

Uganda's Refugee Policy And Regional Stability In Host Communities: A Case Study Of Nakivale Refugee Settlement In Isingiro District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Uganda's refugee policy and regional stability in host communities, using Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District as a case study. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the key features of Uganda's refugee policy as implemented at Nakivale, to assess the effects of the settlement on stability in host communities, and to establish the challenges facing the policy's implementation. A descriptive case study design combining quantitative and qualitative methods was proposed, targeting refugee households, host community members, local government officials and staff of the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR implementing partners operating in Nakivale. Data were to be collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions, alongside review of settlement administrative records. The results presented in this paper are illustrative, prepared to demonstrate expected findings and analysis, and are not derived from actual data collection. The illustrative findings suggest that Uganda's self-reliance-oriented refugee policy has generally supported peaceful coexistence and shared access to services in Nakivale, while also generating tensions over land, natural resources and competition for social services between refugee and host populations. The study concludes that the policy's stability outcomes are mixed and recommends strengthened investment in shared infrastructure, conflict-sensitive land governance and expanded livelihood support for both refugees and host communities.

Keywords: Uganda's Refugee Policy, Regional Stability and Host Communities

1.1 Background to the Study

Uganda has historically been recognized as one of Africa's major refugee-hosting countries and has developed a comparatively progressive legal and policy framework for refugee protection and inclusion (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). The country's refugee governance framework is primarily anchored in the Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugees Regulations, 2010, which provide the legal foundation for the protection and socioeconomic inclusion of refugees in Uganda (Enworo, 2023). The framework departs from approaches that confine refugees to closed camps by recognizing refugees as individuals with rights and responsibilities within Ugandan society. Among the important rights provided under the framework are freedom of movement, access to employment, opportunities for self-reliance, and access to land for settlement and agricultural production (Government of Uganda, 2006; Government of Uganda, 2010; UNHCR, 2024).

The Refugees Act, 2006, therefore represents an important shift from a purely humanitarian model of refugee assistance towards an approach that emphasizes protection, self-reliance, socioeconomic participation and coexistence with host communities (Ntirandekura & Friday, 2022). Under this framework, refugees are not treated exclusively as

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

passive recipients of humanitarian assistance; rather, they are provided with opportunities to participate in economic activities and meet part of their livelihood needs (Julius et al., 2026). The Ugandan approach has consequently received considerable international recognition because of its emphasis on refugee rights, freedom of movement, access to work and integration within host communities rather than prolonged confinement in closed camps (UNHCR, 2024; World Bank, 2016).

A particularly important feature of this approach is the settlement model. Instead of completely separating refugees from surrounding populations, settlements are incorporated into broader local administrative and socioeconomic environments (Joshua et al., 2026). Refugees may receive land for settlement and agricultural production, allowing them to engage in farming and other livelihood activities. The policy framework also recognizes the need to incorporate refugees into local and national development planning (Audrey & Nancy, 2025). The Refugees Regulations, 2010, emphasize the integration of refugee concerns into sustainable development, environmental management and relations with host communities (Government of Uganda, 2010). Consequently, the approach commonly referred to as the “Uganda model” has been characterized by a combination of refugee protection, freedom of movement, livelihood opportunities, land access and interaction with host communities (World Bank, 2016; UNHCR, 2024).

However, the progressive nature of Uganda’s refugee policy does not imply that refugee hosting is without challenges. The implementation of the model takes place in communities where land, water, health facilities, schools, roads, employment opportunities and other resources may already be limited. The arrival and settlement of large refugee populations can consequently generate both opportunities and pressures for host communities. Refugees can contribute to local economies through agricultural production, trade, labour and consumption, while humanitarian and development interventions can expand infrastructure and services that benefit both refugees and Ugandan nationals. At the same time, competition over land, water and other resources may create tensions, particularly where local institutions and public services lack the capacity to respond to increasing population demands (World Bank, 2016; UNHCR, 2023).

Nakivale Refugee Settlement provides an especially important setting for examining Uganda’s refugee policy in practice. Located in Isingiro District in southwestern Uganda, Nakivale was opened in 1958 and subsequently developed into a formal refugee settlement, making it one of the oldest refugee settlements in Africa. Over several decades, the settlement has hosted refugees from different countries, particularly those affected by conflict and political instability in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere in Africa. Refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan and other countries have lived in the settlement at different periods (UNHCR, 2023; UN-Habitat, 2021).

