criticism that too much dependency on the humanitarian aid (stipend) package can lead to refugees' inability to be independent, making them more vulnerable to the potential reduction of humanitarian aid in recent years.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter summarizes the research findings, draws conclusions based on the analyzed data and offers practical recommendations to mitigate resource based conflicts between the refugees and the host communities in Western Uganda. This chapter also highlights the contribution of the study to the existing knowledge and suggests areas for future further research.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the allocation of scarce resources specifically land, water and financial stipends acts as a primary cause of communal tension in the Nakivale environments. The “resource gap” between surging populations and inelastic assets has shifted communal relations from hospitality to competition.

Land Allocation and Communal Conflicts

This study established that land remains the most significant driver of physical conflicts with 78.1% of respondents acknowledging that communal conflicts have persisted since the settlements were established.

- One of the most important findings is the lack of transparency in institutions. One of the important findings is that the institutions are lacking transparency. The results of the statistical analysis were statistically significant and demonstrated that the conflict situation was associated with the lack of consultation with host communities. Some 34.4 % of host members strongly disagreed that they had been consulted before the construction of the refugee villages, which resulted in a “government land grabbing” situation.
- Boundary ambiguity: When boundaries of settlements are unclear, tensions are increased. These areas were gazetted decades ago, but many of the nationals have asserted customary rights to this land based on their believed ancestral rights, stating that the land was not formally acquired under the Land acquisition act.
- The “land squeeze” and encroachment: The refugee plots had been reduced from 50×50m to 30×30m for the purposes of accommodating new arrivals, which has reduced the "self-reliance" strategy. Because of this, 54% of refugees said their land is not enough to support their food security needs and they have to encroach on the grazing lands of the host communities or protected forest areas, which results in violent retaliation and destruction of crops.

Access to Water Resources and Communal Conflicts

More than 87.1% of the respondents reported on water-related conflicts. There is absolute water scarcity and perceived institutional favouritism in the struggle for water.

- Sufficiency and scarcity: About 75% of households reported that the water sources available were not enough to help them with their domestic and livelihood needs and there was a strong statistical relationship between water scarcity and communal clashes.
- Human animal interference: A longstanding flash point is lack of separation between human and livestock sources of water. The data revealed that 80% of the households share water with animals which cause their water to become contaminated and physical conflict during the dry season over rightful access to water.
- Institutional bias: Resentment due to security-bell rings: strategic positioning of water infrastructure such as boreholes and tanks in refugee dense areas. This makes the journey to the water very long for the members of the host community who are forced to pay fees to refugees, though not officially, for using the water. Also, 60% of the host members believe that water planning is “purely technical” and does not take into account local national needs.

Cash handouts and communal conflicts

Cash based interventions offer dignity of choice to refugees but have unknowingly created a new social class Dynamic which threatens to impact on social inclusion.

- Refugees experience relative deprivation because host communities often live in very poor conditions as well and feel left out by the aid organisations. These has given rise to a narrative that refugees are ‘kings and queens’ and that they are guaranteed a monthly stipend, whereas the citizens get nothing.
- Market distortions and debt: The buying power of refugees has spurred local markets, but also caused conflicts over debt. Strife can easily be exacerbated when refugees who have not received aid are required to return it to local showkeepers, who in turn may withhold ownership of the property until they are paid. When refugees who are not receiving aid do not pay the local showkeepers, they risk informal seizure of their property as debt collection.
- Dependency risks: The initiative has opened up the possibility of dependency syndrome where some refugees are less interested in agricultural self-reliance. This reliance means they are very sensitive to funding reductions by the humanitarian community, resulting in a rise in theft and suicides in the settlement when steps are late.

5.2 Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from analysing and presenting the data in this study related to the link between resource allocation strategies and communal conflict in refugee hosting communities in Western Uganda.

Scarcity of resources and inevitability of conflict.

The study shows that the scarcity and inelasticity of the resources, namely land and water, is a root cause of physical conflicts and social disharmony. An ever growing population density in the gazetted zones of Nakivale generates an ever greater “resource gap” with the initial hospitality towards each other transforming into active competition. The results indicates that the conflict is not only a function of the presence of refugees, but also a function of the malthusian struggle between the demand for survival assets and its supply.

The institutional failures and the legitimacy gap.

One main finding of this research is that horizontal management by the institution can often further deepen communal tensions. A “legitimacy gap” exists, as agencies such as OPM and UNHCR are not making any meaningful multi-stakeholder consultation with host community leaders. This opaque situation perpetuates a narrative of “government land grabbing” among nationals that perpetuates xenophobia and a perception of refugees as “privileged aliens” rather than guests. Technical measures such as the borehole or gazetting of land will remain suspect and resented unless these are clearly marked out and people are made aware of them locally through “buy-in”.

Relative Deprivation and Social Cohesion.

The study also finds that discrimination in service provisioning, in which the services are provided only to refugees, is one of the root causes of the ‘they’/‘we’ split. Providing cash handouts to refugees but not host community members, and introducing social services such as electricity, water, and soap, in such a poverty-stricken context, is a condition of relative deprivation. This scenario changes the roles of the host country – now the host community is no longer benefactors, but rather they are feeling alienated and marginalised in their own country. For this reason, the study reaches the following conclusions: social inclusion is not possible as long as the host community experiences a sense of institutional bias towards the welfare of refugees as compared to that of the indigenous community.

