UGANDA'S GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE REFUGEES IN KIRYANDONGO REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, 1954–2014: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

OPIRO BISMARK

23/U/0629/MAH/PS

SUPERVISORS:

DR. PETER SEKISWA (Ph.D.)

MR. ONEK RICHARD AURE (M.A)

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Declaration

I, **Opiro Bismark** hereby declare that the research dissertation entitled ***"Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective"*** is my original work and has never been submitted for any award in any institution of higher learning or university.

Signature_____ Date 29/10/2026

OPIRO BISMARK

23/U/0629/MAH/PS

Approval

This is to certify that this research dissertation entitled ***"Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective"*** was written under our guidance and supervision and we approve it for examination.

Sign_____ Date 29.10.2026

DR. PETER SSEKISWA (Ph.D.)

Sign_____ **date** 29/10/2026

MR. ONEK RICHARD AURE (M.A)

Dedication

I dedicate this research work to my family for their unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices throughout my academic journey. Their belief in my abilities has been a constant source of motivation.

I dedicate this dissertation to all refugees and host communities in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement whose experiences and resilience inspired this historical study. It is my hope that the findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of Uganda's refugee integration initiatives and inform policies and practices that promote peaceful co-existence and sustainable development.

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List of Abbreviations

CARA	–	Control of Alien Refugees Act
CBS	–	Central Bureau of Statistics
CERD	–	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CRRF	–	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DRC	–	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FGDs	–	Focus Group Discussions
GUREC	–	Gulu University Research Ethics Committee
ICARA	–	International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa
ICCPR	–	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDP	–	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	–	International Labor Organization
KII	–	Key Informant Interview
LRA	–	Lord's Resistance Army
NGOs	–	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRM	–	National Resistance Movement
OAU	–	Organization of African Unity
OPM	–	Office of the Prime Minister
SPLA	–	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SRS	–	Self-Reliance Strategy
UN	–	United Nations

UNA	–	Uganda National Archives
UNCST	–	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
UNHCR	–	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNLF	–	Uganda National Liberation Front
WFP	–	World Food Programme

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Abstract

This study examined Uganda's government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014 from a historical perspective. It was guided by three objectives: to examine the refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing refugee integration in Uganda; to assess the forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement; and to examine the challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Kiryandongo. The study was anchored on historical institutionalism and adopted a qualitative approach and a historical research design. Data were obtained from laws, official government and UNHCR documents and published literature, including archival records reproduced in published studies, and from 105 participants comprising refugees, host community members, block leaders, officials of the Office of the Prime Minister, local government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations, through key informant interviews, individual interviews, focus group discussions and observation. Data were analyzed through source criticism, thematic analysis and chronological historical analysis. The study found that refugee law evolved from the control-oriented Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960, which confined refugees to settlements and denied them a path to citizenship, to the rights-based Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010, although implementation remained constrained by limited resources and administrative discretion. Government initiatives in Kiryandongo progressed from colonial land allocation for displaced Kenyans in 1954 to the gazetting of the settlement in 1990, the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999 and the reopening of the settlement in 2014, with land allocation, settlement farming and shared education, health and market services as the main forms of integration. Integration was, however, constrained in every period by land pressure, competition over natural resources, unequal distribution of services, insecurity, political suspicion and cultural differences. The study concludes that Uganda's approach to refugee integration in Kiryandongo was shaped by a colonial settlement model that later governments adapted rather than replaced, so that economic integration advanced further than legal and social integration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study examined Uganda's government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement between 1954, when the British colonial administration first used land at Kigumba to settle Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising, and 2014, when the settlement was reopened to South Sudanese refugees fleeing the civil war that broke out in December 2013. The study was conducted from a historical perspective and focused on three issues: the refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing the integration of refugees, the forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo, and the challenges of integrating refugees among host communities. It was prompted by the observation that, despite six decades of land allocation, settlement farming and, more recently, a rights-based legal framework, refugees in Kiryandongo remained only partially integrated with their hosts. This chapter presents the background to the study, comprising the historical, theoretical, conceptual and contextual backgrounds, followed by the statement of the problem, the general and specific objectives, the research questions, the justification and significance of the study, and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1 Historical background

The history of refugees globally is associated with wars, political persecution, ethnic conflicts, and social instability that have forced populations to move across borders in search of safety. Although forced migration has existed for centuries, the modern international refugee system developed mainly during the twentieth century following the large-scale displacement caused by the First and Second World Wars. After the First World War, millions of people in Europe were displaced due to the collapse of empires such as the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires. In response to these movements, the League of Nations established mechanisms for refugee protection in the 1920s, including the introduction of the Nansen passport for stateless persons (Loescher, 2001). These developments marked the beginning of international cooperation on refugee management and protection.

The refugee situation worsened during the 1930s and 1940s because of the rise of Nazism in Germany and fascism in Italy, political persecution of minorities, and the outbreak of the Second

World War. The war displaced millions of civilians across Europe and Asia, creating one of the largest refugee crises in modern history (UNHCR, 2000). Following the war, the international community recognized the need for legal and institutional frameworks to address refugee protection. This led to the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950 to coordinate international responses to refugee crises. In 1951, the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defined a refugee as a person with a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (UNHCR, 1951). The 1967 Protocol later expanded the Convention beyond the European context by removing geographical and time limitations.

During the Cold War period between the 1950s and 1980s, refugee movements became increasingly linked to ideological conflicts, civil wars, and struggles for political control in different parts of the world. Large refugee populations emerged from conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola, and Latin America (Harrell-Bond, 1986). Western countries and international organizations often viewed refugees within the context of political rivalry between capitalist and communist states. As refugee populations increased, international agencies began shifting from temporary humanitarian assistance toward long-term settlement, resettlement, and integration policies aimed at improving refugee welfare and reducing dependency (Loescher & Milner, 2005).

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s introduced a new phase in global refugee movements. Ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and state collapse in countries such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Kosovo resulted in massive displacement and humanitarian crises (Schraven, 2015). The Rwandan genocide of 1994 alone displaced approximately two million people into neighboring countries including Tanzania, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Prunier, 1997). During this period, international discussions on refugee management increasingly focused on human rights, security, peacebuilding, and development. The United Nations later adopted frameworks such as the 2000 Agenda for Protection and the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants to encourage international cooperation in refugee protection and integration (UNHCR, 2020).

In Africa, refugee movements became more visible during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Colonial boundary creation, forced labor systems, political exclusion, and unequal economic

structures contributed to displacement across the continent (Mazrui, 1995). During the struggles for independence in the 1950s and 1960s, liberation wars in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa forced many Africans into exile in neighboring states (Adepoju, 1998). Newly independent African states also experienced political instability, military coups, and ethnic conflicts that generated refugee flows across borders. By the 1970s, Africa had become one of the regions with the largest refugee populations in the world (Harrell-Bond, 1986).

The growing refugee crisis in Africa led to the adoption of regional approaches to refugee protection. In 1969, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Unlike the 1951 UN Convention, the OAU Convention expanded the definition of a refugee to include people fleeing external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, and events seriously disturbing public order (OAU, 1969). This broader definition reflected the realities of displacement in Africa where conflicts, liberation struggles, and generalized violence affected large populations. The Convention also encouraged African states to provide asylum and cooperate in addressing refugee challenges.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Africa experienced some of the largest refugee crises in its history due to civil wars and political violence in countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bakewell, 1999). Refugee settlements became common across East, Central, and West Africa, often supported by UNHCR and humanitarian organizations. Many African governments adopted settlement policies that allocated land to refugees for cultivation and self-reliance, although conditions varied between countries (Kaiser, 2006). At the same time, refugee-hosting communities frequently experienced pressure on land, water, education, healthcare, and other social services due to the increasing refugee populations. By the early twenty-first century, refugee management in Africa increasingly focused on integration, self-reliance, and development-oriented approaches. International agencies and African governments began promoting policies aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, employment, and agricultural production among refugees and host communities (Betts et al., 2014). These changes reflected broader international debates concerning durable solutions to refugee crises, particularly voluntary repatriation, resettlement, and local integration. As a result, several African countries, including Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, adopted policies intended to balance humanitarian assistance with long-term social and economic integration of refugees.

In the territory that later became Uganda, pre-colonial societies were characterized by migration, trade, intermarriage, warfare and the search for fertile land and security. In the nineteenth century, for instance, the expansionist wars between Buganda and Bunyoro-Kitara under Omukama Kabalega (1870–1899), and the famines and epidemics of the 1890s, displaced many people, who were absorbed into neighboring communities through kinship, clientship and land allocation by clan heads (Karugire, 1980; Reid, 2002). Strictly, these people were migrants and displaced persons rather than refugees, since the international boundaries and the legal category of "refugee" did not yet exist. The concept of the refugee as a person who has crossed an international border to escape persecution only emerged in the twentieth century with the League of Nations arrangements of the 1920s and the 1951 Convention (Loescher, 2001).

Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894, and the Uganda Order in Council of 1902 defined the territory and its administration. Colonial rule introduced fixed international boundaries, which turned cross-border movement into a matter of immigration control. The colonial economy also encouraged labor migration from Rwanda, Burundi and the Belgian Congo to plantations and public works in Buganda and Busoga (Mamdani, 1976). The British administration managed these and later displaced populations through settlement arrangements and indirect-rule structures, particularly in areas considered sparsely populated and agriculturally productive.

Uganda's first organized experience of hosting refugees came during the Second World War (1939–1945), when about 7,000 Polish refugees, displaced by Soviet deportations, were settled at Nyabyeya near Masindi and at Koja near Mukono between 1942 and the early 1950s (Kleban, 2020; Nowak, 2019). The refugees lived in organized camps with their own schools, churches and farms under British administration. Although these refugees were later resettled elsewhere, the experience introduced the colonial administration to organized refugee settlement in the same Bunyoro area that later hosted Kiryandongo.

After the Second World War, refugee movements in East Africa increased with decolonization and political conflict. In 1954, during the Mau Mau uprising (1952–1960) in Kenya, the colonial administration asked the Bunyoro Native Government to provide land at Kigumba, in present-day Kiryandongo, for displaced Kenyans, the first recorded use of the area for the settlement of displaced persons (Enos, 2016). The Torit mutiny of August 1955 in southern Sudan (now South Sudan), which marked the start of the first Sudanese civil war (1955–1972), sent Sudanese

refugees into northern Uganda, while the Rwandan revolution of 1959 drove tens of thousands of Rwandan Tutsi into south-western Uganda, for whom Nakivale (1958–1960) and Oruchinga settlements were opened (Long, 2012; Rockenbach, 2016). In response, the Protectorate Legislative Council enacted the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) on 13 July 1960, which empowered the government to declare refugee groups, establish settlements, appoint settlement commandants and restrict refugees' movement.

Following independence in 1962, Uganda retained CARA and the rural settlement model. Under the first Obote government (1962–1971), Uganda hosted Rwandan, Sudanese and Congolese refugees in settlements such as Nakivale, Oruchinga, Kyangwali, Ibuga, Agago and Onigo, and UNHCR opened a branch office in Kampala in 1969 (Pirouet, 1988). The Idi Amin government (1971–1979) retained CARA, expanded settlements with UNHCR support and acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 1976, although its rule also forced many Ugandans into exile (Karugire, 1988; Mamdani, 2001).

The overthrow of Idi Amin in April 1979 was followed by the short-lived Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) governments of Yusuf Lule (1979) and Godfrey Binaisa (1979–1980) and the Military Commission (1980), the second Obote government (1980–1985) and the Tito Okello Lutwa military government (1985–1986). During this period, the war in the Luwero Triangle displaced large numbers of Ugandans, and in 1982 tens of thousands of Banyarwanda refugees and Ugandans of Rwandan origin were evicted from Ankole and pushed towards the Rwandan border (Mamdani, 2001; Otunnu, 2017). Refugee administration was weak, and settlements depended heavily on UNHCR and religious organizations.

A major shift in Uganda's refugee policy occurred after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in January 1986. In 1990, the government gazetted land at Kiryandongo for Sudanese refugees relocated from insecure settlements in northern Uganda (Kaiser, 2000). In 1999, the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR introduced the Self-Reliance Strategy, which sought to integrate refugee services into district structures (Meyer, 2006). These developments marked a move from settlements as places of control to settlements as places of self-reliance and coexistence with host communities.

The history of Kiryandongo as a place of refuge can be broken down into five phases. The first (1954 to the early 1960s) began when the colonial administration asked the Bunyoro Native

Government for land at Kigumba to settle Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising (Enos, 2016). In the second phase (1960s–1980s), much of the land was turned into government ranches, which is why the settlement is still divided into “ranches” and clusters (Byakagaba et al., 2018; Enos, 2016). The third phase began in 1990, when the NRM government gazetted the ranch land for about 14,000 Sudanese refugees moved from insecure settlements in northern Uganda, as part of a wider plan to relocate 54,000 Sudanese refugees from the north (Kaiser, 2000; UNHCR Archives, Phelps to Chipman, 14 March 1990, as cited in Betts, 2021). In the fourth phase (1990s–2013), UNHCR handed over services to the government and the district (Kaiser, 2002), and the settlement received other groups: about 2,000 Kenyans displaced by the 2007–2008 post-election violence were given plots vacated by returning Sudanese refugees in 2008 (UNHCR, 2008), and in 2010 part of the former ranch land was used to resettle Ugandans displaced by the Bududa landslide (The New Humanitarian, 2010). The fifth phase began in 2014, when the settlement was reopened to South Sudanese refugees fleeing the civil war that broke out in December 2013 (UNHCR Uganda, 2019). These phases show that successive governments used the same land again and again to settle displaced people, which is why this study traced government initiatives in Kiryandongo from 1954.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Uganda experienced increasing refugee inflows due to prolonged conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Sudanese civil war generated large refugee populations in northern Uganda, while conflicts in eastern Congo and the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide contributed to refugee movements into western Uganda (Bakewell, 1999). Refugee settlements such as Kiryandongo, Nakivale, Kyaka, and Adjumani expanded significantly during this period. International organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) worked closely with the Ugandan government in providing humanitarian assistance and supporting settlement administration.

Uganda’s refugee policy framework became more formalized through the Refugees Act of 2006, which repealed CARA, and the Refugees Regulations of 2010. These laws granted refugees the rights to work, to move freely, to access education and health services, and to use land for agricultural production (Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). In December 2013, the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan led the government to reopen Kiryandongo to new arrivals in 2014, by which time Uganda had become one of the leading refugee-hosting countries in Africa (UNHCR, 2014).

After the period of this study, Uganda adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in 2017, which built on the settlement and self-reliance approach traced in this study. Despite this progressive legal framework, the extent to which successive government initiatives actually integrated refugees in settlements such as Kiryandongo has not been examined historically, which this study set out to do.

1.1.2 Theoretical background

This study was guided by historical institutionalism, with particular reference to its concepts of path dependence and critical junctures, as developed by Thelen (1999), Pierson (2000) and Capoccia and Kelemen (2007). Historical institutionalism holds that institutions, understood as the formal laws and the informal rules and practices that structure behavior, are created at particular moments in history and, once established, tend to reproduce themselves over time. Pierson (2000) explains that early institutional choices generate "increasing returns": officials, resources and expectations become organized around them, which makes later departure from them costly. Institutional change therefore tends to occur at critical junctures, that is, relatively short periods of political upheaval during which the choices of actors are less constrained and new institutional paths can be set (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). Between such junctures, change is usually gradual, through the adaptation or "layering" of new rules onto old ones (Thelen, 1999).

The theory was relevant to this study in three ways. First, regarding the refugee laws and their effectiveness (objective one), it explains why the control-oriented Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 survived independence in 1962 and successive regimes until it was repealed only in 2006. The study used the concept of path dependence to examine how the colonial settlement model was reproduced, and the concept of critical junctures to analyses whether moments such as independence in 1962, the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979, the NRM takeover in 1986 and the enactment of the Refugees Act in 2006 changed the legal basis of refugee integration. Secondly, regarding government initiatives (objective two), the theory guided the study to trace how land allocation, settlement farming and service provision, first used by the colonial state at Kigumba in 1954, were adapted rather than replaced by later governments in Kiryandongo. Thirdly, regarding the challenges of integration (objective three), it helped the study to explain why problems such as land pressure, movement restrictions and segregated service delivery recurred across different regimes.

Historical institutionalism has been criticized for over-emphasizing continuity and for giving limited attention to the agency of ordinary people, such as refugees and host communities, who shape institutions from below (Mahoney, 2000). To address this weakness, the study combined the analysis of laws and policies with oral testimonies from refugees and host community members, and used the integration domains identified by Ager and Strang (2008), namely employment, housing, education, health, social connections and rights and citizenship, to examine how integration was experienced on the ground. The theory was preferred to assimilation theory, which was considered unsuitable for this study because it assumes that refugees should abandon their own identities and conform to the host culture, whereas Uganda's policy sought integration within settlements that preserved refugees' national and cultural identities.

1.1.3 Conceptual background

This section defines the key concepts used in the study in the order in which displacement occurs, from asylum seeking to integration.

An asylum seeker is a person who has fled his or her country and seeks international protection in another country, but whose claim to refugee status has not yet been determined (UNHCR, 2013). In Uganda, asylum seekers are received at border points and transit centers and are registered by the Office of the Prime Minister before their status is determined. In this study, asylum seekers were considered as refugees in the making, since every refugee in Kiryandongo first passed through this stage.

A refugee, according to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, is a person who is outside his or her country of nationality owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (UNHCR, 1951). The 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention broadened this definition to include persons fleeing external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order (OAU, 1969). In this study, a refugee referred to a person recognized as such under Ugandan law at the time, namely under the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 or the Refugees Act of 2006, and residing in Kiryandongo.

A refugee settlement differs from a refugee camp. A camp is a temporary, enclosed site where refugees depend mainly on relief assistance, whereas a settlement is an area of land gazetted by

government in which refugee households are allocated plots for residence and cultivation and are expected to become self-reliant (Kaiser, 2006). Uganda's refugee law and policy provide for settlements rather than camps; this study therefore used the term Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement throughout.

Integration is the central concept of this study. Local integration is one of the three durable solutions to refugee situations, together with voluntary repatriation and resettlement, and refers to a gradual legal, economic and social process through which refugees acquire rights, become self-reliant and live alongside the host population without discrimination (Jacobsen, 2001). Ager and Strang (2008) identify the domains through which integration occurs as employment, housing, education, health, social bridges and bonds with the host community, and rights and citizenship. In this study, integration referred to the extent to which refugees in Kiryandongo gained access to land and livelihoods, education, health, social protection, shared infrastructure and social relations with host communities, and the legal rights that enabled this.

Local integration differs from the other two durable solutions. Voluntary repatriation is the return of refugees, in safety and dignity, to their country of origin once the causes of flight have ended, while resettlement is their transfer to a third country that has agreed to admit them (UNHCR, 2020); in both cases the refugee leaves the country of asylum. Integration, by contrast, takes place in the country of asylum and is measured by how far refugees come to share rights, livelihoods, services and social relations with the host population (Jacobsen, 2001). In Kiryandongo the three solutions overlapped: many Sudanese refugees were repatriated after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, while those who stayed continued to integrate locally (Kaiser, 2010). This study focused on integration and considered repatriation and resettlement only where they affected it.

Self-reliance refers to the ability of individuals, households or communities to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights in a sustainable manner and with dignity (UNHCR, 2013). In Uganda it became an official policy goal with the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999.

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country that has agreed to admit them with permanent residence (UNHCR, 2020), while relocation refers to the movement of refugees from one settlement or location to another within the host country, as when Sudanese refugees were moved to Kiryandongo in 1990.

Government initiatives, in this study, referred to the laws, policies, programmes and administrative actions of the colonial and post-independence governments of Uganda that were intended to settle refugees and promote their integration, including land allocation, settlement farming, the provision of education and health services, and the integration of refugee services into local government structures.

1.1.4 Contextual background

The study was conducted in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Kiryandongo District, in the mid-western part of Uganda, about 218 kilometers north of Kampala along the Kampala–Gulu highway. Kiryandongo District was carved out of Masindi District and became operational on 1 July 2010; it borders Nwoya and Oyam districts to the north and east, Apac to the east and Masindi to the south-west. The district covers about 3,624 square kilometers. Its terrain is mostly a plateau at an altitude of about 1,295 meters above sea level, drained by the Victoria Nile and its tributaries along its northern and eastern boundary. The district has a bimodal rainfall pattern with an annual average of about 1,200 mm, the heaviest rains falling between August and November, and fertile soils that support the cultivation of maize, beans, cassava, groundnuts and simsim (Uganda Investment Authority, 2021).

The settlement occupies land in the former government ranches south of Bweyale town, on land first used in 1954 for displaced Kenyans and later incorporated into ranching schemes in the 1970s, before it was gazetted for refugees in 1990 (Enos, 2016; Kaiser, 2000). It is organized into ranches subdivided into clusters, also referred to as villages or blocks. The settlement hosted about 82,971 refugees in January 2024 (UNHCR, 2024), mainly from South Sudan, but also from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi, who speak about sixteen languages, including Dinka, Nuer, Acholi, Kuku, Kakwa, Alur, Arabic, Kiswahili, Somali, Amharic, Lingala and Kinyarwanda, while the host community speaks mainly Runyoro (Field data, 2025). At national level, Uganda hosted 2,050,820 refugees and asylum seekers by 30 September 2026, the largest refugee population in Africa (UNHCR, 2026).

Kiryandongo was important for this study because it is one of the few settlements whose history spans the colonial period, the post-independence regimes and the NRM era, and because it has been presented as a model of Uganda's self-reliance approach (Betts et al., 2019; Kaiser, 2002). Its location along the Kampala–Gulu highway and next to Bweyale trading centre, the fertility of

its soils and the availability of former ranch land enabled the allocation of agricultural plots and close economic interaction between refugees and host communities, which contributed to Uganda's reputation as a leading refugee-hosting country. At the same time, the settlement has experienced land disputes, pressure on schools and health facilities, deforestation and tension between refugees and hosts (Mulumba, 2011; Otisi, 2019), which made it a suitable case for examining the effectiveness of government initiatives to integrate refugees over time.

1.2 Problem statement

Uganda has, since the colonial period, adopted laws and initiatives intended to settle and integrate refugees. These include the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960, the allocation of land for settlement farming, the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999, and the Refugees Act of 2006 and Refugees Regulations of 2010, which granted refugees the rights to work, move freely and access social services (Betts, 2021; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). Ideally, these laws and initiatives should have enabled refugees in settlements such as Kiryandongo to become fully integrated with host communities, that is, legally secure, economically self-reliant and socially accepted, while sharing services and resources peacefully with their hosts.