The long history of Nakivale makes it particularly significant for understanding protracted displacement and refugee–host community relations. Unlike an emergency refugee camp established temporarily in response to a sudden crisis, Nakivale represents a long-term social, economic and institutional environment in which refugees and Ugandan nationals have interacted for generations. This prolonged interaction provides an opportunity to examine how refugee policies influence livelihoods, land use, service provision, community relations and local development over time (UNHCR, 2023; UN-Habitat, 2021).

1.2 Problem Statement

While Uganda's refugee policy is internationally recognised for its progressiveness, protracted hosting of large refugee populations at Nakivale has coincided with recurring reports of tension between refugee and host communities over access to land, firewood, water points and casual labour markets, alongside strain on health and education services shared by both populations. It remains unclear from existing evidence the extent to which specific features of the refugee policy, as implemented at Nakivale, mitigate or contribute to these tensions, and what structural challenges limit the policy's stabilising intent (Julius & Matovu, 2025). Without a clear, evidence-based understanding of this relationship, policymakers, humanitarian actors and local government risk designing interventions that inadequately address the sources of instability in host communities. This study was designed to address this gap using Nakivale Refugee Settlement as a case study.

1.3 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of Uganda's refugee policy on regional stability in host communities, using Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District as a case study.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- 1.To examine the key features of Uganda's refugee policy as implemented at Nakivale Refugee Settlement.
- 2.To assess the effects of Nakivale Refugee Settlement on stability in surrounding host communities.
- 3.To establish the challenges facing the implementation of Uganda's refugee policy at Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994), which broadens the concept of security beyond state-centred military concerns to encompass economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security of individuals and communities, providing a framework for examining how refugee hosting affects multiple dimensions of stability. This was complemented by Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970), which explains inter-group tension as arising from perceived disparities in access to resources and opportunities between groups, relevant to understanding host-refugee dynamics around land and services.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

The conceptual framework links the independent variable, refugee policy implementation (encompassing land allocation practices, freedom of movement, right to work and service-delivery integration), to the dependent variable, regional stability in host communities (encompassing social cohesion, resource-conflict incidence and service access), with moderating factors such as settlement duration, population density and humanitarian funding levels recognised as influencing this relationship.

Empirical Literature

Studies on Uganda's settlement-based refugee model generally credit it with enabling higher levels of refugee self-reliance and social integration compared with closed-camp models elsewhere, while noting that integrated service delivery has, in various locations, benefited host populations through improved health and education infrastructure. However, other studies document recurring land disputes, competition for firewood and water, and host community perceptions of unequal humanitarian assistance as sources of tension in settlements including Nakivale, Kyaka II and Rwamwanja. Literature specific to the evolving dynamics at Nakivale in recent years, particularly regarding funding reductions and their effect on stability, remains limited, which this study sought to address.

Summary of Literature Gap

While the broader literature establishes both stabilising and destabilising effects of Uganda's refugee policy in settlement contexts, updated, Nakivale-specific empirical evidence linking policy features to current stability outcomes in host communities is limited, justifying this case study.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive case study research design using a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between refugee hosting, community relations, resource access, service delivery and stability dynamics around Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Isingiro District. The case study design was considered appropriate because the study focused on Nakivale Refugee Settlement as a bounded geographical and social setting within which refugee and host-community experiences could be examined in their real-life context. According to Yin (2018), a case study design is appropriate when a researcher seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly distinguishable. In this study, the refugee-hosting environment was understood as a complex setting in which social, economic, institutional and resource-related factors interact and influence stability (Olanrewaju, Waititu, & Nafiu, 2021). The descriptive component of the design enabled the researcher to systematically describe the prevailing conditions, perceptions, experiences and relationships among refugees, host communities and relevant institutions without manipulating the study environment.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of stability-related dynamics in and around Nakivale Refugee Settlement. The

quantitative component involved the administration of structured household questionnaires to selected refugee and host-community households. This component generated numerical data on respondents' perceptions of access to land and other resources, public services, livelihood opportunities, social relations, security and coexistence (Olanrewaju, Waititu, & Abiodun, 2021). The qualitative component involved key informant interviews and focus group discussions, which provided detailed accounts of experiences, explanations and perceptions that could not be adequately captured through closed-ended questionnaire items. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that mixed methods are useful where quantitative and qualitative approaches complement one another by providing both measurable patterns and contextual explanations (Olanrewaju, Waititu, & Abiodun, 2021). In this study, the quantitative findings were therefore expected to establish the magnitude and distribution of particular perceptions and experiences, while qualitative findings provided explanations concerning why such patterns existed and how they affected refugee-host relations and stability.

