

Conflict analysis for Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI):

Tensions, Triggers and Conflict Management
in Refugee-Hosting Areas of West Nile



UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN



EMBASSY OF DENMARK
Danida

Refugee entrepreneur is cultivating trees for resale on land borrowed from a local landowner. The landowner will receive the trees on the condition that the refugee farms vegetables for consumption on the farmland surrounding the tree plantation. Refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2023 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

The conflict analysis

The Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action (PARTOCA) conducted this conflict analysis in Uganda's West Nile area between March and June 2026. The conflict analysis is intended to inform the Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI) programme, funded by the Embassy of Denmark (Danida). Ayo Degett (PhD), Programme Manager (Research), and Pernille Sikker Hansen,

Project Officer, wrote the report. This report has been financed by the Government of Denmark. Responsibility for the content lies entirely with the creator. The Government of Denmark does not necessarily share the expressed views and interpretations.

Acknowledgements

PARTOCA is a specialised research capacity within Danish Refugee Council (DRC) that implements ethnographic, participatory studies across Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. We gratefully acknowledge the support of this organisation and our senior academic advisor, Professor Susan Reynolds Whyte, who has contributed to the analysis.

We wish to thank the PARTOCA peer researchers and, in particular, Cecilia Tabu, Gatrude Adiru, Martin Lokolo and Ter Paul Ruot, who have contributed to the data collection in Uganda and with analytical insights. The DRC teams, including URRI Consortium Manager Leonardo Frisani and MEAL specialist Ibrahim Biga Badawi, and URRI's partnering organisations in Kampala, Arua, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Imvepi Settlement,

Lobule Settlement, Bidibidi Settlement, and Palorinya Refugee Settlement have supported the implementation of research activities. Senior Project Officer Kelsey Welham has supported the daily management of the project, Research Assistant Amalie Vestergaard with literature, and Programme Manager Jimmy James Kokedieny with training of the peer researchers.

For their suggestions and inputs on this analysis, we are also grateful to Global Peacebuilding Advisor Line Brylle, Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding Sector Coordinator Benjamin McCabe, Head of MEAL Volker Hüls, and Dr. Yotam Gidron.

The authors want to thank the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) for facilitating access to the research locations. Lastly, we are grateful for the participants who took part in the study.

Contents

Key definitions	iv	4.5. Access to natural resources	29
		4.5.1. Key trends and findings	29
Executive summary	vi	4.5.2. Background	29
		4.5.3. Findings	30
1. Introduction	1	4.6. Impact of reduced humanitarian assistance	33
1.1. Background and objective of the study	2	4.6.1. Key trends and findings	33
		4.6.2. Background	33
2. Context and research locations	5	4.6.3. Findings	33
3. Research approach and methodology	9	5. Gendered dimensions of common conflict patterns	39
3.1. Limitations	11		
		6. Dynamics and key actors in conflict management	43
4. Types and causes of conflicts and tensions	13		
4.1. Overall conflicts and causes identified	13	7. Connectors	47
4.2. Land ownership	15	7.1. Social connectors	47
4.2.1. Key trends and findings	15	7.2. Institutional and resource-based connectors	49
4.2.2. Background	15		
4.2.3. Findings	16	8. Concluding remarks	53
4.3. Farming and land access	21	8.1. Risks identified	53
4.3.1. Key trends and findings	21	8.2. Opportunities	55
4.3.2. Background	21		
4.3.3. Findings	21	9. Literature	57
4.4. Water infrastructures	26		
4.4.1. Key trends and findings	26	Abbreviations	61
4.4.2. Background	26		
4.4.3. Findings	27		



Women on their way to fetch water. Refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



Key definitions

Based on the conflict analysis guidelines developed by The Network for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (NCPBP), Danish Demining Group (DDG) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) (NCPBP, DDG, and DRC 2020) the report draws on the following key definitions:

- **Conflict:** Conflict is a normal part of human interaction, occurring when parties perceive their interests as incompatible, express hostility, or act against each other's interests. Conflict becomes destructive when parties resort to violence. Such conflicts are complex, with multiple causes, interconnected issues and dynamics, and various stages of escalation and de-escalation. Conflict analysis is an important tool for enabling action that mitigates destructive conflict and fosters peaceful societies.
- **Connectors:** Things that unify people despite their differences. Connectors reduce suspicion, mistrust, and inequality within a community.
- **Dividers:** Elements that raise tensions, division, or potential violent conflict between groups. Dividers foster suspicion, mistrust, or inequality within society.
- **Conflict sensitivity:** Conflict sensitivity is an organisation's ability to understand the context and conflict dynamics in which it operates, and how that context interacts with its interventions. Conflict sensitivity involves the ability to act on this understanding to avoid negative impacts while maximising positive impacts on conflict and peace. A commitment to conflict sensitivity is grounded in the recognition that humanitarian assistance and interventions in conflict-affected contexts are not neutral: the way they are administered can either exacerbate tensions or promote peace.
- **Do No Harm:** The 'Do No Harm' framework helps organisations understand complex group relationships by analysing dividers and connectors, assessing how their programmes will interact with the operational context, and adapting interventions to minimise negative impacts and enhance positive ones.





Coordination meeting in boda boda association in a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2025 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



Executive Summary

This conflict analysis is based on research conducted in the West Nile area of Uganda between March and June 2026 and draws on data from similar studies in this area conducted by the same research team since 2018. It aims to inform the Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI) programme, particularly the component coordinated by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in the West Nile area. The report builds on data from 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 119 respondents, a comprehensive literature review and past conflict analysis. The conflict analysis was conducted by the Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action (PARTOCA), a specialised research capacity within DRC that implements ethnographic, participatory studies across Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda using community-driven research approaches. The conflict analysis identifies local tensions and conflict dynamics, focusing mainly on resource-related tensions and conflicts between host and refugee communities across six districts (Yumbe, Moyo, Obongi, Koboko, Terego and Madi-Okollo) and five refugee settlements (Bidibidi, Palorinya, Lobule, Imvepi and Rhino Camp) in Uganda. The analysis aims to outline potential conflict-sensitivity risks and opportunities to reduce tensions and strengthen peaceful co-existence within and around the URRI programme's implementation areas.

Key findings

Main types of conflicts and tensions

Conflicts and tensions mainly revolve around issues of 1) land ownership, 2) access to land for farming and animal grazing, 3) access to water infrastructure, and 4) access to natural resources, primarily firewood, wooden poles for house construction and grass for roofing, as well as natural water sources. In addition, reduced humanitarian assistance has affected these conflict dynamics and triggered the escalation of other issues (including theft, debt, and household conflicts).

Main conflict drivers and causes

The main drivers and causes of conflict identified were poverty, resource scarcity, population growth, and reduced humanitarian assistance. In some locations, the changed climate was also identified as a cause of conflict.

Gender considerations

Conflicts impact men and women, old and young, differently, and some conflicts primarily put women at risk. Women are most often responsible for collecting firewood and fetching water; therefore, conflicts related to these tasks affect them the most. Women are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence

(SGBV) when collecting firewood in remote locations; however, they are also at risk of domestic violence (DV) in their own households. In addition, there are barriers to women's participation in savings groups, income-generating activities, and leadership roles.

Key actors in conflict management

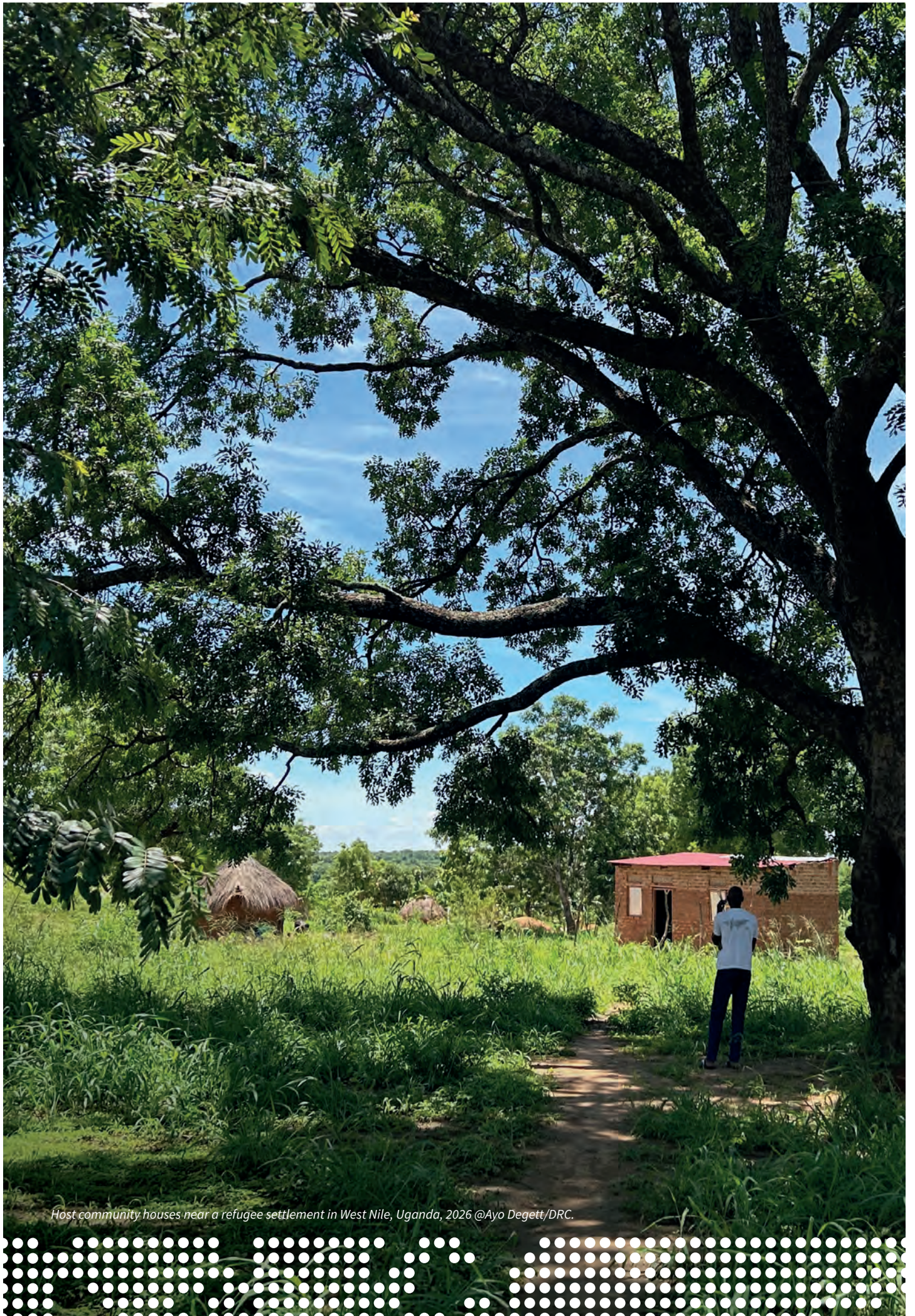
A variety of statutory and community-based actors influence conflict dynamics. Based on data collected for this assessment, the key actors involved in conflict management and resolution are the Local Councils (LCs) and Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs), water committees, elders, and, to some degree, the police. The LCs and RWCs, committees, religious leaders, and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) serve as key connectors, fostering dialogue and social cohesion. Government authorities, such as the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), also influence conflict management.

Main connectors for stability

The study identified several key connectors that can foster peaceful interactions and stability between refugee and host communities, and within these groups. These include social connectors, such as religious and language commonality, intermarriage, and frequent interaction at social events, including weddings and funerals, sports activities, music, drama and dance. The institutional and resource-based connectors include shared services, resources, and facilities such as schools, health facilities, and markets. Some connectors can strengthen peace and social cohesion within the programme, especially through shared goals and needs, including access to water, farmland, and livelihoods; shared training and activities; and mixed farmer and savings groups.

Conflict sensitivity opportunities

The study identified several opportunities for peaceful coexistence and conflict sensitivity. Savings and farming groups with both refugee and host community members can leverage shared needs and goals as a connector. URRI implementers support farmers and community groups that existed prior to the URRI implementation, often self-organised, and also groups that were organised as part of the URRI activities. Indicative results show that pre-existing groups, where participants knew each other for a long time and had built trusting relationships, had strong internal relations that made collaboration easier and reduced the risk of internal conflict. Committees – such as water user committees and land resolution committees – foster ownership and a clearer path of conflict management. This overall learning suggests great opportunities to expand and advance community-led committees for dams and water points.



Host community houses near a refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

1. Introduction

Uganda currently hosts over 2 million refugees, with over 884,270 residing in settlements in the West Nile area, the northwestern part of Uganda bordering South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), formerly known as the West Nile region. Most refugees in West Nile are from South Sudan (97.5%), and the second-largest group is from DR Congo (2%) (UNHCR 2026). In recent decades, Uganda has been more frequently affected by climate and weather hazards, which affect livelihoods, food security, health, and infrastructure (REACH 2026a:1). Climate change in Uganda manifests as higher average temperatures, heat waves, unpredictable rainfall patterns, floods and droughts (*ibid.*:1; Destrijcker et al. 2023:5). In refugee-hosting areas, access to natural resources (including water and fertile land) and basic services is scarce, and the impacts of climate change are particularly severe (REACH 2026a:1). The influx of refugees and overall population growth in the West Nile area have placed a greater strain on available resources and the local environment, resulting in economic, social, developmental, and humanitarian impacts (UN-Habitat 2021:2; Destrijcker et al. 2023:5). In particular, forestry, fertile farmland, and water resources are becoming scarcer and harder to access regularly, while increased demographic pressures in West Nile mean that fewer resources need to be shared between more people (Destrijcker et al. 2023:5–6). In addition, food assistance and other services in refugee-hosting settings across East Africa were drastically cut, reaching historically low levels in Uganda in 2025, as a direct effect of the United States of America (US) reduction in aid in early 2025 (Dawisha 2025; Halakhe 2025; NRG 2025; WFP 2025a).

These increased pressures on natural resources and services provided in areas where refugees and host communities live closely and are highly dependent on these to feed themselves mean that competition over access to these resources is triggering conflicts. This study provides important insights into key conflict dynamics and triggers currently unfolding alongside these developments and identifies opportunities to mitigate them and promote peace. Key data for this study were collected in April 2026 through qualitative, semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 119 respondents across the research locations among the host communities in five locations (Moyo, Yumbe, Terego, Madi-Okollo, and Koboko) and among the refugee communities in the settlements close to these areas (Palorinya Settlement, Bidibidi Settlement, Imvepi Settlement, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement and Lobule Settlement). The data were collected by the Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action (PARTOCA)'s peer researchers in West Nile, who belong to the refugee and host communities in these areas, together with the anthropologically trained lead researchers, the report's authors.

Based on these data and findings from a desk study, the conflict analysis provides an overview of the types of conflict in the area, with a specific focus on the four most frequent conflict types emerging from the data: land ownership; farming and land access; water provision infrastructure; and access to natural resources. The study explores the impact of reduced humanitarian assistance as a trigger of these and other conflicts and how the causes are perceived by the inhabitants. As part of this, the analysis examines key actors in conflict management, connectors that can be leveraged to strengthen peace, and opportunities for peaceful coexistence and conflict sensitivity.

1.1. Background and objective of the study

With funding from the Embassy of Denmark (Danida), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Save the Children International are leading two consortia to implement the Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI) programme from 2025 to 2028. The programme aims to improve climate resilience among women, men and youth in refugee and host communities while fostering inclusive, cohesive and environmentally sustainable development in refugee-hosting areas. DRC's

research team, PARTOCA, conducted this conflict analysis with the aim of contributing to maintaining social cohesion and ensuring programme interventions are implemented in a conflict-sensitive manner. The analysis seeks to identify existing and emerging local tensions, conflict drivers, and opportunities to strengthen the URRI programme's implementation by providing actionable insights into local power relations and conflict dynamics.



A newly established water tank in a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

The analysis is directly linked to all three URRI outcomes¹ by examining conflict dynamics that may affect access to climate-smart agriculture services, market systems and livelihood opportunities; environmental restoration, natural-resource management and equitable access to land, water and ecosystem services; and gender equality, women's leadership and household decision-making promoted through the Gender Action Learning System (GALS). The study applies a Do No Harm approach by assessing how programme targeting, resource allocation, partnerships and implementation modalities could unintentionally reinforce existing divisions or create new tensions between refugees and host communities. Through its link to URRI's outcomes, the study also reflects Danida's gender priorities by considering how

gender norms, unequal power relations and barriers affecting women and girls influence access to resources, participation in decision-making, exposure to conflict and opportunities for meaningful economic and social empowerment.

The overall objective of the analysis is to outline key conflict tendencies, with particular attention to resource-related tensions and relations between refugee and host communities, and to identify conflict-sensitivity risks and opportunities to reduce tensions, strengthen social cohesion, and support locally led peacebuilding within the URRI programme. This report does not include specific recommendations for the URRI programme. These are included in a separate internal annex to ensure respondents' anonymity.

¹ Outcome 1: Climate adaptation and resilience through inclusive climate-smart agriculture; Outcome 2: Sustainable environmental management through conservation, biodiversity, and productivity; Outcome 3: Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, climate adaptation, and environmental management.



Research team receiving direction from refugee settlement inhabitants in West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



2. Context and research locations

Uganda's refugee policy is often portrayed as one of the world's most progressive, supporting refugees in pursuing self-reliance, promoting integration rather than confinement, and directing aid resources to both host and refugee communities (Degett 2018; DRC 2018:4). The formal framework outlined in the 2006 Refugee Act² and the 2010 Refugees Regulations³ opens Uganda's doors to asylum-seekers regardless of nationality. It grants refugees relative freedom of movement and the right to seek employment, while also providing each refugee family with a small piece of land for their exclusive use (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:16)⁴. Recently, the refugee policy has changed, with the Government of Uganda deciding to suspend the *prima facie* status for asylum seekers from South Sudan, Sudan and the DR Congo (EU 2026).

Out of the 2 million refugees hosted in Uganda, 644,875 reside in the settlements in Northwest Nile (Bidibidi and Palorinya) and Southwest Nile (Lobule, Imvepi and Rhino Camp) (UNHCR 2026). Over the past 20 years, particularly since the outbreak of conflict in the Southern part of South Sudan in 2016, the borders and division of these refugee-hosting districts have changed numerous times, reflecting the relative advantage of the services (establishment of water systems, permanent buildings, development of jobs to support these activities, healthcare services, schools, etc.) that often are connected to hosting refugees. The description below reflects the borders as of June 2026, but, as we discuss later in the analysis, some of these borders remain subject to tensions. It is therefore not unlikely that they could be modified in future.

Yumbe District is one of the most densely populated rural districts in Uganda, with a population of over 945,000 people in 2024. The host population is mainly of the Aringa ethnic group, and the predominant religion is Islam, practised by over 70% of residents (REACH 2026b:3). The majority are subsistence farmers, while rearing of livestock – mainly goats, poultry and cattle, is practised on a smaller scale (ibid.:4). Nearly one-third of Yumbe District's population consists of refugees, most of whom reside in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement.

Bidibidi Settlement is located east of Yumbe town and extends all the way to Imvepi Settlement. It was established in August 2016 to accommodate the influx of South Sudanese refugees, mainly from the Greater Equatoria region (IFRC 2016). The population expanded rapidly, and the settlement quickly became one of the largest in the world. Just a few months after its opening, the settlement reached its maximum capacity and stopped accepting new arrivals by December 2016 (DRC 2018:8; REACH, NRC, and UNHCR 2019). Bidibidi is divided into five zones and extends into the sub-counties of Apo, Kochi, Romogi, Ariwa, and Kululu (REACH 2026b:4). The settlement currently hosts 209,928 refugees, with the vast majority being South Sudanese (99.9%) and only a very small number from DR Congo, Sudan, and Ethiopia (UNHCR and Government of Uganda 2026). Although the refugee population is diverse, most are Bari speakers from Central Equatoria, belonging to the ethnic groups of Bari, Mundari, Kuku, Kakwa, Pojulu, and the Nyagwara. The remaining refugees are primarily from the Ma'di and Acholi groups in Eastern Equatoria, with a small number belonging to the Nuer and Dinka groups (DRC 2018:9).