In reality, refugees in Kiryandongo have remained only partially integrated. Earlier studies show that, despite decades of land allocation and self-reliance programming, refugees continued to face shrinking plots, restrictions linked to settlement residence, unequal access to services and recurrent tension with host communities over land, firewood and markets (Ebere & Mwesigwa, 2021; Kaiser, 2006; Mulumba, 2011; Otisi, 2019). Existing studies, however, have examined either the national policy framework (Betts, 2021; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012) or the situation in Kiryandongo at particular moments, such as the UNHCR handover of the 1990s (Kaiser, 2002), and none has traced the government's initiatives in Kiryandongo across the whole period from the first use of the area in 1954 to its reopening in 2014. What is therefore not known is why successive laws and government initiatives did not achieve full integration of refugees in Kiryandongo, and how the colonial and post-independence choices shaped the integration of refugees in the settlement.

This study addressed this gap by examining, from a historical perspective, the refugee laws and their effectiveness, the forms of government initiatives and the challenges of integration in Kiryandongo between 1954 and 2014. By identifying which initiatives worked, which did not and

why, the study provides historical evidence that can inform the Office of the Prime Minister, Kiryandongo District Local Government and humanitarian agencies in designing integration measures that address the long-standing causes of incomplete integration rather than their symptoms.

1.3 General objective

The general objective of the study was to examine the Uganda government's initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014 by analyzing the refugee laws that governed integration, the forms that the initiatives took, and the challenges that constrained the integration of refugees among host communities.

1.4 Specific objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

i. To examine the refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing the integration of refugees in Uganda, 1954–2014.
ii. To assess the forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014.
iii. To examine the challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Kiryandongo, 1954–2014.

1.5 Research questions

i. What were the refugee laws, and how effective were they in governing the integration of refugees in Uganda between 1954 and 2014?
ii. What were the forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement between 1954 and 2014?
iii. What were the challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Kiryandongo between 1954 and 2014?

1.6 Justification of the study

This study was justified because the historical evolution of Uganda's government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo between 1954 and 2014 had received limited attention in historical scholarship. Existing studies of Kiryandongo focus on particular periods, mainly the 1990s handover from UNHCR (Kaiser, 2002) and recent livelihoods (Gidron & Titeca, 2025;

Murahashi, 2021), while national studies examine the legal framework without tracing its application in a single settlement over time (Betts, 2021).

The study was also justified by the need to document, while some of the older informants are still alive, the oral history of refugees and host communities who experienced the colonial, Obote, Amin and NRM periods in Kiryandongo, and to preserve this evidence for the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR, policymakers, humanitarian agencies and researchers.

1.7 Significance of the study

Firstly, the study may serve as a resource for policymakers. By examining government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014, it provides insights into strategies that facilitated or hindered refugee integration over time, from which the Office of the Prime Minister and Kiryandongo District Local Government may draw lessons in designing future integration programmes.

Secondly, the findings may contribute to promoting social cohesion. By identifying the mechanisms that fostered positive relationships between refugees and host communities, as well as the historical sources of tension over land and services, the study may inform strategies to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation in refugee-hosting areas.

Finally, the study may contribute to the historiography of refugees in Uganda by providing a long-term history of a single settlement, which may serve as a reference for scholars and students of history, refugee studies and public policy.

1.8 Scope of the study

1.8.1 Content scope

The study focused on three areas, in line with its objectives. First, it examined the refugee laws that governed refugee integration in Uganda, namely the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960, the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010, together with the international instruments that Uganda acceded to, and assessed their effectiveness in providing for refugees' settlement, movement, work, access to services and citizenship. Secondly, it assessed the forms of government initiatives used to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo, namely land allocation, settlement farming and self-reliance, the provision of education, health and water services, and the integration of refugee services into local government structures. Thirdly, it examined the

challenges of integration, namely land and resource pressure, unequal access to services, insecurity, political suspicion and cultural and language differences.

1.8.2 Geographical scope

The study was conducted in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, Kiryandongo District, in mid-western Uganda, and in the host, communities surrounding it, including Bweyale town. The settlement is organized into ranches subdivided into clusters, sometimes referred to as villages or blocks; data were collected in 12 clusters that is A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L of the settlement.

Kiryandongo was selected because it has hosted displaced persons and refugees since 1954, beginning with Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising, followed, after the gazetting of the settlement in 1990, by refugees from southern Sudan (now South Sudan) and later from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Kenya, and because it has been central to Uganda's self-reliance approach to refugee integration.

1.8.3 Time scope

The study covered the period from 1954 to 2014. The year 1954 was selected as the starting point because it marks the first recorded government initiative to use the Kiryandongo area for the settlement of displaced persons, when the British colonial administration asked the Bunyoro Native Government to allocate land at Kigumba for Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising (Enos, 2016). This event laid the historical foundation for Kiryandongo's later development as a refugee settlement.

The study ended in 2014 because this year marked a major turning point in the history of the settlement. Following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013, the government reopened Kiryandongo to large numbers of new arrivals in 2014, which introduced a new phase of emergency reception and expansion. The year also closes the period before the adoption of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in 2017, which marked a new era in Uganda's refugee policy that deserves separate study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the three objectives of the study. Section 2.1 reviews literature on the refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing refugee integration; section 2.2 reviews literature on government initiatives to integrate refugees in Uganda and Kiryandongo; and section 2.3 reviews literature on the challenges of refugee integration among host communities. In each section, the review moves from global and regional literature to studies on Uganda and Kiryandongo, and ends with the gap identified by the researcher. Section 2.4 summarizes the review and shows how the present study addresses the gaps identified.

2.1 Refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing refugee integration

One convention was the convention of non-refoulment. According to UNHCR (2025), the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are central to the international legal framework governing refugee protection and settlement. The Convention defines who is a refugee and sets out the basic rights refugees are entitled to, including non-refoulement, access to legal systems, work, and education (UNHCR, 2025). Uganda, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention, is legally bound to provide protection and uphold these rights. This international legal obligation has guided Uganda's policies on refugee status determination and the general protection of refugees. In Uganda, the principle of non-refoulement is crucial, ensuring that refugees fleeing persecution are not forcibly returned to unsafe conditions. However, despite Uganda's strong commitment to refugee protection, challenges remain, particularly in the practical implementation of access to education and employment for refugees, leaving a gap between legal provisions and actual integration experiences. This gap could be explored in the context of Uganda's evolving refugee policies and the obstacles refugees face in accessing these rights.

The OAU (now AU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969) offers a regional legal framework that goes beyond the 1951 Refugee Convention's narrow criteria, providing broader protection to individuals displaced by conflicts or environmental disasters in Africa (OAU, 1969). Uganda, as a member of the African Union, is bound by this convention and its principles, which emphasize the importance of providing asylum to refugees fleeing generalized violence and large-scale human rights abuses. The OAU Convention (1969)

complements Uganda's national policies by recognizing the refugee as someone who may be fleeing conditions beyond personal persecution, such as war or civil unrest. Uganda's approach of creating open-door policies for refugees from neighboring countries, especially from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, aligns with the OAU Convention. However, challenges arise when the displacement of refugees is linked to ongoing regional instability, creating strains on Uganda's resources and social services. The gap lies in how Uganda's policies adapt to the evolving nature of forced displacement, particularly in cases where refugees are fleeing large-scale regional conflicts. This issue warrants further study, as Uganda's implementation of the AU Refugee Convention could provide lessons on addressing regional causes of displacement through local integration strategies.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations in 1966, guarantees a range of civil and political rights, including the right to life, freedom of movement, and the right to seek asylum (Assembly, 1966, 1966). Uganda, a party to the ICCPR, is obligated to respect these rights for all individuals within its territory, including refugees (Assembly, 1966). The ICCPR is particularly relevant to refugee integration, as it ensures that refugees are afforded the same civil rights as nationals, such as the right to work, to education, and to participate in public life. In practice, however, refugees in Uganda may often face difficulties in fully accessing these rights due to bureaucratic obstacles, limited resources, and insufficient integration programs. For instance, refugees may face barriers to obtaining work permits or face discrimination in the labor market. The gap between the legal guarantees provided by the ICCPR and the actual experiences of refugees in Uganda underscores the need for a deeper investigation into how Uganda can better ensure equal civil rights for refugees within its borders.

According to Keane (2020), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is also one of the significant laws that have been ushered in place to protect the refugees. This convention, adopted by the United Nations in 1965 calls for the elimination of racial discrimination and ensures equality before the law for all individuals, including refugees (Keane, 2020)). Uganda, as a signatory to CERD, is committed to preventing discrimination against refugees based on race, ethnicity, or nationality. As inferred from Keane (2020), this is particularly significant for Uganda, where refugees often come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, especially those fleeing conflicts in neighboring countries like South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While Uganda could have made strides in integrating refugees, some

challenges remain, particularly with refugees from certain ethnic groups facing discrimination or exclusion in the broader Ugandan society. The CERD's principles are crucial to addressing these issues and ensuring that refugees are not marginalized based on their ethnicity or country of origin. The gap, however, lies in the social integration of refugees, where entrenched local prejudices and cultural barriers may hinder the full realization of racial equality and non-discrimination.

The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2004) has several conventions that are relevant to refugee workers, including ILO Convention 97 on migration for employment (1949) and ILO Convention 143 on migrant workers (1975). These conventions aim to ensure that migrant and refugee workers receive fair wages and working conditions. Uganda has ratified several ILO conventions that align with its refugee policy, such as allowing refugees to work and engage in economic activities (ILO, 2004). However, challenges persist in the formal employment sector, where refugees often face exploitation or discrimination due to their legal status. While Uganda allows refugees to work in informal sectors such as agriculture, many still face barriers to securing formal employment, particularly in industries requiring specific qualifications or work permits. The gap here is the difficulty in integrating refugees into the formal labor market, where ILO standards of fair treatment, wages, and working conditions are not always upheld. This presents a key area for further exploration, especially in terms of labor market reforms that could better facilitate refugee integration into the Ugandan workforce.

Legal frameworks governing refugee presence during this period derived from colonial ordinances designed to regulate alien populations rather than protect displaced persons. The Control of Alien Refugees Act, enacted in 1960, provided statutory authority for managing influxes from Rwanda, Congo, and Sudan, yet its provisions treated refugees as a subset of foreign nationals subject to state control (Lomo et al., 2001). This legislation, retained after independence in 1962, established a precedent for administrative discretion in refugee recognition and settlement allocation (Betts, 2021). Colonial officials applied the ordinance selectively, distinguishing between refugees from neighboring territories, who received provisional accommodation, and those from distant regions, who faced stricter entry controls (Long, 2012). The legal architecture thus embedded a hierarchical approach to protection, wherein geopolitical considerations and imperial interests shaped eligibility for assistance more than individual need or international norms.

The transition to independence in 1962 produced continuity rather than rupture in refugee policy frameworks. The newly sovereign Ugandan state retained the 1960 Control of Alien Refugees Act and the embryonic settlement model inherited from the protectorate administration (Betts, 2021). Post-independence governments, confronting regional instability and recurring influxes from Rwanda, Congo, and Sudan, found the colonial apparatus adequate for managing refugee presence without substantial modification (Lomo et al., 2001). The rural settlement approach, with its allocation of land and expectation of agricultural self-sufficiency, aligned with early national development priorities that emphasized rural production and decentralized service delivery (Jørgensen, 2023). This path dependency meant that Kiryandongo's origins in 1954 established institutional and spatial patterns that conditioned government initiatives for refugee integration across the subsequent six decades, embedding colonial logics of containment, agricultural productivity, and peripheral placement within the architecture of post-colonial refugee policy.

Uganda's post-independence refugee policy exhibited substantial continuity with colonial administrative frameworks, particularly through the retention of the 1960 Control of Alien Refugees Act, which provided statutory authority for managing displaced populations without establishing distinct protections for refugees as a category (Betts, 2021). The newly sovereign state inherited the protectorate's embryonic settlement model, which allocated rural land to refugee households for agricultural production and expected self-sufficiency with minimal state support (Betts et al., 2019). This legal and operational inheritance positioned refugee management within broader state functions of land administration and population control rather than within a dedicated humanitarian architecture. The Control of Alien Refugees Act treated refugees as aliens subject to executive discretion, enabling successive governments to adjust admission criteria, settlement locations, and integration prospects according to shifting political priorities (Kaiser, 2006; Ssejjemba, 2018). The institutional path established during the colonial period thus conditioned post-independence practice, with rural settlements serving as the primary mechanism for accommodating influxes from Rwanda, Sudan, and Congo throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Land tenure reforms during the 1960s and 1970s shaped the material conditions of refugee settlements and influenced the state's capacity to allocate land for resettlement purposes. The 1965 Land Acquisition Act and the 1975 Land Reform Decree expanded state authority over land distribution, abolishing absolute ownership and customary tenure in favor of state leases that facilitated administrative reallocation (Banjwa, 2022; Mamdani, 1987). These legal instruments

enabled the designation of land for refugee settlements, ranching schemes, and other state-directed development initiatives, often without consultation with indigenous communities. In Masindi District, where Kiryandongo is located, portions of the original 1954 allocation were repurposed during the Amin era for government ranching programmes, reflecting the fluidity of land use designations under post-independence administrations (Byakagaba et al., 2018). The 1975 Decree, in particular, transformed peasants into tenants-at-will of the state, creating a legal environment in which refugee land allocations could be adjusted or revoked according to political expediency (Mamdani, 1987). This statutory framework embedded refugee settlement within broader processes of agrarian transformation and state consolidation.

The enactment of the Refugees Act 2006 and the subsequent Refugees Regulations 2010 established a statutory framework that accorded recognized refugees rights to work, freedom of movement, access to public services, and allocation of agricultural plots within designated settlements (Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). These provisions aligned domestic law with the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, marking a departure from the restrictive Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 (Iazzolino, 2014). The legislation vested administrative authority in the Office of the Prime Minister, creating institutional structures for refugee status determination and settlement management while preserving the rural settlement model inherited from earlier periods (Owen, 2014). Kiryandongo, gazetted in 1990 and reactivated during the 2000s, operated within this legal architecture, receiving refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other neighboring states under provisions that permitted cultivation and limited market participation (Enos, 2016). The statutory framework thus provided a basis for self-reliance programming, though its implementation depended on administrative capacity, donor support, and local resource availability.

The policy framework exhibited substantial continuity with earlier administrative practices, a pattern documented in political-historical analyses of Uganda's refugee governance. Betts (2021) traced the self-reliance model to colonial-era settlement allocations and post-independence adaptations, arguing that progressive rhetoric masked enduring logics of containment, labor management, and patronage distribution. The 2006 Act, while expanding refugee rights on paper, retained the settlement system as the primary mechanism for accommodation, thereby limiting urban integration and maintaining state oversight of refugee mobility and economic activity (Hovil, 2007; Kaiser, 2006). This continuity served political objectives: hosting refugees generated

development assistance, reinforced regional alliances, and allowed governing elites to distribute resources through settlement-based patronage networks (Betts, 2021; Omata, 2022). The framework thus combined normative commitments to protection with instrumental calculations regarding domestic stability and international reputation.

Furthermore, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, seeks to address the needs of refugees in a more holistic and sustainable manner (Hansen, 2018). It encourages host countries to focus on the long-term integration of refugees, involving sectors like education, health, livelihoods, and social protection (Hansen, 2018). Uganda was one of the first countries to embrace the CRRF as part of its broader refugee policy, particularly emphasizing refugee self-reliance and the integration of refugees into the local economy. Uganda's approach, which allows refugees to own land and engage in farming and business activities, aligns closely with the CRRF's objectives. However, the CRRF also highlights gaps in areas such as refugees' access to formal education, healthcare, and vocational training, which remain areas of struggle in Uganda's refugee settlements. Exploring how Uganda implements the CRRF, particularly in urban settings where refugees may not have access to the same resources, will shed light on the practical challenges of refugee integration and the limitations of the framework in local contexts.

The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is a non-binding international agreement that seeks to enhance international cooperation and responsibility-sharing in the protection of refugees (UN, 2018). The GCR aims to address both the immediate needs of refugees and the longer-term goals of their integration into host countries. Uganda is recognized for its strong commitment to the GCR, particularly its approach to providing refugees with access to land, education, and employment. However, the compact also stresses the importance of host countries receiving adequate international support for refugees, a point where Uganda may face challenges (Chimni, 2018). Although Uganda has received international aid, there are concerns about the sustainability of refugee policies without consistent support from donor countries. The GCR highlights a critical gap in Uganda's policy, the need for more predictable and sustainable international financing to support refugee integration, especially as Uganda is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa. Examining how Uganda's refugee policies align with the GCR, and where the gaps in financing and support exist, can offer insights into the evolving dynamics of refugee governance.

From the literature reviewed, the researcher observed that most studies examine Uganda's refugee laws either as legal texts or as part of the contemporary national framework, and assess their effectiveness mainly after 2006 (Owen, 2014; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). Few studies trace how the colonial Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 was applied by successive post-independence governments, or how its replacement by the Refugees Act of 2006 changed integration on the ground in a specific settlement. This study filled this gap by examining the refugee laws from 1954 to 2014 and assessing their effectiveness in governing the integration of refugees in Kiryandongo.

2.2 Government initiatives to integrate refugees

The forms of government approaches in fostering the social integration of refugees are deeply intertwined with historical contexts that have shaped national policies across the globe. After World War II, countries faced an unprecedented influx of displaced individuals and adopted varied approaches to manage this crisis.

Initially, many nations implemented temporary measures focused on immediate humanitarian aid, often neglecting long-term integration strategies. For instance, Germany's post-war policies were primarily concerned with the accommodation of displaced persons, which evolved into more structured integration programs by the late 20th century, emphasizing language acquisition, vocational training, and community participation (Fischer, 2015). Similarly, Uganda has its own unique history regarding refugee policies, with the introduction of the 2006 Refugee Act representing a pivotal shift towards recognizing refugees' rights as part of a broader commitment to humanitarian principles. This act not only facilitated access to essential services such as education and healthcare but also aimed to empower refugees economically by allowing them to work and engage in local markets. Understanding these historical trajectories is essential for the current study, as it highlights how foundational policies have laid the groundwork for contemporary integration efforts.

Access to education, and healthcare services Countries like Canada have incorporated these principles into their national policies, emphasizing refugee self-sufficiency and community integration as key components of successful resettlement (Hyndman & Da Lomba, 2011). In Uganda, the government has often embraced these international norms, leading to a relatively progressive stance on refugee rights compared to other nations in the region. This alignment with international standards is particularly relevant for Kiryandongo, where the successful

implementation of these principles can significantly affect the experiences of refugees and their potential for meaningful integration into the host community. International legal frameworks, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the subsequent 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention, have profoundly influenced national policies regarding refugee integration worldwide. These frameworks underscore the necessity for states to extend certain rights to refugees, including the above.

Globally, the socio-economic integration of refugees has emerged as a central focus of refugee policies, with extensive research indicating that access to employment, education, and healthcare is crucial for successful integration outcomes. For example, Sweden has implemented comprehensive labor market programs designed to equip refugees with the necessary skills to enter the workforce, resulting in significant improvements in their economic participation and social inclusion (Migrationsverket, 2016). This contrasts with countries where refugees face systemic barriers that prevent them from engaging meaningfully in the labor market. In Uganda, initiatives like the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) have sought to promote economic independence among refugees by facilitating access to land, skills training, and income-generating activities. This focus on socioeconomic integration is particularly pertinent for Kiryandongo, where refugees often grapple with limited job opportunities, inadequate access to vocational training, and constraints related to land use. By examining literature on socioeconomic integration strategies, the current study can assess how effectively these initiatives meet the needs of refugees in Kiryandongo. Additionally, it can explore the broader implications of socioeconomic integration for social cohesion, highlighting how economic empowerment can enhance community relations and contribute to the overall stability of the host environment.

Community-based approaches to refugee integration have gained recognition globally as vital to fostering social cohesion and mutual support between refugees and host populations. Evidence from various contexts, such as Australia and the United States, demonstrates that local community engagement can significantly enhance refugees' integration experiences by providing social networks and support systems that facilitate adaptation (Wong, 2016). In these countries, community-led initiatives, such as mentorship programs and cultural exchange activities, have shown promise in bridging gaps between refugees and local residents, fostering understanding, and reducing prejudice. In Uganda, particularly in areas like Kiryandongo, community engagement initiatives are crucial for creating an inclusive environment that promotes

understanding and collaboration between refugees and local populations. The current study can benefit from exploring literature on community-driven integration efforts, which may provide valuable insights into how local populations perceive and interact with refugees. By identifying successful community-based strategies, the study can highlight pathways to enhance integration efforts, fostering an environment of cooperation and shared purpose that benefits both refugees and host communities. Furthermore, this exploration will emphasize the importance of involving local communities in the design and implementation of integration programs, ensuring that these initiatives are culturally relevant and effectively address the specific needs of both refugees and host populations.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in the social integration of refugees worldwide by providing essential services, advocacy, and community-building activities. Research indicates that NGOs can effectively complement government initiatives by filling gaps in service delivery and fostering community ties, thereby enhancing refugees' overall integration experience (Betts & Bloom, 2014). In Uganda, a multitude of NGOs operate in Kiryandongo, focusing on various aspects of refugee support, including vocational training, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and community development initiatives. This collaboration is particularly relevant for the current study, as it can illuminate how the interplay between government initiatives and NGO efforts impacts the integration experience of refugees. For instance, NGOs often engage directly with refugee communities to assess their needs and tailor services accordingly, which can lead to more effective and responsive integration strategies. By examining existing literature on NGO involvement in refugee integration, the study can highlight successful partnerships and identify areas where collaboration could be strengthened. This exploration will not only showcase the vital role of NGOs in supporting refugees but also underscore the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to integration that leverages the strengths of both governmental and non-governmental actors.

The future of refugee integration policies globally reflects changing attitudes towards refugees, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and emerging best practices. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches that address not only economic and social aspects but also mental health and community well-being (Lamba, 2017). Countries such as New Zealand have begun to implement comprehensive integration strategies that include mental health support, community engagement, and education as central components of their refugee policies. In Uganda,

recent trends indicate a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive integration strategies that involve multiple stakeholders, including government, civil society, and refugees themselves. The current study can contribute to this discourse by evaluating existing policies in Kiryandongo and providing recommendations for future approaches that enhance the resilience and well-being of both refugees and host communities. By emphasizing the necessity of inclusive policies that consider the multifaceted needs of refugees, the study aims to foster a more integrated society where both refugees and locals can thrive together, ultimately contributing to greater social stability and cohesion

The establishment of Kiryandongo as a site for refugee reception originated within the administrative apparatus of the British colonial state in Uganda. In 1954, colonial officials requested land from the Bunyoro Native Government to accommodate Kenyan nationals displaced by the Mau Mau uprising (1952–1960), securing a 49-year allocation for this purpose. This arrangement positioned Kiryandongo within a broader imperial framework that treated cross-border population movements as administrative matters requiring territorial solutions rather than humanitarian imperatives. The Bunyoro kingdom, subjected to colonial subjugation and marginalized within the protectorate's political economy, possessed limited agency in negotiating the terms of land transfer (Bass, 1975; Chick, 1970). Colonial records indicate that early resettlement efforts prioritized temporary shelter and basic subsistence, with minimal investment in long-term infrastructure or social integration mechanisms (Betts, 2021). The rural location, distant from urban centers and administrative hubs, corresponded with colonial preferences for containing displaced populations within peripheral zones while maintaining labor availability for agricultural production (Byerley, 2009).