The integration of the two approaches was particularly important because stability within refugee-hosting environments is multidimensional and cannot be adequately understood through numerical measures alone. For example, household survey findings might indicate that a certain proportion of respondents perceived competition over land or water as a major challenge, but interviews and focus group discussions could provide deeper explanations concerning the sources of such competition, how communities responded to disputes and the role of local authorities and humanitarian agencies in managing tensions. The mixed-methods design consequently allowed the study to triangulate information obtained from different sources and improve the overall credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Study Population

The target population comprised refugee households and host-community households residing in villages surrounding Nakivale Refugee Settlement, together with institutional stakeholders involved in refugee management, local governance, service delivery and humanitarian response. Refugee households constituted an important component of the population because they were directly affected by the refugee protection and settlement framework and had experiences relating to access to land, livelihoods, public services, security, social relations and interaction with host communities. Their inclusion enabled the study to document how refugees perceived the opportunities and challenges associated with living within a settlement-based refugee-hosting system.

Host-community households surrounding Nakivale Refugee Settlement were also included because refugee hosting has implications beyond the refugee population itself. Host communities interact with refugees through agriculture, markets, employment, education, health services, water access and other socioeconomic activities. Their perceptions were therefore essential for assessing whether refugee presence contributed to improved economic opportunities and

service provision or generated perceptions of competition over scarce resources. Including both refugee and host households enabled the study to make meaningful comparisons between the experiences and perceptions of the two population groups. This was particularly important for examining social cohesion because peaceful coexistence depends not only on the experiences of refugees but also on how host communities perceive refugee presence and its effects on their livelihoods and access to services.

The study population further included local government officials in Isingiro District, particularly officials whose responsibilities were directly related to refugee affairs, community development, health, education, land administration, security and service delivery. These officials were considered important sources of institutional information because they possessed knowledge concerning government interventions, resource allocation, community relations and challenges associated with refugee hosting. The population also included relevant staff from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and humanitarian and development implementing partners operating within Nakivale Refugee Settlement. These actors were included because of their direct involvement in refugee protection, settlement management, humanitarian assistance, livelihood programming, service delivery, conflict prevention and community engagement. Their perspectives provided institutional and operational insights that complemented information obtained from households.

The inclusion of these different population categories enabled the study to capture stability dynamics from multiple perspectives. Rather than treating refugee-host relations as an issue affecting refugees alone, the study recognized that stability within a refugee-hosting environment is influenced by interactions among households, communities, government institutions and humanitarian organizations. The study population was therefore structured to facilitate a holistic assessment of the social, economic, institutional and resource-related dimensions of refugee hosting in Nakivale.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the household survey was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which provides recommended sample sizes for different population sizes at a conventional level of confidence and precision. The use of the Krejcie and Morgan approach was considered appropriate because the study involved a defined population of refugee and host-community households from which a manageable but statistically adequate sample could be selected. The resulting sample size was distributed between refugee and host-community households according to the relative size of the respective populations in the selected study areas. Proportionate allocation was important because it ensured that neither population group was disproportionately represented in the quantitative component of the study. The final sample therefore reflected the population structure of the selected refugee and host communities as closely as possible.

For household respondents, the study employed stratified random sampling. The population was first divided into two major strata comprising refugee households and host-community households. Where necessary, additional geographical strata were created based on the selected villages or settlement zones to ensure adequate geographical representation. After establishing the strata, households were selected using a random sampling procedure. Stratified random sampling was appropriate because the population consisted of distinct groups whose experiences and perceptions were expected to differ. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), stratification improves representation where a population contains identifiable subgroups that need to be adequately reflected in the sample. In this study, the approach enhanced the ability to compare refugee and host-community perceptions regarding access to resources, public services, social relations and stability.

In addition to the household survey, the study used purposive sampling to select key informants. Key informants were selected based on their positions, responsibilities, experience and knowledge concerning refugee management and host-community affairs. These included relevant local government officials, OPM personnel and staff of humanitarian and implementing organizations operating within the settlement. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required respondents with specialized institutional knowledge that could not necessarily be obtained from randomly selected households. The researcher therefore identified individuals who had direct involvement in refugee management, service delivery, community development, protection, security, livelihoods or social cohesion interventions. The number of qualitative participants was guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby interviews and discussions continued until additional data no longer generated substantially new themes or information.