Moyo District had a population of over 109,000 inhabitants as of 2024 and mostly hosts self-settled refugees (REACH 2026c:2). Moyo District borders South Sudan and therefore serves as a transit point for South Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers, who are then settled in refugee camps elsewhere in the country (UIA 2021). Madi, Gimara, Pajulu and Kakwa are the main ethnic communities in the district (ibid.).

Obongi District was carved out of Moyo District and became operational in 2019 (REACH 2026c:2). In 2024, Obongi District had an estimated population of 142,000, a large increase from 2014, before it became its own district, when just 43,061 people lived in the area. The population of Obongi mainly belongs to the Ma'di ethnic group, alongside other West Nile ethnic groups, including the Kakwa and Lugbara. The main religions practised are Christianity and Islam. The district is primarily rural, with residents engaging in subsistence

² See the 2006 Refugee Act in the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) overview of country-specific refugee legislation and treaties (Refworld 2006).

³ See the 2010 Refugees Regulations (Refworld 2010).

⁴ In practise, however, refugees encounter several challenges, for instance, difficulties in obtaining formal employment and their heavy reliance on aid for basic needs confines them to camp settings where assistance is accessible. The camps are mostly located in remote rural areas, with limited opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, securing work permits, or engaging in local business (Degett 2018; Kaiser 2006:602; O'Callaghan 2018:12; Kaiser 2007; Omata and Gidron 2025; Gidron 2025).

farming and fishing to sustain their households (REACH 2026c:3). Obongi District hosts a large refugee population, most of whom reside in Palorinya Refugee Settlement (REACH 2026c:4).

Palorinya Refugee Settlement is located along the Nile, south of Moyo town. It was established in December 2016 and is currently closed to new arrivals (REACH, NRC, and UNHCR 2019). The settlement has seven zones, covers a surface area of 37.58 square kilometres and is located in Obongi district. As of April 2026, Palorinya hosts 144,330 refugees, with 99.9% South Sudanese and a small number from DR Congo and Sudan (UNHCR and Government of Uganda 2026). Refugees thus constitute a substantial proportion of the district's total population (REACH 2026c).

Koboko District had a population of over 271,700 people in 2024. The population comprises various ethnic groups, mainly the Kakwa community, as well as the Lugbara and other West Nile groups. Christianity and Islam are the most practised religions in the district (REACH 2026d:3). Most people in Koboko district are subsistence farmers, with smaller-scale rearing of livestock such as goats, poultry, and cattle (ibid.:4). Koboko District hosts refugees in Lobule Settlement; however, many refugees have also self-settled in urban areas (Cities Alliance 2026:8).

Lobule Settlement is located about a 15-minute drive outside Koboko town. It opened in September 2013 to receive refugees fleeing the conflict in DR Congo (UNHCR and REACH 2018). Lobule Settlement is small compared with the other settlements in the study. The settlement has two zones and four villages, with a population of 6,528 refugees, mainly from DR Congo (99.3%) and a small number of South Sudanese (0.7%) (UNHCR and Government of Uganda 2026). The refugee population primarily comprises the Kakwa ethnic group, which means they share cultural, language, and religious commonalities with the local Ugandan Kakwas. Lobule settlement does not receive new arrivals, although it borders South Sudan and the DR Congo (REACH 2026d:2). Municipal and settlement data indicate that approximately 25,000 self-settled refugees and asylum seekers reside in the district, constituting a significant part of the urban population. These include individuals and families from South Sudan and the DR Congo who have settled in urban and peri-urban areas outside formal settlement areas (REACH 2026d:4).

Terego District was carved out of Arua District and established in 2020, based on the borders of the former Terego County (ended in 2006) (REACH

2026e:3). Terego District has its administrative headquarters in the Leju trading centre and currently has a population of 323,200. The district is mainly rural, with residents living in scattered villages and trading centres. The majority of the population is Lugbara, and Christianity is the primary religion (ibid.:4). Agriculture forms the backbone of the local economy, with the majority of households engaged in farming (ibid.:3). As of January 2026, Terego District hosts over 76,500 refugees who reside in and around Imvepi Settlement, as well as in parts of Rhino Camp Refugee Settlements (REACH 2026e:3).

Imvepi Settlement was established in February 2017 to accommodate asylum seekers fleeing the war in South Sudan (ASPR 2022:14). The settlement has four zones located in Odupi sub-county, which has 53,354 inhabitants. Currently, Imvepi Settlement hosts 79,832 refugees, mostly from South Sudan (93.2%), DR Congo (5.8%) and Sudan (1%).

Madi Okollo District, formerly part of Arua District, had a population of over 178,000 people in 2024, most of whom belong to the Madi ethnic group. Similar to the other West Nile location, Christianity and Islam are the main religions practised by the population (REACH 2026a:4). The district's headquarters is located in Madi Okollo Town (ibid.:3). The population is mainly rural. Most of the district's households depend on agriculture, livestock keeping and small-scale trade (ibid.:4).

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement has hosted refugees since 1980 and continues to receive new arrivals. As of April 2026, 204,257 refugees and asylum-seekers live in Rhino Camp, of whom 93.2% are South Sudanese; others are from DR Congo, Sudan, and Rwanda, with a small number from Burundi and Eritrea (UNHCR and Government of Uganda 2026). Most of the South Sudanese arrived as part of the massive influx of 716,732 refugees who fled South Sudan between 2016 and 2017 (OIOS 2018:1). Rhino Camp is home to multiple ethnic groups from South Sudan, with its population constantly changing due to daily new arrivals. The largest zones are mainly inhabited by refugees from southern South Sudan, including Bari-speaking communities such as the Kakwa, Mundari, Kuku, Kelico, and Mundo. Additionally, Rhino Camp hosts a significant number of refugees from the Dinka and Nuer groups, mostly originating from the northern and eastern regions of South Sudan. Notably, the Nuer population has increased in recent years (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:16–17). Rhino Camp has eight zones and covers approximately 85km². The settlement spans parts of Odupi, Omugo, and Uriama sub-counties in Terego District and extends into Madi-Okollo District.

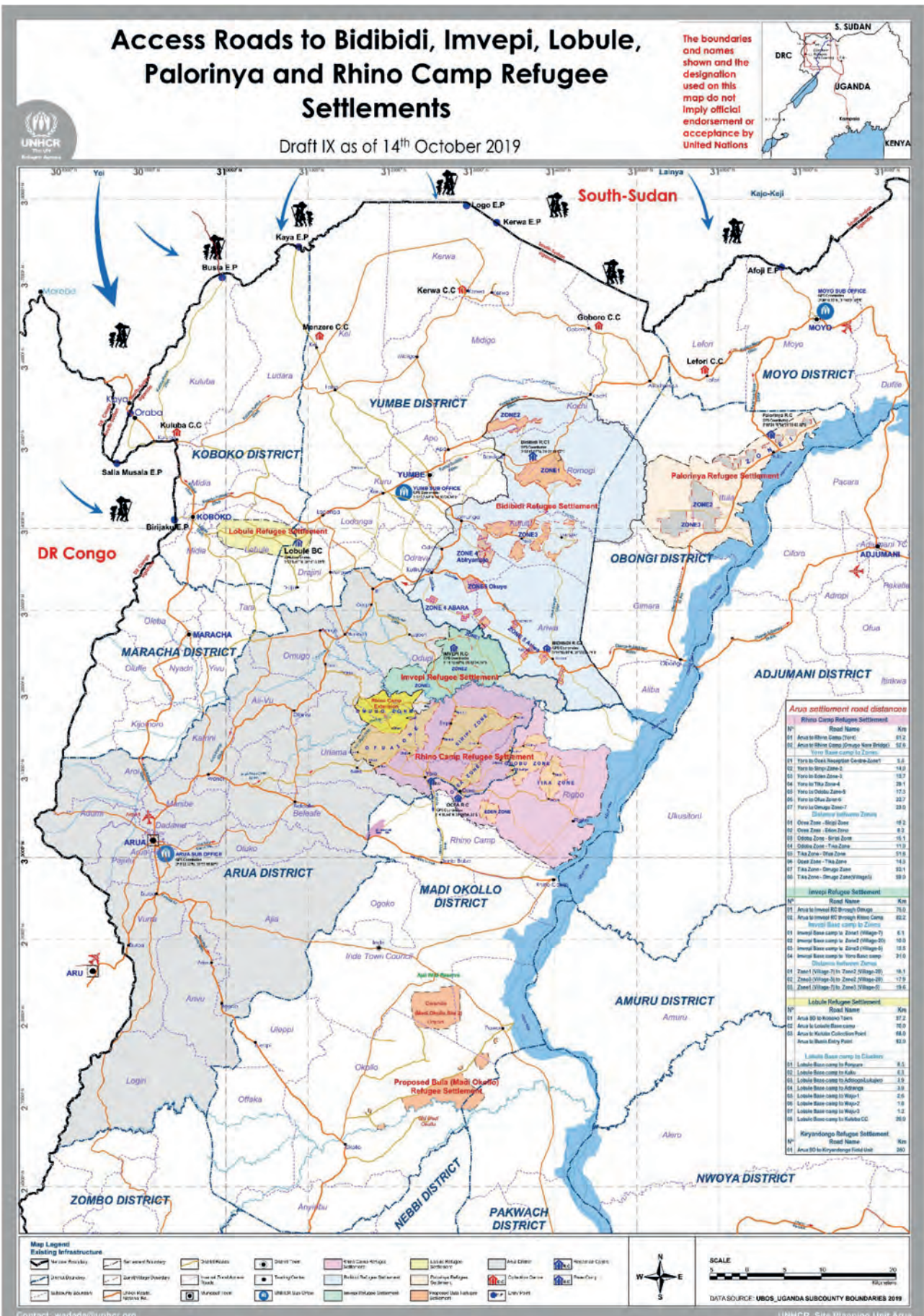


Figure 1: Map of settlement locations from 2019, except the new Zone 8 in Rhino Camp; most locations are accurate (UNHCR 2019).



Roadside shop operated by a refugee. Refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

3. Research approach and methodology

This study analyses overall conflict tendencies, focusing mainly on resource-related tensions and conflicts between host and refugee communities in and around five settlements in West Nile, Uganda (Bidibidi, Palorinya, Lobule, Imvepi and Rhino Camp), with a specific focus on host-refugee relations and resource-related tensions. The conflict analysis relies primarily on qualitative data, with some quantitative elements. The analysis combines desk-study data with findings from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 119 respondents across the research locations. At the end of all interviews and focus groups, the respondents were asked to respond to a set of yes/no questions, which were compared across the groups. Data were collected in April 2026, during which two FGDs were conducted at each location, with host community members and refugee communities, respectively. The FGDs lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. In addition, KIIs were conducted mainly with elected community leaders (Local Council and Refugee Welfare Council)⁵, as well as a few KIIs with women and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners. URRI partners largely identified research participants. To support and contextualise the data collected, the team conducted a desk review of relevant literature, academic work, research reports, and experiences from existing programmes in the research locations.

The approach and analysis of the entire study, including the development of the interview guides and the understanding of the existing power dynamics, humanitarian presence and local tensions in the research locations, draws heavily on

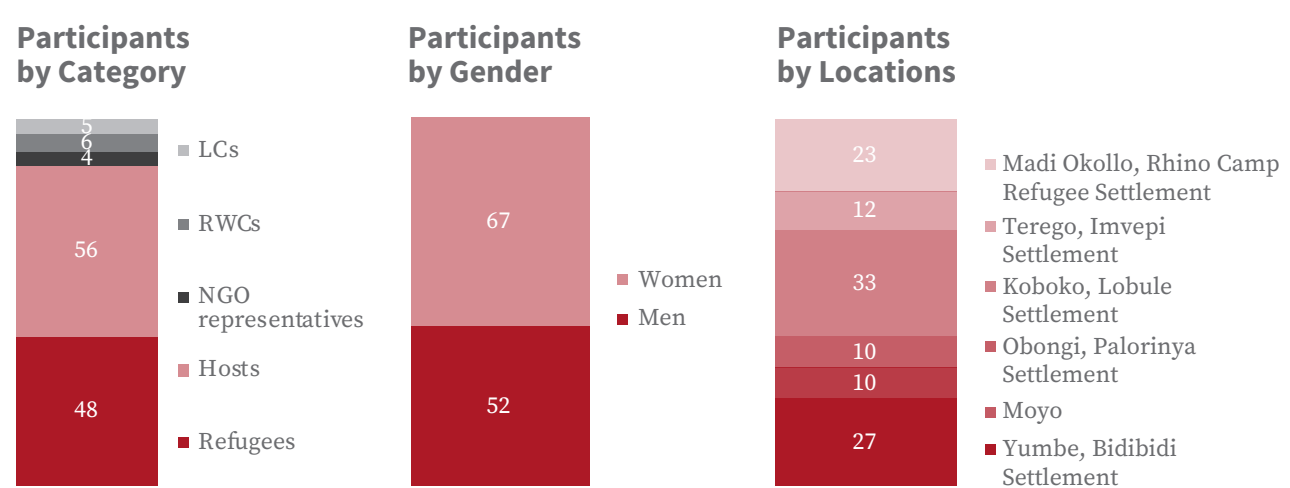
the existing work of the research team, PARTOCA. PARTOCA, a specialised research capacity within DRC, aims to deepen knowledge on how displaced populations navigate their circumstances, seek opportunities, and adapt to changing conditions through locally led, long-term, and cross-border research. Since 2018, the team has implemented ethnographic, participatory studies across Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, primarily among South Sudanese refugees and returnees. Our approach prioritises community ownership and embedded research practice, characterised by a community-driven research modality. PARTOCA recruits and trains refugees (and host community members) as ethnographic peer researchers, who conduct research within their own communities in the refugee camps where they live. This model ensures access, trust, and ethical data collection.

PARTOCA peer-researchers, who belong to the refugee and host communities and speak the languages of these areas, collected the data alongside the anthropologically trained lead researchers who authored the report. Prior to the data collection, all field assistants received training in conflict analysis and the specific data collection tools for the research. One benefit of PARTOCA's participatory approach is that the peer-researchers hold a deep understanding of local dynamics. Their involvement has helped ensure that research activities were designed and implemented in a manner that minimises potential negative impacts on individuals or communities and avoids exacerbating tensions.

⁵ The local community governance in Uganda consists of Local Councils (LCs) with cabinets and chairpersons at five tiers, from village to district (LCIII being sub-county representatives). The LCs are elected by their communities to serve as their official representatives. The governance structure for the refugees, the Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs), mirrors that of the LCs. The RWCs are composed of elected refugee leaders.

Data collection overview	
Participants	119
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	10
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	12
% Female participants	56.3%
% Male participants	43.7%
% Refugee participants	45.4%
% Host participants	54.6%

Data collection overview by location						
	Yumbe, Bidibidi	Moyo	Obongi, Palorinya	Koboko, Lobule	Terego, Imvepi	Madi-Okollo, Rhino Camp
Participants	27	10	10	33	12	23
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	2	1	1	2	2	2
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	2	2	1	2	0	2
% Female participants	44.4%	60	40	78	50	2
% Male participants	55.6%	40%	60%	21.2%	50%	47.8%
% Refugee participants	51.9%	10%	100%	30.3%	41.7%	60.9%
% Host participants	48.1%	90%	0%	69.7%	58.3%	39.1%



The data for the analysis have been collected and stored responsibly, in accordance with established guidelines on confidentiality in humanitarian action and research ethics. The research follows the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the International Committee of the

Red Cross' (ICRC) standards for data protection in humanitarian settings (ALLEA 2023; Marelli 2024)"source": "DOI.org (CSL JSON. All individuals and actors have been assigned pseudonyms from the first point of recording their statements and actions to ensure anonymity.

3.1. Limitations

The sample size for the study cannot be considered representative of either the refugee or the host communities, strictly scientifically speaking. To ensure scientific representation, many more households and wider diversity needed to be considered. The research team engaged with a sample of community members in each research location, and the study was, for instance, not designed with a strong focus on minority groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, gender minorities, people living with specific vulnerabilities or disabilities). Minority groups are, nevertheless, considered in the study and are key to the findings, including considerations for women and youths' inclusion. Interviews were conducted almost exclusively with the majority ethnic groups in each research location. In some interviews with refugees, 'tribalism', discrimination and alliances along ethnic lines did come up, but more specific data collection on these dynamics would be required to deliver a sufficiently detailed analysis of this. Despite these restrictions, the analysis seeks to triangulate findings by combining the qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs collected in-country with the desk study, while also drawing on learnings and the large data pool of other conflict studies by PARTOCA. This triangulation supported validation

of the collected data by placing respondents' experiences within broader dynamics documented in other studies.

Although we include a section on the gendered dimensions of conflict (see section 5), a full gender analysis was not the study's objective. The FGDs included both women and men, which may have affected what both women and men felt comfortable sharing. The analysis indicates which conflicts are present in the areas that could benefit from further investigation. Some FGDs with host communities were conducted far from the refugee settlements; as a result, the host community members interviewed had limited interaction with refugees. This was particularly the case in the FGD carried out in Koboko and, to some extent, in Moyo. Most respondents in these locations had so limited interaction with the refugees that no conflicts existed on the ground and thus could not be explored in interviews. Many important challenges emerged during the FGDs and KIIs across locations. This analysis, however, focuses mainly on conflicts and opportunities related to specific topics relevant to URRI activities. In addition, historical conflicts and grievances are outside the study's scope and have therefore not been included in the analysis.



Dialogue meetings between host community and refugee representatives by URR1 team in host community in West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



4. Types and causes of conflicts and tensions

4.1. Overall conflicts and causes identified

The analysis identified four main types of conflicts and tensions: land ownership; farming and land access (including grazing); water infrastructure; and access to natural resources (primarily firewood, grass, and natural water sources). Reduced humanitarian assistance is adding pressure to these conflict dynamics and increasing other conflicts (including theft, debt, and household conflicts). The complications in accessing farmland and the effect of the reduced humanitarian assistance on the households' ability to leverage the resources delivered by the URRI implementers were also pointed out in the latest annual report for URRI, emphasising that these issues were not considered in the design phase and might need adaptation and attention going forward to ensure successful implementation of URRI (2026). This report treats reduced humanitarian assistance as a cross-cutting focus area and conflict driver.

Across all locations, respondents identified land disputes as a major conflict trigger. These appear at two levels: higher-level land ownership conflicts and interpersonal conflicts over farming and land access. All refugee settlements in West Nile are located on the land of local kin groups. Generally, those with authority in land-related conflicts are landowners, locally referred to as 'landlords', elders, and LCs. Refugees and host community members, who do not own land themselves and depend on renting land for farming, are most affected by these conflicts, especially as many lack formal written agreements. Land ownership disputes among Ugandans also affect refugees when land changes hands, becomes disputed, or has multiple local owners. This is the case, for instance, in Lobule, where the land agreement for the settlement has expired, and in the new Zone 8 of Rhino Camp, which is subject to disputes over the location of the district border. Conflicts over land ownership and access could affect URRI's interventions on climate-smart agriculture and farmer groups. Difficulties in accessing sustainable agreements on fertile land is already indicated in URRI's 2025 annual report, with this conflict analysis, we demonstrate the specific

conflict elements attached to these access problems to be considered for the following years of URRI implementation (URRI 2026).

The interviews also highlighted conflicts over access to water and firewood. They tend to affect women more, as they do these daily tasks. People mostly collect firewood outside settlements, in areas that formally belong to the host community. Conflicts over access to firewood may affect URRI's tree-planting interventions.

The location of water taps or boreholes is key in many conflicts, as it determines who feels ownership over them. When established and functioning well, water committees or watchmen play a key role in resolving and mitigating community-level conflicts relating to water access. Water infrastructure conflicts could impact URRI's interventions on hydrological stabilisation and creation of community water points.

Humanitarian actors may influence conflict dynamics or fuel existing power tensions while delivering services. For URRI, these processes involve decisions on dam and water point locations, and on selection criteria for training and programming, e.g., farmers or savings groups (refugees, host community members, youth, elders, women, men, ethnic groups, etc.).

Conflicts are complex and rarely originate from a single cause; they stem from multiple interrelated drivers. In the study, the main drivers of conflict identified were poverty and resource scarcity. Resource scarcity includes insufficient water supply relative to population size, increased competition for the limited farmland to rent, and depleted natural resources such as firewood. Previous studies in the same locations similarly argue that resource scarcity is the main reason for conflicts between refugees and host communities (Vancluysen and Ingelaere 2020:303–304). In Yumbe and Bidibidi, participants expressed that changes in weather conditions accelerate the negative impact of these

conflicts on resource scarcity. Drought has affected cultivation seasons, increasing food insecurity and tensions, including competition over fertile land and theft of crops and food, as seen across the research locations.