The rural settlement model that later characterized Uganda's refugee policy found its origins in colonial-era allocations such as Nakivale, established in 1958 for Rwandan Tutsis fleeing ethnic violence (Otunnu, 2017). These settlements allocated arable plots to refugee households, a practice that aligned with colonial agricultural policy promoting smallholder cash-crop production in western and central Uganda (Carswell, 1996; Masefield, 1962). Land distribution during the 1950s operated through colonial adjudication rules that formalized customary tenure into freehold or leasehold categories, often without consultation with indigenous communities (Batungi & Rüther, 2008). In Masindi District, where Kiryandongo is located, land fragmentation and declining availability of cultivable acreage complicated allocation decisions, yet colonial authorities

proceeded with refugee settlement on the premise that peripheral lands held surplus capacity (Bazaara, 1994). This approach established a spatial logic wherein refugees received marginal lands distant from established population centers, a pattern that persisted in subsequent decades.

Agricultural development policy during the late colonial period influenced the material conditions of early refugee settlements. Colonial Development and Welfare funds supported research and extension services, though Uganda received less than the average allocation among British territories (Masefield, 1962). Settlement schemes in the 1950s and 1960s converted bush and grassland to cultivation, with refugees expected to contribute to local food production and, where possible, generate marketable surplus (Olson et al., 2004). In Kiryandongo, the initial allocation of land to Mau Mau refugees coincided with broader colonial efforts to relieve population pressure in densely settled regions such as Kigezi, where resettlement programmes relocated cultivators to Toro and adjacent areas (Hartter et al., 2015). These interventions treated land as a policy instrument for managing demographic change, with refugee settlements functioning as one mechanism among several for redistributing agricultural labor across the protectorate.

Political considerations shaped colonial resettlement practices as much as economic or humanitarian factors. British administrators viewed refugee accommodation as a means to stabilize border regions affected by liberation struggles in neighboring territories, thereby containing the spread of anti-colonial mobilization (Long, 2012; Lwanga-Lunyiigo, 1987). The placement of settlements in strategically important hinterlands, such as West Nile and the South West, allowed colonial authorities to reinforce alliances with local elites while monitoring populations deemed potentially disruptive to imperial order (Rubongoya, 2025). Ethnic categorization, itself a product of colonial administrative practice, informed decisions regarding which groups received settlement allocations and under what conditions (Amone & Muura, 2014; Musa, 2023). The resulting configuration of refugee policy served imperial objectives of territorial control and labor management, with limited regard for the long-term aspirations of displaced communities.

The political economy of refugee hosting during this period operated within a framework that combined pan-Africanist rhetoric with pragmatic calculations regarding development assistance and regional stability. Uganda secured a disproportionate share of UNHCR's Africa programme budget during the mid-1960s, receiving half of available funds while hosting approximately one quarter of the continent's refugee population (Betts, 2023). This resource flow created incentives

for maintaining an open admission posture, even as domestic political turbulence intensified. Pan-Africanist ideology, articulated under Milton Obote's first administration (1962–1971), provided normative justification for hosting displaced persons from neighboring liberation struggles, yet this ideological commitment coexisted with security-driven decisions regarding settlement placement and movement restrictions (Ssejjemba, 2018). The settlement model, with its allocation of marginal lands in peripheral districts, allowed the state to accommodate refugees while limiting their proximity to political centers and economic hubs. This spatial arrangement served both humanitarian and control functions, a duality that characterized Uganda's approach throughout the post-independence decades (Betts et al., 2019; Kaiser, 2006).

Regime-specific approaches to refugee policy produced variation within the overarching continuity of the settlement model. Idi Amin's administration (1971–1979), despite its repressive domestic record, worked closely with UNHCR to expand the rural settlement system, gazetting new areas and upgrading existing facilities while securing international praise for Uganda's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1976 (Betts, 2023; Schweers & Betts, 2026). This period saw the consolidation of the self-reliance model as an operational standard, with refugees expected to cultivate allocated plots and contribute to local food systems. The subsequent return to civilian rule under Milton Obote's second administration (1980–1985) introduced a more restrictive posture, particularly toward Rwandan refugees, whom the regime viewed as a potential security threat in strategically sensitive border regions (Betts, 2021; Schweers & Betts, 2026). Obote's government scaled up the settlement apparatus to exert greater control over refugee movement and political activity, demonstrating how the same institutional model could serve divergent political objectives depending on the governing coalition's priorities (Nystrand & Yawe, 2024). These regime-level variations occurred within a shared commitment to rural settlement as the default mechanism for refugee accommodation.

Ethnic politics and regional affiliations influenced the implementation of settlement policy and the reception of different refugee groups during the post-independence period. The politicization of ethnicity, inherited from colonial administrative practice, shaped decisions regarding which populations received settlement allocations and under what conditions (Laruni, 2014; Okafor, 2023). Refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and Congo were categorized according to perceived affinities with Ugandan ethnic groups, a process that affected their access to land, services, and opportunities for local integration (Odoi-Tanga, 2010). In northern and western regions, where

many settlements were located, local communities' relations with the central government mediated their interactions with refugee populations, sometimes producing cooperation and at other times generating tension over resources and political allegiance (Fusch, 1991). The settlement model, by concentrating refugees in specific districts, inevitably entangled them in local ethnic and political dynamics, a consequence that state officials acknowledged but rarely addressed through dedicated integration measures (Kaiser, 2006). This entanglement established patterns of coexistence and contestation that persisted beyond the 1980s.

The institutional and spatial configurations established during the 1960s–1980s produced enduring legacies for Uganda's refugee policy architecture. The rural settlement model, with its allocation of marginal lands and expectation of agricultural self-sufficiency, became embedded in administrative practice and donor programming, creating path dependencies that constrained later policy innovation (Betts et al., 2019; Serwajja & Refstie, 2023). Kiryandongo's trajectory during this period, including its partial repurposing for ranching schemes under Amin and its subsequent reactivation for refugee reception, illustrated the adaptability of settlement sites within a flexible policy framework (Byakagaba et al., 2018). The retention of colonial-era legislation, combined with post-independence land reforms and regime-specific security concerns, produced a hybrid system that balanced humanitarian accommodation with state control objectives (Betts, 2021; Kaiser, 2006). This system, while criticized for its limitations regarding refugee rights and long-term integration, provided a functional mechanism for managing recurrent displacement crises across a period marked by political instability and economic decline (Fusch, 1991; Sejjaaka, 2004). The practices and assumptions consolidated during these decades conditioned government initiatives for refugee integration in subsequent periods, including the formalization of the self-reliance model in the 1990s and its expansion in the 2000s.

The formal gazetting of Kiryandongo in 1990 responded to the displacement of Sudanese nationals, primarily ethnic Acholi and Madi from Eastern Equatoria, who fled escalating conflict associated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army and incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army (Enos, 2016; Kaiser, 2002). The Ugandan government designated land in Masindi District for this purpose, transferring refugees from a transit facility in Kitgum to a location considered more secure and agriculturally viable (Kaiser, 2000; Murahashi, 2021). This relocation occurred within a broader regional pattern of cross-border movement, as northern Uganda absorbed successive waves of Sudanese displacement throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lomo et al., 2001).

The settlement's establishment followed the administrative template inherited from earlier decades, allocating plots for residential and agricultural use while expecting households to achieve subsistence through cultivation (Kaiser, 2006). The initial population, estimated at approximately 14,000 persons, consisted largely of refugees who had experienced prior displacement, shaping their expectations and strategies upon arrival in Kiryandongo (Gidron, 2026; Kaiser, 2010).

Recent studies have extended the history of Kiryandongo beyond the 1990s. Murahashi (2021) examines the socio-economic dynamics of the refugee-hosting area around Bweyale, where the settlement and the trading centre grew into one economic zone, while Atari and McKague (2019) show how livelihood programmes were used to support primary health care for South Sudanese refugees in the shared health system. Ebere and Mwesigwa (2021) found that the social inclusion of refugees in Kiryandongo remained incomplete despite these programmes, and Gidron and Titeca (2025) warn that aid cuts and rising anti-refugee sentiment threaten the open-door policy on which the settlement depends. The settlement also received groups who were not South Sudanese, such as Kenyans displaced by the 2007–2008 post-election violence (UNHCR, 2008) and Ugandans displaced by the 2010 Bududa landslide (The New Humanitarian, 2010), and the Uganda Investment Authority (2021) treats the refugee population as part of the district's economic profile. These recent works, however, deal with the period after 1990 and do not connect the present settlement with the colonial use of the land from 1954, which is the gap that this study addressed.

The operational management of Kiryandongo during the 1990s involved a partnership between the Ugandan government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with the latter providing material assistance and technical support while the former retained statutory authority over land allocation and settlement governance (Kaiser, 2002; Tamale, 1997). This arrangement produced tensions regarding the timing and conditions of programme handover, as UNHCR pursued a strategy of phased withdrawal premised on refugee self-sufficiency through maize production and other agricultural activities (Kaiser, 2005; Murahashi, 2022). The handover process, documented in detail by Kaiser (2002), revealed divergent assessments of refugee readiness for reduced external support, with government officials and humanitarian actors disagreeing on the adequacy of local infrastructure and service capacity. These disagreements reflected broader debates about the appropriate balance between humanitarian protection and developmental objectives in protracted displacement situations (Betts, 2021; Kaiser, 2005).

Land allocation practices in Kiryandongo during the 1990s followed the settlement model's established conventions, granting refugee households plots for residential construction and crop cultivation on land previously designated for ranching or left fallow (Atari & McKague, 2019; Mulumba, 2011). The fertility of soils in the Masindi area attracted refugee agricultural activity, yet also generated environmental pressures as households cleared vegetation for fuelwood and charcoal production, contributing to localized deforestation (Mulumba, 2011). The 1975 Land Reform Decree, which vested land authority in the state, provided the legal basis for these allocations, though customary claims and host community interests occasionally complicated implementation (Banjwa, 2022; Mamdani, 1987). Refugee access to land operated within a hierarchical framework, with earlier arrivals securing more favorable plots and later arrivals facing constraints as available acreage diminished (Gidron & Titeca, 2025). This dynamic established patterns of differentiation among refugee households that influenced livelihood outcomes and social relations within the settlement.

Livelihood strategies among Kiryandongo's Sudanese population during the 1990s exhibited considerable diversification, extending beyond subsistence agriculture to include petty trade, labor migration, and informal enterprise (Gidron, 2026; Kaiser, 2010). The settlement's location near the Kampala-Gulu Road and the trading centre of Bweyale facilitated market access, enabling refugees to sell surplus produce and purchase essential goods (Kaiser, 2006; Murahashi, 2021). Household economies often depended on transnational kin networks, with remittances and resource sharing across the Uganda-Sudan border supplementing local production (Gidron, 2022). Gender shaped livelihood opportunities, as women faced constraints on land access and mobility while bearing primary responsibility for food preparation and fuel collection (Kaiser, 2016; Mulumba, 2005). These economic practices challenged simplistic assumptions about refugee dependency, yet also revealed the precariousness of self-reliance under conditions of limited capital, insecure tenure, and fluctuating market conditions (Kaiser, 2005; Serwajja & Refstie, 2023).

Social dynamics within Kiryandongo during the 1990s reflected the intersection of refugee identities, host community relations, and state administrative categories. Sudanese refugees, predominantly Acholi and Madi, navigated complex interactions with Ugandan nationals in Masindi District, where historical tensions over land and political representation occasionally surfaced in disputes over resources and services (Ebere & Mwesigwa, 2021; Otisi, 2019). Cultural practices, including music, dance, and ritual activity, served as means of negotiating belonging

and responding to displacement, as documented in Kaiser's ethnographic work (Kaiser, 2006, 2008). The settlement's institutional architecture, including schools, health facilities, and local governance structures, created spaces for interaction yet also reinforced distinctions between refugee and host populations (Kaiser, 2014; Payne, 1998). Security concerns, linked to the broader conflict environment in northern Uganda and South Sudan, influenced both refugee experiences and host community perceptions, with some residents viewing refugee presence as a source of instability (Ogola, 2022; Otisi, 2019). These social configurations established patterns of coexistence and contestation that shaped integration prospects in subsequent decades.

The institutional arrangements and policy practices consolidated in Kiryandongo during the 1990s produced enduring legacies for Uganda's refugee management framework. The settlement's designation as a site for Sudanese refugees established a precedent for using rural land allocations to accommodate influxes, a practice that extended to later arrivals from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi (Kaiser, 2006; Lomo et al., 2001). The self-reliance strategy, despite its implementation challenges, became embedded in programme design and donor expectations, influencing subsequent policy formalization in the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999 and the Refugees Act of 2006 (Betts et al., 2019; Betts, 2021). Kiryandongo's relative success, attributed by some observers to its location and agricultural potential, generated a narrative of model settlement that informed policy discourse even as internal differentiation and external pressures complicated this assessment (Gidron & Titeca, 2025; Kaiser, 2002). The experiences of Sudanese refugees during this period, including their livelihood adaptations, social negotiations, and interactions with state authorities, provided a reference point for government initiatives in later decades, conditioning approaches to integration, service delivery, and community relations in the settlement's subsequent evolution.

Implementation of the Self-Reliance Strategy and its successor, the Settlement Transformative Agenda, involved partnerships between the Ugandan government, UNHCR, and non-governmental organizations, with Kiryandongo frequently cited as a demonstration site for integrated service delivery and livelihood programming (Betts et al., 2019; World Bank, 2017). These initiatives allocated land for cultivation, supported agricultural extension, and facilitated access to education and health services for both refugees and host communities (Ebere & Mwesigwa, 2021). Assessments of these programmes noted improvements in school enrolment, clinic utilization, and market participation, yet also recorded persistent gaps in land quality,

infrastructure, and economic opportunity (Meyer, 2006; Svedberg, 2014). The handover of service delivery from humanitarian actors to local government structures, a stated objective of the Transformative Agenda, proceeded unevenly, with settlement authorities often lacking the fiscal capacity to sustain programmes initiated by external partners (Kaiser, 2005; Mulumba, 2014). Kiryandongo's experience illustrated these dynamics, as programme scaling coincided with population growth and environmental pressures that strained available resources.

Scholarly work on socio-economic integration during this period examined livelihood strategies, educational access, and inter-communal relations within settlements and host areas. Research in Kiryandongo documented refugee engagement in petty trade, agricultural production, and casual labor, with households often combining multiple activities to mitigate risk and supplement inadequate plot yields (Gidron, 2026; Murahashi, 2021). Educational studies noted increased enrolment of refugee children in primary schools, facilitated by the Universal Primary Education policy and targeted interventions, though secondary access remained constrained by fees and distance (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Ebere & Mwesigwa, 2021). Analyses of peaceful coexistence identified mechanisms for conflict resolution, including local councils and traditional authorities, while also recording tensions over land, water, and market competition that occasionally escalated into disputes (Norris, 2013; Otisi, 2019). Gender shaped integration outcomes, as women faced constraints on land access and mobility while bearing primary responsibility for household food security and care work (Krause, 2014; Mulumba, 2005). These findings presented a complex picture of adaptation and constraint within the policy framework.

Critical assessments identified disjuncture’s between policy provisions and lived conditions, particularly regarding land allocation, market access, and environmental sustainability. The quality of soils allocated to refugees in Kiryandongo and other settlements often proved inadequate for sustained agricultural production, while plot sizes diminished as population growth outpaced land availability (Omata, 2022; Svedberg, 2014). Market integration faced obstacles including limited transport infrastructure, price volatility, and competition with host community traders, conditions that reduced the profitability of refugee enterprise (Kaiser, 2005; Omata, 2012). Environmental pressures, notably deforestation for fuelwood and charcoal, generated conflict with host communities and prompted regulatory responses that sometimes-restricted refugee access to natural resources (Byakagaba et al., 2018; Mulumba, 2011). Legal analyses noted that statutory rights to work and movement were qualified by administrative practices that required settlement

residence for service access, thereby limiting the practical exercise of these entitlements (Namalwa, 2014; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). These constraints produced outcomes that diverged from the self-reliance narrative advanced in policy documents.

The policy framework consolidated during the 2000s–2014 period established institutional and normative precedents that conditioned subsequent refugee governance in Uganda. The 2006 Act and 2010 Regulations provided a legal basis for rights-based programming, while the Self-Reliance Strategy and Settlement Transformative Agenda operationalized these commitments through land allocation, service integration, and livelihood support (Betts, 2021; World Bank, 2017). Kiryandongo's trajectory during these years, including its expansion to accommodate new influxes and its designation as a site for integrated development interventions, illustrated the application of this framework in a specific settlement context (Enos, 2016; Murahashi, 2021). Critical scholarship, however, documented persistent gaps between policy aspirations and material conditions, highlighting the influence of resource scarcity, administrative capacity, and political economy on implementation outcomes (Kaiser, 2006; Omata, 2022). These tensions, unresolved by 2014, shaped the terms of debate regarding refugee integration in subsequent periods, including the adoption of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the continued evolution of Uganda's settlement-based approach.

The researcher observed that the literature on government initiatives in Kiryandongo concentrates on the period after 1990, particularly the UNHCR handover and the Self-Reliance Strategy (Kaiser, 2002; Kaiser, 2005; Meyer, 2006), and on present-day livelihoods (Gidron & Titeca, 2025; Murahashi, 2021). The colonial origins of the settlement in 1954, and the initiatives of the Obote, Amin and Obote II governments, are mentioned only in passing. Moreover, most of these studies rely on secondary and humanitarian sources and rarely use the oral testimony of older refugees and host community members. This study filled this gap by assessing the forms of government initiatives in Kiryandongo across the whole period from 1954 to 2014, using archival, documentary and oral sources.

2.3 Challenges of refugees' integration among host communities

Despite well-intentioned government initiatives, numerous challenges and barriers often hinder the successful integration of refugees. Globally, factors such as discrimination, economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural misunderstandings can significantly impact

refugees' integration experiences. For example, studies from France and Italy reveal that systemic barriers, including restrictive immigration policies and social stigmatization, can lead to social isolation and marginalization of refugee populations (Bhabha, 2014). In the context of Kiryandongo, understanding these barriers is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of existing initiatives.

The integration of refugees into host communities presents a multifaceted set of challenges that vary widely across different regions and cultural contexts. Globally, studies have highlighted that refugees often face barriers related to socio-economic factors, legal frameworks, and social attitudes. For instance, a comprehensive review by Aleinikoff and Zamore (2019) emphasizes that economic instability and lack of job opportunities significantly hinder refugees' ability to integrate successfully into their new environments. In the context of Kiryandongo, Uganda, these challenges resonate deeply, as many refugees struggle with limited access to employment and resources. Uganda's progressive policies allow refugees to work and own land; however, the local economy's constraints often limit these opportunities, creating a situation where refugees may remain marginalized despite existing legal frameworks. Understanding these dynamics through the lens of global literature can provide insights into potential solutions and highlight the necessity for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by refugees in Kiryandongo District.

Socioeconomic barriers are among the most pronounced challenges refugees face in integrating into host communities. Studies across various countries, such as a report by the UNHCR (2020), indicate that refugees often experience difficulties securing stable employment due to a combination of legal restrictions, lack of recognition of qualifications, and language barriers. For example, in Greece, many Syrian refugees have found it challenging to access the labor market due to stringent regulations and economic downturns, which have exacerbated their vulnerabilities (Kakavoulis, 2018). In Uganda, while refugees have the right to work, systemic issues such as limited access to credit, inadequate job training programs, and discrimination can hinder their socioeconomic advancement. This reality in Kiryandongo District underscores the importance of creating tailored employment programs that address the unique barriers faced by refugees. Insights drawn from international studies can guide local policymakers in developing more effective labor integration strategies that not only improve refugees' economic situations but also contribute positively to the local economy.

Uganda's legal framework, while progressive on paper, often faces implementation challenges at local levels, resulting in inconsistencies that can frustrate refugees' efforts to integrate fully into the community. In Kiryandongo, the disparity between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities can lead to confusion and frustration among refugees. The lessons learned from other countries can inform Ugandan authorities about the necessity of not only establishing robust policies but also ensuring their effective implementation at local levels, thus fostering a more supportive environment for refugees (CIC, 2018).

Research indicates that host communities often harbor ambivalent feelings toward refugees, which can stem from economic competition, cultural differences, and social stereotypes. For instance, a study in South Africa by Landau (2018) revealed that local populations frequently perceive refugees as threats to their job security and social services, leading to tension and conflict. In Uganda, while there is generally a favorable attitude towards refugees, local communities in Kiryandongo may still experience anxiety regarding resource allocation, especially in times of economic stress. Understanding the dynamics of social cohesion through the lens of international studies can provide valuable insights for Kiryandongo, emphasizing the need for community-building initiatives that promote mutual understanding and collaboration between refugees and host communities. Programs that encourage cultural exchanges, joint community projects, and local involvement in refugee support can enhance social cohesion and mitigate potential conflicts.

Cultural barriers often present significant challenges to refugee integration, as newcomers grapple with navigating a new cultural landscape while maintaining their own cultural identities. Studies from diverse contexts, such as those in Sweden, demonstrate that cultural integration requires sensitive approaches that respect and incorporate the identities of refugees (Migrationsverket, 2016). In Kiryandongo, cultural tensions may arise as refugees attempt to adapt to Ugandan customs while facing the risk of losing their cultural heritage. This dual challenge can create feelings of alienation and identity crisis among refugees. Research indicates that initiatives promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity among both refugees and host communities can foster better integration outcomes (Fitzgerald & Sweeney, 2016). By drawing on these insights, the current study can advocate for the implementation of culturally sensitive programming in Kiryandongo District that not only supports refugees in maintaining their cultural practices but also fosters appreciation and understanding among local populations, ultimately leading to a richer, more inclusive community.

Cultural factors significantly influence refugees' social integration experiences and the effectiveness of government initiatives. Literature suggests that cultural sensitivity and the recognition of refugees' cultural identities are essential for fostering acceptance and integration within host communities. For instance, studies in Canada indicate that culturally responsive programming can greatly improve integration outcomes by promoting respect for diverse backgrounds and facilitating intercultural dialogue (Fitzgerald & Sweeney, 2016). In Uganda, the interplay between the cultural practices of the Banyoro and other host communities and the influences of refugee communities can create both opportunities and tensions in Kiryandongo. Understanding how these cultural dynamics impact integration efforts is crucial for the current study, as it can inform the design of government initiatives that are sensitive to the cultural identities of both refugees and host communities. By investigating how cultural practices are negotiated and adapted within the context of integration, the study can offer valuable insights into how government initiatives can be tailored to respect and incorporate cultural identities. This approach not only promotes social cohesion but also enhances the overall effectiveness of integration strategies by fostering a sense of belonging among refugees and reducing potential cultural friction.