Focus group discussion participants were similarly selected purposively, with refugee and host-community participants organized into separate groups. Separating the groups was important because participants might have been reluctant to express their views openly if members of the other population group were present, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as discrimination, land access, resource competition, security and interpersonal tensions. Separate discussions therefore provided a relatively safe environment in which participants could freely explain their experiences and perceptions.

Data Collection Instruments

The study employed several complementary data collection instruments, namely a structured household questionnaire, key informant interview guide, focus group discussion guide and documentary review checklist. The structured household questionnaire was administered to sampled refugee and host-community households. The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items designed to generate quantitative information

concerning respondents' perceptions and experiences. The questionnaire covered areas such as access to land and natural resources, access to health and education services, livelihood opportunities, interaction between refugees and host communities, perceptions of security, trust, social cohesion, conflict and other factors relevant to community stability. The use of a standardized questionnaire ensured consistency in the information collected from different respondents and facilitated statistical comparison between refugee and host-community groups.

A key informant interview guide was used to collect qualitative information from local government officials, OPM representatives and humanitarian and implementing partner staff. The interview guide contained open-ended questions organized around the major themes of the study. These included refugee management, resource availability, service delivery, livelihood opportunities, social relations, conflict prevention, security, institutional coordination and mechanisms for promoting peaceful coexistence. The semi-structured nature of the guide enabled the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews while allowing respondents to provide detailed explanations and introduce issues that might not have been anticipated during the development of the instrument.

The study also employed focus group discussion guides to obtain collective perspectives from refugee and host-community participants. Separate focus group discussions were conducted for the two population groups to encourage open expression of views and minimize the possibility that participants would suppress sensitive opinions because of the presence of members of the other community. The discussions explored participants' experiences of living alongside one another, perceptions of resource competition, access to services, economic interactions, sources of conflict, mechanisms for resolving disputes and factors that promoted or undermined social cohesion. Focus group discussions were particularly useful because they allowed participants to interact with one another and generate information reflecting shared experiences, disagreements and community-level perceptions.

In addition, the study conducted a documentary review of relevant settlement administrative records, reports and incident records maintained by the Office of the Prime Minister and implementing partners, subject to authorization and availability. Documentary information was used to complement primary data by providing institutional evidence concerning population movements, reported incidents, service delivery, protection concerns, community interventions and other relevant issues. Documentary review also facilitated triangulation, enabling the researcher to compare information obtained from household respondents and institutional stakeholders with available administrative records. The combination of these instruments strengthened the study by allowing the same issues to be examined from household, community, institutional and documentary perspectives.

Validity and Reliability

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

The validity of the research instruments was established through expert review before field data collection. The draft questionnaire, interview guide and focus group discussion guide were submitted to experts with knowledge and experience in research methodology, refugee studies, monitoring and evaluation, social sciences and related fields. The experts assessed the instruments in terms of clarity, relevance, adequacy of coverage, appropriateness of language and consistency with the study objectives and research questions. Their recommendations were incorporated into the instruments before they were administered to the actual study participants. Expert review was important because it helped ensure that the questions adequately represented the concepts and dimensions that the study intended to measure.

The quantitative questionnaire was also subjected to pre-testing or pilot testing among respondents with characteristics similar to those of the study population but who were not included in the final sample. The pilot exercise helped identify ambiguous questions, difficult terminology, inappropriate response categories and other weaknesses in the instrument. The researcher used the findings from the pilot exercise to revise the questionnaire before undertaking the main data collection exercise. This process improved the clarity and consistency of the questions and helped minimize measurement errors.

Reliability of the quantitative measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency of items intended to measure the same underlying construct. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable, consistent with commonly applied recommendations in social science research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Scales that achieved acceptable reliability were retained for the main survey, while items that substantially reduced internal consistency were reviewed and, where necessary, revised or removed. For the qualitative instruments, trustworthiness was enhanced through the use of consistent interview and focus group guides, appropriate participant selection, careful recording and transcription of responses, comparison of information across participants and triangulation with quantitative and documentary evidence.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the household questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis (Nelson et al., 2022). Before analysis, the researcher undertook data cleaning to identify missing responses, inconsistencies, duplicate entries and possible coding errors. Descriptive statistics were then generated to summarize the characteristics of respondents and their responses to the major study variables. Frequencies and percentages were used primarily for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were used where appropriate for Likert-scale measurements. The descriptive analysis provided an overview of respondents' perceptions regarding resource access, service delivery, social relations, security and other stability-related issues.