Among the host community, population growth has led to increased competition over (fertile) land. Before, this part of Uganda was sparsely populated, and there was plenty of land, distributed among sons for generations (traditionally, land is inherited along paternal lines, and this is still the case today), and often landowners lent and gifted pieces of land to friends, relatives and people in need. In line with population growth and competition for resources, disputes over ownership, often over deals made decades ago, flare up. Most land in northern Uganda is held under customary tenure; land ‘ownership’ in the sense of formal freehold title is rare. Current commodification of land increases conflict among landholders (Meinert and Whyte 2023).

Reduced humanitarian assistance and (perceived) unequal distribution were also reported as triggers of increased conflict among refugees and between refugees and host communities over farmland and natural resources, while also heightening tensions as theft, debt and household conflicts increase. The sharp decline in humanitarian assistance in 2025 means many refugees have been phased out of food and cash assistance, while healthcare and education services are decreasing (Degett, Whyte, and Hansen 2026).

These sharp declines in assistance and options for casual labour with the humanitarian actors also affect the host communities close to the settlements and the level of conflict due to petty crime and ‘assistance envy’, feelings of jealousy over aid. This has increased demand for – and the cost of – farmland rental. Many host community members appreciate the presence of refugees in their area because it has brought ‘development’, as mentioned in FGDs and in many previous interviews conducted by the research team over the past nine years (see also Whyte and Vusso 2025). The types of ‘development’ mentioned in interviews with host community members included health facilities, secondary schools (in remote parts of West Nile), economic recovery programmes, and casual/incentive jobs. This, along with refugees’ ability to exchange items, conduct small-scale trade, and rent

land, is now decreasing because many refugees no longer have the income to support these activities. Reduced humanitarian assistance in the context of URRI’s implementation makes it important to consider intervention targeting and potential social cohesion risks. The need to adapt programming better to the changed financial reality of most refugee households is also mentioned in the annual report by the URRI team (URRI 2026).

In most locations, the overall relationship between the refugee and host community was described as fairly good. In sites where the land is disputed or where long-term relations have not yet been established, there is generally more tension between refugee and host communities (particularly in Lobule and zone 8 of Rhino Camp). Participants mainly described conflicts not in terms of the entire refugee or host communities, but as caused by specific criminals, individual landlords, or that “...both the refugee and the host community, there are those ones who are good and there are those ones who are bad” (Bidibidi FGD).

Alliances and hostilities along ethnic lines are key dimensions of internal conflicts among South Sudanese and between South Sudanese refugees and their host communities. Refugees reported numerous instances in interviews where they experienced what they described as ‘tribalism’ and discrimination based on ethnicity. These divides were identified as important dimensions of conflict, but given the above limitations of the short study, further data collection exploring these dynamics more closely would be required to conduct a nuanced and detailed analysis of ethnic divisions. A previous study by the research team analysed inter-ethnic conflicts in Rhino Camp and found that ethnically related conflicts often escalated and were triggered after minor disagreements, such as disputes between children from diverse ethnic groups at water points (Degett and Whyte 2023:18–19). Many ethnic groups in Rhino Camp have longstanding tensions rooted in the South Sudanese wars, revealing a complex web of rivalries and alliances among them (ibid.). While ethnicity is often a significant and intricate aspect of conflict, it is not the primary focus of this study.

4.2. Land ownership

4.2.1. Key trends and findings

- The study shows that conflicts and tensions over land ownership mainly centre on inheritance, land sales and compensation, land agreements, and unclear or disputed borders, both between individual landowners and between counties.
- In these conflicts, the main parties are the host community members (and their leaders), as they are the landowners. Refugees – and host community members who do not own land – are mostly indirectly affected when their rented plots are located on disputed land. Sometimes these conflicts result in the loss of access to plots or their destruction.
- Land agreements over the land where settlements are located tend to affect the relationships between refugee and host communities; when agreements expire, they can lead to conflict and hostility toward refugees (as in Lobule).
- Land ownership disputes are particularly intense when the land is fertile or when potential compensation is involved. In both Yumbe and Moyo, the construction of a road has led to community conflicts between clans and ethnic groups over land ownership and compensation entitlement.
- Programme implementation that involves infrastructure, such as dams, can trigger future conflicts and tensions over ownership after the project period or if accidents occur. In addition, if actors implementing the interventions do not appreciate traditions of land cleansing, this may also trigger conflicts.
- Interpersonal disputes arise over inheritance and land division within families. Population growth is a key factor: while the land remains the same size, as families grow, it must be divided among more people, and existing deals/agreements with external parties become disputed.
- Unclear and disputed borders can cause conflicts: Some refugees and host community members expressed that they do not know exactly where the borders between districts and between Uganda and South Sudan lie.
- Conflicts over land ownership could affect URRI's interventions on climate-smart agriculture, dam construction, and farmer groups. URRI and humanitarian actors may

influence conflict dynamics or fuel existing power tensions in decisions about dam and water-point locations. It is important to consider who owns the land where services are implemented.

4.2.2. Background

In West Nile, land is a crucial resource for livelihoods. Land ownership is simultaneously sensitive and divisive, rooted in debates over resource sharing that can trigger bitterness and insecurity. Moreover, land is more than just a resource; it holds deep cultural significance for the host community in the area, who maintain strong cultural and emotional ties to their land (DRC 2018:19; Destrijcker et al. 2023:33). The history of land ownership in Northern Uganda and West Nile is complex, shaped by conflict and political interference. Uganda recognises multiple types of land tenure systems, and although authorities have endeavoured to establish legal frameworks for land ownership, much rural land in West Nile remains managed under customary law and traditional chiefdoms (Destrijcker et al. 2023:33). Consequently, land used for settlements generally falls under the customary land tenure system. The land ownership system is recognised and regulated by Uganda's 1995 Constitution and the Land Act of 2010, which support traditional practices of the host community, including customary land tenure (NRC 2024:7). Under statutory law, women have the legal right to own and inherit land equally with men, but these rights are often overridden by customary practices that restrict women's rights to access, inherit, and own land (Foote 2025:49; UCOBAC and ILC n.d.:1). Customary tenure refers to community-recognised rights for land use (Burke and Kobusingye 2014:18). Land under customary tenure is typically managed by structures such as clans or sub-clans (IRRI 2019:12). While individuals act as custodians of the land, it ultimately belongs to the clan. Land custodians decide on ownership, access, and regulate its use and transfer, often in consultation with elders or clan members (Burke and Kobusingye 2014:18). Custodians or landowners are usually elders or family heads who make decisions regarding customary land matters (IRRI 2019:12). The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)

generally negotiates with these local community leaders to gain access to land for refugee settlements (NRC 2024:7). OPM is the Ugandan government body responsible for all refugee-related affairs, including determining refugee status, allocating land for refugees, and coordinating and managing settlements. According to Uganda's 2010 Refugee Regulations, refugees in settlements may access land for cultivation, but they do not own it and are therefore not permitted to rent, buy, or sell it (NRC 2024:7). Previous studies indicate that in some cases, negotiations and land allocations to refugees have fostered resentment among the local host community, especially where payments were expected but not made (IRRI 2019:14; DRC 2018:25; Destrijcker et al. 2023:33). However, generally, the host community has welcomed refugees. In much of the West Nile area, refugees and hosts share linguistic and cultural similarities and often intermarry, particularly among certain ethnic groups. They also share the experience of being refugees, as many Ugandans were displaced to South Sudan in the 1980s (DRC 2018:5; UN-Habitat 2021:2; Degett 2018; Harrell-Bond 1986).

4.2.3. Findings

In Koboko, for the host community living farther from the settlement, the main issue raised regarding land ownership was that land has become a scarce resource: *'Recently, the population has shot up, and land has become limited. In the past, our grandfathers used to give land for free. But now, because of that [land] shortage, people are demanding back that land'* (FGD Koboko). This sentiment of having to 'demand back' land has led to many conflicts, as plots are, in practice, owned and used by multiple owners and users. For instance, in one case, a man referred to as Samuel sought to reclaim his grandfather's land. The land had been given to another man. When Samuel confronted him, the man said, 'It was your grandfather who gave me the land. He has even given us the boundary, and this is the boundary between you and me.' Samuel felt he was the rightful owner. The conflict eventually reached the police and remains unresolved. The families using the land no longer visit each other and have not yet decided whether to sit down together for a dialogue to find a solution.

In Lobule, the land agreement for the settlement itself was identified as a major point of conflict, creating tension between refugees and members of the nearby host community. The land agreement was originally signed for five years and has exceeded that period by far. Refugees reported in the interviews that the host community want their

land back: *'now since the food rations have already been cut off, what are the refugees doing here? Why don't they leave their land and go? That's what the host community are trying to offer to us.'* This creates a high level of tension between the two communities, which has also complicated the structures for conflict management. At the time of the interview, the village chairperson explained that he received threats to the level that he needed to leave Lobule and move to Koboko town:

'I cannot stay in my place because I know something may happen to me. These people may come one day and burn me or kill me in my home. That's why I decided to be in town, and I just moved here [Lobule] to do my work and go back... There are also some kinds of words spoken by the locals that they have killed a lot of South Sudanese refugees who have been here before... For me, it's simple; they can kill me. So with all those words, it has made me scared.' (Lobule FGD)

As the quote illustrates, the level of tension between refugees and their host community neighbours is very high, with explicit threats, even if the conflict has not manifested in violence. Yet, refugees in Lobule see no option of returning to DR Congo, where the conflict which displaced them is still ongoing.

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement is situated on clan-owned land, held under customary tenure. The land is therefore managed through traditional governance and inherited through ancestral lines (O'Callaghan 2018:20). Both Rhino Camp and Imvepi settlement were in Arua district. The creation of the new Madi-Okollo district became a political point of contention due to the potential advantages of refugee presence, because funds from the refugee response are channelled through the district hosting the refugees (IRRI 2019:16). The host and refugee communities residing in the newly established Zone 8 of Rhino Camp live on the border between the two new districts, **Madi-Okollo and Terego**. The district border remains disputed, and as a result, the services on this land are contested. For instance, an international organisation is constructing a motorised water system in the area, but both districts want the pipes on their land to serve their own inhabitants. The project is therefore delayed and disputed. The host community in Madi-Okollo indicated that constructing Zone 8 was an attempt to balance the advantages of the refugee-hosting areas between the two districts, rather than a necessary measure. Several interlocutors stated that most refugees formally belonging to

and registered in Zone 8 are staying with relatives in the more established areas of the settlement. According to them, services and funding are put to better use in these populated areas, in contrast to Zone 8, where they are spread thin in the sparsely populated new zone.

According to the respondents in interviews, the land agreement for Zone 8 were still disputed. In the refugees' perception, current tensions may stem from the host community's dissatisfaction with the land agreement where Zone 8 is placed:

'The owners of this land were not paid; they have a balance of money to be paid by OPM and UNHCR for allowing refugees to be put here. If you don't pay this balance, it will cause problems for you [people living in Zone 8]. So, what we are thinking is maybe the differences we are having with the host community are because of this. And I am giving this as a recommendation that whoever they made an agreement with for this land of Zone 8 should be able to pay what the landlords need and so that we will have a good relationship with the landlords and the community around [rather] than [there] being a problem (...) and the host community will end up killing us one by one.' (Rhino Camp FGD)

As indicated in this statement, the refugee community is concerned about the perceived land agreement issue and fears that tensions may escalate to violence if not managed. Despite a government policy against paying communities, some communities may still have certain expectations. Other studies show that although host communities across the West Nile area have generally given land for settlements free of charge, many had specific expectations about how they would benefit from this arrangement (DRC 2018:25; IRRI 2019:13–14). Many felt promises went unmet, and many expected appreciation for their generosity in one way or the other (ibid.).

In Terego, the host community mostly faced challenges with land rented from other community members. According to them, disputes over land ownership have, in some cases, become harder to resolve after the government officially divided the land into different districts. According to the FGD participants, the LC surveyed the land and set the boundaries, proclaiming: *'Whatever land that we have divided, there is no need for you to have issues on it. If you have any other complaints, you can continue with it, but we're doing this today, we're not returning back soon.'* As such, they discouraged the

community from raising issues related to district boundaries and division. These findings indicate that it might be difficult to resolve conflicts related to use of the land, as long as the borders remain disputed.

For respondents in **Imvepi settlement**, the cemetery appeared to be a key area of concern. In contrast to other areas of the West Nile, refugees are not allowed to bury their relatives within or in close proximity to their plots; all deceased inhabitants need to be buried at the local cemetery. Normally, this would not be an issue, but the cemetery is currently full and has been for some time. Grieving families are therefore turned away, with no other option than transporting their dead relatives to South Sudan, according to the refugees interviewed. The cost of transporting the deceased across the border is high, and many families are struggling to find solutions. The crosscutting issue on disputed land ownership by the host community was also brought up in the FGD:

'There was a conflict between the hosts about the land. Somebody was given land [then] the other one came saying, "why are you giving my land? It belongs to me". And the other one said, "oh, you are the son of my sister. You don't belong here. You belong somewhere else. So this land belongs to me". So that was the conflict. They fought a lot but it didn't include the refugees. But it affected us because all those plots that were [cultivated] by refugees, all the things were chopped down. They just told the refugees to leave this place... So those areas, they were fighting there, whether you have cultivated something or not, you cannot get anything... So the things we cultivated were destroyed. They destroyed everything in the garden.' (FGD Imvepi)

Where there are disputes over land ownership, as in this case between a man and his nephew, they affect the refugees who have rented the land for farming. The dispute was resolved, although it escalated to violence, and several host community members needed medical attention. Although the refugees were not involved in the conflict, their crops were caught in the crossfire, putting them in a vulnerable position. An almost identical episode was recorded by the PARTOCA research team in January 2025 in Rhino Camp, and it does not seem uncommon.

In Moyo, rising poverty was reported to cause host community members to sell their land to afford food or school fees. Sometimes, the sale of land

– especially for humanitarian purposes – leads to greater conflicts between clans; for example, a landlord sold 100 acres of land for the construction of a school. A landlord from another clan then said the land belonged to them, sparking an ongoing conflict between the two clans. A man in the FGD explained that the land was sold ‘*maybe because of poverty and maybe because of greed. If you are greedy, you may decide to own everything. Poverty may be there, but greediness may also be there.*’ In Moyo, several similar instances of clan conflicts over land appear. Often, the most fertile land is the most contested. This was the case in one conflict between two ethnic groups: ‘*It’s also about the fertility of the soil. When the land is fertile, it brings more attention. Also, for the community outside, they also target that land and come to buy it. That is why the conflict comes about.*’ The cause of this conflict seems more related to resource scarcity than to tensions along clan lines⁶. Where the soil is fertile, more people want to rent land, which also leads to more disputes.

The construction of a road in Moyo has also sparked a major conflict between two ethnic groups, which is still ongoing. The owners of the land through which the road is to pass must be compensated, yet two clans claimed the land as theirs. This has led to fighting between the clans and made farming difficult for those cultivating the disputed land: ‘*Going to the garden alone has become a problem. Sometimes when you go, you are attacked. There are some people who have already been taken to prison because of that conflict.*’ According to the respondents, police and military forces had to intervene to calm the conflict, while the tensions persist:

‘So the major issue concerning those roads there is when the road passes along your garden, they are not compensating you. They destroy your crops, and at the end of the day, they are not giving you something to reward you... It increases our poverty level because if you have only land, and you have all those crops around that land there, and it is destroyed, you may end up unable to pay to send your child to school.’ (Moyo FGD)

The border between Uganda and South Sudan is also a source of tension because it is not clearly demarcated throughout. Respondents from the host community explained that when they go into the forest areas, some accidentally cross into South

Sudan and encounter criminals and government soldiers. Many host community members described the land across the border into South Sudan as more fertile and more ideal for cultivation: ‘*...mostly, we cultivate from that side of the border. So mostly when we go to dig, then when those SPLA, those soldiers come, it gives us fear. So it has meant that going to do cultivation is hard. Then when you don’t dig, there’s no capital, there’s no food for the children*’ (Moyo host FGD). Among the host community in Moyo, a major concern was the loss of land for cultivation due to conflict between the two clans mentioned above and to daily disputes with soldiers across the border, as many depend on farming at the border to sustain their livelihoods.

In addition, the construction of a dam in Moyo has caused tension due to the process, or rather the lack of an appropriate process, preparing for it, according to interviews with the host community:

‘That land, in the clan, it was given to one of my family members. It got a lot of attention, whereby the clan did not want the project to be working there... When you are doing a project like this, you are taking all the water at the local land level; there should be a land appeasement where you have to cut a goat or a sheep. Something small, some traditional thing. So it was not done. And that thing up to now has brought a lot of attention from the clan, from the elders. The elders are still in need of that appeasement. So the land cleansing was not done.’ (Moyo FGD)

This land cleansing or appeasement for the elders was perceived to be the responsibility of the landlord and the organisation constructing the dam. The PARTOCA team has followed similar cases in the past. In Rhino Camp, a similar dam was constructed by a large NGO and sparked disputes with the landowners, who were dissatisfied with the lack of support for a cleansing ritual, similar to the situation in Moyo. In addition, after the project period, the dam was handed over to the sub-county without the landowners’ involvement. This was not the end of the tensions. According to the data and interviews from this period, two refugee children drowned in the dam because the fence surrounding the dam had not been properly maintained. And to make things worse, the landowners had requested that the dam be constructed further away from the

⁶ Potential historical conflicts or grievances between the clans and ethnic groups in the area may also play a part, yet this is not within the scope of this analysis.

refugees to reduce the risk of drowning accidents, according to the respondents. In their opinion, the death of the children was not only an accident due to bad luck, but it was also perceived as connected with the lack of a cleansing ritual. Usually, an elder performs such rituals, slaughtering a goat before construction begins on a piece of land. The ritual is believed to prevent death and make potential snakes in the water harmless. As such, dams like the one in Moyo could trigger future conflicts if the actors implementing the interventions do not appreciate these traditions.

In Palorinya, examples were also raised of conflicts caused by the unclear border between the districts (Moyo and Obongi). Sometimes refugees accidentally cross the border into Moyo to collect firewood, as explained by a refugee leader:

'We had one of our guys there who went to cut firewood... He cycled on his bicycle and he bypassed the border. Of course, we [in Palorinya] don't know exactly where the border is. But he went to the other district so he could cut some wood. From there, other people came down to the forest... they came and arrested him. And after that, they demanded a ransom. Money to be paid, so that they could release him. And he said, 'I don't have money' so they decided to take him back, they found us, they asked for his release' (KII RWC Palorinya)

In the end, refugee leaders paid the fine. According to respondents, most refugees do not know exactly where the borders between districts are, and because districts have different bylaws and regulations, this can get them into trouble.

Bidibidi settlement was established when the host community gazetted 250 square kilometres of communal land, a process the OPM negotiated with local officials and community leaders (DRC 2018:8). The land agreement remains valid, and our study has not recorded tensions related to the land on which the settlement is located.