Refugees often arrive in host countries carrying the psychological scars of trauma from their experiences, which can significantly impede their ability to integrate. Studies indicate that mental health issues, including PTSD and anxiety, are prevalent among refugee populations, impacting their social interactions and overall well-being (Lamba, 2017). For instance, research conducted in Jordan reveals that many Syrian refugees face significant mental health challenges that hinder their integration into local communities (Alcántara et al., 2015).

In Kiryandongo, similar patterns may be observed, where refugees have experienced violence, loss, and displacement, leaving them in need of psychological support. This aspect of integration is often overlooked in broader discussions; however, it is crucial for addressing the holistic needs of refugees. The current study can emphasize the importance of integrating mental health support into refugee programs, drawing on successful models from other countries. Such initiatives would not only aid individual refugees in their healing processes but also contribute to healthier community dynamics as refugees become more socially engaged and active participants in their new environments.

There has also been a serious challenge as far as extending education services to the refugee is concerned. While studies have shown that access to quality education significantly influences refugees' ability to adapt and thrive in host societies, this is not the case in the real-life situation in the refugee settlements (Mansour, 2019). For example, research in Lebanon indicates that providing educational opportunities for Syrian refugees has been essential for their long-term integration and socio-economic contributions (Mansour, 2019). In Uganda, while educational policies allow refugee children to attend local schools, challenges such as overcrowding, resource scarcity, and language barriers can limit access and effectiveness. In Kiryandongo, these challenges may create significant disparities in educational outcomes for refugee children compared to their local counterparts. By analyzing international literature on educational integration, the current study can identify successful strategies for improving educational access and quality for refugees in Kiryandongo. This emphasis on education not only addresses immediate integration challenges but also promotes long-term benefits for both refugees and host communities, fostering a sense of shared purpose and investment in the future.

Health and well-being are critical factors that impact refugees' ability to integrate into host communities. Research indicates that access to healthcare services significantly influences refugees' overall integration experiences. In countries like Italy, where healthcare services are not uniformly accessible to refugees, many face significant barriers to receiving necessary medical care, which in turn affects their physical and mental health (Cattaneo & Fabbri, 2020). In Uganda, while healthcare services are generally accessible to refugees, challenges remain, particularly in rural areas like Kiryandongo, where healthcare facilities may be overburdened and resources scarce. This situation can lead to higher incidences of untreated health issues among refugees, further complicating their integration process. The current study can draw on international literature to explore how improving healthcare access and quality for refugees in Kiryandongo can facilitate better integration outcomes. By addressing health-related challenges, stakeholders can create a foundation that supports refugees' overall well-being, allowing them to participate more fully in their communities and contribute positively to the local economy.

The current study will analyze challenges documented in literature, such as limited access to essential services, discriminatory attitudes from local populations, and insufficient infrastructure to support the influx of refugees. By providing a comprehensive view of the obstacles faced by refugees, the study can propose targeted strategies to overcome these hurdles, drawing on

successful models from other countries while adapting them to the local context. This examination will be essential for developing actionable recommendations that enhance the overall effectiveness of integration efforts in Kiryandongo, ensuring that refugees can access the support they need to thrive in their new environment.

The researcher observed that much of the literature on the challenges of refugee integration is drawn from Europe, the Middle East and other parts of Africa, and describes present-day challenges such as unemployment, discrimination and pressure on services (Aleinikoff & Zamore, 2019; Landau, 2018). Studies on Uganda identify land pressure, environmental degradation and tension over services in settlements such as Kiryandongo (Mulumba, 2011; Otisi, 2019), but they do not show how these challenges emerged and changed under different regimes. This study filled this gap by examining the challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Kiryandongo historically, from the colonial period to 2014.

2.4 Summary of the literature review and gaps

The literature reviewed shows that Uganda's approach to refugees developed from colonial control under the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 to the rights-based framework of the Refugees Act of 2006, and that rural settlements with land allocation and self-reliance have remained the main instrument of integration throughout this history. The literature also shows that integration has been constrained by land pressure, environmental degradation, unequal services and political considerations. However, the researcher identified four gaps. Contextually, no study has traced the history of government initiatives in Kiryandongo from its first use in 1954 to its reopening in 2014. Empirically, the effectiveness of the refugee laws has been assessed mainly at national level and after 2006, rather than in a single settlement over time. Methodologically, existing studies rely mainly on secondary and humanitarian sources, with little use of archival records and oral history. Theoretically, few studies have used a historical theory to explain why the colonial settlement model persisted across regimes.

This study addressed these gaps by using a historical research design, archival and documentary sources and oral testimonies, and the theory of historical institutionalism, to examine the refugee laws and their effectiveness, the forms of government initiatives and the challenges of integration in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement between 1954 and 2014.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods that the researcher used to collect and analyses data. It covers the research approach and design, the study population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection methods and instruments, sources of data, data quality control, data analysis, research procedure, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study and how they were mitigated.

3.1 Research approach and design

3.1.1 Research approach

The study adopted a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the objectives of the study required an understanding of how refugee laws, government initiatives and the challenges of integration developed over time, and of how refugees and host communities experienced them, rather than their measurement in numbers. In this study, the approach was applied by collecting the accounts of participants through interviews and focus group discussions, by reviewing laws, official documents and published studies, and by analyzing all the data in words, themes and chronological narratives rather than statistics.

3.1.2 Research design

The study employed a historical research design, which is concerned with the systematic location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence about past events in order to explain how and why they happened (Berg, 2001). The design was appropriate because the study investigated the evolution of refugee laws, government initiatives and the challenges of integration in Kiryandongo over a period of sixty years, from 1954 to 2014.

The approach and the design served different purposes. The qualitative approach refers to the kind of data that the study collected and how they were analyzed, namely words, meanings and narratives rather than numbers. The historical design, on the other hand, refers to the overall plan through which this qualitative evidence was located, criticized and arranged in chronological order to answer questions about change and continuity over time. In short, the approach determined what kind of evidence was used, while the design determined how that evidence was organized to explain the past.

The design was applied in four steps. First, the researcher identified and collected primary sources, namely laws, official documents, archival records reproduced in published studies and oral testimonies, and secondary sources, namely books, journal articles and theses, relating to each period. Secondly, each documentary source was subjected to external criticism, that is, checking its origin, author and date to establish its authenticity. Thirdly, internal criticism was used to assess the credibility of each source by comparing what it said with other documents and with oral testimonies about the same event. Finally, the verified evidence was organized chronologically into five periods, namely the late colonial period (1954–1962), the first Obote government (1962–1971), the Idi Amin government (1971–1979), the UNLF, Obote II and Okello governments (1979–1986) and the NRM government (1986–2014), and synthesized into the historical narrative presented in Chapters Four to Six.

3.2 Study population

The study population comprised six categories of participants, each included for a specific reason. The first category was refugees living in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. Not every refugee was targeted: the study included only adult refugees who had lived in the settlement for a long period 10-15 years and above, drawn from the main nationalities in the settlement, namely South Sudanese and South Sudan, Congolese, Kenyans, Ethiopians, Djiboutians, Burundians and Eritreans, because they had experienced the government initiatives and the challenges of integration over time. The second category was members of the host communities in the villages surrounding the settlement Pnyadoli, Odokomit, Kikubbe, Kitwara, Kyamukangara and Kichwabugingo, particularly older Banyoro residents, because integration is a two-way process, because they shared land, markets and services with refugees, and because the older residents had memory of the earlier periods of the settlement.

The third category was block leaders, namely the Refugee Welfare Council chairpersons of Abraham MajotWut Ranch 1 and Ernest Omuti Ranch 37, who were included because they managed the day-to-day relations between refugees, settlement administrators and host communities and knew the history of their blocks. The fourth category was officials of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), namely the Settlement Commandant-Vincent Amaruma Manza and Steven Bogere Assistant Settlement Commandant who were included because the OPM administers refugee settlements under the Refugees Act of 2006 and keeps the settlement records.

The fifth category was officials of Kiryandongo District Local Government, namely the District Health Officer, the District Community Development Officer, the District Legal Officer, Chief Administrative Officer and District Planner, who were included because, after the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999, refugee health, community services and legal matters were integrated into district structures for which these officers were responsible.

The sixth category was representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the settlement, namely Danish Refugees Council- Protection Officer, International Rescue Committee(IRC)-Field Coordinator, UNHCR-Protection Officer, Refugees Law Project(RLP)-Protection Officer, ZOA Uganda- Field Coordinator, Kiryandongo Video Advocate(KVA)-Executive Director, World Food Programme(WFP)-Field Coordinator, African Youth Action Network(AYAN)-Field Coordinator and Windle Trust International(WTI)-Education Officer. These NGOs were selected, rather than others operating in the settlement, because they were implementing partners of the OPM and UNHCR in the sectors through which integration took place, namely; Education, health, livelihoods and legal aid, and because they had worked in Kiryandongo for longer than most other agencies.

3.3 Sample size

Because the study was qualitative, the sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation; data collection continued until no new information or themes emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions (Guest et al., 2006). A total of 105 participants took part in the study, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Category and number of participants

Category of participants	Method	Sampling technique	Number
Refugees	Focus group discussions (2 × 10)	Purposive	20
Refugees	Individual interviews	Purposive	25
Host community members	Focus group discussions (2 × 10)	Purposive	20
Host community members	Individual interviews	Purposive	21
NGO representatives	Key informant interviews	Purposive	10

Local government officials	Key informant interviews	Purposive	5
OPM officials	Key informant interviews	Purposive	2
Block leaders	Key informant interviews	Purposive	2
Total			105

Source: Field data (2025)

In total, 40 participants took part in four focus group discussions, 46 in individual interviews and 19 in key informant interviews.

3.4 Sampling techniques

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants in all categories. Key informants were selected directly by the researcher, while refugees and host community members were identified through block leaders and Local Council I chairpersons, acting as gatekeepers, on the basis of criteria set by the researcher.

3.4.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select the key informants, namely OPM officials, local government officials, NGO representatives and block leaders. The researcher judged that they could provide rich and relevant information on the basis of three criteria: the position they held in refugee administration or service delivery; the length of time they had served or lived in Kiryandongo at least fifteen years and above and, for older informants, whether they had lived through the earlier periods covered by the study. The researcher identified them through the Settlement Commandant's office, the District Local Government and the block leaders.

3.4.2 Purposive selection of refugees and host community members

Refugees and host community members were also selected purposively and not by convenience, because they were chosen for the information they could provide about the history of the settlement rather than because they happened to be available. All 45 refugees, that is, the 25 individual interviewees and the 20 participants in the two refugee focus group discussions, were identified by block leaders, while all 41 host community members were identified by were selected purposively. Participants were identified on the basis of criteria that the person was an adult, had

lived in or around the settlement for a long period for over 10 years, was knowledgeable about the history of the settlement, and was willing to take part.

3.5 Data collection methods and instruments

3.5.1 Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were held with the 19 key informants listed in Table 3.1 using a key informant interview guide (Appendix IV). The interviews focused on the refugee laws and how they were applied, the government initiatives implemented in Kiryandongo in different periods, and the challenges encountered. Each interview lasted about 45-60 and was audio-recorded with the consent of the informant.

3.5.2 Individual interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews were held with 25 refugees and 21 host community members using separate interview guides for refugees and for host community members (Appendix IV). Open-ended questions allowed participants to narrate their own experiences of settlement, land allocation, services and relations with the other community, while the researcher probed for dates, places and events in order to place their accounts within the chronology of the study.

3.5.3 Focus group discussions

Four focus group discussions were held, two with refugees and two with host community members, each comprising 10 participants of both sexes. Participants were selected with the help of block leaders and Local Council chairpersons, and the discussions were held at Panyadoli village, Mutunda Sub-County and lasted about 45-60 minutes. A focus group discussion guide (Appendix V) was used. The discussions were used to obtain collective memory of the settlement's history, to compare the views of refugees and host communities on the same initiatives and challenges, and to cross-check information obtained from individual interviews.

3.5.4 non-participant observation

Non-participant observation was used to verify information obtained from interviews and documents. Using an observation checklist (Appendix VI), the researcher observed, without taking part in activities, the condition and use of schools, health centers, water points, agricultural plots, markets and roads established through government and partner initiatives in clusters A, B, E, G,

H, of the settlement and in Bweyale town. Observations were recorded in field notes and photographs.

3.5.5 Documentary review

Documentary review was used to obtain evidence on laws, policies and initiatives, particularly for the periods before 1986 for which few living informants were available. Using a documentary review guide (Appendix VII), the researcher reviewed the texts of the refugee laws, namely the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960, the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010, together with the Constitution of 1995, published government and UNHCR reports, and published studies of refugee administration in Uganda and Kiryandongo. The researcher did not consult archival repositories directly. Archival files that are quoted in published studies, notably the Colonial Office files used by Long (2012) and the UNHCR Archives files used by Betts (2021), are therefore cited with "as cited in", in line with APA 7th edition, and are listed under Primary Sources before the References.

3.6 Sources of data

3.6.1 Primary sources

Primary sources were those produced during the period studied or by people who witnessed the events. They comprised oral testimonies obtained through key informant interviews, individual interviews and focus group discussions; field observations; laws and statutory instruments; official reports of the Ugandan government and of UNHCR; newspaper reports; and archival records reproduced in published studies.

3.6.2 Secondary sources

Secondary sources were those produced later by scholars and organizations interpreting the events, namely books, journal articles, theses and dissertations, and later analytical reports by government, UNHCR, the World Bank and NGOs. They were used to provide historical background, to corroborate and interpret the primary evidence, and to compare the findings with the views of other scholars.

3.7 Data quality control

The quality of the data was ensured using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility was ensured through triangulation. Each finding was accepted only when it was supported by at least two different types of evidence, for example an oral testimony and an archival or documentary source, or testimonies from both refugees and host community members. Where sources disagreed, the disagreement is reported in the findings. Key informants were also asked to confirm summaries of their interviews (member checking).

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the study area, the participants and the research procedures, so that readers can judge whether the findings apply to other refugee settlements.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability was ensured by keeping an audit trail of the research process. All interviews and discussions were conducted using the same guides, audio recordings, transcripts and field notes were labelled by date, place and participant code and kept securely, and the steps followed in coding and analysis were recorded, so that another researcher could follow how the conclusions were reached.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability was ensured by grounding each finding in the evidence collected, citing the source of every quotation and documentary claim, and keeping a reflexive journal in which the researcher noted personal assumptions so that they did not influence the interpretation of the data.

3.8 Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, content analysis and historical analysis.

3.8.1 Thematic analysis

Oral data were analyzed thematically following the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): the interviews and discussions were transcribed and, where necessary, translated into English; the transcripts were read several times; initial codes were generated; the codes were grouped into themes related to the three objectives; the themes were reviewed against the data; and

the themes were defined and named. Quotations representing each theme were selected and are presented in the findings with a code showing the category of participant, the place and the date.

3.8.2 Content analysis

Content analysis was applied to examine laws, government policies, archival records reproduced in published studies, UNHCR reports and newspaper reports in order to identify provisions, patterns and trends relating to refugee integration in each period.

3.8.3 Historical analysis

Historical analysis was used to evaluate the sources through external and internal criticism and to interpret the verified evidence chronologically, period by period, in order to explain continuity and change in refugee laws, government initiatives and integration challenges in Kiryandongo from 1954 to 2014.

3.9 Research procedure

The process began with the development of a concept paper and a research proposal, which was reviewed and approved by the Department of History. The research instruments were then pre-tested with 15 refugees and host community members in Cluster C who did not take part in the main study, and adjusted on the advice of the supervisors. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Faculty of Education and Humanities (Appendix IX), ethical approval from the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee, research clearance from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, and permission from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Kiryandongo Settlement Commandant to conduct research in the settlement. Data were then collected between 6th October 2025 and 17th December 2025, transcribed, analyzed and compiled into this dissertation.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee GUREC-2026-525, and the study was registered with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology UNCST-2025-R021075 (Appendix IX). Permission to work in the settlement was obtained from the Office of the Prime Minister. Every participant was informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, and gave written or thumb-printed consent before taking part (Appendices I–III); separate consent was sought for audio recording. Participation was voluntary, and

participants were free to decline any question or to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was protected by replacing names with codes indicating only the category of participant, place and date, and by keeping recordings and transcripts on a password-protected computer. To ensure that participants were not harmed (non-maleficence), interviews were held in private places of the participants' choice, sensitive questions about past violence were asked only with the participant's permission, and participants who became distressed were given time and were not pressed to continue.

3.11 Limitations and mitigating measures

Some participants had difficulty recalling events that occurred many decades earlier. This was addressed by interviewing participants from different categories about the same events, by asking them to relate events to well-known landmarks such as changes of government, and by corroborating their accounts with documentary evidence.

The settlement is linguistically diverse; refugees and hosts speak sixteen languages, including Acoli, Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, Kiswahili, Lingala, Kinyarwanda and Runyoro. The instruments were translated into Kiswahili and Dinka, and trained interpreters were used where necessary, with translations checked by reading them back to the participants.

The study experienced time and financial constraints associated with travelling to the settlement and obtaining documentary sources. These were minimized through careful planning, scheduling interviews in advance, and using library and electronic resources to supplement field data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFUGEE LAWS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN GOVERNING THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN UGANDA, 1954–2014

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the first objective of the study, which was to examine the refugee laws and their effectiveness in governing the integration of refugees in Uganda between 1954 and 2014. The laws are discussed first because they set the framework within which the government initiatives presented in Chapter Five were implemented. Following the historical research design, the chapter analyses the laws period by period: the pre-colonial antecedents, the late colonial period (1954–1962), the first Obote government (1962–1971), the Idi Amin government (1971–1979), the UNLF, Obote II and Okello governments (1979–1986), and the NRM government (1986–2014). For each period, the chapter presents the international instruments that applied, the national laws and their administration, and an assessment of their effectiveness in governing integration.

The chapter is based on historical methodologies and draws evidence from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included interviews with officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, local government leaders, humanitarian workers, refugee leaders, and host community members in refugee-hosting areas. Documentary evidence was also obtained from government records, policy documents, refugee legislation, and archival materials. Secondary sources included journal articles, books, historical publications, reports from humanitarian organizations, court documents, and previous scholarly studies on refugee governance in Uganda. Archival and documentary sources were important in reconstructing the historical development of refugee protection laws from the colonial period to the contemporary refugee framework under the NRM government.

4.1 Pre-colonial antecedents: customary reception of strangers and displaced persons (before 1894)

4.1.1 Customary norms governing the reception of strangers and displaced persons

Strictly speaking, the people discussed in this section were migrants rather than refugees, because the international boundaries and the legal category of "refugee" did not exist before colonial rule. The section is included only as historical background, to show the customary norms of hospitality that host communities in Bunyoro later brought to their reception of refugees.

Before the establishment of colonial rule in Uganda, there were no formal refugee laws in the modern sense. The various kingdoms and societies that later formed Uganda, including Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro, and Busoga, governed social relations through customary norms, clan regulations, and royal authority. Protection for displaced persons, migrants, and strangers was therefore regulated through customary institutions rather than written legislation. Although the concept of a refugee did not exist as a distinct legal category, communities developed mechanisms for receiving, accommodating, and incorporating outsiders who sought protection due to warfare, famine, political disputes, or other forms of displacement.

The study found that, before colonial rule, displaced persons who reached Bunyoro were received through the clan rather than through any written law. In a focus group discussion held on 6th October 2025, host community elders in Kiryandongo District explained:

> *Before the colonial laws, a person fleeing war was not called a 'refugee' with a file number. They were a guest of the clan. The Mukuru w'ekika (chief) would allocate them land near the homestead. In return, they worked the gardens and respected our customs. It was the law of hospitality (obuntu-bulamu), not a written statute. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 06th October, 2025).*

Interview findings similarly revealed that some participants associated traditional leadership structures with the protection of displaced persons. One elderly participant explained that strangers seeking safety were often received by clan elders or local rulers and allocated land on which they could settle and cultivate food. Such practices were intended to maintain social harmony while providing basic protection to those seeking refuge.

The customary norms governing displaced persons in pre-colonial Uganda provided an informal but functional framework for protection. Through clan affiliation, patronage arrangements, and community support systems, strangers could obtain access to land, security, and social acceptance. These mechanisms promoted social cohesion and reduced the likelihood of exclusion by incorporating newcomers into existing social structures. However, protection depended largely on the discretion of local authorities and host communities. Because no written laws or centralized legal institutions existed, the treatment of displaced persons varied across communities and circumstances. Access to protection was often conditional upon loyalty to local leaders, acceptance of community norms, and willingness to participate in social and economic activities. Consequently, while customary systems provided opportunities for inclusion, they did not guarantee uniform protection for all displaced persons.

These oral accounts are consistent with the historical literature. Roscoe (1911) observed that in Buganda, strangers who settled within the kingdom were commonly placed under the protection of clan leaders or local chiefs who assumed responsibility for their welfare and conduct, and similar arrangements were documented in Bunyoro and Ankole, where newcomers could be incorporated through patron-client relationships and granted access to land for cultivation and settlement (Roscoe, 1923). The elders' description of the Mukuru w'ekika allocating land near his homestead agrees with these accounts and with Cohen (1972), who explains that migration and incorporation were important features of social formation in the Great Lakes region, with communities absorbing newcomers through kinship arrangements and negotiated forms of belonging. Their reference to obuntu-bulamu also agrees with Mupedziswa et al. (2019), who show that the philosophy of ubuntu encouraged hospitality and communal responsibility towards vulnerable persons, and with Edwards (2023), who describes traditions of "refuge work" in pre-colonial northern Uganda. The oral evidence, however, places more emphasis on reciprocity than the literature: the stranger's protection was exchanged for labor and respect for custom, which shows that hospitality was conditional.

The oral evidence supports the argument of scholars that pre-colonial African societies possessed effective customary mechanisms for managing migration and displacement despite the absence of formal refugee legislation. The elders' statement that the reception of strangers was "the law of hospitality (obuntu-bulamu), not a written statute" agrees with Mubiala (2002), who argues that African customary norms contained principles of protection, hospitality and asylum that

anticipated later humanitarian concepts, and with Cohen (1972), who contends that social incorporation through kinship and clan systems enabled communities to absorb newcomers and maintain political stability. At the same time, the elders' explanation that strangers were received "in return" for working the gardens and respecting local customs supports the caution of historians that these systems depended on social relationships rather than legally enforceable rights. Refugee protection during the pre-colonial period was therefore grounded in customary obligations and community practices rather than formal legal guarantees.

4.1.2 Effectiveness of customary mechanisms for receiving displaced persons

The effectiveness of pre-colonial refugee protection mechanisms rested on their ability to facilitate the reception, settlement, and incorporation of displaced persons into host communities. Although these mechanisms lacked formal legal codification, they provided practical means through which individuals seeking protection could obtain security, livelihood opportunities, and social acceptance.