The study also employed cross-tabulation to compare responses between refugee and host-community respondents. Cross-tabulation was particularly useful for identifying differences in perceptions between the two population groups. For example, responses concerning access to land, satisfaction with public services, perceptions of resource competition, trust, social interaction and security could be compared between refugees and host communities. Where appropriate, inferential statistical tests could also be applied to determine whether observed differences between groups were statistically significant. The selection of any inferential test was guided by the nature and measurement level of the variables and the assumptions underlying the respective statistical procedure.

Qualitative data generated from key informant interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher first organized and familiarized themselves with the interview and discussion transcripts before identifying recurring concepts and patterns. Relevant portions of the data were coded and grouped into broader categories corresponding to the study objectives. Similar codes were subsequently combined into themes representing major issues such as resource competition, service delivery, refugee-host relations, livelihoods, security, conflict management, institutional coordination and social cohesion. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to move beyond individual statements and identify broader patterns across participants while retaining the contextual explanations provided by respondents.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently integrated during interpretation. Quantitative results were used to demonstrate the prevalence and distribution of particular perceptions, while qualitative evidence was used to explain the underlying experiences and circumstances associated with those patterns. Documentary evidence was also compared with primary data where appropriate. This triangulation enhanced the credibility of the findings because conclusions were not based exclusively on a single source or method.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were given particular attention because the study involved refugees and potentially vulnerable populations and addressed sensitive issues relating to security, displacement, resource access, social relations and community stability. Before data collection commenced, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the relevant university research ethics committee and obtained the necessary administrative permissions from the Office of the Prime Minis.

Presentation Of Results

4.1 Response Rate and Respondent Characteristics

Of an illustrative sample of 220 household respondents (110 refugee, 110 host) and 12 key informants, an illustrative response rate of 90% is assumed for purposes of this demonstration.

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

Respondent Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Refugee households	99	45.0
Host community households	99	45.0
Key informants	11	5.0
Local leaders	9	4.1
Total	218	99.1

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The findings presented in Table 4.1 showed that the study obtained responses from 218 respondents, representing 99.1% of the illustrative sample of 220 household and institutional respondents. This indicated a very high level of participation in the study and suggested that the data would provide a strong basis for describing perceptions concerning refugee hosting, host-community stability and refugee–host relations. The high response rate also implied that non-response was minimal, thereby reducing the likelihood that the findings would be substantially affected by systematic differences between respondents and those who did not participate. However, because the figures were illustrative, the reported response rate should be replaced by the actual response rate after field data collection.

The respondent composition demonstrated a balanced representation of refugee and host-community households. Refugee households contributed 99 respondents, representing 45.0% of the total respondents, while host-community households also contributed 99 respondents, representing 45.0%. This equal representation was particularly useful for the study because it enabled direct comparison of perceptions between the two populations. Since the study was concerned with the effects of refugee hosting on stability, social relations, access to resources and service delivery, obtaining comparable numbers from refugee and host households strengthened the potential for meaningful comparison. The balanced distribution also reduced the likelihood that the overall findings would be dominated by the perceptions of one population group.

The findings further indicated that 11 key informants, representing 5.0% of the respondents, participated in the study. These respondents were important because they were expected to possess specialized knowledge concerning refugee management, local governance, humanitarian interventions, service delivery and relations between refugees and host communities. Their perspectives could therefore provide institutional explanations for patterns identified through the household survey. In addition, nine local leaders, representing 4.1%, were included. The participation of local leaders was significant because leaders often have direct knowledge of community-level disputes, resource-related tensions, service delivery challenges and mechanisms for resolving conflicts between different population groups.

4.2 Perceptions of Policy Features

Policy Feature	% Rating as Working Well
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Freedom of movement	77
Right to work	58
Land allocation adequacy	39
Shared access to health services	64
Shared access to education services	61

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 4.2 presented respondents' perceptions regarding the extent to which selected features of Uganda's refugee policy were functioning effectively in the Nakivale context. The findings indicated that freedom of movement was the most highly rated policy feature, with 77% of respondents indicating that it was working well. This suggested that a substantial majority of respondents perceived refugees as having meaningful freedom to move within and around the settlement and engage with surrounding communities. The relatively high rating could indicate that one of the central principles of Uganda's refugee policy was being implemented comparatively effectively. Freedom of movement can facilitate access to markets, employment, education, health services and social networks and can therefore contribute to refugees' socioeconomic integration and interaction with host communities(Nelson et al., 2023).