In Yumbe district, as in Moyo, tensions have arisen among the local host community due to road construction. Compensation was intended for those who were to be relocated from their land. However, this led to heated conflict, as one member of the host community described it:

'There was a lot of fighting over there, whereby so many people were injured. The issue was that three clans combined to fight against [another clan]. They came to talk with the government officials who are responsible for road construction, saying that that is their land the road is passing through. Then the ones from [the other clan] also went there to tell the government officials that this is our land and in case of compensation, we are the ones to sign the paperwork... So in that process, the fight erupted between them. There is one person who was beaten and is still in the hospital.' (Yumbe FGD)

Poverty in the area may also contribute to these disputes, as it makes some more desperate to seek compensation by claiming ownership of land. There were several examples of violent community conflicts over land:

'One of the impacts of these land conflicts is, you may find sometimes people keep on clashing until somebody may be killed in these conflicts during the fight over these lands in the communities... It happened some two years back here in Yumbe, where two clans were fighting over land. They ended up using bows for shooting each other, and people died on both sides during this fight.' (Yumbe FGD)

Land ownership disputes between clans and ethnic groups have led to violent, deadly clashes. At the inter-personal and household level, land ownership disputes are also frequent. These conflicts mainly concern inheritance and division of land. For instance, a young man in the FGD, referred to as Peter, had a dispute with his father's brother. Peter had grown up with his maternal uncles and approached his father's family as an adult:

'As I have grown, culturally I expected that they would give me all the land that was my father's to me to take over from there. But then my uncle could not allow me to have that. So the land that belonged to my father plus the land of my uncle, my uncle took it all and is the one digging there. When I went again to the LCs to complain about this because I wanted the portion that belongs to me, my uncle decided that now he is going to the police.' (Yumbe FGD)

Normally, these family disputes are handled by elders and local authorities such as the LC, but one of the uncles decided to escalate the case to the police. It is Peter's perception that the uncle is bribing and misusing his access to the police: 'So up to now... I do not greet my uncle. My uncle doesn't greet me. We don't shake hands. We don't even greet "good morning, good morning". It's not there... But now with the police, the issue is not solved. The whole issue has remained like that, and the relationship between us is broken completely' (Yumbe FGD). Although the conflict did not result in violence, it has considerably affected relationships among family members. Respondents in Yumbe explained that many land conflicts in their area led family members to refrain from greeting or interacting with one another. Many of these land inheritance disputes occurred because the land was not divided among the children before the father's death. In Yumbe, one cause of land conflicts was believed to be population growth, yet participants did not see the influx of refugees as the issue:

'The major trigger for these conflicts of land and other resources is the increase in population. The population is increasing; however, the size of the land has remained the same. It is not expanding. So it is easy for people to clash over these resources... For instance, in a family, I am alone, I have this brother, he has maybe five children, the brother has maybe six, the other one has ten. All these children, they need land, but [the land] has still remained the same; it has not expanded. So you'll find that these children are struggling for the same land.' (FGD Yumbe)

The land's size has stayed the same, but it needs to be divided among more people into smaller plots, causing conflicts within families. Another participant gave a similar example:

'I have my children, then I have a sister who gets married somewhere and also has children from there. Maybe she has issues with her husband there and comes home with her children. So her children are going to grow [up] here. Already the population has increased because the sister has added her children, plus mine... So they're all going to be struggling for the same land here... So this keeps on bringing an increase in the population, hence conflict among the people in the community.' (FGD Yumbe)

In Moyo, similar cases were raised during interviews; for example, one woman explained that she had separated from her husband and returned to her home with her children. Here, she was given a small piece of land to farm. However, it soon became apparent that her grandfather's co-wife caused a dispute in the household because she believed that the return was intended to secure a share of the scarce family-owned land for her children.

4.3. Farming and land access

4.3.1. Key trends and findings

- Across research locations, land access conflicts emerged as a major source of conflict between host and refugee communities. Demand and competition for land have increased, in part because reduced humanitarian assistance has made many refugees more dependent on farming.
- Conflicts and disputes usually arise between landlords from the host community and renters, including both refugee and host communities.
- The conflicts and tensions primarily stem from land leasing for farming. Agreements are usually verbal, making them easier to break or exploit. ‘Double renting’—where the same land is rented to multiple parties—is common and a major conflict trigger. Sometimes, several individuals may also claim to be the true landowner.
- Some landlords engage in exploitative practices, such as renting land to have others clear the bushes, then withdrawing the agreement later, or unfairly increasing rental prices.
- Many conflicts and tensions arise from stray animals damaging crops, which worsens when no procedures are in place to address the issue.
- Conflicts over access to farmland could affect URRI’s interventions in climate-smart agriculture and with farmer groups. Farmer groups often need to rent land for their activities and are therefore vulnerable to double-renting, rising land rental prices, breaches of verbal agreements, and exploitative land clearing practices.

4.3.2. Background

Within the settlements, refugee households are allocated 30m x 30m plots of land, regardless of household size (NRC 2024:7). These plots are mainly used by refugees to build shelters, and perhaps a small kitchen garden, but the space is generally too limited for subsistence or livelihood farming (ibid.). Therefore, refugees must find alternative ways to access farmland, primarily by renting land from local landowners in nearby villages, known locally as ‘landlords’. This practice is not exclusive to refugees; members of the local Ugandan community also rent fertile land from these ‘landlords’. Renting land presents challenges. Many landlords are hesitant to sign

formal lease agreements. Instead, most tenants depend on informal verbal agreements, which are easier to break and can lead to disputes. Some landlords also engage in exploitative practices, such as raising rental prices or renting the same plot of land to multiple tenants (NRC 2024:9; KRC Uganda 2021:15, 27; ASPR 2022:20). Although these arrangements sometimes cause conflicts, informal land-leasing agreements between refugees and host communities in the West Nile area have generally strengthened community ties and proved mutually beneficial. For instance, some farmers have increased their agricultural output by allowing refugees to cultivate parts of their land (Destrijcker et al. 2023:40). Both refugees and host community members often farm, keep livestock—such as goats, pigs, and cattle—or do both. When animals encroach on or damage neighbours’ crops, it frequently causes conflicts that can escalate into confrontations between livestock owners and crop growers (KRC Uganda 2021:25).

4.3.3. Findings

In Rhino Camp, refugees have faced various disputes over land-leasing agreements with landlords from the host community, documented by the research team’s data since 2018. At times, multiple landlords will claim ownership of a piece of land rented by refugees: *‘I documented an agreement with my sister, renting land from her. We had an agreement. Then another landlord said, “ah no, the land you rented does not belong to that person. I’m the real landlord.” So the land problem is [caused by] dishonouring agreements, actually. It’s a very big challenge.’* (Rhino Camp FGD).

Most agreements are verbal, leaving refugees vulnerable when these agreements are not honoured. However, obtaining written agreements can be difficult. For example, one woman, Elizabeth, explained that humanitarian actors in the settlement had advised her not to pay for land without a signed agreement. The INGO could assist with this, so she and the landlord visited their office. There, they were told the document would not be ready until the following week. This frustrated the landlord, who felt Elizabeth had wasted his time by bringing him to the office, and he stated he would not wait a week for the document. Ultimately, she paid the landlord without a formal agreement.

Disputes over access to farmland are not the only source of conflict. Disagreements over cattle grazing rights are also common, as in many other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa where pastoralists and farmers coexist. Currently, refugees in Rhino Camp's new Zone 8 report difficulties with the host community's animals wandering freely, which hampers crop cultivation out of fear that they may be trampled by cows and goats: *'People started wanting to plant some small crops on the ground. But you see cows coming from the other direction, goats coming. You don't press exactly who is your owner. So it's like they just release their cows, their animals, to go and eat the things intentionally'* (Rhino Camp FGD). Compared to other areas of Rhino Camp, Zone 8 has recently opened, and procedures for managing stray animals have not yet been established. Other zones have systems in which stray animals are captured and taken to an 'animal prison' where the owner can retrieve them, and compensation for destroyed crops can be arranged. Some of these procedures were introduced after tragic incidents, including revenge killings of about 15 refugees in response to a dispute over the destruction of crops by cows from the host communities near Tika Zone in 2020 (Degett 2023). Refugees in Zone 8 said they planned to organise a meeting with the LC and hold a community dialogue to develop a similar process.

In Madi-Okollo, respondents did not mention issues of stray animals. The host community interviewed lived far from the settlement (approximately 10km) and generally reported having a good relationship with refugees. For those who have built relationships with refugees, they may also give them land for free: *'With that kind of friendship and knowing this person very well, we can give them a small piece of land to cultivate for themselves without payment'*. Some organisations in the area have also supported processes for land-leasing agreements, helping refugees and nationals fill out land rental agreement forms, but according to the host community, the refugees have not yet approached them to request land, which could also be explained by the distance to this particular host community.

In Terego, the host community highlighted the issue of stray animals that destroy garden crops as a point of conflict:

'You find that from the refugee side, the animals are left, and these people from the host, they are doing cultivation. So these people, their animals come and destroy our crops. Then also from this side, you find that the host also leave their animals. They also go and destroy their crops that side. So this brings tensions between us. However, if your animal destroys someone's crop, the block leaders will be informed, the LCs will be informed. The first time, the owner of the garden can say, "okay, don't do it again. Make sure your animals are tied. Don't destroy my things again". Now, for the second time, that's when the issue of compensation will come in.' (Terego FGD)

These issues cause tension between refugees and host community members. However, as the quote above explains, there appears to be a clear process for handling such cases: first, a warning, then compensation. This process seems to prevent tensions from escalating. Some people also try to resolve issues with stray animals among themselves before bringing the case to the LC. For example, one woman found some goats in her garden, destroying her crops. She took the goats to the owner, a neighbouring refugee, and said, *'These animals of yours destroyed the crops in the garden. So, can you get me the seedlings, then I can replace them back in the garden.'* The owner of the goats, however, did not agree and therefore did not replace the seedlings. In the end, the case was taken to the LC, where the amount of compensation was decided.

The host community in Terego generally reported that land pressure has increased, with insufficient land available for cultivation. Some host community members in the FGD were themselves renting land from landlords and had also experienced the issue of 'double renting'. One woman, Mary, gave an example of this. She had rented some land from a landlord, who then rented part of it to a refugee. She went to the landlord and told him, *'This is the land I'd already bought from you. Why would you sell it to another person?'* The three parties resolved the issues in a locally arranged mediation meeting. Mary, however, decided to let the refugee keep the land, saying, *'You know, since this refugee has already also paid you money for this land, I'm leaving this for the refugee. But now what I'm saying is don't encroach again on the remaining land that I'm having.'*

In Terego, those who own land and are landlords themselves, or have purchased land from landlords, rent land to refugees for a season or a full year.

However, this arrangement presents its own set of challenges.

‘Sometimes these refugees also come to me to rent land. But then you will realise that after these people rent land from you, if you may say 30,000 [Ugandan Shillings (UGX)] to rent this land, they pay you 15,000. Then the remaining balance of 15,000, they will not pay it. The person will say, [after harvest] I will give you your remaining money. But they continuously say, “I don’t have money to pay you back”. And yet you see that the person has [harvested] something from the garden; he’s even selling it, he’s getting money out of it, but purposely refuses to pay your money, telling you that he is poor, doesn’t have money to pay. So it ends up bringing tensions between us.’ (Terego FGD)

Some landlords report that refugees leave the rent unpaid, causing tensions that could escalate.

In Imvepi settlement, among the neighbouring refugees, some maintained good relationships with the landlords. For example, one man recounted that a landlord had given him two quarter acres of land for his exclusive use while in displacement. However, problems arise when such verbal agreements are broken. According to the refugees, there are documents for formalising signed agreements, but landlords are often reluctant to sign written contracts regarding the land, which also makes it easy to terminate the agreements. For instance, in some cases, refugees may have already planted their crops in the garden when the landlord might say, *‘This year, I don’t want you to dig, leave my land.’* This leaves the refugees feeling powerless: *‘And you don’t have power, then you leave, although you have dug it, you just leave it’* (Imvepi FGD). The lease duration can also pose problems. While landlords usually make annual agreements aligned with the calendar year, refugees renting may prefer agreements that better match crop seasons. For example, if they plant their cassava in May, they want the agreement to extend until May the following year, rather than ending at the close of the current year. However, in some cases, refugees have been compelled to leave the land before their crops were ready:

‘So it happened that somebody had planted the cassava, and then the cassava was not ready for harvest, and then the landlord came. He wanted the land back, and yet the cassava was not ready to be harvested. Then he sold it [the land] to another person. So that person came in; they informed the owner of the cassava to carry his cassava. He wanted to plant his crops in the garden.’ (Imvepi FGD)

In this case, the refugee had to uproot the cassava, which was not yet ready, because a new owner had arrived and wanted to use the land, leading to a loss for the refugee.

In Yumbe, the host community noted in the FGDs that before the refugees arrived, some land had been demarcated for grazing animals. These areas are now occupied by refugees, leaving no vacant land for grazing. The main issue, however, appeared to be related to the land-leasing agreements. Even when farmer groups receive support with seeds, they still need to rent land.

‘The group goes and hires land from a landlord. You find the landlord gives you land that is literally looking like this bush... So the group goes and clears this land. Most times when you’re clearing the land for the first time, you’ll find that the yield is not okay. But the group expects that next season, if we were given a chance to re-cultivate this land again, [then] we are going to get something better. But you’ll find that the landlord, after seeing that we have cleared the land, it doesn’t matter whether we have received anything good out of the land or not, the landlord will not accept that. He will just tell us, “The time I gave you to use the land is over; just leave my land”. So you find the group has completely made the loss. So when the group decides to go back to the landlord to talk about it, it brings conflict between us.’ (Yumbe FGD)

In another case, a group of farmers from the host community hoped to use the same land they had rented the previous year for cultivation. A member of the group who owned some land had offered it to them, leading to a verbal agreement. They cleared the land and planted crops, which were later harvested. However, the following year, when they returned to plant seeds, the landlord informed them that the agreement had ended and their right to use the land was over.

‘What the group members have come to realise is people are trying to use our energy to clear the land which has been left there abandoned for long. Once we clear this land, the person says that “you leave my land”. Their aim is not actually to give [the land] willingly, but just to make sure that we clear the land for them. After clearing, someone takes over the land and just leaves the group like that.’ (Yumbe FGD)

The farmer group felt exploited by their colleague. Cases like these, where there is a power imbalance among group members, can lead to conflict. Additionally, there were complaints that seeds provided by NGOs are distributed outside the planting season; some seeds are given in September, when they should ideally have been planted in July.

The leaders in Yumbe reported a rise in land conflicts. Refugees have been affected by cuts in humanitarian aid, and many are now seeking land to farm. However, the procedures for acquiring land are not always clear, and access has become more difficult, especially for refugees.

For refugees in Bidibidi, as with other research locations, land for cultivation is essential but also a source of tension, as one refugee states:

‘The problem that we have in general here is the problem of land. For example, we farmers, we depend on farming since we are in a situation of self-reliance [phased out of assistance]. So, land becomes a problem. In a situation where the place given is 30 by 30 [meters]; now, to feed on that land and also make a business on that land becomes a problem. You think of going back [to South Sudan], yet the war still continues. It brings a higher pressure on us as a group... Those stray animals destroy all the crops. The crops germinate well, but you find that they all get destroyed.’ (Bidibidi FGD)

Those who lose access to food assistance must find land to farm, as the provided plot is too small. The rising demand for land increases tensions, and even when crops are successful, they risk being destroyed by stray animals. In this area, the issue of breaking verbal land-leasing agreements was also raised. For example, a refugee named Steven rented some land from a landlord. Steven and his wife visited the landlord’s home and reached a

verbal agreement to farm the land. However, when Steven began preparing the soil, another man from the host community arrived and threatened him: ‘Leave this place if you want to be alive. But if you don’t want to be alive, keep digging.’ Steven stayed silent and then asked him, ‘Why are you saying I should stop digging this place?’ The man replied that the land belonged to him, not to the other man from whom Steven had rented it. Steven attempted to report the matter to LC, but the man claiming to be the landlord and with whom he had made the agreement had mysteriously disappeared. Some participants in the FGD believed that landlords sometimes use this tactic to reclaim their land.

‘On the issues of the land for cultivation, sometimes you find that you can talk to the person, and the person will give you the land. But now if this person maybe wanted to take his land back, you find he may take it in such a way that he may go and talk to somebody else. And then another person will be there in the garden and say, “this land that has been given to you is not for this person, and I’m the owner”. That is how they take it back, but they don’t take it directly.’ (Bidibidi FGD)

Cases like these, where the original landlord cannot be identified, are difficult to resolve. As humanitarian aid decreases and land demand rises, renters might become more eager to access land, while landlords, often facing poverty themselves, could also become more desperate to generate income from their land:

‘When you go to the landlords, sometimes they can give you land... You find that they can sell it to you, like a quarter at 50,000 [UGX, 13 US Dollars (USD)]. But now later on, if someone else comes, because people are really looking for land, if someone comes and offers 70,000 [UGX, 19 USD], you find that the landlord will chase you away and give the land to that one who has a lot of money.’ (Bidibidi FGD)

Competition for access to farmland is increasing, and some landlords may take advantage by giving the land to those who can pay the most. The farmer groups that are set up as part of humanitarian programmes also experience exploitation related to rent charges: ‘So, also when those landlords realise that maybe a group was supported by an NGO, the charging goes higher’ (Bidibidi FGD). The charges for those who have been supported in some way by humanitarian actors are

sometimes raised, making it challenging for these farmer groups to afford land rent.

In Lobule, as in most other research locations, the issue of ‘double renting’ land causes conflict. Furthermore, very few landowners are willing to provide farmland free of charge, and land has become more expensive for refugees to afford due to reduced humanitarian aid (we will discuss this further in section 4.6). The land-leasing agreements in Lobule are seasonal, whereas in other locations, agreements typically run on an annual basis. In some cases, the leasing periods do not correspond with crop cycles, so refugees are told to leave the rented land before they can harvest their crops.

As with other research locations, stray animals that damage crops are also a challenge for refugees in Lobule. However, while the other locations in the study (except zone 8 of Rhino Camp) have procedures for managing this issue, it is more difficult in Lobule: *‘As refugees have put effort into cultivating and growing some crops around, then the host community graze their cattle, and they eat our plants. And when we complain to the local authorities, nothing is taken into action. So we just remain silent’* (Lobule FGD). Because the presence of the refugees is disputed after the land agreement has expired, refugees struggle to raise issues with local authorities and feel that conflicts are not addressed. Consequently, some have given up reporting issues involving stray animals to the authorities.

In Koboko, since none of the participants was renting land to refugees (due to the distance to the settlement, as described earlier), conflicts over this were not present. However, the local leader interviewed said that land-leasing agreements are mostly verbal, leading to double-renting. The local government is implementing a process of requiring written agreements and witness signatures to mitigate this issue. In the area, however, most land conflicts revolved around ownership rather than renting land for farming. Yet, the issues over ownership also relate to the value of land: *‘Now the current generation is taking advantage [of the fact] that land is a valuable thing. When they can reclaim their land, they can sell it expensively and make a gain of money’* (Koboko FGD). Many may be interested in getting back the land their fathers had availed for refugee settlement so they can sell or rent it to others at a high price. As poverty was mentioned as a challenge in the area, this may also drive more people to try to earn something from their land.

In Palorinya settlement, refugees face issues similar to those in other settlements. On a personal

level, conflicts can arise between neighbours if one begins digging and extends their land across a boundary into another’s plot or garden. However, the biggest challenge remains renting land for cultivation. Refugees reported that this has become more difficult due to reduced humanitarian assistance. Although most who no longer receive food aid wish to farm, they lack the funds to rent land. In Palorinya, refugees also face problems with double renting and land-leasing agreements being terminated after the land has been cleared. One refugee woman rented land from a local community member, but when she arrived to cultivate it, she found that a farming group was already working there. The landlord then offered her another piece of land instead:

‘The garden has a lot of trees, and even though you plant your crops here, it will not grow well. The yield will be very poor. So I rejected that place. And that man said, “If you don’t want to cultivate this garden, there is no way I can give you back your money”. So I surrendered that money, 40,000 [UGX, 11 USD] up to now. I’m not demanding anything.’ (Palorinya FGD)

Another woman, Gloria, rented a garden for 50,000 UGX (13 USD) and prepared it for planting. Later, she went to plant her crops, but when she reached the garden, the landowner chased her away, saying, ‘You are no longer going to plant your crops here’. The landowner repaid her only 45,000 UGX (12 USD), which Gloria felt was unfair because she had used her energy to cultivate the garden and should have been compensated for her labour. She lost the garden, and the matter was not resolved. Similar to the previous case, she decided to abandon it, but her relationship with the landowner remains strained. Some, however, have had positive experiences of renting land from the local community.

‘If you have a relationship with your host community, you can even hire land. Like, I can hire land from you, and that land will stay forever until you go back. So, like us, every year, we agree: I give you something. That is the relationship that we already started building. We are sharing; that means the resources that we have here.’ (Palorinya FGD)

As exemplified in this case, relationship-building, including intermarriage, often facilitates greater access to land.

In Moyo, the large land conflicts between the two previously mentioned clans also affected land rental agreements among members of these clans. Even those who had prepaid rent and cleared plots for cultivation were prevented from using them because of this conflict. As in other areas, there were disputes over double-renting of land in Moyo. A woman named Grace explained that she was given some land by a landlord, cleared it of bushes, and cultivated part of it, leaving a section uncleared. The landlord then rented the uncleared land to someone else without her knowledge. Later, when Grace returned to clear the land, someone called her to ask why she was clearing land that belonged to him. She said, ‘You know, this land was given to me by the landlord,’ and they realised they had rented the same piece of land. They both sat together with the landlord and some witnesses.