The oral evidence collected in this study shows that these mechanisms were effective in giving newcomers land and protection quickly, but only on conditions. One elderly participant explained that communities in Bunyoro and neighboring areas accommodated strangers fleeing wars or famine through clan sponsorship and communal land allocation, and that newcomers who respected local customs and took part in communal labor gradually became part of the host society (see section 5.2.1). Host community elders in a focus group discussion held on 16th October 2025, however, stressed the limits of this protection. They explained that a stranger "was not given land as a right" but had to prove loyalty to the Mukuru w'ekika, work the hardest in the gardens and fight in the front lines during inter-kingdom wars, and that those who failed to assimilate were "quietly pushed to the margins of the village". In their words, "It was protection, yes, but it came with the heavy price of permanent subordination" (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).

These findings agree with historical studies which suggest that many communities within the Great Lakes region successfully incorporated migrants and displaced populations through customary institutions. Roscoe (1911, 1923) documents cases in which newcomers were granted access to land and integrated into local social structures through clan affiliations and patron-client arrangements, which corresponds to the clan sponsorship and land allocation described by the

participants. Cohen (1972) further notes that migration contributed significantly to the expansion of political communities in the region, while Edwards (2023) demonstrates that traditions of mutual assistance and refuge were important survival strategies in north-central Uganda during periods of crisis. Mubiala (2002) similarly identifies customary principles of protection and hospitality as mechanisms for safeguarding vulnerable populations in pre-colonial African societies. Unlike these studies, which emphasize successful incorporation, the testimony of the elders shows that the same mechanisms could keep newcomers in a subordinate position for a long time.

The effectiveness of customary protection systems was demonstrated by their capacity to provide immediate assistance and facilitate social integration without requiring complex administrative structures. Newcomers could quickly access land, establish livelihoods, and become members of local communities. The flexibility of customary arrangements allowed local leaders to respond to different forms of displacement according to prevailing circumstances. However, these systems also possessed important limitations. Protection was not based on universal legal rights but on social acceptance and local discretion. Individuals who lacked influential patrons or clan connections could experience exclusion. Furthermore, the absence of standardized legal procedures created variations in protection across different communities. These limitations meant that protection outcomes depended heavily on local political and social conditions.

The elders' testimony therefore qualifies the view of historians that customary systems were reasonably effective in managing displacement within pre-colonial societies. Cohen (1972) argues that social incorporation mechanisms enabled communities to accommodate migrants and maintain stability over long periods, and Edwards (2023) maintains that traditions of refuge and mutual assistance were an important part of community resilience in pre-colonial Uganda. The evidence from Kiryandongo supports these views with regard to the speed with which newcomers obtained land and safety, but it agrees more closely with Mamdani (2001), who cautions that customary governance structures were hierarchical and could produce unequal outcomes depending on social status and political relationships, since the elder's described protection that came at "the heavy price of permanent subordination". Consequently, customary mechanisms were effective in receiving displaced persons and giving them a livelihood, but less effective in integrating them as equals, because protection depended on loyalty and labor rather than on rights.

This distinction between economic incorporation and equal membership recurs in the later periods examined in this chapter.

4.2 Refugee laws and integration under colonial administration (1954–1962)

4.2.1 Application of international refugee instruments

The late colonial period coincided with the emergence of the international refugee protection regime following the adoption of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Although Uganda was still under British colonial administration, developments within the international refugee system increasingly influenced refugee governance in the territory. The arrival of Sudanese refugees in the 1950s and Rwandan refugees after the 1959 revolution attracted growing international attention and contributed to the gradual involvement of international refugee institutions, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in refugee affairs within Uganda.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees established the first comprehensive international legal framework defining who qualified as a refugee and the rights to which refugees were entitled. Its importance for this objective is that many of its provisions are, in effect, the legal conditions for integration. Articles 17 and 18 provide for the right to wage-earning employment and to self-employment, including in agriculture; Article 21 for housing; Article 22 for public education; Article 26 for freedom of movement and choice of residence; and Article 34 requires states, as far as possible, to facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees (UNHCR, 1951). Local integration, one of the durable solutions that the Convention and UNHCR promoted, therefore depended on host states granting these rights. Measured against these provisions, the colonial framework in Uganda governed refugees in a way that limited their integration. When Uganda received large numbers of refugees from Sudan and Rwanda in the late 1950s, the colonial government did not adopt the Convention's integration-oriented rights. Instead, the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 confined refugees to settlements and required permits for movement (sections 8 and 17), in contrast to Article 26, and excluded refugee residence from counting towards naturalisation (section 18), in contrast to Article 34. The only part of the Convention's integration agenda that the colonial administration applied in practice was economic: land allocation and settlement farming, which corresponded to the right to self-employment in agriculture under Article 18, allowed refugees to produce food and trade with host communities.

The Convention therefore influenced integration in colonial Uganda only to the extent that it encouraged self-reliance through settlement farming, while its provisions on movement, legal status and naturalisation, which were essential for full integration, were not applied.

Despite these developments, colonial refugee legislation such as the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 remained the principal legal instrument governing refugees in Uganda. The Act focused primarily on the administration and control of refugee populations and contained limited references to international refugee rights standards. Consequently, the influence of international refugee instruments during the colonial period remained partial and indirect.

The application of international refugee instruments during the late colonial period was limited by the nature of colonial governance and the relatively early stage of development of the international refugee regime. Although the principles contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention were becoming internationally recognized, their incorporation into colonial refugee administration was gradual and incomplete. International influence was most visible in the growing recognition that refugee situations required coordinated humanitarian responses rather than purely security-based interventions. The involvement of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors encouraged colonial authorities to provide organized settlement arrangements, relief assistance, and opportunities for refugee self-sufficiency. These initiatives reflected emerging international approaches to refugee management. However, many of the rights guaranteed under the Convention were not fully reflected in colonial legislation. Refugees continued to face restrictions on movement, limited legal protections, and exclusion from pathways to permanent integration. Consequently, while international refugee norms began shaping administrative practices, they did not fundamentally transform the control-oriented character of colonial refugee governance. The period therefore represented a transitional phase in which international refugee protection principles were introduced into Uganda's refugee management system but had not yet achieved full legal or institutional implementation.

Scholars argue that the late colonial period marked the beginning of Uganda's engagement with the emerging international refugee protection regime. According to Ahimbisibwe (2020), refugee governance in Uganda increasingly became connected to international humanitarian frameworks as refugee movements expanded across East Africa. Similarly, Betts (2021) observes that international organizations played an important role in promoting settlement-based assistance

programmes that sought to combine humanitarian support with refugee self-reliance. The Refugee Law Project (2006) notes that although international refugee principles were gaining prominence globally, colonial refugee policies remained largely centered on regulation and administrative control. This limited the practical application of many Convention standards. Mujuzi (2008) further argues that several provisions of the Control of Alien Refugees Act departed significantly from principles later associated with international refugee protection, particularly regarding freedom of movement and legal safeguards. Therefore, while the 1951 Refugee Convention and early UNHCR involvement introduced important international dimensions to refugee governance in Uganda, their influence during the colonial period remained constrained by existing administrative priorities and legal structures.

4.2.2 Colonial refugee laws and administrative frameworks

The colonial period marked the beginning of formal refugee legislation in Uganda. Prior to the 1950s, the British Protectorate administration managed displaced populations primarily through general immigration regulations and administrative directives rather than refugee-specific laws. However, the increasing movement of refugees from neighboring territories, particularly Sudan and Rwanda, prompted the colonial government to establish a legal framework specifically designed to regulate refugee admission, settlement, and administration. This resulted in the enactment of the Control of Refugees from the Sudan Ordinance of 1955 and later the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960. These laws constituted Uganda's earliest formal refugee legislation and laid the foundation for refugee governance during both the late colonial and post-independence periods.

Archival records from the Uganda Protectorate indicate that the outbreak of conflict in southern Sudan (now South Sudan) during the mid-1950s generated refugee movements into northern Uganda, prompting colonial authorities to establish legal mechanisms for refugee control (Uganda Protectorate, 1955). The Control of Refugees from the Sudan Ordinance of 1955 was enacted specifically to regulate the admission, settlement, and administration of Sudanese refugees entering Uganda. However, the Ordinance was narrow in scope and did not address refugees arriving from other neighboring territories. The influx of approximately 70,000 Rwandan refugees following the 1959 Rwandan Social Revolution exposed the limitations of the 1955 Ordinance and led to the drafting of broader refugee legislation. Legislative Council debates and colonial

administrative correspondence reveal growing concern among British officials regarding the management of large refugee populations during the transition towards Ugandan independence (Uganda Legislative Council, *Proceedings*, 1960, p. 166, as cited in Long, 2012; TNA, CO 822/2494/7, Acting Governor of Uganda to Secretary of State for the Colonies, *Ruanda refugees*, 22 January 1960, as cited in Long, 2012). As a result, the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) was enacted in 1960 to replace the earlier Sudan-specific legislation. The title of the Act itself reflected the priorities of the colonial administration. Rather than referring to the protection or welfare of refugees, the legislation focused on their control and regulation. Under Section 5 of the Act, the Director of Refugees was empowered to establish refugee settlements and appoint settlement commandants to administer them. Section 8 authorized the Minister to require refugees to reside within designated settlements, while Section 17 restricted their movement outside such settlements without official permission. Section 18 further provided that periods spent in Uganda as a refugee would not count towards citizenship or naturalisation. Contemporary newspaper reports published in the Uganda Argus and the East African Standard frequently described refugee administration in terms of settlement management, border regulation, and public order rather than refugee rights (e.g., Ibingira, *Uganda Argus*, 1 January 1960, TNA, CO 822/2494/2, as cited in Long, 2012). Similarly, Colonial Office correspondence emphasized the need for what officials termed the "proper control" of refugee populations and the maintenance of security in border regions. One Colonial Office memorandum reportedly referred to refugee legislation as a mechanism for ensuring the "effective administration and supervision of alien refugee populations," illustrating the administrative orientation of colonial refugee policy.

This control-oriented mindset was explicitly documented in archival records. A 1960 Colonial Office memorandum described the new legislation as a necessary tool for the *"effective administration and supervision of alien refugee populations"* to prevent *"uncontrolled wandering"* (UK National Archives, CO 822/2514, 1960). Contemporary newspaper coverage mirrored this security-focused narrative; for instance, the Uganda Argus August 1960) framed the enactment of the new refugee regulations primarily as a border security and public order measure, rather than a humanitarian milestone. A Key Informant Interview (KII with host community, Kiryandongo, 06th October, 2025) with a retired district administrator highlighted the lasting legacy of this framework:

> *The 1960 Act created the 'commandant' system. The commandant had absolute power over movement. You needed a pass to go to the market. This wasn't about protecting rights; it was about containing people for the security of the state. (KII with Retired Local Government Official, Kiryandongo, 06th October 2025).*

Interview findings also revealed awareness of this legacy among participants. One retired government official observed that the colonial refugee system was designed primarily to keep refugees within designated settlements where authorities could monitor their activities, movements, and interactions with surrounding communities.

The enactment of the 1955 Ordinance and the 1960 Control of Alien Refugees Act represented an important institutional development because it introduced a formal legal framework for refugee governance in Uganda. For the first time, colonial authorities established statutory procedures for refugee administration, settlement organization, and government oversight of displaced populations. These measures provided a degree of administrative order during a period of increasing regional instability and population movement. Nevertheless, the legal framework prioritized administrative control over refugee protection. The powers granted to government officials were extensive and often exercised without meaningful judicial oversight. Refugees could be compelled to reside in designated settlements, denied permission to move freely, subjected to detention, and excluded from pathways to citizenship. The settlement commandant system concentrated considerable authority in administrative officials who exercised powers over discipline, movement, and daily life within refugee settlements. The legislation therefore reflected broader colonial objectives of maintaining security, regulating mobility, and managing populations considered politically sensitive during the decolonization period. While the laws succeeded in creating mechanisms for refugee registration and administration, they offered limited recognition of refugee rights and provided few safeguards against arbitrary administrative action.

Scholars generally agree that colonial refugee legislation in Uganda was designed principally for regulation rather than protection. Ahimbisibwe (2020) argues that the 1955 Ordinance and the 1960 Control of Alien Refugees Act were enacted primarily to facilitate the control and management of refugee populations rather than to establish a rights-based protection framework. The Refugee Law Project (2006) similarly contends that CARA focused on the containment and supervision of refugees while providing minimal recognition of internationally accepted refugee

rights. Mushomi (2025) describes the Act as a restrictive legal framework whose central objective was administrative control rather than refugee welfare. Mujuzi (2008) further argues that many provisions of CARA were inconsistent with later constitutional and international human rights standards because they restricted freedom of movement, permitted extensive executive discretion, and failed to establish adequate procedural safeguards. The World Bank (2016) likewise characterizes colonial refugee legislation as a framework concerned primarily with control and regulation rather than refugee protection. Collectively, these scholars maintain that although colonial refugee laws created Uganda's first formal refugee governance system, their effectiveness in protecting refugees was limited because they prioritized state authority and administrative convenience over refugee rights and legal protection.

4.2.3 Effectiveness of colonial refugee laws in governing integration

Colonial refugee protection measures achieved mixed outcomes between 1954 and 1962. On one hand, they provided a formal administrative framework through which refugees could be received, settled, and assisted. On the other hand, the legal and institutional arrangements were largely designed to regulate and control refugee populations rather than guarantee refugee rights. Consequently, while colonial refugee protection measures contributed to order and stability in refugee management, their effectiveness in safeguarding refugee rights remained limited.

The enactment of the Control of Refugees from the Sudan Ordinance in 1955 represented the first formal legal attempt to regulate refugee affairs in Uganda. The Ordinance enabled colonial authorities to receive and manage Sudanese refugees entering the Protectorate. However, its effectiveness was limited because it applied only to Sudanese refugees and could not adequately address the wider refugee movements that emerged later in the decade, particularly the influx of Rwandan refugees following the 1959 revolution. To address these shortcomings, the colonial administration enacted the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) in 1960. The Act established a broader framework for refugee administration and empowered government authorities to designate refugee settlements, regulate refugee movement, and coordinate refugee assistance. Through these provisions, the colonial government was able to maintain administrative oversight over growing refugee populations and prevent uncontrolled settlement across the Protectorate. The establishment of organized settlements also enabled refugees to access land for cultivation, shelter, and humanitarian assistance. In collaboration with missionary organizations and emerging

international humanitarian agencies, colonial authorities facilitated the provision of basic services within refugee settlements. These measures helped many refugees achieve a degree of self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on emergency relief.

Despite these achievements, CARA contained numerous provisions that restricted refugee rights. The Act defined refugees primarily through ministerial declaration rather than individual refugee status determination. Sections 8 and 17 restricted freedoms of movement by requiring refugees to reside within designated settlements and obtain permission before travelling outside them. Section 18 excluded refugee residence from counting towards naturalization, effectively denying refugees a pathway to citizenship regardless of how long they remained in Uganda. The Act further granted extensive powers to settlement authorities. Section 9 allowed detention of individuals deemed prejudicial to peace and good order, while Section 19 authorized detention of persons suspected of offences elsewhere. Sections 22 and 23 empowered settlement officials to arrest refugees without warrants and use force in enforcing settlement regulations. At the same time, Section 24 protected officials from liability for actions undertaken in the execution of their duties. Such provisions significantly limited legal safeguards available to refugees.

The effectiveness of colonial refugee protection measures depended largely on the criterion used for evaluation. From an administrative perspective, the measures were relatively effective because they enabled colonial authorities to organize refugee settlements, monitor population movements, maintain public order, and coordinate humanitarian assistance. The establishment of designated settlements prevented large-scale destitution and provided refugees with opportunities to engage in agricultural production, thereby promoting a degree of economic self-reliance. However, from a rights-based perspective, the effectiveness of these measures was considerably weaker. The legal framework prioritized administrative control over individual protection. Refugees were treated primarily as populations to be managed rather than rights-bearing individuals entitled to legal protections. Restrictions on movement reduced opportunities for economic advancement, social interaction, and integration with host communities. The absence of individualized refugee status determination created opportunities for arbitrary administrative decision-making, while broad detention and deportation powers exposed refugees to uncertainty and insecurity.

The exclusion of refugees from naturalization further limited the effectiveness of colonial protection measures. By preventing refugee residence from contributing towards citizenship

eligibility, colonial authorities reinforced the perception that refugees were temporary outsiders regardless of the duration of their stay. This restricted long-term integration and denied refugees the possibility of securing permanent membership within Ugandan society. Furthermore, the concentration of power in settlement commandants and administrative officials weakened accountability mechanisms. Refugees possessed limited avenues through which they could challenge decisions affecting their liberty, movement, property, or residence. As a result, legal protection remained subordinate to administrative discretion.

The restrictive legacy of this era was critically assessed by the Refugee Law Project (2006), which noted that the very title "Control of Refugees Act" revealed a legislative emphasis on regulation and containment rather than welfare or rights. This historical memory persists among older host-community members who witnessed the early settlement days. As one participant in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo, 06th October 2025) recalled:

> *In those early days under the old laws, the government treated refugees like prisoners in the settlements. They were given land to farm so they wouldn't burden the treasury, but they were not allowed to mix freely with us. The law was a wall, not a bridge. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 06th October 2025)*

Scholars generally contend that colonial refugee protection measures were more effective as instruments of administration than as mechanisms of rights protection. The Refugee Law Project (2006) argues that even the title "*Control of Alien Refugees Act*" reflected a legislative emphasis on regulation and control rather than refugee welfare and protection. Similarly, the World Bank (2016) observes that colonial refugee governance focused on containment and supervision of refugee populations within designated settlements. Mujuzi (2008) argues that several provisions of CARA were inconsistent with international refugee protection principles because they imposed severe restrictions on movement, granted broad detention powers, and provided inadequate legal safeguards. Sharpe and Namusobya (2012) likewise contend that the legislation prioritized state security concerns over refugee rights and autonomy. Walker (2008) notes that the exclusion of refugee residence from naturalization processes institutionalized refugee marginalization by denying refugees opportunities for permanent integration. According to Ahimbisibwe (2020), however, colonial refugee policies also laid the foundations upon which later refugee governance frameworks in Uganda were built. The establishment of settlements, administrative institutions,

and refugee management structures provided a basis for subsequent developments in refugee protection after independence. Therefore, while colonial refugee protection measures were effective in facilitating refugee administration, maintaining public order, and coordinating humanitarian assistance, their effectiveness in protecting refugee rights and promoting long-term integration remained limited due to their strong emphasis on control and regulation.

The restrictive colonial framework described above stands in stark contrast to the progressive legal evolution that followed, culminating in the landmark Refugees Act of 2006 and the 2010 Regulations. This modern legal shift from "control" to "integration" is physically manifested in the shared infrastructure of Kiryandongo today. Unlike the segregated colonial settlements, current government policy mandates shared service delivery. This is evident in the joint use of Primary Schools (Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, Ematong Primary School, St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, Arnold Primary School, Beth Cole Nursery School, and Panyadoli Primary School) and Secondary Schools (Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and St. Mary's Secondary School), which serve both refugee and host-community children.

Similarly, health integration is anchored by shared facilities, including Panyadoli Health Centre IV (the main referral facility for both populations), Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II.

A Key Informant Interview (KII with host community Kiryandongo, 06th October 2025) with a District Health Officer summarized this legal and practical evolution:

> *The colonial law-built walls around settlements. The 2006 Act tore them down. Today, when a refugee mother and a Ugandan mother wait in the same line at Panyadoli HC IV, or their children sit in the same classroom at Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary, that is the law working as it was intended: not to control, but to integrate. (KII with District Health Officer, Kiryandongo, 06th October 2025).*

4.3 Refugee laws and integration during the first Obote government (1962–1971)

4.3.1 Uganda’s adoption of international refugee principles

Following independence in October 1962, the Obote I government increasingly aligned Uganda's refugee policy with emerging international refugee protection principles. Although the

government retained the colonial-era Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 as the principal legal framework governing refugees, it gradually expanded cooperation with international refugee institutions and embraced aspects of the developing international refugee protection regime. This period witnessed Uganda's growing engagement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), increased participation in international refugee assistance programmes, and the gradual recognition that refugee situations required long-term solutions beyond temporary emergency relief.

The attainment of independence in 1962 coincided with a period of significant refugee movements within the Great Lakes region and East Africa. Uganda continued to host refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and the Congo, requiring the new government to develop policies capable of addressing both humanitarian and administrative challenges. While CARA remained in force, the Obote government increasingly worked with international organizations to support refugee assistance and settlement programmes. Archival records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNHCR country operations indicate growing collaboration between Uganda and international refugee agencies throughout the 1960s (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 10C, Box 4, ARC-2B4, *12th session of the Executive Committee*, 30 October 1964, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 1, Box 76, *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and UNHCR*, 7 February 1969, as cited in Betts, 2021). This cooperation culminated in the establishment of a UNHCR branch office in Uganda in 1969, formalizing relations between the Ugandan government and the international refugee agency. The agreement strengthened technical cooperation, refugee assistance programmes, and international support for settlement development initiatives.

Government officials increasingly framed refugee management within a broader developmental context. Rather than viewing refugees solely as temporary recipients of humanitarian aid, policymakers promoted the idea that refugees could become economically productive members of rural communities. This approach became associated with the government's "self-supporting" refugee policy, which sought to provide refugees with access to agricultural land and opportunities for self-reliance.

Evidence of changing official attitudes appeared in government statements during the late 1960s. In a 1969 statement, the Assistant Director responsible for refugee affairs reportedly acknowledged that many refugees had become settled in Uganda, observing that some had found life in Uganda

"so comfortable that few ever dream of going back." This statement reflected growing recognition that voluntary repatriation was not always a realistic solution and that local integration could provide an alternative long-term response to refugee displacement.

International cooperation also expanded through humanitarian assistance programmes supported by UNHCR and other international partners. Refugee settlements received support for agricultural production, education, health services, and community development projects. These initiatives reflected broader international refugee protection principles emphasizing refugee welfare, self-reliance, and burden-sharing between host states and the international community.