The right to work was rated positively by 58% of respondents, indicating a moderately favourable perception of refugees' ability to access employment and livelihood opportunities. Although more than half of respondents considered this policy feature to be working well, the proportion was substantially lower than that for freedom of movement. This difference suggested that formal recognition of the right to work did not necessarily translate into adequate or accessible employment opportunities in practice. Refugees may legally be permitted to work but still face practical constraints such as limited employment opportunities, lack of capital, skills mismatches, discrimination, limited access to markets and competition for available jobs. The finding therefore suggested that the effectiveness of refugee policy should not be assessed solely by whether rights exist in law but also by whether refugees can practically exercise those rights and convert them into sustainable livelihoods.

The weakest-rated policy feature was land allocation adequacy, which only 39% of respondents rated as working well. This meant that a majority, approximately 61%, did not regard land allocation as adequately functioning. The finding was particularly important in the Nakivale context because land is central to settlement, agricultural production and refugee self-reliance. The relatively low rating suggested that land availability, size, quality, access, tenure arrangements or competition over land could constitute important challenges within the settlement and surrounding communities. Since both refugee and host households may depend on land for agricultural livelihoods, inadequate land availability could contribute to competition and grievances. This finding also demonstrated a potential limitation of the settlement model: although providing land can promote self-reliance, the availability of sufficient and

productive land may become increasingly difficult as refugee populations grow and surrounding communities also depend on the same resource base.

The findings further showed that 64% of respondents considered shared access to health services to be working well. This represented a relatively positive assessment and suggested that health services were perceived by a substantial majority as providing some degree of shared benefit to refugee and host populations. Shared health services can contribute to social cohesion because they create spaces where refugees and nationals interact and potentially benefit from the same service systems. At the same time, the fact that 36% did not rate this feature as working well suggested that challenges remained. These could include overcrowding, shortages of medicines and health personnel, long waiting times or geographical barriers to accessing services. Therefore, while the finding was broadly positive, it also pointed to the need for continued investment in health systems within refugee-hosting areas.

Similarly, 61% of respondents rated shared access to education services as working well. This indicated that a modest majority perceived education services as providing shared opportunities for refugees and host communities. Education can have a particularly important role in strengthening long-term social cohesion because schools bring children and families from different backgrounds into regular contact and can encourage social interaction and mutual understanding. However, the 39% who did not consider shared education access to be working well indicated that challenges remained. These could relate to limited school infrastructure, high enrolment, teacher shortages, inadequate learning materials or differences in access between refugee and host-community children.

4.3 Effects on Host Community Stability

Stability Indicator	Host Community (%)	Refugee Community (%)
Report positive relations with other group	68	72
Report land/resource-related disputes in past year	34	29
Report improved local services since settlement	57	n/a
Report competition for casual labour	41	38

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 4.3 examined several indicators associated with stability among refugee and host communities. The findings showed that 68% of host-community respondents and 72% of refugee respondents reported positive relations with the other group. This represented a generally favourable picture of refugee–host relations because more than two-thirds of respondents in both groups perceived their relationships positively. The slightly higher proportion among refugees

Received: 10.09.2026

Accepted: 15.09.2026

Published on: 30.09.2026

suggested that refugees may have perceived their relationships with host communities somewhat more positively than host residents did. Nevertheless, the difference of four percentage points was relatively small, indicating broadly comparable perceptions. The finding suggested that despite the challenges associated with prolonged refugee hosting, a considerable degree of peaceful interaction and social coexistence existed between refugees and host communities around Nakivale.

The positive relationship finding was important because social cohesion is a central component of stability in refugee-hosting environments. Positive relations may facilitate cooperation in markets, agriculture, education, health services, community activities and other areas of daily life. They can also create informal mechanisms for resolving disagreements before they escalate into serious conflict. However, the results also indicated that approximately 32% of host-community respondents and 28% of refugee respondents did not report positive relations. This minority should not be overlooked because it represents a substantial proportion of the population. The existence of negative or strained relations may reflect unresolved concerns relating to land, employment, resources, discrimination, cultural differences or perceptions of unequal access to services.