‘The landlord gave me that land first; now he gave it to the other person later. Maybe he forgot that he had already given that land to me because the land was not cleared. So now, to solve the issue, they measured that portion of the land. He said this person who is complaining should now dig the other one. Leave that one [which is cleared]. That is how we resolved it’ (Moyo FGD)

In the end, Grace kept the land she had cleared, while the other person received the piece of uncleared land.

Envy and accusations of witchcraft were identified as sources of conflict within the host community in Moyo. They noted that one neighbour’s successful farm and produce often led to envy and accusations of witchcraft from others.

‘Like it happens when you put effort into your work [in the garden]. At the end of the day, if you happen to get the result of the yield, then from there they start alleging, “You are working through the power of evil”... The other issue is also... False allegation; you are alleged to be a witch, when you are not. And in such [cases], if the information has not been de-campaigned, then the community can gang up against you, when you are hardworking, or you produce a lot.’ (Moyo FGD)

4.4. Water infrastructures

4.4.1. Key trends and findings

- According to respondents, one of the main sources of conflict over water access is the scarcity of water supplies, which leads to long queues, congestion at water points, and sparks quarrels or fights.
- Conflicts mainly occur when people jump the queue or when misunderstandings happen, for example, because of language barriers. Disputes can also arise over the fair sharing of water, such as when one person has many jerry cans to fill, and another comes with only one.
- Women and girls are most affected by conflicts at water points because they are responsible for collecting water for their households.
- Due to limited water supply and congestion at water points, households sometimes go without water for several days. Some taps also run dry, with water unavailable for days at a time.

- In some areas, the placement of water points fosters a sense of ownership and restricts others’ access. For example, according to the host community, some refugees believe that water points are built specifically for them rather than for the host community.
- Water infrastructure conflicts could impact URRI’s interventions in hydrological stabilisation and the creation of community water points. Decisions on the location of water points are key to mitigating conflicts, as they determine who feels ownership over them.

4.4.2. Background

Host communities and refugee households usually access water from boreholes and taps. Women and children are most often responsible for fetching water (Logie et al. 2021:2; DRC 2018:31; ASPR 2022:8; Destrijcker et al. 2023:18; Cities Alliance 2026:18). In

most parts of the West Nile region, the population in refugee settlements continues to grow, but the number of water collection points remains the same, leading to water shortages and increased competition (KRC Uganda 2021:25). As confirmed by other studies and the respondents, conflicts often arise when someone jumps the queue at a water point (ibid.; Degett and Whyte 2023:19). Long waiting times and queues can also raise tensions at water points (IRRI 2019:25). Additionally, studies have shown that both refugee and host populations sometimes claim ownership of water points located in their villages or areas, which restricts others' access to water (ibid.:25; KRC Uganda 2021:14). In some cases, when water supply at boreholes is limited, women and girls must travel long distances to fetch water, increasing their burden and exposing them to risks such as SGBV (Logie et al. 2021:2; NRC 2024:14, 19).

4.4.3. Findings

In Bidibidi settlement, tensions often arise at water points in the evening, when many women queue to fill their jerrycans:

'Sometimes we find that the person who will go and collect the firewood, because the distance is very far, the person will take long. By the time she comes back, she will start to rush to fetch water. There are a lot of people; there's congestion there... Sometimes here we can stay for three or four days without water.' (FGD Bidibidi).

Water points are reported to be few relative to the large population, and long queues can mean a household goes without water for several days. A young woman named Sarah explained that one day, when she had to cook for her siblings, after school, there was no water. When she went to the water point, she was denied because too many people were already there. The nearby primary school also had no water; children were therefore affected by a lack of water both at school and at home. The issue of inadequate water provision caused tension at water points and within households.

Among the host community in Yumbe, near Bidibidi settlement, water conflicts were not identified as a specific issue during the interviews and FGDs. The nearby boreholes were shared by both refugee and host communities, and although accessing water from these boreholes could be

challenging due to long queues, it reportedly rarely caused conflict among the women fetching water.

In Moyo, water conflicts among the community members are caused by the high population getting water from the same water points, as explained by a woman in the host community: *'When you go to [fetch water], you want to put your jerrycan. The other one also struggles to put hers. Then there, you may collide. It will end up with fighting or quarrelling. Just because the number of boreholes built around here is not enough for the community'* (FDG Moyo).

In Palorinya, the neighbouring refugee community raised similar issues of conflicts at the water points. The participants explained that these conflicts were caused by a lack of mutual respect and misunderstandings: when someone has many jerrycans, others want to be allowed to fill theirs first, but there is no formal system to favour some over others. Children are often at risk of physical punishment from their guardians if they are not able to fetch water according to expectations. At this point, the child's parents – and sometimes even the extended family of the clan – will typically be involved, increasing the risk of the conflict escalating.

In Lobule settlement, water points are scarce and located far from the community, leading to crowding at water sources and conflicts between refugees and host communities over water access. Respondents reported that the boreholes are poorly maintained, break frequently, and that repairs are often delayed. Additionally, the water supply is irregular, with shortages lasting up to a month, which worsens water scarcity (UNHCR and REACH 2018). A more recent study found that in densely populated neighbourhoods in Koboko, where refugees are hosted, water and sanitation infrastructure have not kept pace with population growth, directly impacting public health and household productivity (Cities Alliance 2026:18). Although refugee and host communities have demonstrated strong social cohesion, their shared reliance on strained water points and waste management services puts pressure on low-income households (ibid.). In the FGD with refugees in Lobule, however, conflicts related to water provision were not raised, except for one instance of thieves stealing the solar panels that power the water point.

In Koboko, water provision was similarly not mentioned as a source of conflict. As mentioned earlier, the host community with which the research team interacted lived far from the Lobule settlement and did not have to share these services

with refugees. However, although it may not lead to conflicts, water infrastructure is still under pressure in Koboko; access to safe drinking water remains a challenge, with many households lacking access to reliable, clean water or relying on unsafe or distant water sources (Cities Alliance 2026:18).

In Imvepi, refugees did not raise any concerns related to water access. Yet, the neighbouring hosts **in Terego**, raised several issues. A previous point of conflict, according to the host community, was that refugees felt ownership over water taps:

'At the time when they had newly brought the refugees to this place, you would find that these water points where organisations have put the taps, if you went there as a host community to fetch water, the refugees would come with many jerrycans. They would tell you that, "No, this water is not here because of you people, the host. Why is it that before they brought us refugees here, they didn't put the tap. They have put this water point only for us." They would always undermine the host community, not allowing us to get the services.' (Terego FGD)

However, this situation has changed because most of the taps installed when the refugees arrived are no longer working, prompting many to fetch water from boreholes in the host community. Despite this, the number of boreholes has not increased, leading to greater pressure and tension at the water points. One woman explained:

'Initially, before the coming of the refugees, there was one borehole where we [the host community] used to fetch water, and there was no struggle. So now, because we are sharing that water point with the refugees, although they have put the taps in the community to supply water for them, there are times when you find these taps; the water is not coming. You will find that sometimes when there is breakage in these pipes, there is no water. Once you go to the water point to get water, the number is large, the queue is long, and you cannot get water fast enough to go do your work. If I have come first, you have come late, but maybe I have an emergency issue; I want to get water first so that I can go back. So when I come to request, everyone will be like, "I came first, I also need water". So you'll find that conflict coming.' (Terego FGD)

According to her, this leads to conflicts between both refugee and host community members, and also internally among refugees and among host community women. Whereas the boreholes in the host community areas are perhaps a bit more

reliable, the taps installed in the settlement often break, leading to congestion at the water point. Another woman gave an example of such a conflict:

'A refugee came with many jerrycans, and the host came with a few jerrycans. So she kept on filling the water, and then the host was like, "You have many jerrycans; can I also fetch mine, and I go?" Then the refugee was like, "You know, it is first come, first served". So they picked quarrels, and it almost exploded into a fight. Then the watchman who oversees that the water is safe and people receive water peacefully had to come in to stop the quarrels among them. Then afterwards, there was a fine that was put on the two people who quarrelled at the water point.' (Terego FGD).

According to respondents, this dispute did not escalate into a physical fight because a 'watchman' was present and able to intervene. Watchmen typically also maintain order in the queue, ensuring that people follow the line and that everyone can fill their jerrycans. They also bring conflicts to the water committee, where those involved sit down to resolve their issues and pay a fine for fighting. Water committees, or water user committees, are usually community-led and include representatives from both refugee and host communities. They collaborate to organise access to water and, together with leaders, contribute to conflict management.

In Rhino Camp, zone 8, the refugee and host communities live on the border between the Madi-Okollo and Terego districts, and as mentioned, the border and services are disputed in this area. Access to water is very limited; the only available borehole for both groups is in Zone 8. The border dispute has delayed a large-scale project to install a motorised water system. Refugees in Zone 8 also expressed concerns about water scarcity and ongoing disputes. One example is a refugee called Rose. According to her, she waited in line to fill her jerrycans. When it was her turn, a man from the host community suddenly placed his jerrycan instead, and Rose asked, *'Why are you doing this? It's my turn to fetch water.'* The man responded, *'You people left your conflict in South Sudan, and you are coming here to Uganda. Why don't you finish your conflict in South Sudan, instead of coming here to disturb people?'* The argument quickly escalated, with the man threatening to kill her. Rose quickly left for the trading centre, but the man picked up a panga and followed her. She managed to run away and ultimately reported the incident to the police, who handled it with the RWC1 and other leaders.

In Madi-Okollo, water was similarly described as a major source of conflict between refugee and host communities, simply because it is insufficient. At the refugee site, water flow sometimes stops for 2 to 3 days. This leads to fights at the water points. In addition, disputes over the queue system and language barriers can also cause conflicts, according to a man from the host community:

‘What brings conflict over water is that the refugees do not want to make a line. It has been the system: you make a line so that you can get water. However, the refugees don’t want to [make a] line; they just want to fetch... The next thing is also the language. Someone coming [who] wants water and has no language to ask that “you help me, let me pump”, and that makes them rush.’ (Madi-Okollo FGD)

Some host community members reported that refugees feel a sense of ownership over the boreholes: *‘The refugees feel like the borehole was constructed for them, not for the nationals. So whenever they come, they just feel they should pump their water before the nationals. And that’s why there’s always conflicts at the water point’* (Madi-Okollo FGD). Usually, water user committee members are onsite at the borehole and can step in to resolve disputes. The host community noted that, because of this, no major conflicts have occurred that required formal settlement, since issues are typically dealt with as they happen.

4.5. Access to natural resources

4.5.1. Key trends and findings

- Access to natural resources, especially firewood for cooking and wooden poles for house construction, is a source of conflict in areas where these resources are scarce. In some locations, many trees have been cleared, heightening competition for resources and affecting the climate, biodiversity, and soil.
- Across the research locations, access to grass rarely led to conflicts. Most refugees and host community members reported that hosts typically provide grass to their neighbours for free, provided the refugees ask permission in advance. However, in some cases, refugees have been denied access to cut grass.
- Women are primarily responsible for gathering firewood and other natural resources, making them more vulnerable to conflicts over these resources. Sometimes, refugees are denied access to firewood. Women face dangers such as sexual exploitation, rape, and violence, especially when travelling long distances to collect wood.
- The local community needs water access for their livestock, and these sites have also become scarce, leading to issues of lost animals and theft. During the dry season, limited water for livestock forces them to walk long distances and sometimes destroy crops, resulting in conflicts.

- Conflicts over access to firewood may affect URRI’s tree-planting interventions. In these interventions, it is important to consider where trees are planted and who will own and access these resources.

4.5.2. Background

In the West Nile area, most households depend on natural resources, namely firewood for cooking, wood for house construction, and grass for thatched roofs, and, in some cases, water sources for fishing and cattle. The majority of the host communities use charcoal, while the often poorer refugee communities use firewood collected from the surrounding forest areas as their cooking fuel (Destrijcker et al. 2023:31). Refugees usually gather firewood and building wood outside settlement areas on lands owned by host communities, which can sometimes cause misunderstandings and conflicts between refugees and local residents (ibid.). In most cases, the host community restrict access to natural resources, such as firewood and grass, and in some cases attack refugees collecting these materials (IRRI 2019:1). According to some host community members, many refugees do not seek consent before cutting down trees and grass, causing environmental degradation (IRRI 2019:1; ASPR 2022:21). Driven by population

growth and heavy reliance on wood as a cooking fuel, trees are being cut down at an unsustainable pace (Destrijcker et al. 2023:5; ASPR 2022:21). Forestry management is generally weak in rural areas and around refugee settlements, which exacerbates these issues. As forestry products become scarcer, the risk of tensions and conflicts over competition for control and access to these resources increases (Destrijcker et al. 2023:5). As with fetching water, collecting firewood, poles for house construction and grass, is also considered women's responsibility, and conflicts over these natural resources therefore affect women the most (Destrijcker et al. 2023:31; ASPR 2022:8, 19). Women and girls face risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), physical assault, harassment, and sexual violence when collecting firewood and grass (NRC 2024:19; Destrijcker et al. 2023:31). The scarcity of forestry products also increases the risk of SGBV, as women and girls have to spend more time and cover greater distances to collect firewood (Destrijcker et al. 2023:31; Logie et al. 2021:6). Within households, women and children are also exposed to violence when they are unable to cook food for the household due to firewood deficiency (ASPR 2022:21).

4.5.3. Findings

In Moyo, among the host community, women experience challenges collecting firewood. They need to walk a long distance to the bush areas to collect firewood, and even there, most of the firewood has been cut down. Misunderstandings and tensions between neighbours sometimes occur over ownership of firewood, as narrated by a host community man:

'I may go and cut some trees down to dry so that my madam will come and collect it... One time when I was cutting the trees, my neighbours saw me. Then they waited until the wood got dry. Instead of my wife, these people came around and collected the firewood because they have no firewood around, and they want to get the one which is ready... When they did that, we ended up quarrelling and fighting... Of course, what I said is I'm the one who cut the [wood], and I cut it for my family. And if you [take it], you expect my family to sleep hungry. So I [went to their place] and [retrieved] the firewood from them... Of course they want my family to sleep hungry.' (FDG Moyo)

In this case, he was able to retrieve his firewood cuttings, and the conflict did not lead to a fight. However, it is clear that such cases are sensitive, as taking someone's firewood is directly related to hunger. According to the LC leaders, in the area, some have planted their own trees which they prune to get firewood, while others go to the forests and reserves along the border: *'There are days which are set for them to collect firewood. Not every day. And there are numbers for women, you get around [5] bundles of firewood'* (KII Moyo). For some of these locations, limits have been set to manage firewood collection.

Inadequate water resources for the host community's livestock, mainly cows, goats and pigs, is also an issue. Cattle in particular move long distances to get water, especially during the dry season, thereby exposing them to theft, and sometimes they simply get lost.

In Palorinya, among the refugees, women expressed that they fear attacks when going to collect firewood. One woman narrated a recent example from a woman in the community who went to collect firewood in the forest. As she was on her way home from collecting firewood, some people from the host community came out of nowhere. They tied a piece of cloth over her eyes and tied her hands, leaving her alone in the forest. Luckily, she was found and brought home. Although they did not rape or beat her, there have also been such cases, and as a result, most women go in groups to collect firewood. Refugee leaders also confirmed that there had been cases of rape of women going to collect firewood, where the perpetrators would take the panga from the women and threaten them, sometimes with a bow and arrow. Cases like these are reported to the police. Although households in Palorinya depend on firewood, leaves and bark from coconut trees within the settlement can also be used for cooking as an alternative if firewood cannot be collected.

In Palorinya, the issue of access to fishing sites was also brought up. The settlement is located close to the River Nile, where some find a livelihood fishing. Refugee leaders gave examples that refugees had experienced having their fishing nets and hooks confiscated by host community members who felt that the fishing sites belonged to them. Once reported to the refugee leaders, the issue was brought to the LCIII, who encouraged the host community to allow refugees to fish alongside them.

In Bidibidi, refugee women walk 5-10 kilometres into the host community to collect firewood. Women are generally advised to walk in groups when collecting firewood to prevent rape. In most cases, women reported being met by youth from the host community, who sent them away when they attempted to collect firewood. Refugees in Bidibidi generally expressed that the host community sometimes denies them access to firewood and even grass. In relation to firewood, a man in the FGD explained: ‘They deny it because we are cutting the trees down, and they know that it affects the climate. So we are also urging partners to support us with some skills so that we can also plant trees so that we can live in harmony with them. Because we realise they are also right’ (FGD Bidibidi). Refugees fully understand the issues and consequences of cutting down trees, yet they lack the support to plant new ones.

In Yumbe, the host community members similarly shared their perception that natural resources, such as trees, have been cleared by the refugees for firewood. This is believed to have caused drought in the area, affecting opportunities for cultivation:

‘The refugees have come. The trees around have been cleared for firewood, which has now in return brought in drought season in the area. There’s now no proper season for cultivation. On top of that, they have stopped giving food to the refugees. So we are already worried that if this continues, in the next years, how is it going to be? How are the refugees going to survive? How are we going to survive as the hosts, because now the weather is not okay, you cannot do agriculture. However, we feel our relationship with refugees is good; only now all of us are struggling. What is affecting the refugees is also affecting us.’ (Yumbe FGD)

Although the host community members interviewed appreciated the presence of refugees, they expressed concern about the depletion of natural resources if this continues. The local leader interviewed also expressed that issues can arise between landlord and refugee renters on the use of the land’s resources: ‘Sometimes the landlord will say, as they are walking around here, “preserve the trees”. But you find, instead of farming, others want to get fuel in the form of charcoal, by cutting down these trees... Conflicts can easily begin to develop between them and the landlord who gave them the land’ (Yumbe KII). When refugees do not ask landlords for permission, conflicts may erupt. In this regard, the LC reported that conflicts over grass and firewood have generally declined. Leaders have issued a recommendation that refugees should

always ask permission from the owner of the trees or grass before cutting them, and the LC believes this has reduced conflicts. Other conflicts related to firewood raised by the leader involve the making of charcoal: ‘He burns the charcoal during dry season. In the process, this charcoal burst and set off a fire, and the fire destroyed houses. Eventually, it usually generates a kind of misunderstanding, hostility, hatred, where they will say we should not allow these people to come and do this’ (Yumbe KII). Issues can in this way quickly develop into a sentiment that refugees should not be allowed to collect firewood or make charcoal.

Access to natural water sources is also vital for host community members keeping cattle. A local leader mentioned that limited water sources for livestock can lead to issues: ‘Sometimes, when it comes to dry season, our communities have a culture of setting animals free. The animals just roam around. Because at that time there is limited water, you find the animals can go as far as 10 kilometres. Grazing and coming back. In this process, sometimes the animals end up destroying crops.’ (LC Yumbe). As mentioned in the previous section, crop destruction by animals often triggers conflicts between crop owners and animal owners.

In Imvepi, refugees are sometimes turned away by the host community when going to look for firewood:

‘They collect your pangas, your axe, and they send you back home. “Why do you come and cut our firewood?” So you have to ask for permission. And you give them [some of] the beans you received as food [rations]. Then you say, “Give me firewood, I give you food”. Then it will be okay. But when you go barehanded like this, they will not allow it.’ (FGD Imvepi)

Asking for permission is not enough to secure firewood: you also cannot come empty-handed. This type of exchange was likely easier when more refugees received food assistance. Some of the beans received at the food distribution centre were traded for firewood. Now that many refugees have been phased out of food assistance, this may pose challenges, as they remain highly dependent on firewood, yet have limited or no items to trade.