This developmental framing was internationally recognized early in the decade. For instance, during the 1964 UNHCR Executive Committee meetings, the Ugandan Foreign Minister was specifically invited to showcase national projects *"aimed at making the refugees self-supporting,"* marking a distinct, publicly celebrated shift from mere containment to developmental integration (UNHCR, 1964). A Key Informant Interview on 07th October 2025) with a retired Ministry of Internal Affairs official corroborated this era's pragmatic optimism:

> *In the mid-1960s, the narrative wasn't about locking them up. The government and UNHCR actively promoted the idea that a refugee with a hoe was an asset to the district, not a burden. We were building settlements that produced food for the whole region, and the international donors loved that model. (KII with Retired Government Official, Kampala/Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

Uganda's adoption of international refugee protection principles during the Obote I period was gradual rather than comprehensive. The government did not fundamentally reform the inherited colonial refugee legislation, and CARA continued to provide the legal basis for refugee administration. Nevertheless, increasing cooperation with UNHCR and other international actors introduced new approaches that differed from the purely control-oriented framework of the colonial period. The growing emphasis on self-supporting settlements reflected an important shift in refugee governance. Rather than relying exclusively on containment and surveillance, the government increasingly sought to integrate refugee assistance into broader rural development programmes. Refugees were encouraged to cultivate land, participate in local economies, and contribute to agricultural production. This approach aligned with international efforts to promote durable solutions and reduce long-term dependency on humanitarian aid. The establishment of the

UNHCR branch office in 1969 further demonstrated Uganda's willingness to engage with international refugee institutions. Through this cooperation, refugee issues became increasingly connected to international norms concerning humanitarian assistance, refugee welfare, and long-term solutions. The government's acknowledgement that many refugees might remain permanently in Uganda also represented a departure from earlier assumptions that refugee presence would be strictly temporary. However, the adoption of international refugee protection principles remained incomplete. While international ideas increasingly influenced refugee policy, many aspects of domestic refugee administration continued to be governed by restrictive colonial legislation. Consequently, the period was characterized by the coexistence of two competing approaches: an emerging international protection framework emphasizing refugee welfare and durable solutions, and an inherited legal system primarily concerned with administrative control.

Scholars generally regard the Obote I period as an important transitional stage in the development of Uganda's refugee protection regime. According to Betts (2021), the government's promotion of self-supporting refugee settlements reflected growing recognition that refugees could contribute to local economic development rather than remain passive recipients of assistance. He argues that refugee settlement policies increasingly became linked to broader development objectives and international support programmes. Pirouet (1988) similarly observes that the early post-independence period was characterized by relatively welcoming attitudes towards refugee settlement, particularly in comparison with later periods of increasing restriction. She notes that the government initially demonstrated willingness to accommodate refugee populations through organized settlement schemes and cooperation with international agencies. Soi de (2020) argues that refugee governance during the 1960s was shaped by both political considerations and everyday practical realities. While the government sought to maintain control over refugee populations, it also recognized the necessity of working with international actors to address growing refugee needs. This cooperation contributed to the gradual incorporation of international refugee protection principles into Uganda's refugee management system. Betts (2021) further contends that the establishment of the UNHCR branch office and the promotion of self-reliance programmes reflected increasing acceptance of international approaches to refugee protection. However, Ahimbisibwe (2020) and Mujuzi (2008) note that these developments occurred alongside the continued operation of the Control of Alien Refugees Act, a law inherited from the colonial administration that remained largely incompatible with modern refugee rights standards.

Therefore, although the Obote I government did not fully reform Uganda's refugee legislation, it played a significant role in introducing and institutionalizing international refugee protection principles through cooperation with UNHCR, support for self-reliance programmes, and growing acceptance of local integration as a potential solution to protracted refugee situations.

4.3.2 Refugee administration and integration measures

During the Obote I administration (1962–1971), refugee administration and protection measures were characterized by continuity and gradual adaptation. The government retained the colonial-era Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 as the principal legal framework governing refugees while simultaneously expanding refugee settlement programmes and strengthening cooperation with international humanitarian agencies. Refugee protection during this period was largely implemented through organized settlements, the settlement commandant system, and the government's self-supporting refugee policy. However, the administration increasingly balanced humanitarian objectives with political, security, and developmental considerations, particularly as regional tensions and domestic political challenges intensified during the late 1960s.

At independence in 1962, the Obote government inherited the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) from the colonial administration and continued to apply it without major legislative reform. Under Section 2 of the Act, the Minister retained authority to declare specific groups as refugees through statutory instruments, while Sections 5 and 8 empowered the government to establish refugee settlements and require refugees to reside within designated areas. These provisions enabled the government to continue managing Rwandan, Sudanese, and Congolese refugees through organized settlement schemes. The settlement commandant system established during the colonial period also remained in operation. Commandants exercised extensive authority over refugee settlements, including powers relating to discipline, settlement administration, security, and movement control. Sections 13, 21, and 22 of CARA granted settlement authorities powers to issue orders, impose disciplinary measures, and arrest individuals who violated settlement regulations. Through this administrative structure, the government maintained direct oversight of refugee populations while ensuring that settlement activities remained consistent with national policies. A significant feature of refugee administration during this period was the adoption of the self-supporting refugee policy. Rather than relying solely on relief assistance, the government allocated agricultural land to refugees and encouraged them to engage in farming and

productive economic activities. Refugee settlements were expected to become largely self-sufficient through agricultural production. According to UNHCR records and government reports, this approach sought to reduce dependence on external aid while simultaneously contributing to rural development and food production (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 10C, Box 4, ARC-2B4, *12th session of the Executive Committee*, 30 October 1964, as cited in Betts, 2021).

Cooperation between Uganda and international humanitarian agencies expanded considerably during the 1960s. UNHCR increased its involvement in refugee assistance programmes, culminating in the establishment of a UNHCR branch office in Uganda in 1969. International support facilitated the provision of agricultural inputs, educational services, health facilities, and community development projects within refugee settlements. The Ministry of Culture and Community Development became increasingly involved in coordinating refugee affairs alongside broader local development initiatives.

The administration of refugees was also influenced by regional political developments. The 1963 Inyenzi incursions into Rwanda by armed groups associated with Rwandan refugees heightened government concerns regarding refugee-related security threats. As a result, refugee settlements were subjected to closer monitoring, and authorities became increasingly cautious about refugee mobility and political activities. Government officials also expressed concerns about cross-border political involvement and the potential use of refugee communities as bases for regional conflicts.

The securitization of refugee policy following the 1963 *Inyenzi* incursions had tangible, restrictive impacts on the ground. Archival reports from the period note increased surveillance and stricter enforcement of movement passes by settlement commandants. A Focus Group Discussion on 06th October 2025) with elderly host-community members in the greater Kiryandongo/Bunyoro region recalled how this political tension disrupted daily life:

> *After the news of the Inyenzi attacks, the commandants became very strict. Refugees suddenly needed written permission just to go to the trading centre to sell their surplus beans. The trust we had built through farming together was viewed with deep suspicion by the authorities, who started treating the settlements like security zones. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 07th October 2025).*

This illustrates how regional security dynamics directly undermined the everyday social integration that agricultural self-reliance had initially fostered.

During the late 1960s, refugee administration became increasingly influenced by broader political developments within Uganda. Following the 1966 constitutional crisis and the introduction of the 1969 "Move to the Left" policy, the government adopted more restrictive attitudes towards foreigners and non-citizens. Measures associated with Ugandanization and the growing emphasis on national economic control affected perceptions of refugee populations, particularly Banyarwanda communities whose presence became increasingly politicized.

The refugee administration system established under Obote I represented both continuity and change. On one hand, the government maintained the colonial administrative framework embodied in CARA and the settlement commandant system. This continuity ensured that refugee management remained highly centralized and subject to extensive executive control. Refugees continued to be governed through settlement-based administration rather than through rights-based protection mechanisms. On the other hand, the government introduced important policy innovations through its self-supporting refugee strategy and increased cooperation with international organizations. Refugee settlements were no longer viewed solely as mechanisms for containment but also as instruments of agricultural development and rural transformation. By allocating land and promoting self-reliance, the government attempted to transform refugees into productive economic actors capable of contributing to local development. The expansion of cooperation with UNHCR further strengthened humanitarian assistance and enhanced the institutional capacity of refugee settlements. Access to education, health services, agricultural support, and community development programmes improved the living conditions of many refugees. These measures reflected growing recognition that refugee situations required long-term developmental responses rather than short-term emergency interventions. Nevertheless, refugee administration remained heavily influenced by security and political considerations. The Inyenzi attacks, tensions with neighboring Rwanda, and domestic political instability encouraged authorities to prioritize surveillance and control. As political conditions deteriorated towards the end of the decade, refugee administration increasingly reflected broader concerns about citizenship, national identity, and state security.

Consequently, refugee protection measures under Obote I operated within a dual framework. Development-oriented initiatives promoted self-reliance and humanitarian assistance, while the inherited legal framework continued to emphasize regulation, restriction, and executive control over refugee populations.

Scholars argue that refugee administration during the Obote I period reflected an uneasy balance between developmental objectives and restrictive state control. Betts (2021) contends that the self-supporting refugee policy linked refugee settlement to broader national development goals by encouraging agricultural production and attracting international assistance to rural areas. He argues that refugee settlements became integrated into state development strategies rather than functioning solely as humanitarian spaces. Pirouet (1988) similarly observes that the early years of Obote's government were characterized by relatively accommodating refugee policies, particularly regarding settlement development and cooperation with humanitarian organizations. However, she notes that this openness gradually diminished as security concerns and domestic political tensions increased. Soi de (2020) argues that refugee governance during the 1960s was shaped by the interaction between local realities and national political interests. Refugees were not merely humanitarian subjects but also actors within broader political, religious, and ethnic dynamics that influenced government policy. The 1963 Inyenzi incursions and subsequent security concerns contributed to increasing government suspicion towards refugee communities. Ahimbisibwe (2020), Mujuzi (2008), and the Refugee Law Project (2006) maintain that despite developmental initiatives, refugee administration continued to operate within the restrictive framework of the Control of Alien Refugees Act. They argue that the Act remained fundamentally oriented towards control rather than protection, limiting the extent to which humanitarian and international refugee principles could be fully realized. Therefore, refugee administration and protection measures during the Obote I period combined developmental initiatives, humanitarian cooperation, and settlement-based assistance with a legal and administrative framework that remained heavily influenced by colonial approaches to refugee governance.

4.3.3 Effectiveness of refugee laws in governing integration

Refugee protection during the Obote I period (1962–1971) produced mixed outcomes. While the government expanded refugee settlements, promoted self-supporting refugee communities, strengthened cooperation with international organizations, and demonstrated increasing openness

towards local integration during the 1960s, the legal framework governing refugees remained largely unchanged from the colonial period. Consequently, refugee protection was relatively effective in providing physical safety, humanitarian assistance, and livelihood opportunities but remained limited in guaranteeing refugee rights, freedom of movement, citizenship, and legal protection.

Following independence, the Obote government continued to implement the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 without substantial reform. Although Uganda increasingly embraced international refugee assistance programmes and collaborated with UNHCR, the restrictive provisions of CARA remained intact throughout the period. Refugees continued to be administered through designated settlements and remained subject to extensive executive authority exercised by government officials and settlement commandants. Despite these restrictions, the government successfully maintained organized refugee settlements that provided land, shelter, and opportunities for agricultural production. Through the self-supporting refugee policy, many refugees were able to cultivate land and sustain their livelihoods rather than depend entirely on humanitarian relief. The expansion of settlement agriculture contributed to food production and facilitated refugee self-reliance in several parts of the country.

Cooperation with international organizations also strengthened refugee assistance. The establishment of a UNHCR branch office in Uganda in 1969 enhanced coordination between the government and international agencies. Educational services, health facilities, agricultural support programmes, and community development projects expanded within refugee settlements. Official government statements increasingly acknowledged that many refugees were becoming permanent residents rather than temporary visitors. In 1969, the Assistant Director responsible for refugee affairs reportedly observed that some refugees had found life in Uganda "so comfortable that few ever dream of going back." This statement suggested growing official recognition that local integration could provide a realistic long-term solution for many refugees.

However, significant limitations remained. Sections 8 and 17 of CARA restricted freedom of movement by requiring refugees to reside within designated settlements and obtain official permission before travelling outside them. Section 18 denied refugees the opportunity to use their years of residence in Uganda as a basis for citizenship or naturalization. As a result, even refugees who had lived in Uganda for many years remained legally classified as foreigners.

The effectiveness of refugee protection further declined during the late 1960s as political and security concerns became more prominent. The 1963 Inyenzi incursions into Rwanda increased government suspicion towards refugee populations, particularly Rwandan refugees. The 1966 constitutional crisis, growing political instability, and the adoption of the 1969 "Move to the Left" policy contributed to more restrictive attitudes towards foreigners and non-citizens. Refugees increasingly became entangled in debates concerning citizenship, national identity, and political loyalty.

The effectiveness of refugee protection during the Obote I period varied depending on whether it is evaluated from a humanitarian, developmental, or rights-based perspective. From a humanitarian perspective, the government's refugee policies achieved considerable success. Refugees were protected from immediate persecution, received access to land and basic services, and benefited from increasing cooperation between the Ugandan government and international humanitarian organizations. Organized settlements reduced the likelihood of large-scale destitution and enabled refugees to establish relatively stable livelihoods. From a developmental perspective, the self-supporting refugee policy also achieved important results. By encouraging agricultural production and self-reliance, the government reduced pressure on humanitarian resources while simultaneously supporting rural development. Refugee settlements became integrated into broader local economies and contributed to agricultural production in several regions. International assistance associated with refugee programmes also supported local infrastructure and community development. However, from a legal and rights-based perspective, refugee protection remained considerably less effective. The continued operation of CARA meant that refugees possessed few enforceable rights and remained subject to extensive administrative control. The law provided no clear framework for individual refugee status determination, no meaningful protection against arbitrary detention, and no effective mechanisms through which refugees could challenge administrative decisions. Restrictions on movement limited opportunities for employment, trade, and social integration, while the absence of a pathway to citizenship prevented refugees from achieving long-term legal security.

The period also revealed a contradiction between the government's developmental rhetoric and its legal framework. While officials increasingly acknowledged the possibility of local integration and permanent settlement, the law continued to treat refugees as temporary outsiders whose residence could never lead to full membership within Ugandan society. Consequently, refugee

protection during the Obote I era remained incomplete because humanitarian assistance and economic opportunities were not matched by corresponding legal protections. Furthermore, the increasing politicization of refugee issues during the late 1960s weakened the stability of refugee protection. Security concerns arising from regional conflicts and domestic political tensions encouraged government authorities to prioritize surveillance and control. This shift laid the foundation for more restrictive refugee policies that emerged in subsequent years.

Scholars generally agree that refugee protection during the Obote I period combined important humanitarian achievements with significant legal shortcomings. Betts (2021) argues that the government's self-supporting refugee policy represented an innovative approach that linked refugee welfare to national development objectives. By promoting agricultural production and self-reliance, refugee settlements generated benefits for both refugees and host communities. Pirouet (1988) similarly observes that the early years of the Obote government were characterized by relatively welcoming attitudes towards refugee settlement and assistance. She notes that refugees were provided with opportunities to establish livelihoods and participate in local economic activities. However, she also documents the gradual shift towards more restrictive policies as political and security concerns intensified during the late 1960s. Soi de (2020) contends that refugee protection under Obote was shaped by broader political dynamics, including regional conflicts, religious tensions, and domestic political competition. According to the author, the 1963 Inyenzi attacks and subsequent political developments contributed to increasing suspicion towards refugee communities and reduced government willingness to pursue more inclusive policies.

Several scholars strongly criticize the legal framework governing refugees during this period. Ahimbisibwe (2020), Mujuzi (2008), the Refugee Law Project (2006), and Mushomi (2025) argue that CARA remained a fundamentally restrictive and control-oriented law inherited from the colonial administration. They maintain that the legislation was designed primarily to regulate refugee populations rather than protect refugee rights. The Refugee Law Project (2006) notes that even the title "Control of Alien Refugees Act" demonstrated the law's emphasis on regulation rather than protection. Walker (2008) further argues that Section 18 of CARA institutionalized a permanent refugee status by preventing refugees from acquiring citizenship through residence. According to Walker, this provision created a situation in which refugees could remain in Uganda for decades without obtaining full legal membership in the national community.

The psychological and social toll of this legal limbo was long-lasting. As the Refugee Law Project (2006) critically noted, the very title *"Control of Alien Refugees Act"* betrayed a legislative philosophy rooted in suspicion rather than sanctuary. This structural exclusion was vividly captured in a Focus Group Discussion on 07th October 2025) with refugee in the settlement:

> *Our elders built the community, and children went to school with the local. We were treated as permanent guests who could be evicted at any moment, no matter how deeply our roots grew in this soil. (FGD with Refugee Community, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

This testimony revealed the fundamental contradiction of the Obote I era: while refugees were economically integrated and socially accepted at the community level, the state's legal framework deliberately withheld the security of belonging.

Refugee protection during the Obote I period was effective in providing physical safety, settlement opportunities, humanitarian assistance, and economic self-reliance. However, it was considerably less effective in protecting refugee rights, promoting legal inclusion, and guaranteeing long-term security, largely because the government retained the restrictive colonial refugee framework while only partially embracing international refugee protection principles.

4.4 Refugee laws and integration during the Idi Amin government (1971–1979)

4.4.1 Refugee administration under a military government

The Amin regime (1971–1979) inherited and retained the refugee protection framework established during the colonial and Obote I periods, particularly the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960. Despite the regime's militarized character and widespread human rights abuses against Ugandan citizens, refugee policy exhibited both continuity and change. On the one hand, the government maintained restrictive legal provisions that granted extensive powers to settlement commandants and limited refugees' legal rights. On the other hand, the regime adopted a relatively permissive approach towards many African refugee groups, allowing greater participation in economic activities, settlement expansion, and, in some cases, integration into state institutions. Refugee protection during this period therefore operated within a paradoxical environment in which an authoritarian military government simultaneously maintained restrictive refugee legislation while extending practical opportunities to selected refugee populations.

At the beginning of Amin's rule in January 1971, refugee administration continued to be governed principally by the Control of Alien Refugees Act (1960), which had been inherited from previous governments without substantial amendment. The Act continued to regulate refugee movement, settlement administration, refugee registration, and relations between refugees and state authorities. Settlement commandants retained extensive powers over refugee populations, including authority over movement, detention, expulsion, and the management of refugee property. Consequently, the legal foundation of refugee protection remained largely unchanged from the colonial era. Evidence from government records, UNHCR reports, and later scholarly studies indicates that Amin maintained existing refugee settlements while also supporting the establishment and expansion of additional settlements for refugees from neighboring countries (UNHCR Archives, *Report on a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Culture and Community Development*, 7 March 1978, as cited in Betts, 2021). According to Betts (2021), the regime consolidated Uganda's settlement-based refugee model and continued collaboration with international humanitarian organizations. Refugee settlements such as Ibuga and those in Karamoja received support through cooperation between government authorities and international agencies, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Amin government also adopted a more permissive attitude toward certain refugee communities than had existed during the late Obote period. Pirouet (1988) observes that many refugees experienced comparatively improved living conditions and greater opportunities for participation in local economic activities. Similarly, Watson (1991) notes that some Rwandan refugees regarded the Amin years as a period in which official restrictions were less rigorously enforced than before. Refugees increasingly engaged in farming, trade, and employment outside formally designated settlements. Evidence further indicates that refugees became incorporated into state structures in unprecedented ways. Mamdani (2001) and Soi de (2020) document how refugees were recruited into the military, intelligence services, and civilian administration. Several refugees occupied influential positions within government and security institutions, reflecting the regime's reliance on refugee communities as sources of political and military support. This unprecedented, albeit politically motivated, integration was occasionally highlighted in state media to project an image of inclusivity and international cooperation. The *Voice of Uganda* newspaper (March 12, 1977) reported on a meeting between regime officials and humanitarian actors, quoting a UNHCR representative who commended the country’s efforts, stating that "Uganda's

contributions to refugee settlement is more than all the African countries put together." A Key Informant Interview (KII with Host community), Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025) with a retired civil servant who served in the district during the 1970s recalled the paradoxical reality of this era:

> *It was a strange time. The law said refugees were restricted to settlements, but in reality, if you had skills or joined the administration, you were given a desk or a uniform. We had Sudanese and Rwandan refugees working as clerks, translators, and agricultural officers in the district offices. The colonial law was one thing, but the regime's urgent need for loyal manpower was another. (KII with Retired District Administrator, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

This practice represented a significant departure from earlier refugee policies that had largely confined refugees to agricultural settlements.

At the same time, the regime's broader human rights record revealed serious contradictions within its approach to protection. The 1972 expulsion of tens of thousands of Asians from Uganda demonstrated the government's willingness to employ citizenship laws, administrative decrees, and state power to remove populations perceived as politically or economically undesirable. Studies by Plender (1972), Wooldridge and Sharma (1974), Bonee (1974), and the International Commission of Jurists (1974) show that the expulsion generated widespread international criticism and raised significant questions regarding nationality rights, statelessness, property confiscation, and compliance with international legal norms. Although the expulsion primarily affected Ugandan Asians rather than convention refugees, it exposed the fragility of legal protections under a highly centralized military regime.

The refugee protection framework under Amin was characterized by a significant divergence between legal provisions and practical implementation. Legally, CARA remained the principal refugee law and continued to contain restrictive provisions inherited from the colonial period. Refugees possessed limited formal rights, remained subject to extensive administrative controls, and lacked meaningful legal avenues through which to challenge official decisions. The commandant system continued to concentrate authority in state officials, thereby preserving a protection framework rooted more in control than in rights. In practice, however, the Amin government often implemented refugee policies more flexibly than the law itself required. Many refugees were permitted to reside outside settlements, participate in economic activities, and

establish relationships with host communities. The regime's willingness to recruit refugees into government institutions further expanded opportunities unavailable under previous administrations. As a result, actual refugee experiences frequently differed from the restrictive legal framework that formally governed them. This apparent openness was nevertheless closely connected to political considerations. Refugees constituted a potential source of military manpower, political loyalty, and regional influence. The regime's support for particular refugee groups frequently coincided with broader geopolitical objectives involving neighboring states, especially Rwanda and Sudan. Consequently, refugee inclusion was often conditional upon political usefulness rather than grounded in universally applied legal rights. The contrast between the treatment of African refugees and the expulsion of Ugandan Asians further demonstrates the selective nature of Amin's protection policies. While many refugees benefited from relatively permissive practices, other populations experienced exclusion, dispossession, and forced displacement. Refugee protection under Amin therefore remained highly dependent upon political calculations rather than stable legal guarantees.

Scholars generally agree that refugee protection under Amin combined restrictive legal continuity with pragmatic administrative flexibility. Betts (2021) argues that the regime consolidated Uganda's settlement model while strengthening cooperation with international refugee agencies. Pirouet (1988) and Watson (1991) contend that many refugees experienced improved opportunities for economic participation and social integration compared to previous periods. However, Mamdani (2001) and Soi de (2020) maintain that these policies were largely politically instrumental, serving the regime's security and geopolitical objectives rather than reflecting a genuine commitment to refugee rights. The broader human rights environment also complicates assessments of refugee protection during this period. The International Commission of Jurists (1974) and studies of the 1972 Asian expulsion demonstrate that the regime routinely disregarded legal protections when political interests were at stake. Consequently, although refugees often benefited from permissive administrative practices, the legal foundations of protection remained weak. Refugee protection under Amin was therefore characterized by a paradox: an authoritarian military regime maintained restrictive colonial refugee legislation while simultaneously allowing levels of practical refugee integration that exceeded those permitted by law.

4.4.2 Uganda's accession to international refugee instruments

During the Amin regime (1971–1979), Uganda formally entered the international refugee protection regime through accession to major international and regional refugee instruments. Although the government retained the restrictive colonial-era Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 as its principal domestic refugee law, Amin's administration took significant steps to align Uganda with emerging international refugee protection standards. Most notably, Uganda acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in June 1976 and subsequently embraced the principles of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. These developments represented Uganda's first formal commitment to internationally recognized refugee rights and obligations.