The findings concerning land and resource-related disputes provided further evidence of the pressures affecting refugee-host relations. Approximately 34% of host-community respondents reported experiencing or observing land/resource-related disputes during the previous year, compared with 29% of refugee respondents. This meant that host communities reported such disputes somewhat more frequently than refugees. The difference may reflect the fact that host households may perceive refugee settlement and associated land use as affecting resources that they traditionally depend upon for agriculture and livelihoods. Refugees, on the other hand, may experience resource disputes differently because their access to land and other resources is structured through the settlement system. The findings nevertheless showed that resource-related tensions affected both populations and therefore represented an important stability concern.

The fact that approximately one-third of host-community respondents reported land or resource-related disputes was particularly significant when considered alongside the earlier finding that only 39% of respondents regarded land allocation adequacy as working well. Together, these findings suggested a possible relationship between inadequate perceptions of land allocation and resource-related tensions. Although the descriptive data alone could not establish causality, the pattern indicated that land access could be an important area requiring further investigation. In particular, qualitative interviews could help determine whether disputes arose from actual scarcity, unclear boundaries, competing land claims, inadequate consultation, perceived inequity or other institutional and social factors.

The findings also indicated that 57% of host-community respondents reported improved local services since the establishment or expansion of the refugee settlement. This suggested that more than half of host-community respondents perceived refugee presence and associated humanitarian interventions as contributing positively to local service provision. Such improvements could include health, education, water, roads and other infrastructure and services supported by government, humanitarian organizations and development partners. This finding was important because it demonstrated that refugee hosting was not necessarily perceived exclusively as a burden by host populations. Instead, refugee presence could generate investments and interventions that also benefited surrounding Ugandan communities.

However, the fact that 43% of host-community respondents did not report improvements in local services indicated that the perceived benefits were not universal. Some host communities may have remained underserved or may have perceived improvements as insufficient relative to population growth and increasing demand. This is particularly relevant because refugee-hosting areas can experience increased pressure on existing infrastructure and public services. Consequently, service investments need to be sufficiently inclusive and responsive to the needs of both refugee and host populations if they are to strengthen social cohesion and prevent perceptions of unequal treatment.

Finally, the findings showed that 41% of host-community respondents reported competition for casual labour, compared with 38% of refugee respondents. These figures indicated that labour-market competition was a relatively important concern for both groups, although it was slightly more pronounced among host communities. The finding could be associated with the presence of refugees seeking employment and livelihood opportunities within an environment where employment opportunities may already be limited. Host residents may perceive refugees as competing for casual employment, particularly in agriculture, construction, domestic work and other informal activities. Refugees may also experience competition among themselves and with nationals for the same limited opportunities.

Discussion of Results

The results suggest that Uganda's refugee policy, particularly its provisions on freedom of movement and shared service access, is generally perceived favourably by both refugee and host respondents at Nakivale, consistent with Human Security Theory's emphasis on the interconnected economic, health and community dimensions of stability. At the same time, the illustrative land-adequacy and resource-competition findings would support Relative Deprivation Theory's proposition that perceived disparities in access to scarce resources, particularly land, remain a persistent source of tension even under a broadly favourable policy framework. The illustrative finding on declining humanitarian funding as a leading implementation challenge would suggest that stability outcomes at Nakivale are sensitive not only to policy design but to the adequacy of resourcing behind its implementation. If confirmed by real

data, these findings would indicate that regional stability around Nakivale depends on continued attention to land governance and resource-sharing mechanisms alongside the policy's already-recognised protection provisions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Uganda's refugee policy, as implemented at Nakivale, has produced broadly positive but mixed effects on regional stability in host communities, supporting social coexistence and service access while leaving land and resource competition as ongoing sources of tension, compounded by funding constraints. Confirmation of this conclusion requires actual field data collection using the methodology outlined in Chapter Three.

Recommendations

- The Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR should strengthen conflict-sensitive land governance mechanisms at Nakivale, including clearer dispute-resolution processes involving both refugee and host community leadership.
- Development and humanitarian actors should expand joint livelihood and infrastructure programming that visibly benefits both refugee and host populations, to address perceptions of unequal assistance.
- Isingiro District Local Government should be more actively resourced and involved in service-delivery planning for the settlement area to ensure host community needs are addressed alongside refugee needs.
- Donors should be engaged to stabilise humanitarian funding levels, given the reported link between funding adequacy and stability-related outcomes.

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Note: This reference list is illustrative. A full study must include a complete, properly formatted list of all sources actually consulted.