In Terego, close to Imvepi, collecting firewood used to be easy, as a host community member described: ‘Just turn behind the house, you get firewood, but now people have cleared all the firewood around.’ Currently, most of the trees in the area have been cut down,

and wood is becoming a scarce resource. Currently, when land is rented from the host community, refugees tend to clear all the trees for firewood. There is no designated site for collecting firewood, so a place that was gazetted for farmland is where most refugees and some hosts collect firewood: *‘On bad days, if you go, those people who are taking care of the farm, they chase you away: “You are not supposed to cut firewood here”. If you go the other days, when they are not there, you have a chance to collect firewood.’* The host community, however, were generally fine with refugees collecting firewood on their land, which is already dry, whereas cutting standing trees created tension:

‘There’s a high demand for the resources. The lands are being cleared, the trees are being cut continuously, but they are not replaced. Still, we allow them to go in the gardens to collect; sometimes they can enter someone’s garden and collect the dry ones. But there are some days you find the tensions rising because you, the owner of the land, you need that firewood, and the refugee also needs it and collects it. So tensions are still rising, because of the issue of fewer resources. Because of the diminishing resources and the increasing population, the conflicts are increasing.’ (Terego FGD)

Scarce resources lead to more conflict between refugees and host communities. Several respondents mentioned that tree cutting affects the soil and, in turn, agricultural activities. Refugees are therefore sometimes denied access to firewood: *‘Sometimes when we refugees go into the host community to try to cut their trees for firewood, we are chased back. We are told, “don’t cut any tree here, go back”. Then we go back.’* In previous years, organisations have attempted tree-planting initiatives, but some activities were unsuccessful due to the weather conditions. However, the host community still perceives such initiatives as potentially being able to resolve some of the issues.

In Madi-Okollo, near Zone 8 of Rhino Camp, the host community did not report issues or conflicts related to firewood or other natural resources. According to them, they mostly give firewood to refugees for free: *‘There is no conflict over firewood. We allow them [refugees] to go and collect firewood. And some of them even ask for cassava leaves, which we also give them.’* The same is the case for wood poles for construction: *‘When it comes to issue of trees, we give them free [wood] poles for construction. If they want to build, they come to the host community, we can give them poles for construction.’*

In Rhino Camp, however, sexual assault and exploitation were reported as a potential consequence of accessing natural resources from the host community. One woman, Joyce, narrated her experience trying to buy wood from a host community man to construct her home. They agreed on 100,000 UGX (approx. 27 USD) for the wooden poles; however, Joyce had only 85,000 UGX (approx. 23 USD) at the time. She asked him to give her some time to raise the balance. The man had a different idea. He suggested that she could have sex with him to cover the remaining UGX 15,000 (approx. 4 USD). Joyce refused. She decided not to fight with him over the money she had already paid because she did not want to cause conflict. Instead, Joyce just left the case, and the man kept the 85,000 UGX she had already paid. Women can end up in precarious situations, and some may not feel it is possible to refuse. In the end, access to materials for house construction and firewood for cooking is vital, which adds pressure for women who encounter sexual exploitation.

In Lobule, like other settlements in the study, accessing firewood is a challenge because there are few ‘natural trees’ without owners. Refugees are rarely allowed to collect firewood: *‘These days also, when we go to collect the firewood from them [the host community], they will just take it away. They chase people away.’* Some use grass instead, or if they can afford it, they buy firewood from the landowners. But trying to collect it for free causes issues.

In Koboko this was also the case: *‘Those natural trees, when they are gazetted in your territory, nobody is allowed to go and pick that firewood. It will start in a conflict’* (Koboko FGD). Most trees are on land that belongs to someone, and they usually do not allow others to collect firewood from their land. A woman in the FGD gave an example of her own children: *‘[They] attempted to go and get firewood from someone’s land. The children were caned and they were told to leave the trees there. Then they were chased away without the trees’* (Koboko FGD). In this case, the children had to come home empty-handed. In another instance, a woman who was chased away in the process of collecting firewood said: *‘I was told to leave all that I had collected there.’* Some use dried cassava stalks to cook their food when getting firewood is not possible, or garbage. Others travel to the DR Congo to collect firewood because there are many trees in this area, so people are typically allowed to collect it, whereas collecting it on land owned by someone in Uganda poses issues.

4.6. Impact of reduced humanitarian assistance

4.6.1. Key trends and findings

- The impacts of the reduced humanitarian funding for refugees in Uganda, especially the phasing out of food assistance for most refugees, are manifold, including: inability to pay school fees; rise in school dropouts; increase in child, early and forced marriage; hunger; theft; debt; and, sadly, many suicides. All these issues contribute to heightened levels of tension in the research locations.
- In line with the reductions in food assistance, refugees increasingly rely on access to farmland and, in most cases, rent land for farming. Consequently, demand and competition for farmland have risen. However, some members of the host community are also affected by poverty, which drives up the costs of renting land. It has become more difficult for refugees to afford farmland and firewood and to exchange goods in general, which, in some locations, has affected peaceful coexistence.
- As hunger and poverty have risen, theft of crops, food, and animals has become a larger problem, according to the participants. Cases of theft often lead to conflict when the thief is caught.
- Refugees are increasingly taking on debt and renting land or buying food on credit, which leads to conflict when they cannot repay the loan.
- With less funding, health facilities have also been affected, leading to fewer staff and sometimes low medicine stocks, which also contributes to increased competition for health services.
- Demand for food in markets has risen, leading to higher prices and affecting both host community members and refugees.
- The selection criteria for the Differentiated Assistance (DA) are unclear to the inhabitants (e.g., some single mothers receive food while others in similar situations do not). This situation has created tension between farmer group members and within the community at large.
- The reduced humanitarian assistance in the context of URRI's implementation period makes it important to consider the targeting of interventions and potential social cohesion risks in line with the recommendations in the annual report (URRI 2026). The interaction between the

context and intervention should be considered, including the selection criteria for training and programming, e.g., farmers or savings groups (refugees, host community members, youth, elders, women, men, ethnic groups, etc.).

4.6.2. Background

At the start of 2025, the already declining humanitarian funding was severely cut following the sudden withdrawal of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Food aid and other services in refugee camps across East Africa were significantly reduced, reaching historic lows in Uganda (Dawisha 2025; Halakhe 2025; NRG 2025; WFP 2025a; WFP 2025b). The impacts of these recent aid cuts have been numerous. In Ugandan refugee settlements, health and education services were affected, and food assistance was diminished, with 1 million refugees completely phased out of food assistance, while the remaining 662,000 refugees received significantly less (Degett, Whyte, and Hansen 2026:17–19, 35–37; Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:23–27). The reduced aid may also have heightened tensions and conflict dynamics in West Nile more widely, with theft- and debt-related conflicts in particular increasing (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:30–32; Humanitarian Action 2025). Another study has shown that the sudden withdrawal of USAID caused a significant and lasting rise in conflict in Africa's most USAID-dependent regions, indicating that large-scale, abrupt aid reductions can destabilise already fragile environments (Rohner et al. 2026) the second Trump administration issued a blanket stop-work order for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The decline in humanitarian funding has impacted not only refugees but also host community members who have benefited from this assistance in various ways.

4.6.3. Findings

Across the settlements of Lobule, Bidibidi, Palorinya, Rhino Camp, and Imvepi, refugees have been affected by reductions in humanitarian aid at both household and community levels. The general situation is worsening after many were

phased out of food assistance. Refugees struggle to feed their families and pay school fees. Schools and other services have reduced capacity, leading to overcrowding and conflicts. Some youth who have dropped out have turned to crime or engaged in risky work such as gold mining (mainly in Imvepi). There was also mention of increased instability within households, including rising domestic violence. As a refugee in Bidibidi stated: *‘Domestic violence is also increasing. Even dropouts. Because there’s no money; paying for children in the second grade is very hard. So you find girls getting pregnant, and they drop out of school. Sometimes children are even married because there’s no sufficient balance there’* (Bidibidi FGD). Some families resort to child or forced marriage to gain bridewealth. The research team has observed several cases of forced marriage in both Rhino Camp and Kenyan settlements (Kakuma and Kalobeyei) (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026). Although these practices existed before the recent aid reduction, forced marriage is often worsened by scarce resources (Doherty, Rao, and Radney 2024; Concina, Drzewiecki, and JRS 2024; UN Women 2026).

Respondents in **Palorinya and Bidibidi**, indicated that suicide was increasingly used as a final option to cope with decreased assistance.

‘If you see that your neighbour had a good harvest, now for you, you don’t have anything. It can even cause you to hang yourself and commit suicide. For me, if I am hungry, I can even cry. Because when we reached this settlement, we were given food [rations], but now we are categorised. Some of us are in category 3, category 2, category 1. So those in category 3 are the people who are not supported with the food.’ (Palorinya FGD)

According to refugee leaders in Palorinya, suicide can also lead to conflict, especially in Uganda, where it is illegal. Suicides and suicide attempts as conflict triggers are also frequently seen in the research teams’ data from Uganda over the past nine years (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026; Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2024:46–47).

The reductions in humanitarian aid also impact the host community, both directly and indirectly. The services shared with refugees, such as healthcare and education, are diminished, along with jobs (mostly casual and incentive) offered by the humanitarian actors, which provided a significant income for nearby villages. Although disputed by key actors, it is well known that many members of the host community benefited directly from food

aid, particularly children under five and those not recorded in the biometric system (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026). Additionally, trade and income from renting farmland to refugees have decreased due to the refugees’ presence, as has the small-scale casual labour often paid in kind, such as repairing grass roofs. As explained by a host community respondent, this new situation brings tension within households: *‘The garden work you’re doing is not enough to sustain the family. So, you find that hunger comes in the home. And in homes where there is hunger, there’s always no understanding between the family members. So, you find the children having conflicts with their parents, parents not having a good understanding with their wife and their husband’* (Terego FGD).

Across the locations, theft of animals, crops and other items was highlighted as a trigger of conflict. In **all settlements and among most host communities in Yumbe and Terego**, theft cases were perceived to have increased over the past year due to reductions in humanitarian assistance. In **Yumbe**, the host community was especially affected by theft of cows and goats. They believe that the thieves are mixed groups of refugees and host community members, but with the host community members as the ‘planners’ behind the theft. Theft cases are often difficult to solve because they occur at night, but the host community members in the FGD reported that a few days after losing a goat, for example, they would hear from other community members who may have spotted it far away. Most believe that goats are taken to the market in Imvepi to be sold. Respondents link the increased theft to reduced household assistance: *‘Because of the issue of categorisation, there are increased theft cases in the community.’*

In **Bidibidi**, the rise in theft is believed to be driven by hunger, partly caused by reductions in food assistance. According to FGD participants, both refugees and host community members steal. They commonly target crops from gardens or goats. The number of goats in the settlement has fallen sharply due to theft, with one man in the FGD noting that he used to have eight goats but now has none. We have seen similar developments in Rhino Camp, where keeping goats has become both too expensive after the aid reductions and too risky due to increased theft (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026). Although rising theft heightens tension and insecurity in Yumbe and Bidibidi, no examples were given of theft leading to conflicts between groups or individuals, as the thieves usually remain unknown.

Terego, the host community close to Imvepi, had also experienced an increase in theft of crops from their gardens:

'The issue of theft cases has come mainly after the issue of categorisation, because the refugees are not getting food. They decided to start doing agriculture with us. But you find that most of their youths are not participating in this work; then they before the cassava is even ready, they go and start stealing it in the gardens... For the refugees, it is easy for them to monitor and sometimes even catch people who are stealing their things in the garden. Then there are a lot of quarrels and sometimes beating of the victims. But for us, the host, it is hard for us to capture those people who are stealing our things. Sometimes, maybe it is overnight, you find in the morning in the garden, your cassava is removed. Currently, the most rampant issue we are observing is the issue of theft in the garden.' (Terego FGD)

The host community in Terego believes that refugees have more time to guard their gardens in the evening, when theft is most common. The community members shared several examples of crop theft; for instance, one woman explained: *'Every time I wake up in the morning, I find that someone has uprooted the cassava. It continuously happened until the cassava remained a small portion.'* Another woman from the community, Jane, had planted pumpkins near her home, which were then stolen by a female refugee. Jane discovered the woman with the pumpkin. The two women did not share a common language and could therefore not agree on a solution on the spot. Jane brought the woman to the security focal person for refugees in the settlement, who demanded that she compensate for the stolen pumpkin. However, the woman lacked the funds to do so, likely explaining her theft initially. Consequently, the security focal person decided that physical punishment was the only option and ordered the woman to be publicly caned. Jane did not intend for this to happen and later reflected on the incident during the focus group discussion.

'Actually, I had brought her to the security just to make sure that the security team informs her not to come to my garden and steal again, maybe next time to request. But then, people also gathered around; there were many people. But it was not okay with me, caning her in front of the gathering because I felt that would be like a shame on my side. But the security from their side said no, that is how he wants it to be handled.' (Terego FGD)

According to Jane, she was not seeking compensation or punishment; she simply wanted to ensure that the woman would not steal again and, hopefully, recover the stolen pumpkin. This way of managing the issue could unintentionally heighten tensions between the refugees and the host community.

In Bidibidi, the reduced humanitarian assistance also posed a challenge to the group dynamics in the refugee farmer groups. Those in category 3 (people phased out of food assistance) who share farm groups with individuals in categories 1 and 2 (who receive food) sometimes choose to avoid their part of the work on the farm or only harvest crops for themselves, because they believe they should have an advantage over those still on food rations. As explained by a member:

'Tomorrow, if it is their day to come and work in the [farmer] group, that one will say, "ah, we [were] not eating yesterday". So the group members cannot participate equally... There was a time when we came in the morning, everything was [harvested]. They said, "these things belong to the group. How do you expect us to survive, us in category three?" So, it affects the groups.' (Bidibidi FGD)

This dynamic between members of the farmer groups and within the broader community is leading to tension in the implementation areas. As another participant in Bidibidi explained: *'I expected that all the refugees are equal. But now when this issue of food categorisation came where there is category one, category two, and category three, people now start to develop bad habits. Even if this is my brother, but he's receiving food rations, we now have a gap'* (Bidibidi FGD).

In Yumbe, the host members raised concerns about the amount of seeds provided to the farmer groups.

'Organisations measure the seeds and give them to the group members. You'll imagine that there are 30 people in a group. They bring seeds that cannot even be divided by these 30 people. And they will say that these seeds are for the group. But in this group, each person has different problems in his or her home. So once this harvest is out, what they are getting from it does not solve their problems in their homes. So, you'll see conflict amongst the group members simply because what the organisation is giving is small and the group is large, and our problems are more than what they are giving.' (Yumbe FGD)

As households increasingly face poverty and hunger, conflicts arise among group members when yields are insufficient for everyone. The same concern was raised by refugees in Bidibidi.

Across all locations, individuals borrow from Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), businesses, and other people. But particularly among refugees, debt and debt-related conflicts seem to have increased as humanitarian assistance has decreased, as the research team's earlier studies indicated (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026; Degett and Whyte 2026). Refugees mostly borrow food, but also cash for their businesses, land rental, or school fees. In Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, Lobule, and Imvepi, refugees felt that debt cases increased with aid cuts. Many struggle to repay loans, and some end up fleeing and crossing the border, mainly to South Sudan, to avoid repayment. Sometimes, people are arrested or taken to the LCI for borrowing money from the host community without repaying it. In Bidibidi, some have experienced having all their belongings confiscated to settle large debts. As a result, it has become more difficult to borrow from the host community, especially in Lobule and Rhino Camp.

'Before, when we were getting the food rations, we could go and borrow, and then we pay later. But this time they fear that people will borrow and they will not pay. When maybe a cow died, they inform the refugees that "you come and take it for credit and pay later". It happens. But now, when it dies, we will not be informed. Because they know we have no money. Once they distribute to the refugees, the refugees will have nothing to pay. So they are no longer doing this kind of practice.' (Lobule FGD)

There used to be more trade and interaction between refugees and host community members in and around Lobule, but in line with the food ration cuts, these have diminished. Refugees in Lobule are taking loans from each other:

'It's very hard because, if this sister goes to me to ask for a credit of a food item. I will need to give it, definitely, [although] I know that she has nothing to refund it back. It will cause a kind of problem between us. I know their situation on the ground. And then when you go to maybe borrow from a shop, the shop owners will this time not agree to give you a debt [credit]' (Lobule FGD).

Many feel compelled to lend food to their community members because they understand how desperate the situation is. However, it can lead to internal conflict and tension when someone cannot repay the

loan. VSLA groups also grant only small loans out of concern that the money will not be repaid.

In Rhino Camp, a refugee woman described the difficulty of taking loans from the host community:

'There are times that we don't have money, but then we go to the neighbours who are nationals, to get food items on credit. Then we tell them that, "okay, you wait for the day of [food] distribution to come and collect your money". But the challenge is sometimes when the national person does not understand you very well, before you get cash during the distribution time, they start disturbing you; they need their money... [It can] even bring a fight. Somebody can fear that if you have a debt with that person, it may bring a problem later. I may borrow, but I fear that it may bring a problem.' (Rhino Camp FGD)

Another woman said she is not taking credit: *'I fear that someone will come and strangle me over the money. What I do is I sell my clothes. If I have a problem, I can just sell my clothes and then buy food'* (Rhino Camp FGD). Selling in-kind items is a common practice that the research team has noticed increasingly since the phasing out of food assistance. However, it is not sustainable, and many people are running out of items to sell.

In Yumbe, unpredictable weather also affects debt-related conflicts among refugees and farming hosts. It is common for farmers in VSLAs to borrow money for seedlings and seeds, but if the harvest fails (due to drought or heavy rain), they are unable to repay the loan, creating tension and conflict.

In addition to increased debt, the reduced humanitarian assistance also impacts relationships between refugees and host communities in various other ways. **In Bidibidi**, refugees said they believed living conditions in the host community are even more critical than among the refugees themselves, leading to survival strategies.

'When the food [ration] was there, some of the host community would also come and buy the food within the settlement... Now that they have cut off the food ration, the only thing that comes to their mind is that they increase the price of the land so that at least they also get some money for them to survive. So, you find when you go to rent land, they will now increase the price, and it becomes very expensive for us [the refugees].' (Bidibidi FGD)

The rising cost of farmland rent also affects refugees. Refugees phased out of humanitarian assistance have lost funds and food items that they used to trade for firewood, for instance.

In Yumbe, the host community felt that they had really benefited from the humanitarian assistance that refugees received:

'It has also caused a lot of hunger in the community because they have reduced the food given to the refugees, and now there are some refugees who are not getting food. So this has increased the demand for food in the markets. When the refugees were not there, the prices in the market were not like this. When they were receiving their rations, the demand for food was not there. They were also selling their food [from food rations] to the host community members. Literally, the community members were benefiting from it. But because of the categorisation issue, they are not giving them food; they are not receiving anything. However, we are now all struggling for the little that is being produced by the hosts in the market.' (Yumbe FGD)

The reduced assistance has affected food demand in markets, leading to higher prices. This was also the case in **Koboko**: *'It has affected us so much. When those refugees [were] still receiving the food ration or the cash, the prices of the things were very low. But now, as the refugees are not getting the food anymore, prices have gone very high, and the things that we used to buy cheaply, this time it's very expensive for us'* (Koboko FGD). For instance, beans, which reportedly used to cost 1,500 UGX (approx. 0.5 USD) per kilo, now cost 5,000 UGX (approx. 1.5 USD) per kilo. Similarly, in Madi-Okollo, a woman described the impacts of the reduced food assistance for refugees: *'The food is not enough in the market, and the price has increased. So, like a national, maybe you don't have that food at home, you want to buy, but now it is expensive.'*

In addition, **in Yumbe** there is also competition for health services: *'When you go to the health centres, you find there's also a struggle for the health services in the hospitals. So there's [an] increase of people falling sick in the community. Even if I go to the health centre, there are fewer drugs given, there are so many people; refugees are coming, the hosts are coming. So there's literally competition for services'* (Yumbe FGD). Health services have also been impacted by reduced humanitarian assistance, as most NGO health providers have experienced budget cuts, resulting in reduced staffing and medicine stocks (Degett, Whyte, and Hansen 2026). It also contributed to their peaceful coexistence. For instance, refugees would visit host community households for funerals and bring food (and vice versa), yet now poverty has made this practice difficult.

In Lobule, refugees similarly felt that reduced

humanitarian assistance had greatly impacted peaceful coexistence, both with the host community and internally among refugees.

'One of the sources of conflict that we have discovered is the issue of the food cuts that has caused a problem. As refugees, we don't have cash to hire the host community gardens. So the host community take over all their land. So we feel so unhappy for ourselves because we are useless now. We cannot afford to hire their land. So we are not happy even among ourselves. Because some of the people have been taken out [of food assistance] and others are still existing, so people don't associate among themselves well. They feel like some are more favoured than the others.' (Lobule FGD)

The cash received through distributions was partly used to rent land from the host community members, who also benefited from the aid refugees received. Now, refugees in Lobule can no longer afford to rent land for farming, which has affected the relationship: *'before when we were receiving [assistance] and we had cash, we had a very good relationship with the host community. And we could afford to hire land'* (Lobule FGD). Among the refugees, this has also created a divide: some are more 'favoured' because they still receive food rations, while others have been phased out.