Dependency and Sustainability of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS)

Ultimately, the research arrives at the conclusion that the self-reliance strategy is a positive one in theory, but there is a lack of progress in its application due to the “land squeeze” and the “dependency syndrome” that is increasing. Refugees are forced to rely on cash stipends, and agricultural self-sufficiency is close to impossible as land plots are reduced to 30x30m. Unless these are sharpened and enhanced to incorporate sustainable livelihood projects for both, the ensuing economic hopelessness will remain a source of theft, encroachment and violent communal conflict.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the field findings and the ensuing analysis the study makes the following recommendations to the Government of Uganda, UNHCR and other implementing partners in the Nakivale settlements in a bid to reduce resource based conflict and contribute towards sustainable social inclusion.

Mitigating conflicts and allocating land.

- Consultations with host community leaders: Consultations should be done on a comprehensive scale with all of the host community leaders before any new land allocation or new refugee village is established by OPM. This process should include the identification of land suitable for refugee settlement with the establishment of ancestral boundaries and the achievement of “buy in” from the indigenous people to prevent “land grabbing” perceptions.

- Physical demarcation and plot registration: Government should make a priority in demarcating settlement boundaries physically using permanent markers so as to address information conflicts. Also, to prevent disputes over encroachment, the authorities are to be urged to measure the land allotted to them and not estimate the area.
- Agricultural mechanization and inputs should be provided to OPM and UNHCR to ensure maximum food production in such small plots of land, to address the 'land squeeze' caused by plots being reduced to 30x30m size. There is a need to move from individual plot to group owned plantations (coffee/banana farms) where refugees and host communities can work for wages, thereby promoting economic independence.

Water Resource Management

- Separate water points for humans and animals: Agencies that implement this need to put up walls to separate water points for livestock and boreholes for humans to eliminate a major flash point for physical confrontation. This is crucial for hygiene and to reduce regular conflicts between host pastoralists and refugee farmers.
- Equitable distribution of infrastructure: there should be agencies like National Water and Sewage Cooperation and UNHCR to have water points in the host community villages as well as in the refugee villages. This 'whole of community' approach helps mitigate host resentment towards the 'privileges' of the refugees.
- Community led water management: Agencies should not use "purely technical" research for locating a borehole but engage local people in the planning process so that the water resource will be owned and committed to the maintenance of the communities.

The provision of cash handouts and livelihood sustainability

- Eligibility criteria for cash based interventions should be reviewed to include the most vulnerable members of the host community, which currently is not included in eligibility criteria for non discriminatory service strategy. It is essential to work on the vulnerabilities of the host community in tandem with the protection of the refugees if the tendency of "kings and queens" are to be avoided, and so as to avoid social jealousy.
- Financial stipends – Clear road map and project diversification: The disbursement of financial stipends must be communicated effectively on the basis of a clear road map and a clear time line to the implementing agencies in order to avoid panic and financial debt conflict with local shopkeepers. Cash handouts should be complemented with vocational training and sustainable projects, which will help build long-term self-reliance and reduce dependency syndrome, beyond the cycle of aid provision.
- Market sensitization and debt regulation: Authorities have been asked to ensure that there are regular market sensitization and dialogues between refugees and host community vendors to create a mechanism for resolving debts, which would help address the arbitrary seizure of refugees' property.

General, institutional and social integration

- Unified Service delivery: For social cohesion, humanitarian actors should link their systems with the local district's structures for health and education. Vocational colleges and secondary schools with both youth and adult students will facilitate cross-cultural contacts and be an opportunity for the youth to experience cultural diversity.

- Joint peace committees: OPM should establish local peace committees, comprising both refugees and nationals, to serve as an early warning mechanism for local conflicts regarding shared resources, before they escalate and become violent.
- Relocation and repatriation: Whenever the environment has been overwhelmed by the population, in this case, the government should consider the repatriation of some refugees to less populated regions. Refugees need to be sensitized to the advantages of permanent return as a solution to decongest the area once the countries of origin have become stable.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The following areas are recommended for further research to extend the results of this study and fill in some of the gaps in the literature on refugee administration and communal relations:

- The global and national policy context: There is need for more research to understand the long-term implications of the “open door policy” on the socio-economic stability of host countries such as Uganda. Also, the impact of the refugee inflows on environmental degradation, especially on running out of energy resources and water table should be studied in detail.
- Resource management and conflict: scholars need to explore more the linkages between the state and the community in terms of conflict, focusing on how land policies and rules interact with and/or conflict with customary land rights in settlement areas.
- Economic and social dynamics: There is a need to quantify the economic impact of refugee inflows on the markets and national developments to move beyond qualitative perceptions. Further work could also investigate the dependency factor affecting refugee lands and the multi-layered psychological, socio-cultural and physiological impact that a top-down approach of state and international agencies has on both the refugees and the host communities.
- Intergroup relations and integration: In-depth analysis is needed to investigate, the impact of inter ethnic relations in the settlement on livelihoods and social cohesion. Moreover, comparative research between urban refugee contexts and rural communities may help to better understand the nature of the different factors that drive communal tension and the impact of integration policies in the local context.
- Security and peacebuilding: Studies should explore the wider impact of refugee flows on national security and stability and build on the existing research on the causes of displacement in Great Lakes region to enhance peacebuilding efforts in the area.

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