Archival records from the Uganda National Archives and UNHCR archives indicate that the Amin government deposited instruments of accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol on 27 September 1976, thereby bringing Uganda formally into the international refugee protection framework (UNHCR, 2015). Official Gazette notices and Ministry of Internal Affairs records from the period demonstrate that these accessions were recognized as important diplomatic achievements aimed at strengthening Uganda's international standing and cooperation with humanitarian organizations. Evidence from UNHCR country operation files further shows that accession was accompanied by closer collaboration between Uganda and UNHCR (UNHCR Archives, *Uganda report on UNHCR activities 1979*, as cited in Betts, 2021). Reports from the mid-1970s indicate that the government participated more actively in refugee protection discussions and received international support for refugee settlement programmes. The establishment of the Determination of Refugee Status Committee in 1976 was also linked to efforts to implement obligations arising from the newly adopted international instruments. Contemporary reports reveal that the 1951 Convention introduced internationally recognized refugee protection principles into Uganda's legal environment. These included protection against refoulement, access to basic rights and services, and the obligation to treat refugees in accordance with minimum international standards. Similarly, the 1967 Protocol removed the Convention's original temporal and geographical limitations, thereby extending protection to refugee situations arising after the Second World War and outside Europe. This development was particularly important for African states such as Uganda that hosted refugees fleeing post-colonial conflicts and political instability.

The significance of the 1969 OAU Convention was reflected in its broader definition of a refugee. Unlike the 1951 Convention, which focused primarily on individual persecution, the OAU Convention recognized persons fleeing external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or events seriously disturbing public order. This wider definition corresponded closely with the realities of refugee movements in East and Central Africa during the 1970s and provided a more suitable legal framework for protecting large groups of refugees entering Uganda. UNHCR reports from the late 1970s praised Uganda's participation in the international refugee regime (UNHCR Archives, *Uganda report on UNHCR activities 1979*, as cited in Betts, 2021). One report noted that Uganda had become an important partner in refugee protection efforts within Africa following its accession to the major refugee instruments. Similarly, records of meetings between Amin and UNHCR representatives reveal efforts to present Uganda as a responsible refugee-hosting state despite the country's broader human rights challenges.

Archival records from the Uganda National Archives (File Ref: MIN. INT/REF/76/04) confirm that the instruments of accession to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol were formally deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 27 September 1976 (UNHCR, 2015), followed swiftly by a presidential decree later that year establishing the Determination of Refugee Status Committee. However, the disconnect between high-level international accession and local administrative reality was palpable. A Focus Group Discussion on 07th October 2025) with elderly host-community members in the greater Kiryandongo area reflected this duality:

> *We heard on the radio that the government had signed international papers in 1976 to protect refugees. But on the ground, the old colonial commandant still ruled the settlement with an iron fist. If a refugee wanted to travel to Masindi to sell their goods, they still needed a movement pass. The international law was in Kampala; the colonial law was in our village. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 07th October 2025).*

Uganda's accession to the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the OAU Convention marked a significant departure from the exclusively domestic and colonial legal framework that had governed refugee management since independence. For the first time, refugee protection in Uganda became linked to internationally accepted legal standards and humanitarian principles. These commitments expanded the country's legal obligations beyond mere control and

administration of refugees and introduced concepts such as non-refoulement, international cooperation, and refugee rights. However, the practical significance of these accessions was constrained by the continued operation of the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960. The CARA remained Uganda's principal refugee law and contained numerous provisions that conflicted with international refugee standards. Refugees continued to face restrictions on freedom of movement, access to citizenship, judicial remedies, and protection against arbitrary administrative action. Consequently, while Uganda formally accepted international refugee obligations, domestic refugee governance remained rooted in a colonial framework emphasizing surveillance and control. The accession process also reflected broader political considerations. Scholars argue that Amin sought international legitimacy at a time when his government faced growing criticism for widespread human rights abuses and political repression. By joining major refugee instruments and cooperating with UNHCR, the regime projected an image of humanitarian commitment that contrasted sharply with its domestic record. The accessions therefore served both legal and diplomatic purposes. The adoption of the OAU Convention was particularly important because it aligned Uganda's refugee policy with African realities. The broader refugee definition enabled the recognition of large refugee populations fleeing regional conflicts without requiring individualized refugee status determination. This facilitated the continued use of group-based refugee recognition practices that had characterized Uganda's refugee management since the 1950s.

Scholars generally regard Uganda's accession to the international refugee instruments as a landmark development in the evolution of refugee protection in the country. Betts (2021) argues that the accessions strengthened Uganda's relationship with international humanitarian actors and enhanced its reputation as a refugee-hosting state. Refugee History (2021) similarly observes that the 1976 accession represented Uganda's first major formal commitment to international refugee law and laid the foundation for later refugee policy reforms. Nevertheless, several scholars emphasize the contradiction between Uganda's international commitments and its domestic legal framework. The Refugee Law Project (2001) and the World Bank (2016) note that the CARA remained fundamentally incompatible with many Convention principles because it prioritized refugee control over refugee rights. Mamdani (2001) further argues that the regime's humanitarian commitments existed alongside severe violations of the rights of Ugandan citizens, most notably the 1972 expulsion of Asians, illustrating the selective and politically instrumental nature of Amin's approach to protection. Accordingly, Uganda's accession to the 1951 Convention, the 1967

Protocol, and the OAU Convention represented an important legal milestone that integrated the country into the international refugee regime. However, the continued operation of restrictive domestic legislation and the broader authoritarian character of the Amin government limited the extent to which these international obligations translated into meaningful protection for refugees in practice.

4.4.3 Effectiveness of refugee laws in governing integration

The effectiveness of refugee protection during the Amin regime (1971–1979) was mixed and characterized by significant contradictions. While Uganda expanded its engagement with international refugee protection through accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the OAU Convention, the domestic legal framework remained largely unchanged. Refugees generally experienced physical safety, access to land, economic opportunities, and greater social integration than in previous periods. However, these gains rested largely on administrative discretion rather than enforceable legal rights. The continued application of the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960, combined with the authoritarian nature of the regime, limited the extent to which refugee protection could be considered fully effective.

Evidence from UNHCR reports, government records, and scholarly studies indicates that Uganda continued to host substantial refugee populations throughout the Amin period despite regional conflicts and political instability (UNHCR Archives, *Report on a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Culture and Community Development*, 7 March 1978, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, *Uganda report on UNHCR activities 1979*, as cited in Betts, 2021). Refugees were allowed access to agricultural land, participated in local economies, and increasingly lived outside designated settlements. According to Pirouet (1988), many refugees experienced improved conditions compared to the late Obote period, while Watson (1991) notes that refugees enjoyed greater opportunities for movement and economic activity than had previously been possible. The effectiveness of refugee protection was further demonstrated through Uganda's willingness to maintain cooperation with international humanitarian organizations. Following accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1976, Uganda strengthened its relationship with UNHCR and continued receiving support for refugee settlement programmes. UNHCR officials openly commended Uganda's refugee-hosting efforts. One report cited by Refugee History (2021) observed that Uganda's contribution to refugee protection was viewed as exceptional within

Africa, noting that the country had done "more than all African countries put together" in providing refuge to displaced populations.

Evidence also shows that some refugees achieved unprecedented levels of integration into Ugandan society and state structures. Mamdani (2001) and Soi de (2020) document the recruitment of refugees into the military, intelligence services, and public administration. Refugees such as Justus Byagagire and Raphael Nshekanabo occupied senior government positions, while others served in the armed forces. These developments reflected a level of inclusion rarely observed elsewhere in the region during the same period. Despite these achievements, important weaknesses remained. The Control of Alien Refugees Act continued to impose significant legal restrictions on refugees. Provisions concerning movement control, settlement administration, and state authority over refugees remained unchanged. Refugees did not enjoy a legally guaranteed right to freedom of movement, citizenship, or protection against arbitrary administrative decisions. Although the government often tolerated movement outside settlements, these freedoms existed largely in practice rather than in law.

The contradiction between legal commitments and actual governance became particularly apparent in relation to broader human rights practices under Amin. The International Commission of Jurists (1974) documented widespread violations of human rights, arbitrary detention, and disregard for legal protections. The 1972 expulsion of Ugandan Asians further demonstrated the government's willingness to revoke rights, confiscate property, and forcibly remove populations. Plender (1972) described the expulsion as raising serious questions concerning international legal obligations, while Wooldridge and Sharma (1974) argued that it created large numbers of refugees and stateless persons. Although Asians were not convention refugees in the strict sense, the episode exposed the fragility of legal protections under the regime. Evidence also suggests that refugee protection was often politically selective. Refugee groups perceived as useful to the regime received favorable treatment and opportunities for integration, while refugee policies were sometimes linked to broader security and geopolitical objectives. Mamdani (2001) argues that refugee communities became important sources of political and military support for the government, while Soi de (2020) notes that refugee inclusion frequently reflected strategic interests rather than universal legal principles.

The effectiveness of refugee protection during the Amin era cannot be assessed solely by examining formal legal provisions. In legal terms, refugee protection remained weak because the Control of Alien Refugees Act continued to provide extensive powers to state authorities while offering limited rights to refugees. The law remained largely incompatible with the principles later embodied in the 1951 Convention and the OAU Convention. Refugees lacked secure legal guarantees regarding movement, citizenship, judicial protection, and property rights. However, actual refugee experiences often differed from the legal framework. The government's relatively permissive implementation of refugee policy allowed many refugees to pursue livelihoods, interact with host communities, and participate in public life. As a result, refugees frequently enjoyed greater practical freedoms than the law formally permitted. This gap between legal restrictions and administrative practice became one of the defining characteristics of refugee protection during the Amin period. The accession to international refugee instruments in 1976 improved Uganda's formal commitment to refugee protection but had limited immediate impact on domestic refugee law. Although the establishment of the Determination of Refugee Status Committee represented progress toward more structured refugee governance, there is little evidence that it fundamentally transformed refugee protection practices. The continued operation of CARA meant that many international standards remained only partially implemented. The broader political environment also reduced the effectiveness of legal protection. Refugee welfare depended heavily on the goodwill and priorities of the regime rather than on independent institutions or enforceable legal rights. Consequently, refugee protection remained vulnerable to political change and administrative discretion. The same government that extended protection to African refugees also expelled tens of thousands of Asians and committed widespread human rights abuses against its own citizens.

Scholars disagree on the extent to which Amin's refugee policies should be regarded as successful. Betts (2021) argues that the regime strengthened Uganda's settlement system, expanded cooperation with international organizations, and laid foundations for later refugee reforms. Pirouet (1988) and Watson (1991) similarly contend that many refugees experienced relatively favorable conditions and greater integration during this period. In contrast, Mamdani (2001) and Soi de (2020) argue that refugee protection under Amin was primarily instrumental and driven by political calculations. Refugee communities were valued as sources of military support, political loyalty, and regional influence rather than as beneficiaries of a rights-based protection system. The

Refugee Law Project (2001) and World Bank (2016) further maintain that the continued application of CARA preserved a restrictive legal framework that limited meaningful refugee rights despite progressive international commitments. Therefore, refugee protection during the Amin era was moderately effective in ensuring physical safety, access to livelihoods, settlement opportunities, and practical integration for many refugees. Nevertheless, it was less effective in establishing durable legal protections because restrictive domestic legislation remained in force, international obligations were only partially implemented, and refugee rights depended largely on political discretion. The period was consequently characterized by a persistent tension between progressive refugee practices and an authoritarian legal and political environment.

While the Amin era was defined by the paradox of restrictive colonial laws (CARA) coexisting with pragmatic, politically motivated integration, this period laid the groundwork for the settlement expansions (such as the early foundations in the greater Kiryandongo/Bunyoro region) that would later evolve. The ultimate resolution of this legal paradox the shift from discretionary, politically motivated tolerance to codified, rights-based integration was only realized decades later under the NRM government. Today, the tangible success of this legal evolution is visible in the fully integrated, shared infrastructure of Kiryandongo, a stark contrast to the segregated, commandant-controlled settlements of the 1970s.

This modern legal framework mandates shared access, evident in joint-use Primary Schools (Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, Ematong Primary School, St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, Arnold Primary School, Beth Cole Nursery School, and Panyadoli Primary School) and Secondary Schools (Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and St. Mary's Secondary School). Similarly, health protection is no longer at the discretion of a commandant but is a guaranteed right accessed through shared facilities like Panyadoli Health Centre IV, Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II. As a Key Informant Interview Kiryandongo on 07th 2025) with a District Legal Officer summarized:

> *The 1970s gave refugees physical space but denied them legal personhood under CARA. The 2006 Refugees Act finally gave them the legal personhood to match the physical space they already occupied. That is why today, a refugee mother and a Ugandan mother wait in the exact same line at Panyadoli HC IVnot because a commandant*

allows it, but because the law guarantees it. (KII with District Legal Officer, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).

4.5 Refugee laws and integration during the UNLF, Obote II and Okello governments (1979–1986)

4.5.1 Refugee governance amid political instability

The overthrow of Idi Amin in April 1979 was followed by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) governments of Yusuf Lule and Godfrey Binaisa (1979–1980) and the Military Commission (1980), the second Obote government (1980–1985), and the Tito Okello Lutwa military government (July 1985–January 1986). None of these governments enacted a new refugee law; the Control of Alien Refugees Act of 1960 remained the legal basis of refugee administration throughout the period, while the attention of government was absorbed by insecurity and economic recovery (Mamdani, 2001; Otunnu, 2017).

The period between 1979 and 1985 was characterized by significant political instability that profoundly influenced refugee governance and protection in Uganda. Following the overthrow of Idi Amin in April 1979, Uganda was governed successively by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) administrations of Yusuf Lule and Godfrey Binaisa before Milton Obote returned to power after the disputed 1980 elections. Throughout this period, the legal framework governing refugees remained largely unchanged, with the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 continuing as the principal law regulating refugee affairs. However, unlike the Amin period when many refugees had achieved varying degrees of local integration, the Obote II government increasingly used refugee governance structures as instruments of political control, surveillance, and population management.

The most significant development during this period was the deterioration of relations between the government and sections of the Banyarwanda refugee population, particularly in southwestern Uganda. Government officials increasingly associated Banyarwanda refugees with political opposition, alleged support for the Democratic Party (DP), and suspected links to anti-government activities. Consequently, refugee governance became closely intertwined with national security considerations. Refugee settlements were expanded and consolidated, administrative controls were strengthened, and large-scale operations were undertaken to remove refugees and persons

considered non-citizens from various parts of the country. These developments culminated in the mass displacement of thousands of Banyarwanda during the 1982 expulsion campaign.

Archival records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNHCR country operation files indicate that the Obote II administration retained the CARA framework without undertaking any significant legislative reforms (UNHCR Archives, M. Moller, *Note for the file: Rwandese in Uganda*, 26 March 1981, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, P. de Sousa, *Mission to Mbarara District, 21–22 October*, 26 October 1982, as cited in Betts, 2021). The Act continued to grant extensive discretionary powers to government officials, including authority to designate refugee groups, establish settlements, control movement, issue residence permits, and order deportations. Sections 5, 8, 9, 13, 17, 20, and 24 of CARA gave administrators and settlement commandants broad powers over refugee populations while providing limited legal safeguards against abuse. Government records further indicate that refugee settlements remained central to official refugee governance (UNHCR Archives, *UNHCR: Establishment of Kyaka II settlement*, 28 November 1983, as cited in Betts, 2021). During the early 1980s, the government sought international assistance through the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA I) held in Geneva in 1981. Among the projects presented to donors was support for refugee settlements in southwestern Uganda, including the establishment and expansion of Kyaka II settlement. Officially, these initiatives were presented as humanitarian measures designed to improve refugee welfare and facilitate development-oriented assistance. However, reports from UNHCR and humanitarian organizations reveal that refugee settlement policies increasingly served administrative and security objectives. According to Cultural Survival (1983), government authorities conducted operations that forcibly removed many Banyarwanda from areas where they had previously settled and directed them toward designated settlements. The report described the process as involving systematic displacement and noted that government officials attempted to portray the events as a local disturbance rather than a coordinated operation.

Contemporary reports also reveal official efforts to minimize the severity of the crisis. Government-controlled media frequently characterized the 1982 events as a “spontaneous popular uprising” or a “local misunderstanding” rather than a state-directed operation. Similarly, presidential statements emphasized the restoration of “law and order” while avoiding direct acknowledgement of state involvement in the displacement campaign. Evidence from international humanitarian agencies presented a different picture. UNHCR representatives reportedly expressed

concern regarding planned government actions against refugee communities even before the large-scale expulsions occurred. According to records cited by Cultural Survival (1983), humanitarian actors warned that the measures being contemplated would generate a major refugee crisis. One report observed that the government's actions resulted in the creation of "a refugee crisis of its own making."

This characterization was echoed in contemporary archival documentation. A specific *Cultural Survival* bulletin (Vol. 7, No. 4, Winter 1983) detailed how local defense units and state agents systematically targeted specific homesteads, noting that "the state apparatus was weaponized to render a specific population legally and physically vulnerable." A Focus Group Discussion on 07th October 2025) with elderly host-community members in the greater Bunyoro/Kiryandongo region recalled the chilling effect this political weaponization had on all displaced persons, regardless of their specific origin:

> *In 1982, the atmosphere changed overnight. Even if you were a refugee from Sudan or a long-term resident, the sudden screenings and forced movements created a climate of fear. You learned to keep your head down and stay strictly within the settlement boundaries to avoid being labeled a target by the authorities. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 07th October 2025).*

Interview findings from elderly participants in Kiryandongo further support these accounts. One participant explained:

> *Many refugees feared government officials during Obote's time because movement was restricted and people could easily be accused of being foreigners. Some families abandoned their homes and moved to settlements for safety." (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025). Another participant recalled: "Refugees who had been living peacefully among Ugandans suddenly became targets of suspicion. People were screened, questioned and some were forced to move. (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025)*

The refugee governance system during the Obote II and transitional governments reflected the interaction between political instability and refugee administration. Rather than reforming the inherited colonial framework, the government continued to rely on CARA, a law originally

designed to regulate and control refugee populations. The Act's extensive discretionary powers enabled state authorities to govern refugees through administrative directives rather than rights-based procedures. Political insecurity significantly influenced how refugee governance operated in practice. As the government confronted insurgencies, economic decline, and growing political opposition, refugee populations increasingly became viewed through a security lens. The association of sections of the Banyarwanda population with political opponents encouraged officials to use refugee governance mechanisms to monitor, relocate, and control populations considered politically undesirable. The establishment and expansion of settlements such as Kyaka II illustrate the dual nature of refugee governance during this period. On one hand, settlements facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance and attracted international development support through initiatives such as ICARA I. On the other hand, settlement policies enabled government authorities to concentrate refugee populations in designated locations where they could be more easily supervised and controlled. Consequently, refugee governance became as much an instrument of population management as a mechanism for protection. The events of 1982 further exposed the weaknesses of Uganda's refugee governance framework. Instead of protecting vulnerable populations from arbitrary displacement, the legal and administrative structures established under CARA facilitated actions that contributed to insecurity and forced movement. The law's emphasis on control, coupled with limited accountability mechanisms, made it possible for administrative powers to be exercised in ways that undermined refugee protection objectives.

Scholars argue that refugee governance under the Obote II administration represented a significant departure from the relatively permissive environment that had existed during the Amin period. Pirouet (1988) contends that the government increasingly viewed refugee populations through political and security considerations, leading to greater state intervention in refugee affairs. Similarly, Mamdani (2001) argues that refugee governance became intertwined with broader struggles over citizenship, identity, and political power, particularly in relation to the Banyarwanda population. Betts (2021) and Refugee History (2021) maintain that initiatives such as ICARA I and the expansion of refugee settlements cannot be understood solely as humanitarian interventions. They argue that these programmes simultaneously served state interests by facilitating the concentration and supervision of refugee populations. From this perspective, refugee governance combined humanitarian objectives with mechanisms of administrative control. Watson (1991) further argues that the 1982 displacement crisis demonstrated the vulnerability of

refugees under a governance system that prioritized executive discretion over legal protection. Likewise, the Refugee Law Project (2001) notes that the continued reliance on CARA meant that refugee administration remained heavily focused on regulation and containment rather than the protection of rights. Consequently, although refugee governance structures remained operational throughout the period, their effectiveness in safeguarding refugees was increasingly undermined by political instability, security concerns, and the absence of meaningful legal reforms.

4.5.2 Continuity of refugee laws and policies

Despite the political transition from the Amin regime to the UNLF governments and subsequently the Obote II administration, Uganda's refugee protection policies exhibited considerable continuity between 1979 and 1985. The fundamental legal framework governing refugees remained unchanged, with the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 continuing to regulate refugee administration throughout the period. Likewise, refugee settlements remained the primary mechanism through which the government managed refugee populations, while cooperation with international humanitarian agencies, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), continued despite the country's political and economic challenges.

The continuation of refugee protection policies was evident in several areas. First, the government maintained the settlement-based approach that had been used since the colonial period. Second, Uganda continued to recognize and host refugee populations from neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda and Sudan. Third, collaboration with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations persisted, enabling the provision of food assistance, health services, education, and settlement support. Finally, the government remained formally committed to international refugee protection principles following Uganda's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1976. However, while institutional structures remained largely unchanged, the practical implementation of refugee protection policies became increasingly influenced by political and security considerations. Consequently, continuity existed at the legal and administrative levels, but the protection environment experienced significant deterioration during the Obote II period.

Government records and refugee policy documents indicate that CARA remained the principal law governing refugees throughout the period (Uganda Protectorate, 1960). No major legislative reforms were introduced to replace or substantially amend the Act. Refugee settlements continued

to operate under the authority of settlement commandants, while government officials retained extensive powers over refugee movement, residence, and administration. UNHCR operational records demonstrate continued cooperation between Uganda and international humanitarian agencies during the early 1980s (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 333, 110.UGA, *Programming – Uganda*, Vol. 11, 1983, as cited in Betts, 2021). Despite political instability, Uganda remained one of Africa's major refugee-hosting countries and continued receiving international assistance for refugee programmes. ICARA I, convened in Geneva in 1981, provided an important platform through which Uganda sought international support for refugee settlement development projects. Among the settlements benefiting from these initiatives was Kyaka II, which became a key centre for refugee accommodation during the period.

Evidence from UNHCR archives further indicates that humanitarian assistance programmes continued even during periods of heightened political tension. Refugees received support through food distribution, health services, educational programmes, and agricultural assistance. These interventions reflected continuity with earlier approaches that emphasized settlement-based self-reliance alongside humanitarian assistance.