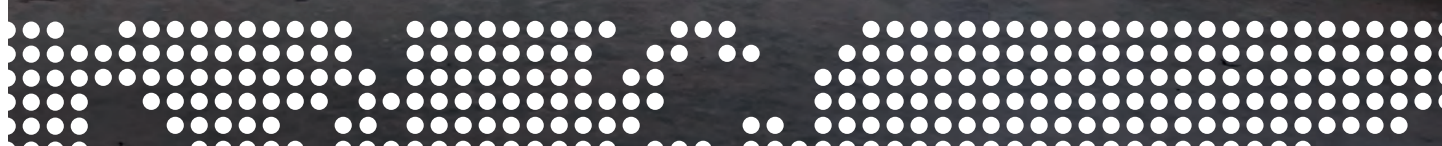
Among the host community members interviewed in **Terego**, there was a different perception of the reduced humanitarian assistance compared to the other locations in the study.

'When they were still giving [refugees] the food rations, they were receiving enough food, oil, and everything was given to them, they would sometimes point at the host community saying "these are poor people, they don't have anything, that's why they're not eating, they don't have enough meals at their home". But now because the services are reduced for them, most of them are not getting food. Now they are looking at it like, "I think we are together with this host. We need to coexist with them". Now they come to us, look for land to cultivate. That shows that they have also understood that they are not different from us. They are the same people... So with the reduction in the aid, it has also brought us together' (Terego FGD)

Here, the phasing out of food assistance was seen as reducing the power imbalance by improving access to funds, encouraging refugees to farm, and fostering peaceful coexistence.



Community hall in refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



5. Gendered dimensions of common conflict patterns

It is clear from the study that men and women participate differently in, and are affected differently by, conflicts in the research locations in the West Nile area. Some types of conflicts and tensions highlighted earlier mainly impact women, while others affect households and families at large. In practice, Ugandan women have restricted rights to access, inherit, and own land due to customary practices, even though statutory laws have officially

banned discrimination in land ownership since 1995 (Foote 2025:49; UCOBAC and ILC n.d.:1). While host community women do have land use rights through their fathers and husbands, it remains difficult for them to establish land ownership in reality. This increases their reliance on renting land and makes them more vulnerable to land conflicts, similar to refugee men and women who also rely on renting.





Outskirts of a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



Because collecting firewood and fetching water are considered women's responsibilities in both refugee and host communities, they are more impacted by tensions and conflicts related to these tasks, as highlighted in many studies conducted in these research areas (Logie et al. 2021:2, 6; DRC 2018:31; NRC 2024:19; ASPR 2022:8, 19; Destrijcker et al. 2023:18, 31; Cities Alliance 2026:18; Naiga 2025). As noted earlier, women often fear collecting firewood alone. They prefer to go in groups because of the risks of attacks and rape. A study in Bidibidi showed that the gendered division of labour, where women and girls are responsible for firewood and water collection, exposes them to violence, which is worsened by issues such as deforestation (Logie et al. 2021:8). Women are required to walk longer distances to gather firewood due to deforestation, making them more isolated and thus more vulnerable to violence (ibid.:6).

Cases of sexual exploitation remain a persistent concern for women, with these incidents frequently appearing in the research team's data over the past nine years. A notable example from Rhino Camp, described above, involves Joyce, who was unable to pay the full price for wooden poles and was consequently asked for sexual favours to settle her debt. Such cases leave women vulnerable, especially in areas like Zone 8, where there are no comprehensive structures to address these incidents.

While women constitute the majority of the population in Ugandan refugee settlements, their meaningful participation in formal decision-making processes remains limited (Naiga 2025). As highlighted by respondents in our FGDs and in a recent study, female leaders are crucial for ensuring a better understanding of, and highlighting, the specific challenges facing women in the settlements (ibid.). The study also notes that, since women are most affected by land, firewood, and water conflicts, they should be actively included in decision-making on policies and services related to these issues, which they are not sufficiently included in today (ibid.).

Internally in households, traditional gender roles, particularly discriminatory and paternal control mechanisms over women's actions, choices,

preferences, and whereabouts, are prevalent in the data for this study and the research team's long-term engagement in the area. This is also often the case when the paternal decision-makers are based far away in other camps or back in South Sudan (Degett and Whyte Forthcoming). Some respondents reported that host women are sometimes not permitted by their husbands to join VSLA groups or take loans, due to a fear that if they are unable to repay the debt, 'his land will be grabbed' (Yumbe FGD). Many women benefit from joining VSLAs to start businesses, rent land for farming, or pay for their children's school fees. Restricting access to loan associations significantly limits their options for making ends meet day to day and pursuing future opportunities, such as education or starting a local business.

Another common issue reported by respondents in this and many other studies conducted by the research team is that husbands assume control over their wives' earnings, loans, and salaries. An example of this was given in Terego by a Ugandan woman living next door to a refugee family. The refugee woman had purchased firewood to burn for charcoal to earn an income. She asked her husband for support during the process, but after all the charcoal was sold, her husband kept all the earnings, despite her having bought the wood with her own savings. The wife decided to confront her husband because she felt she should at least be compensated for her investment, but she was beaten by her husband.

It is evident from the data that women are vulnerable to SGBV and domestic violence. Suspicion of women's behaviour and cultural acceptance of punishment and physical discipline for women increase the challenges. A common example that emerged during the engagement was that some husbands believe their wives might be having an affair when the long queue at the water point delays their return to the homestead in the evening, which can easily lead to aggression and punishment (see many similar examples in Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2024).

Alcohol and drug abuse among men was frequently mentioned in interviews as a trigger for these acts of aggression, abuse, and domestic violence.



Women operating one of the first motorised water pumps after installation in a refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2018 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



6. Dynamics and key actors in conflict management

Conflict dynamics are shaped by a range of formal and informal actors. The primary parties involved in conflict management include the LCs and RWCs, water and land resolution committees, elders, the OPM, police and military forces, religious leaders, and humanitarian organisations.

In Uganda, local community governance comprises Local Councils (LCs) with cabinets and chairpersons across five tiers, from village to district. These LCs are elected by their communities to serve as their official representatives. The LCI and LCII members are usually influential figures near the settlements, especially since they belong to clans that hold land ownership (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:30). They are generally involved in managing conflicts within the host community, particularly when elders, extended families, or the involved parties cannot resolve the issue. For example, in Moyo, respondents explained that when land conflicts or disputes occur, the first step is to approach the landlord, followed by the landlord's elder. Next, the elder summons fellow elders for a mediation meeting with the conflicting parties. If the matter cannot be resolved, it is usually reported to the LCI and may be escalated to the LCIII level. Elders and the LCs collaborate closely in conflict mitigation and other matters.

'So these children, when they grew up, they started having conflicts over the land because the father died, and he did not divide the land equally before he passed away. So what they did was, all the elders gathered, plus some [LC] leaders in the community; they called those children of that late man, they went to the garden they were having conflicts over. The land was divided equally in the presence of the elders and the leaders. They would divide it and say that this is yours, this is yours, and this is yours, so that it was easier for them to manage that conflict. Since then, the children are now living peacefully. Each person knows that this is mine, and this is mine.' (Yumbe FGD)

They are often involved in dividing land when disputes arise. Usually, a court fee is required to have your case heard at the LC. In Terego, an example was given of someone whose goats destroyed another person's garden crops. The owner of the goats had to pay 5,000 UGX (1.5 USD) in court fees in addition to compensation to the garden owner.

The governance structure of the refugee community, the RWCs, mirrors that of the LCs. The RWCs are composed of elected refugee leaders who serve as the official link between the refugee community and Ugandan authorities and humanitarian actors. The RWC structure and its chairpersons are key figures in conflict prevention, mediation, and mitigation for refugees (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026:30). Generally, when a conflict or dispute arises between refugees, the matter is first taken to elders or neighbours – depending on the nature of the conflict – then to the block leader and to the RWC, and so on. Government actors, such as the OPM, provide policies and regulations on conflict management both formally and informally, such as restricting or granting the RWC structure a mandate to resolve certain types of conflicts within the community (see also Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2024). Because of their mandate and authority, OPM staff, particularly Settlement Commandants, are key actors in handling disputes and tensions that escalate to the community level and are often attentive to and well-respected by refugees. **Refugees in Bidibidi**, for instance, requested direct support from OPM in terms of creating an open location for farming or supporting land leasing agreements with landlords: *'So in case anything happens, at least for them, they have the power of talking to the host community. But for us, even if we have the agreement, at any time they can just terminate that agreement.'*

In some areas, water committees have been set up and generally handle water conflicts effectively. As mentioned, water committees are usually community-led and composed of representatives from both refugee and host communities, who collaborate to organise water access and contribute to conflict management. For example, in the host community of Terego near Imvepi, there are ‘watchmen’ at the water points. In case of disputes, the watchmen sit down with the conflicting parties to discuss the issue, and those involved are fined UGX 5,000 (approx. 1.5 USD): *‘It has become a policy that anyone who fights at the water point, you are charged with some fine to pay to ensure that people don’t fight there.’* The funds collected from fines are used to maintain the boreholes.

Some settlements also have land resolution committees. These committees manage conflicts in relation to land, such as mediating land disputes and border issues. Land resolution committees include the LCs, clan leaders and local leaders of the area or sub-county.

Disputes between refugees and members of the host community are most often managed by both the RWC and LC. When a refugee reports a problem to the RWC, they contact the LC and organise a meeting with all involved parties from both sides. For instance, if crops are damaged by a stray animal, the matter is resolved by agreeing on appropriate compensation for the damages. In most locations, cooperation among RWCs, LCs, and OPM is generally viewed positively. In Bidibidi, for example, if something is stolen, the RWC informs the LC, and if the item can be traced and recovered, it is returned.

In Lobule and zone 8 of Rhino Camp, the mechanisms for managing conflicts are under strain. **In Lobule**, respondents expressed concern over processes or pathways for addressing problems or disputes. Refugees report that they face threats when they raise issues. In Lobule, peace committees have been organised by humanitarian actors and comprise community members from refugee and host communities. Although these peace committees meet with both the host and refugee communities to discuss conflicts, such as tensions over stray animals, reporting these to the committee has become difficult: *‘For you who reported this case, you will be in problems. They will keep disturbing you, insulting you. They have some words that they are tired of refugees. And then they can even burn their houses.’* These threats stem from the fact that the land agreement for the settlement has expired, preventing refugees from reporting

problems: *‘When your crops have been damaged by cattle, then you have to just keep silent. And whatever the harm, you to just keep silent over it.’* The elected leader also faces threats when he attempts to report issues. Recently, when some solar lights were stolen, he reported it to organisations and authorities, and they said the solar lights belong to the host community, so even if they were stolen, it is not his concern to report such issues. He was threatened that if he continued to report such cases, they would chase him away or burn him inside the house. As mentioned, these threats forced the leader to move his household to the town, which also makes it harder for refugees in Lobule to report issues, as they would need to travel to the town.

Refugees in zone 8 of Rhino Camp mentioned that they generally do not report issues because they do not know or trust the existing structures. Generally speaking, processes to mitigate conflicts have also not yet been put in place. For instance, most people are aware that in other zones of Rhino Camp, there are specific times, mainly during the rainy season, when animals need to be tied, and if a stray animal is found in your garden, you should hand it over to LC1, and the owner is fined for leaving the animal untied.

Elders are important figures in conflict management. However, **in Moyo**, due to the intense land conflict between two clans, the elders are also hesitant to get involved: *‘The elders are quiet because they’re also fearing it. They’re fearing to go and do some demarcations. The fear is that when you go, the other clan might come and fight’.* When land conflicts occur, the ideal approach is to report the issue to the elders of the involved landlords and, if the matter cannot be resolved, to the LC structure. In practice, there were a couple of examples of host community members in Moyo ‘leaving’ a problem instead of reporting it to the elders: *‘When those neighbours decided to grab my land, I left the land. Instead of going to call for the elders, I decided to leave the land for those people. I didn’t go back to solve the issue’* (Moyo FGD). This may relate to the big ongoing land conflict: *‘When there’s a conflict, mostly one part has to step down. But if all of them stand up for the issue, it brings a lot of conflict, a lot of fighting, and so what we have come [to realise] is one part has to step down. To just let go’* (Moyo FGD). Letting a case go becomes a way of avoiding conflict: *‘It is one way of solving the issue. So there will be no fighting’* (Moyo FGD).

Police are sometimes involved in conflict management, mainly in criminal cases when reports are made. As our previous study in Rhino

Camp has shown (2024), access to police in settlements is sometimes limited due to fees and the high population-to-police ratio. Generally, the police are mostly involved in conflicts that have escalated to violence; conflicts ‘where there is blood’, as other studies have also indicated (Gidron 2022:26; Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2024:29). Occasionally, police intervene in other ‘minor’ cases. In Peter’s case from Yumbe is a good example. He grew up with his maternal family, and when he returned to his father’s land, his uncle did not want him to own any of it. The uncle reported the case to the police, which is somewhat unusual: *‘My uncle reported the case to the police. I went to the LCs and the elders. Because culturally for land issues you’re supposed to sit with the LCs and the elders, because these are the people who know the boundaries of these lands. But my uncle refuses and goes to police’* (Yumbe FGD). In some minor cases, the police will refer back to other authorities. As reported in Imvepi among refugees, examples were given in which issues involving stray animals were sometimes reported to the police, who then called the LC1 to resolve them. Additionally, the police and military become involved when a conflict escalates significantly, such as the dispute between two clans in Moyo over land, in which they intervened.

Religious leaders, churches, and faith-based organisations also contribute to peacebuilding. For example, in Moyo, during a major conflict in 2014, they intervened and organised a peace dialogue for the community. They said: *‘Whether being Sudanese, Ugandan or what, you are a person of God. You belong to God. So you should not fight against your brother. You should see every person as brothers and sisters’* (Moyo FGD). Most often, religious actors support conflict management and peacebuilding through collective prayers, preaching peaceful coexistence, and engaging in dialogue. This helps to reduce

conflicts, as a refugee leader in Rhino Camp noted: *‘The church and the leaderships have actually ironed out a lot of [conflicts] in dialogues, in small gatherings, in funerals... They’ve been educating people on how to stay with their neighbours’* (KII Rhino Camp).

A significant number of NGO and CBO-led peace-building initiatives operate in the research area, although many have been scaled back due to cuts in humanitarian funding. The RWCs sometimes seek assistance from NGOs and other stakeholders to promote dialogue between conflicting communities. Some have received training from humanitarian organisations: *‘Conflicts were a bit common. People were not understanding each other... There even were a lot of trainings on peace, on how you can approach and how you can stay [with] the other, and it reduced those kinds of conflicts [between groups]’* (Palorinya FGD). Some leaders noted that findings from assessments, such as this conflict analysis, are rarely shared, even though they could be useful to them.

Actors are generally multifaceted. Not all leaders are equally skilled at managing conflicts. Collaboration among the various categories of actors also varies. In the same location, elders can be perceived as having a positive influence and playing an important role in conflict management, yet at the same time, some elders influence youth to participate in fights over land (as was the case in Moyo). Some RWCs and LCs are very active leaders, while others are perhaps less involved. RWCs are volunteers and refugees who have also been affected by the reduction in humanitarian aid. In some cases, this may mean that leaders need to focus more on their income-generating activities than on their leadership roles (Degett, Hansen, and Whyte 2026).



Host community boys take care of cattle in a local cattle collaboration initiative between local Ugandans and South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda, 2023 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

7. Connectors

The previous sections have highlighted points of conflict, triggers and tensions in the research locations. The analysis of primary and secondary data highlights recurring events, situations, traditions, and social gatherings that reinforce peaceful relations and social stability among hosts and refugees, as well as within the groups. This

section will outline key connectors, both between refugee and host communities and within ethnic groups, and will touch on the social, institutional, and resource-based aspects of reinforcing peaceful coexistence. All these potential connectors can either create division or foster positive interactions between groups.

7.1. Social connectors

Faith-based gatherings serve as connectors in most locations. Mosques and, in particular, churches are shared by refugee and host communities. As mentioned by a respondent: *‘They are believers. They go for prayers, and in the church, they say you should not fight your neighbours, you should pray harder. That’s another way of bringing people together and resolving conflict’* (Palorinya FGD). While most refugees are Christians, host communities in Yumbe practise Islam. Intermarriage was high in most areas, except in the newly established Zone 8 in Rhino Camp, where inhabitants have not yet established long-term social relations, and in the Yumbe area, where differences in religion and culture complicate intermarriage. Intermarriage is a strong connector between refugee and host communities, and also a way to get access to land for the refugee marrying into a host family: *‘So if I married your daughter, you are supposed to respect me. So, if you are my in-law, and I try to borrow land, then that will build that relationship.’* (Palorinya FGD). Intermarriage also connects host communities across different clans: *‘If you get married to a certain clan, definitely you have created a relationship. You become related to each other’* (KII Moyo). Occasions like traditional weddings also bring people together across different groups. Across most locations (Imvepi, Terego, Bidibidi, Yumbe, Moyo, Rhino Camp), funerals were described as social events that unite people across groups and between refugee and host communities.

‘For us, if somebody has been living together in the trading centre, you sit together with them in the evening hours, you share time together. If this person has lost someone, maybe in South Sudan and has gotten a phone call that, “oh, you have lost a relative”, then they begin to mourn the next evening at their home. It feels bad for us. You have been staying with someone the other days, and then today the person is mourning. If you are not mourning with the person, it doesn’t look well. These people have stayed here long. We feel that these are our sisters and brothers. When we have occasions, we pray together. Even in schools, our children study together. So we feel that we are one with these people. We have lived with them for long. So this has united us to be brothers and sisters. That’s why we end up being together with them in times of funeral.’ (Terego FGD)

Joining your neighbours in mourning is a strong social norm, and for some, failing to do so might lead to accusations of causing the death. Other studies have also demonstrated this, for instance, in Bidibidi and Rhino Camp, where refugees and host community members participate in funeral rites when someone loses a loved one and provide support to the bereaved with cash and food (KRC Uganda 2021:13). Events such as drama, music, and dance festivals generally bring people together (Moyo). Similarly, sports activities unite refugee and host communities, as they invite each other to friendly matches. Other social events also foster community bonds, such as when elders

organise ceremonies with food, and within the host community, ‘communal sittings’ also serve this purpose: *‘The communal sittings, where the elders sit and have their discussions. Also they have these communal family sittings where they have joint meals as a family and talk together, and that also brings them together’* (Moyo FGD). Community elders, elected leaders, religious leaders, and NGOs often act as key connectors, promoting social cohesion—particularly in managing disputes over land, water, and other resources—and in facilitating dialogue and peacebuilding events.

For some, shared experiences of historical ties, linguistic similarities, and culinary preferences serve as unifying elements for both refugee and host communities. For generations born before the mid-1980s, the displacement of Ugandan refugees in South Sudan following the fall of former President Idi Amin holds particular significance: *‘We are one. These people who have come, we share the same blood. We tell them that we also went to South Sudan as refugees, and when we were there, they were also treating us as brothers, so there’s no reason to create a rift’* (LC Yumbe). In some locations, refugee and host communities speak dialects of the same language, particularly the Kakwa in Koboko, Terego, and Madi-Okollo, whose dialects extend across the border into both the DR Congo and South Sudan. In contrast, misunderstandings based on language differences can sometimes trigger or exacerbate conflict. This was once the case in Imvepi:

‘Those days we used not to understand their language. Refugees used not to understand our language. So anytime we talked, refugees would feel like we were talking about them, against them. Then when they are talking, we would also feel the refugees are talking about us. But now we understand their language, and the refugees also understand our language. You can easily know what the person is talking about, whether good or bad, so it makes us coexist’ (Terego FGD).

The long-term interaction between host and refugee communities has enabled effective communication and understanding. In Zone 8, a recent conflict escalated because a woman borrowed money from a man living in a nearby village, with the condition that she would repay the loan once she received the food distribution. According to the refugee woman, the deal was clear, but the man misunderstood the timing of the distribution, and language differences made it difficult to steer the conversation constructively, ultimately leading to a dispute that local leaders resolved.

Shared goals or circumstances also bring together refugee and host communities. Another study has shown that using the same land for cultivation has also connected refugee and host communities in Bidibidi and Rhino Camp (KRC Uganda 2021:13). As mentioned earlier, the host community in Imvepi felt they had more in common with refugees now that refugees have been phased out of food assistance, bringing them closer together as refugees are joining them in cultivating land. In some locations, landlords even lend their land to refugees for free or without a time limit. Generally, shared needs such as access to water, farmland, and livelihoods also act as connectors.

7.2. Institutional and resource-based connectors

Shared services, resources, and facilities serve as strong links between refugee and host communities. On a daily basis, health centres, schools, and other facilities function as venues for social interaction. A study in Bidibidi and Rhino Camp similarly observed that sharing water points, health centres, and children attending the same schools brings refugees and host community members together (KRC Uganda 2021:13). While sharing water points and health facilities can sometimes lead to conflict, it was also described as something that unites people, as respondents in Yumbe and Terego also mentioned: *‘We all meet together with these people at health facilities. Health services unite us together because we all receive them in the same place’* (FGD Yumbe).

On a broader level, sub-county leaders recognise that the arrival of refugees in West Nile has led to improvements in overall development and infrastructure at various levels. One LC highlighted that the reason why three health centres are operating in his area is because of the presence of refugees. Without refugees, they would be fortunate to have just one. A similar sentiment was expressed by the host community in Madi-Okollo: *‘The development right now in Rhino Camp Sub County, is because of the presence of the refugees. Now when you look at the health centre in Rhino Camp, it has developed and looks nice because of the presence of the refugees’* (Madi-Okollo FGD).



Arua city from above, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

There is a fear that services and health centres might disappear if refugees return. Because the development came ‘because of the presence of the refugees’, the concern may be that donors are likely to pull their funding if there are no longer refugees in the area. The host community generally appreciates the development and services introduced to their areas because of the refugees’ presence. Programmes, interventions, and training by humanitarian actors act as connectors. Especially when training groups, for example, include both refugees and members of the host community, these are occasions for them to meet and interact across groups. The positive opportunities that the refugee response offers are valued everywhere.

‘I am appreciating the presence of refugees, and feel that our relationship with them is good... we are able to acquire so many trainings and studies because of the presence of refugees, because whenever they are bringing something for the refugees, there is always 30% nationals and 70% refugees. So this has greatly improved the relationship between us and the refugees. The presence of refugees in this community, it has done a lot of positive things.’ (Yumbe FGD)

Others mentioned that before the arrival of the refugees, many children in the host community were not receiving an education. Now, many have gained skills through training in tailoring, hairdressing, carpentry, or mechanics, and have been able to find employment. However, the future in this regard is hard to predict. If funding cuts continue (or even stay at this level), while the number of refugees keeps growing, the services provided by humanitarian actors are under immense pressure. It is likely that earlier feelings of unity and widespread hospitality will decline among the population in the West Nile area. We are already seeing tighter policies toward refugees and humanitarian organisations, with *prima facie* status being removed from March 2026 and the introduction of the Protection of Sovereignty Bill 2026 (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda 2026).

Exchange and sharing of resources connect refugees and host communities. In Bidibidi, for instance, a refugee woman mentioned in an interview that she borrowed a bucket of cassava flour from a host community neighbour and, in exchange, she would support the family with their farming activities. Generally, VSLAs and savings groups were mentioned as something that unites people: *‘We also have one of the neighbours who is a landlord. Since we have been in the same group of savings, so because of our common objective, I have developed a love for her and I have a very good relationship with that host’* (Lobule FGD).

Participants generally saw great potential in having mixed savings and farmer groups with both refugees and host community members: *‘I think it’s important to have a balance in the groups. If groups are to be formed in the community, the groups should at least be equal. Both the refugee and the host community should be 50-50’* (Bidibidi FGD). The only barrier could be language, which needs to be considered: *‘So that in a group where they have host community, refugees should also be there. And they only need one person who could be in the group who can speak English or speak a local language and then do translation’* (Madi-Okollo FGD).

In most locations, markets were described as meeting points for social interaction, connecting various groups through the common purpose of buying, selling, or trading items: *‘If you’re a newcomer, you’re not even going to know this is a South Sudanese. You’re not going to know it. Because they stay together. Like even doing business, they do business together in the market’* (Moyo LC). As explained in the previous section, this has come under pressure due to reduced humanitarian assistance. In Lobule, however, the refugee respondents explained that the current tensions between refugees and hosts mean that some host community members even avoid buying groceries from refugees at the market.

Social connectors

- Church and faith-based gatherings
- Common goals, needs and circumstances
- Language
- Intermarriage
- Social occasions (weddings, funerals etc.)
- Sport activities, music, drama, dance
- Community leaders and elders
- Shared experiences, history and traditions

Institutional and resource-based connectors

- Programmes and trainings
- Shared schools and vocational trainings
- Development and fair distributions
- Shared services, resources and facilities
- Markets
- Mixed savings and farm groups



Laundry day at refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda, 2024 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



8. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the study does not include an exhaustive list of conflict causes and drivers, but the main ones identified within its scope were: poverty, resource scarcity, unpredictable weather conditions, population growth, reduced humanitarian assistance, and assistance envy (among refugees and between them and their hosts). These drivers impacted conflict and tensions over land ownership, farming and land access, water provision, and access to natural resources.

Ownership of and access to land are major sources of conflict and concern among both host and refugee communities across the research locations. Land ownership disputes are especially intense when the land is fertile or when compensation payments are involved. Generally, in areas where the land designated for settlement is unclear or disputed, such as Lobule and Zone 8 of Rhino Camp, tensions spill over to the refugees. In the West Nile area, many rely on farming, and demand for land among refugees has increased following reductions in humanitarian aid.

Conflicts over water provision and access to natural resources predominantly affect women. A limited water supply causes long queues, congestion at water points, and tensions, often resulting in physical fights. Attempting to gather firewood in the host community can also lead to conflicts. Additionally, women face risks of sexual exploitation, rape, and violence, particularly when travelling long distances to collect firewood.

Long-term social relations between the refugee and host communities are key to good land agreements, as shown by the comparison between the new and old zones and settlements. In Rhino Camp and Imvepi, it is not uncommon for refugees with limited other options to borrow farmland for free. There are also fewer misunderstandings between refugee and host communities with long-term relationships. For instance, in Imvepi, language differences initially led to misunderstandings and tensions, but over time, many members of the two communities have learned to understand each other's languages, and tensions in this regard have reduced.

There are fewer conflicts where local policies for conflict resolution, strong community structures and committees for handling disputes are in place. This includes guidelines for firewood collection and policies on stray animals. In the study, we recorded solutions such as allowing animals to walk freely only during specific months of the year, as well as 'animal detention areas' where loose animals can be kept, and owners must compensate for damages to crops or belongings caused by their animals.

Strong governance and leadership structures – and collaboration among these actors – are essential for conflict management and peaceful coexistence. In some areas, refugees do not know where to turn with their issues (Lobule), while in others, high levels of conflict cause disputes to go unreported and unresolved (Moyo).

8.1 Risks identified

Local partner organisations face greater risks if a project fails or causes conflicts, such as the deaths at dams constructed on a previous project, as described above. It is therefore necessary to consider the power balance and the division of responsibilities between the programme leads (e.g. INGOs) and their local partners. In addition, the capacity of local partners to handle and mitigate

potential risks should be supported, for instance, through training in conflict sensitivity.

There are conflict-sensitivity risks involved, for instance, in building water points and dams. It is relevant to consider where it is located, who owns the land, whether they will feel entitled to the dam, who has access, and who bears responsibility in



A classroom in a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

the event of future accidents, conflicts, or disputes. Measures need to be taken to mitigate potential future triggers of conflict and ensure sustainability beyond the project period, for instance, through the involvement of local leaders, authorities, and organisations.

The power dynamics and tensions within farmer groups require further examination. When some members receive food aid while others do not, or when one person owns the land used for the group's farming activities, and others do not have ownership rights, conflicts can arise. Many

farmer groups face difficulties renting land and would benefit from additional support, including assistance with agreements with landlords. Regarding seed distribution, considerations such as seasonal timing and seed quantities should be addressed. These factors seem to increase internal competition for the group's output.

Women's participation in VSLAs can have protection implications, so their involvement and safeguarding should be considered and addressed through appropriate interventions to minimise risk and avoid creating new tensions.

8.2 Opportunities

Several opportunities for improved peaceful coexistence and conflict-sensitive approaches were identified in the study:

- Having mixed groups, both savings and farmer groups, can leverage the connector of shared needs and goals. Both refugees and host communities need access to livelihoods and farming, so bringing communities together around a shared goal would be beneficial.
- Participatory decision-making processes would also enhance the peaceful relations between farming and VSLA group members. For example, the groups in Zone 8 of Rhino Camp were formed entirely by the NGO, and not all members expressed a desire to cooperate, according to members. In contrast, the groups in Imvepi already knew each other and had previously been part of some form of group. The groups tend to be more productive when members choose whom to collaborate with, which aligns with meaningful participatory approaches. Strong social bonds and existing collaborations may also help reduce the risk of internal conflict within groups. When groups
- are established by partner NGOs, it is important to consider how to foster and maintain social relations within the farmer and savings groups.
- Committees, such as water user committees and land resolution committees, foster ownership and clear paths for conflict management. Community-led committees for programme outputs, such as dams and water points, should be increased and strengthened.
- Findings from the conflict analysis should be shared with the leaders and stakeholders who took part in the study for ethical and accountability purposes. The programme could benefit from their input on how they perceive their role in conflict management, feedback on the opportunities identified, and recommendations. The study also identified several opportunities for awareness-raising and training among both hosts and refugees, e.g. on land rights and land agreement processes.
- It would be helpful and enforce accountability platforms for dialogue were set up. Here people can express their issues, concerns and challenges.



A homestead in a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2026 @Ayo Degett/DRC.

9. Literature

ALLEA

2023 The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Revised edition 2023. Berlin. <https://doi.org/10.26356/ECOC>, accessed December 3, 2024.

ASPR

2022 Conflict Analysis Report: Strengthening Conflict and Gender Sensitive Community Resilience in Protracted Crisis in Northern Uganda and Central Equatorial, South Sudan (2021-2024). The Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Burke, Christopher, and Doreen Nancy Kobusingye
2014 Women's Land Rights in Northern Uganda (West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Teso and Karamoja). Oxfam.

Cities Alliance

2026 SUIDAC: Koboko, Uganda Feasibility Study.

Concina, Giacomo, Jill Drzewiecki, and JRS

2024 Breaking Down Barriers: Increasing Girls' Access to and Completion of Secondary Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp. The JRS Kenya & Eastern African Regional office teams.

Dawisha, Emile

2025 Preserving Refugee Health in Uganda. Think Global Health, May 5. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/preserving-refugee-health-uganda>.

Degett, Ayo

2018 Preliminary Assessment Findings: Participation of Persons of Concern in Humanitarian Action. <https://www.pro.drc.ngo/media/134jgi1f/preliminary-findings-participation-in-rhino-camp-july-2018.pdf>, accessed November 14, 2025.

2023 Recognising Refugee Endeavours: South Sudanese Participation in Humanitarian Action in Uganda - and Jordanian Juxtapositions. University of Copenhagen.

Degett, Ayo, Pernille Sikker Hansen, and Susan R. Whyte

2024 Seeking Solutions: South Sudanese Refugee Endeavours among Multiple Possibilities in Kenya and Uganda. ASPIRE Preliminary Findings, Year 2. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council.

Degett, Ayo, Pernille Sikker Hansen, and Susan Reynolds Whyte

2026 Narrowing Horizons: Contingencies, Coping Practices and Conflict Handling among South Sudanese Refugees after Aid Cuts. ASPIRE Findings, Year 3. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council.

Degett, Ayo, and Susan R. Whyte

2023 Endeavours for Peace: Young South Sudanese Refugees' Efforts to Create Better and More Peaceful Futures. ASPIRE Preliminary Findings, Year 1. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council.

Degett, Ayo, and Susan Reynolds Whyte

2026 Staying and Moving: Refugee Adaptations to Cuts in Humanitarian Support. Copenhagen: Danish Refugee Council.

Forthcoming Mobility, Life Projects and Virtues: Young South Sudanese Refugees Facing Donor Aid Cuts. Children's Geographies. Taylor & Francis.

Degett, Ayo, Susan Reynolds Whyte, and Pernille Sikker Hansen

2026 Care Relations under Pressure: Displaced South Sudanese with Chronic Disabling Conditions in Times of Humanitarian Funding Cuts. ADAPT Research Findings 2025. Danish Refugee Council.

Destrijcker, Lucas, Melissa Kyeyune, Johanna Caitlin Dieffenbacher, and Claudia Zwar

2023 Climate, Peace and Security Study: Uganda, West Nile Sub-Region. Weathering Risk.

Doherty, Fiona C, Smitha Rao, and Angelise R Radney

2024 Association between Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Extreme Weather Events: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review. International Social Work 67(3): 616-634.

DRC

2018 Contested Refuge: The Political Economy and Conflict Dynamics in Uganda's Bidibidi Refugee Settlements. Danish Refugee Council.

EU

2026 UNHCR 95th Standing Committee - Statement by the EU and Its Member States -

Agenda Item 3 Regional Updates: Africa. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/unhcr-95th-standing-committee-statement-eu-and-its-member-states-agenda-item-3-regional-updates_en.

Foote, Alexandra

2025 Land, Law, and Legacy: Reconciling Gender Equality with Tradition in Northern Uganda. *Gender & Development* 33(1): 41–69.

Gidron, Yotam

2022 Gender and Access to Justice in Uganda's Refugee Settlements: The Experiences of South Sudanese Refugees. Working Paper 27. Refugee Law Project.

2025 Survivalist Mobilities: Freedom of Movement and the Economic Lives of Settlement Refugees in Uganda. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 38(3): 584–602.

Halakhe, Abdullahi

2025 A Way Forward as Aid Cuts Threaten Progress for Refugee Integration in Kenya. *Refugees International*.

Harrell-Bond, Barbara E.

1986 *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Humanitarian Action

2025 Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan - Global Humanitarian Overview 2026. <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2026/article/uganda-country-refugee-response-plan>, accessed April 8, 2026.

IFRC

2016 Uganda: Population Movement Emergency Appeal. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

IRRI

2019 Understanding Conflict Dynamics around Refugee Settlements in Northern Uganda. International Refugee Rights Initiative.

Kaiser, Tania

2006 Between a Camp and a Hard Place: Rights, Livelihood and Experiences of the Local Settlement System for Long-Term Refugees in Uganda. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 44(4): 597–621.
2007 'Moving Up and Down Looking for Money': Making a Living in a Ugandan Refugee Camp 1. In *Livelihoods at the Margins*. 1st edition. James Staples, ed. Pp. 215–236. Routledge.

KRC Uganda

2021 A Conflict Mapping Report: Advancing Peaceful Co-Existence & Respect for Human Rights among Refugees & Host Communities in Northern Uganda. Palebek (Lamwo District), Rhino (Mad-Okollo and Terego Districts) and Bidi Bidi (Yumbe District).

Logie, Carmen H., Moses Okumu, Maya Latif, et al.

2021 Exploring Resource Scarcity and Contextual Influences on Wellbeing among Young Refugees in Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda: Findings from a Qualitative Study. *Conflict and Health* 15(1): 3.

Marelli, Massimo, ed.

2024 *Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action*. 3rd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781009414630/type/book>, accessed December 3, 2024.

Meinert, Lotte, and Susan Reynolds Whyte, eds.

2023 *This Land Is Not for Sale: Trust and Transitions in Northern Uganda*. New York: Berghahn.

Naiga, Resty

2025 Where Are Women's Voices in Water and Land Management in Uganda's Refugee Settings? XCEPT, April. <https://www.xcept-research.org/where-are-womens-voices-in-water-and-land-management-in-ugandas-refugee-settings/>, accessed November 13, 2025.

NCPB, DDG, and DRC

2020 *Conflict Analysis Guidelines*. <https://drc.ngo/en/documents/conflict-analysis-guidelines/>.

NRC

2024 *Housing Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements*.

NRG

2025 *Kenya Refugee Response Under Strain: Funding Cuts, Differentiated Assistance, and the Rising Social Cohesion Crisis*.

O'Callaghan, Sorcha

2018 *Are Integrated Access to Services a Step towards Integration? Nairobi, Kenya: ReDSS and Danish Refugee Council*.

OIOS

2018 Internal Audit Division Report 2018/097, Audit of the Operations in Uganda for the UNHCR. Audit Report. 2018/097. Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

Omata, Naohiko, and Yotam Gidron
2025 Returning to Fund Refugeehood: Dispersal and Survival between Uganda and South Sudan. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 51(1): 101–121.

Parliament of the Republic of Uganda
2026 Parliament Passes Sovereignty Bill, May 6. <https://www.parliament.go.ug/news/4420/parliament-passes-sovereignty-bill>.

REACH
2026a Uganda: Climate Hazard Assessment – Madi Okollo District (April 2026).
2026b Uganda: Climate Hazard Assessment – Yumbe District (April 2026).
2026c Uganda: Climate Hazard Assessment – Obongi District (April 2026).
2026d Uganda: Climate Hazard Assessment – Koboko District (April 2026).
2026e Uganda: Climate Hazard Assessment – Terego District (April 2026).

REACH, NRC, and UNHCR
2019 Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property (Kampala District, May 2019).

Refworld
2006 Uganda: The Refugee Act 2006. Refworld UNHCR. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4b7baba52.html>, accessed April 12, 2024.
2010 Uganda: The Refugees Regulations, 2010. Refworld UNHCR. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/544e4f154.html>, accessed June 3, 2023.

Rohner, D., U. Sunde, O. Vanden Eynde, A. L. Wright, and J.-R. Zeng
2026 Aiding Peace or Conflict? The Impact of USAID Cuts on Violence. *Science* 392(6799): eaed6802.

UCOBAC, and ILC
N.d. Women's Land Rights as a Pathway to Economic Justice.

UIA
2021 Moyo District Investment Profile. Moyo: Uganda Investment Authority. <https://www.ugandainvest.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Moyo-2021.pdf>.

UN Women
2026 Empowering Women during Humanitarian Crises.

UN-Habitat
2021 Economic Development Assessment in West Nile Region, Uganda.

UNHCR
2019 Access Roads to Bidibidi, Imvepi, Lobule, Palorinya and Rhino Camp Refugee Settlements. Map.
2026 Uganda - Refugee Statistics May 2026.

UNHCR, and Government of Uganda
2026 Uganda - Refugee Statistics April 2026. Uganda.

UNHCR, and REACH
2018 Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring - Settlement Fact Sheet: Lobule.

URRI
2026 Taking Root: Building Resilience in Uganda's Refugee-Hosting Communities. Annual Report 2025. URRI & Danida. <https://ulearn-uganda.org/taking-root-building-resilience-in-ugandas-refugee-hosting-communities/>.

Vancluysen, Sarah, and Bert Ingelaere
2020 Conflict Resolution as Cultural Brokerage: How Refugee Leaders Mediate Disputes in Uganda's Refugee Settlements. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33(2): 300–315.

WFP
2025a A Lifeline at Risk: Food Assistance at a Breaking Point - Refugees in Uganda Country Report.
2025b Uganda Country Brief August 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/wfp-uganda-country-brief-august-2025>.

Whyte, Susan Reynolds, and Paulino Vusso
2025 Land for Refugees: Sharing and Exchanging in Northern Uganda. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jrs/feaf074/8374823>, accessed February 27, 2026.



A vegetable market in a refugee settlement, West Nile, Uganda, 2023 @Ayo Degett/DRC.



Abbreviations

DANIDA	Embassy of Denmark
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DA	Differentiated Assistance
DV	Domestic violence
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCs	Local Councils
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
NRG	NGO Refugee Group
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PARTOCA	Participatory Research Team on Community-led Action
RLO	Refugee-led Organisation
RWC	Refugee Welfare Councils
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
URRI	Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative
UGX	Ugandan Shilling
US	The United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollars
WFP	World Food Programme
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association



DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL



UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN



EMBASSY OF DENMARK
Danida

This report has been financed by the Government of Denmark. Responsibility for the content lies entirely with the creator. The Government of Denmark does not necessarily share the expressed views and interpretations.