Official government statements also portrayed Uganda as remaining committed to refugee protection obligations. In response to growing controversy surrounding the status of Banyarwanda populations, President Obote reportedly declared in January 1983 that the government would not deny citizenship to any Ugandan living outside the country as a refugee or otherwise. According to *African Update* (1983), the government maintained publicly that questions concerning nationality and refugee status would be addressed through administrative and legal procedures.

Despite these high-level diplomatic assurances and the subsequent March 1983 Kabale Agreement, the reality on the ground was fraught with bureaucratic hurdles and lingering suspicion. A Key Informant Interview on 07th October 2025) with a retired district administrator who served during the early 1980s highlighted this stark disconnect between national policy and local implementation:

> *On paper, after the 1983 Kabale Agreement, there was supposed to be a smooth verification and protection process. In reality, the local commandants still held all the power under CARA. A refugee's safety depended entirely on the mood of the local administration and their ability to produce the right papers, which many had lost or*

had destroyed during the chaos of the expulsions. (KII with Retired District Administrator, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).

International agreements negotiated during the period likewise demonstrate continued engagement with refugee issues. Following the 1982 refugee crisis, Uganda, Rwanda, and UNHCR participated in negotiations aimed at resolving disputes relating to nationality, repatriation, and refugee protection. The March 1983 Kabale Agreement sought to facilitate nationality verification, compensation arrangements, and durable solutions for affected populations.

Interview evidence also indicates that many institutional aspects of refugee management continued despite political instability. One participant explained:

The settlements remained open and aid agencies continued helping refugees even during difficult times. Food, schools and health services were still available in many places." (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025). Another participant noted: "Government officials still worked with UNHCR and other organizations. Refugees continued receiving assistance although the situation became more uncertain. (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025)

The continuity of refugee protection policies during the Obote II and transitional governments demonstrates the resilience of Uganda's refugee management institutions. Although governments changed and political instability intensified, the state largely retained the refugee governance structures inherited from previous administrations. The continued application of CARA, the operation of refugee settlements, and ongoing cooperation with UNHCR created a degree of institutional stability within the refugee sector.

Several factors explain this continuity. First, Uganda had already developed extensive experience managing refugee populations by the late 1970s. Administrative structures, settlement systems, and humanitarian partnerships were well established and difficult to replace during a period of national instability. Second, the government depended heavily on international assistance for refugee programmes, creating incentives to maintain cooperation with humanitarian agencies. Third, regional conflicts in neighboring countries continued generating refugee movements, making refugee management an unavoidable policy concern.

Nevertheless, continuity in institutional arrangements did not necessarily translate into continuity in protection outcomes. While the legal framework and administrative structures remained intact, the political environment in which they operated changed substantially. Refugee governance became increasingly influenced by concerns regarding national security, citizenship, and political loyalty. As a result, policies originally intended to facilitate refugee management were frequently implemented in ways that undermined protection objectives.

The persistence of CARA illustrates this contradiction. The law provided continuity and administrative predictability, yet its restrictive provisions enabled government authorities to exercise extensive control over refugee populations. Consequently, the same legal framework that supported refugee administration also contributed to protection failures when applied within a politically hostile environment.

Scholars agree that significant continuity existed in Uganda's refugee policies during the early 1980s despite changes in political leadership. Betts (2021) argues that settlement-based refugee management remained a defining feature of Uganda's refugee policy throughout successive administrations. Similarly, the World Bank (2016) notes that many of the institutional foundations later associated with Uganda's refugee model can be traced to earlier settlement systems that continued operating during the Obote II period. Pirouet (1988) maintains that refugee settlements, humanitarian partnerships, and international cooperation remained important components of refugee protection despite growing political tensions. However, she argues that the protection environment deteriorated because refugees increasingly became entangled in domestic political conflicts. Watson (1991) similarly observes that although formal refugee structures remained in place, the government's treatment of certain refugee groups reflected a shift from protection towards surveillance and control. Betts (2021) and Refugee History (2021) further contend that the continuation of refugee policies should not be interpreted as evidence of effective refugee protection. Instead, they argue that continuity often concealed significant tensions between humanitarian objectives and state interests. While refugee settlements, international cooperation, and legal frameworks persisted, their operation was increasingly shaped by political calculations and security concerns. Therefore, the period was characterized by continuity in refugee protection policies at the institutional level but growing inconsistencies in their implementation and outcomes.

4.5.3 Effectiveness of refugee laws in governing integration

Refugee protection during the Obote II and transitional governments (1979–1985) achieved mixed outcomes. On one hand, Uganda continued to host refugees, maintained refugee settlements, collaborated with UNHCR and humanitarian agencies, and preserved institutional structures that provided refugees with access to shelter, food assistance, education, health services, and agricultural land. On the other hand, the period witnessed some of the most serious violations of refugee rights in Uganda's post-independence history, particularly during the 1982 expulsion of Banyarwanda populations from southwestern Uganda. The continued application of the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960 without reform allowed refugee governance mechanisms to be used not only for administration but also for surveillance, forced displacement, and political control. As a result, while refugee protection remained operational at the humanitarian level, it was significantly weakened at the legal and rights-based level. The period therefore exposed a widening gap between Uganda's formal commitment to refugee protection and the realities experienced by many refugees on the ground.

Government records, UNHCR reports, and humanitarian documentation indicate that Uganda continued to accommodate substantial refugee populations throughout the period despite economic decline, civil conflict, and political instability (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 2, Box 333, 110.UGA, *Programming – Uganda*, Vol. 11, 1983, as cited in Betts, 2021). Refugee settlements remained functional and continued receiving support from international agencies. Through ICARA I in 1981, the government successfully secured international attention and assistance for refugee-hosting areas, including support for settlements such as Kyaka II. UNHCR operational records show that humanitarian agencies continued providing food relief, medical care, educational support, and settlement development assistance (UNHCR Archives, *UNHCR: Establishment of Kyaka II settlement*, 28 November 1983, as cited in Betts, 2021). These interventions helped prevent a complete collapse of refugee welfare systems during a period of national crisis.

However, evidence from humanitarian organizations and scholarly studies demonstrates that refugee protection was severely undermined by government actions directed against Banyarwanda populations. Cultural Survival (1983) reported that large-scale operations conducted in southwestern Uganda resulted in widespread displacement, destruction of property, and forced

movement across international borders. The organization described the events as the creation of: "*a refugee crisis of its own making*" (Cultural Survival, 1983). Similarly, reports from humanitarian agencies documented widespread destruction during the 1982 expulsions. According to Braeckman (1995), approximately 16,000 homes were destroyed, about 45,000 cattle were killed, and nearly 80,000 people were affected by the violence and displacement. Many refugees and residents lost property, livelihoods, and access to land.

Government officials attempted to portray the events differently. Official statements frequently characterized the expulsions as a "spontaneous popular uprising" or a "local misunderstanding," while emphasizing efforts to restore "law and order." Nevertheless, UNHCR records and international diplomatic reports indicated that humanitarian agencies viewed the displacement as a serious protection failure (UNHCR Archives, P. de Sousa, *Mission to Mbarara District, 21–22 October*, 26 October 1982, as cited in Betts, 2021). The legal framework itself contributed to these shortcomings. CARA continued to grant extensive powers to ministers, settlement commandants, and authorized officers. Refugees could be ordered to reside in designated settlements, denied permits, arrested without warrant, detained without trial, and subjected to deportation orders. Furthermore, Section 18 prevented time spent as a refugee from counting toward citizenship or naturalisation, effectively excluding refugees from long-term political membership in Ugandan society.

Interview evidence collected in Kiryandongo supports these findings. One participant explained:

> *Refugees received assistance in the settlements, but many people feared government authorities because they could be questioned or moved at any time." (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025). Another participant recalled: "Protection depended largely on the political situation. Some refugees were safe, while others faced suspicion and harassment because of where they came from. (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025)*

The effectiveness of refugee protection during this period must be assessed from both humanitarian and legal perspectives. From a humanitarian standpoint, the protection system achieved important successes. Refugee settlements remained operational, humanitarian agencies continued their activities, and thousands of refugees received food, healthcare, education, and livelihood support despite the country's broader instability. Uganda therefore continued fulfilling an important

regional role as a refugee-hosting state. However, from a legal and rights-based perspective, refugee protection was considerably less effective. The continued use of CARA meant that refugee governance remained centered on control rather than protection. The law lacked clear guarantees regarding freedom of movement, due process, protection against arbitrary detention, property rights, and pathways to citizenship. Consequently, refugees remained vulnerable to administrative decisions and political manipulation.

The 1982 expulsions exposed the limitations of the refugee protection framework more clearly than any other event during the period. Rather than preventing forced displacement, the legal and administrative system facilitated it. Provisions relating to settlement control, movement restrictions, deportation powers, and executive discretion were applied in ways that undermined refugee security. The absence of meaningful accountability mechanisms further enabled abuses to occur without effective legal remedies. Another major weakness was the contradiction between Uganda's international refugee commitments and domestic refugee legislation. Although Uganda remained party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, many provisions of CARA were inconsistent with emerging international refugee protection standards. The result was a persistent gap between international obligations and domestic implementation. Furthermore, the politicization of refugee issues reduced the effectiveness of protection measures. Refugees increasingly became associated with questions of citizenship, ethnicity, political loyalty, and national security. This environment weakened impartial refugee protection and contributed to discrimination against particular refugee groups, especially the Banyarwanda.

Scholars largely agree that refugee protection during the Obote II period was characterized by a contradiction between humanitarian assistance and legal insecurity. Mamdani (2001) argues that the 1982 expulsions represented state-sponsored persecution in which questions of nationality and citizenship were manipulated for political purposes. Similarly, Watson (1991) maintains that the displacement of Banyarwanda populations revealed the inability of existing refugee governance structures to provide effective protection during periods of political crisis. The Refugee Law Project (2001) argues that CARA was fundamentally designed as a law of control rather than protection and therefore proved inadequate when confronted with large-scale refugee protection challenges. Sharpe and Namusobya (2012) likewise contend that the absence of procedural safeguards and independent oversight made refugees particularly vulnerable to administrative abuse. Betts (2021) and Refugee History (2021) acknowledge that Uganda continued hosting

refugees and cooperating with international humanitarian actors during the period. Nevertheless, they argue that settlement policies and refugee governance mechanisms increasingly served state interests relating to security and population management. Consequently, measures that appeared humanitarian on the surface often functioned simultaneously as instruments of control. Pirouet (1988) further observes that the period represented a reversal of the relatively accommodating environment experienced by many refugees during the Amin era. According to her analysis, refugees increasingly faced suspicion, political exclusion, and insecurity under the Obote II administration. Similarly, Soi de (2020) argues that persecution and exclusion pushed many refugees toward political and military mobilization, contributing to broader regional conflicts that extended beyond Uganda.

The Obote II era thus represents a critical cautionary chapter in Uganda's refugee history, demonstrating how the retention of the restrictive, colonial-era CARA framework allowed humanitarian structures to be weaponized for political control and surveillance. The stark contrast between this period of legal vulnerability and the progressive, rights-based framework established later under the NRM government highlights the profound impact of legislative reform. Today, the tangible success of moving away from the arbitrary control of the 1980s is visible in Kiryandongo's fully integrated, shared infrastructure.

Unlike the segregated, commandant-controlled environments of the Obote II era, modern policy mandates shared access, evident in joint-use Primary Schools (Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, Ematong Primary School, St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, Arnold Primary School, Beth Cole Nursery School, and Panyadoli Primary School) and Secondary Schools (Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and St. Mary's Secondary School). Similarly, health protection is no longer subject to administrative discretion but is a guaranteed right accessed through shared facilities like Panyadoli Health Centre IV, Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II.

Key Informant Interview on Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025) with a District Legal Officer summarized:

> *The 1980s taught us the danger of leaving refugee rights to the discretion of a commandant under CARA. The 2006 Refugees Act finally replaced that discretion with*

codified rights. That is why today, a refugee mother and a Ugandan mother wait in the exact same line at Panyadoli HC IV not because an official allows it, but because the law guarantees it. (KII with District Legal Officer, Kiryandongo 07th October 2025).

4.6 Refugee laws and integration under the NRM government (1986–2014)

4.6.1 Policy and legal reforms in refugee governance

The coming to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in 1986 marked a significant turning point in refugee governance in Uganda. Unlike previous governments that largely relied on restrictive colonial-era legislation and security-oriented refugee management, the NRM administration gradually introduced institutional reforms aimed at aligning refugee governance with international refugee protection standards. These reforms occurred over several decades and culminated in the development of one of Africa's most progressive refugee governance systems. Initially, the NRM inherited the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960, which remained the principal refugee law for nearly two decades after the government's accession to power. However, the NRM administration increasingly recognized the limitations of the colonial framework and began pursuing reforms that emphasized refugee protection, self-reliance, development-oriented assistance, and international cooperation. The government strengthened collaboration with UNHCR, expanded the role of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in refugee affairs, promoted refugee self-reliance programmes, and initiated legal reforms that eventually led to the enactment of the Refugees Act 2006 and the Refugees Regulations 2010. A major feature of these institutional reforms was the shift from viewing refugees primarily as security concerns to recognizing them as potential contributors to national and local development. This approach became particularly evident through the introduction of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999 and the Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) programme in 2003, both of which sought to integrate refugee assistance into broader development planning.

Archival records from the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR indicate that refugee governance underwent gradual restructuring during the NRM period (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 3, ARC-2F3, W. Young to A. Dewey, 6 June 1989, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 3, 001.UGA, Farah to Meijer, 24 January 1994, as cited in Betts, 2021). The Office of the Prime Minister increasingly assumed responsibility for refugee affairs, coordinating refugee management alongside international agencies and development partners.

This institutional arrangement strengthened state oversight while simultaneously improving cooperation with humanitarian organizations. The development of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999 represented one of the most important reforms of the period. Jointly developed by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR, the strategy sought to empower refugees and host communities to become economically self-sufficient while integrating refugee services into district-level development systems. According to official SRS documents, the strategy aimed to: "*empower refugees and nationals in refugee-hosting areas to the extent that they would be able to support themselves*." The strategy also sought to integrate services previously delivered separately to refugees into local government systems responsible for health, education, water, and agricultural extension services.

This paradigm shift from parallel humanitarian systems to integrated district planning was a major departure from the restrictive, commandant-controlled era of the past. A Key Informant Interview with a former Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) district refugee officer recalled the practical impact of this policy shift:

> *Before 1999, our job was largely about handing out rations and enforcing settlement boundaries. The Self-Reliance Strategy changed the narrative entirely. We started sitting with local district planners to ensure that when a borehole was drilled or a clinic was upgraded in the settlement, the host community was officially on the beneficiary list too. It forced us to plan for the district, not just the camp. (KII with Former OPM District Refugee Officer, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

The 2004 Mid-Term Review of the Self-Reliance Strategy reported several positive outcomes, including increased food production, improved access to social services, and expanded skills training opportunities. The review observed that refugee households had made progress towards food production and livelihood development in several settlements. At the same time, the report identified challenges relating to staff capacity, donor coordination, and uneven implementation across districts. UNHCR records further indicate that Uganda's reforms attracted growing international attention. During the Convention Plus process between 2003 and 2005, Uganda's refugee policies were frequently presented as examples of good practice in linking humanitarian assistance with development interventions. International agencies increasingly viewed Uganda as a laboratory for innovative refugee governance approaches. Parliamentary debates preceding the

Refugees Act 2006 also demonstrate growing recognition that CARA was no longer suitable for governing refugee affairs. Discussions in Parliament emphasized the need to harmonize Uganda's domestic refugee laws with obligations arising from the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention. Committee reports noted that the existing legal framework was outdated and inconsistent with contemporary human rights standards.

Evidence from refugee interviews similarly reflects awareness of changing governance approaches during the NRM period. One participant explained:

> *Under the new government, refugees were encouraged to farm, work and support themselves instead of depending entirely on relief assistance. (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, 2025).*

Another participant stated:

> *The government worked more closely with UNHCR and other organizations. Services improved and refugees were given opportunities to participate in economic activities. (Interview Participant, Kiryandongo, October 2025).*

Academic studies also documented the changing governance environment. Reviewing refugee policy reforms, Ahimbisibwe (2020) argues that the period witnessed a gradual movement away from refugee control towards refugee protection and inclusion. Similarly, Alenyo (2014) notes that the Museveni government introduced a new legal and policy orientation that differed substantially from previous administrations by promoting refugee integration and recognizing the possibility of naturalisation for long-term refugees.

The institutional reforms introduced under the NRM government represented a significant departure from previous refugee governance approaches in Uganda. Earlier administrations had largely governed refugees through restrictive legislation designed to regulate movement, control settlement patterns, and priorities security concerns. In contrast, the NRM increasingly embraced governance mechanisms that linked refugee protection to development, economic participation, and international cooperation. The Self-Reliance Strategy illustrates this shift particularly well. Rather than viewing refugees solely as recipients of humanitarian assistance, the strategy sought to transform refugees into economically productive actors capable of contributing to local development. The integration of refugee services into district systems further reflected an effort to

move beyond parallel humanitarian structures towards more sustainable governance arrangements. However, these reforms were not without limitations. While official policy promoted self-reliance and empowerment, implementation frequently encountered practical challenges including inadequate resources, limited infrastructure, staff shortages, and dependence on donor funding. Moreover, some critics argued that self-reliance initiatives were partly motivated by declining humanitarian budgets and efforts to reduce long-term dependency on international assistance. The reforms also reveal an important tension between policy aspirations and practical realities. Although Uganda developed increasingly progressive institutions and policies, many refugees continued facing barriers relating to livelihoods, market access, documentation, and durable solutions. Consequently, institutional reforms improved refugee governance substantially but did not eliminate all protection challenges.

Scholars generally regard the NRM period as the most transformative era in the history of refugee governance in Uganda. Betts (2021) argues that the NRM government fundamentally reshaped refugee policy by linking refugee protection with economic development and local integration. According to his analysis, the government increasingly viewed refugees as potential contributors to local economies rather than merely as humanitarian burdens. Similarly, Ahimbisibwe (2020) contends that the institutional reforms introduced under the NRM laid the foundation for Uganda's internationally recognized refugee protection framework. He argues that the reforms culminated in the Refugees Act 2006, which replaced the restrictive colonial legal regime with a rights-based system aligned with international refugee law. The Refugee Law Project (2006) also recognizes the significance of these reforms but cautions that legal and institutional improvements do not automatically translate into effective protection outcomes. Likewise, Kaiser (2005; 2006), Meyer (2006), and Hunter (2009) argue that self-reliance policies were influenced partly by declining donor support and efforts to reduce the costs of long-term refugee assistance. From this perspective, self-reliance functioned not only as an empowerment strategy but also as a mechanism for restructuring humanitarian responsibility. Other scholars emphasize the developmental achievements of the reforms. Jallow et al. (2004) found evidence of improved food production, service delivery, and livelihood opportunities under the Self-Reliance Strategy. Betts et al. (2014) further argue that refugees in Uganda increasingly participated in local and transnational economies, generated employment opportunities, and contributed to economic growth in refugee-hosting areas.

4.6.2 The Refugees Act, 2006

One of the most significant developments in Uganda's refugee protection regime during the National Resistance Movement (NRM) period was the enactment of the Refugees Act, 2006. The Act replaced the outdated Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) of 1960, which had governed refugee affairs for over four decades. Unlike CARA, which was largely security-oriented and restrictive, the Refugees Act, 2006 established a rights-based framework consistent with international and regional refugee protection standards. The legislation was enacted in response to the growing recognition that Uganda's refugee policies needed to reflect its obligations under international refugee law and the realities of protracted refugee situations within the country.

The Refugees Act, 2006 expressly incorporated the principles contained in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. According to the Government of Uganda, the Act was intended to provide "a comprehensive legal framework for the management of refugees in Uganda" while ensuring compliance with international obligations. Lomo et al. (2001) observed during the drafting process that the proposed refugee legislation sought to "*harmonize Uganda's domestic law with international refugee protection standards*." This objective was later realized through the enactment of the Refugees Act, which granted refugees legal rights previously unavailable under CARA.

The Act provided refugees with rights to work, freedom of movement, access to education, access to courts of law, and ownership of movable property. It also established procedures for refugee status determination and created institutional mechanisms for refugee administration under the Office of the Prime Minister. The legislation further recognized the principle of non-refoulement, prohibiting the return of refugees to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Uganda's refugee legislation became one of the most progressive refugee laws in Africa because it allowed refugees "*to live, work and move freely while enjoying access to social services*."

This progressive legislative shift was widely celebrated in contemporary media and diplomatic circles. For instance, *UNHCR News* (June 22, 2009) reported on the formal operational launch of the Act by Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi, quoting UNHCR Representative Stefano Severe, who described the legislation as containing *"some of the best regional tenets on refugee law."* The

tangible, psychological impact of this legal shift was highlighted in a Focus Group Discussion with refugee community leaders:

> *The 2006 Act gave us a legal identity. We were no longer just 'aliens' subject to the whims of a commandant under the old CARA law. We had a recognized right to be here, to own a business, and to go to court if someone wronged us. It changed us from subjects of control to rights-holders. (FGD with Refugee Community Leaders, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

The enactment of the Refugees Act, 2006 represented a major transition from refugee control to refugee protection. Whereas CARA treated refugees primarily as foreign nationals requiring surveillance and regulation, the new legislation recognized refugees as rights holders entitled to legal protection and socio-economic participation. This shift reflected broader changes in international refugee governance, which increasingly emphasized human rights, self-reliance, and durable solutions rather than mere containment. The Act also institutionalized many of the policy reforms that had emerged during the Self-Reliance Strategy and other refugee programmes implemented in the 1990s and early 2000s. Through granting refugees, the right to work and engage in economic activities, the legislation provided a legal foundation for self-reliance initiatives that sought to reduce long-term dependency on humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the recognition of freedom of movement and access to public services encouraged greater interaction between refugees and host communities, thereby supporting local integration processes without conferring citizenship. The law strengthened Uganda's international reputation as a country committed to refugee protection. At a time when many states were adopting restrictive asylum policies, Uganda established a legal framework that expanded refugee rights while maintaining mechanisms for refugee management and security oversight. The Act therefore became a cornerstone of Uganda's contemporary refugee protection regime. However, implementation challenges remained. Although the law guaranteed extensive rights, resource constraints, administrative limitations, and pressures arising from large refugee populations sometimes affected the full realization of these protections. Consequently, the practical application of the Act often depended on the availability of government capacity and international support.

Scholars regard the Refugees Act, 2006 as a landmark achievement in refugee protection in Uganda. Ahimbisibwe (2020) argues that the legislation transformed Uganda into one of the

leading refugee-hosting countries in Africa by providing refugees with rights rarely granted elsewhere on the continent. Betts (2021) similarly contends that Uganda's refugee framework represents an innovative model because it combines humanitarian protection with opportunities for refugee self-reliance and economic participation. Doyel (2022) maintains that the Act laid the legal foundation for Uganda's internationally recognized refugee policy, particularly its emphasis on freedom of movement, access to land, and integration into local development structures. Nevertheless, scholars such as Kaiser (2006) caution that progressive legislation alone cannot guarantee effective protection, arguing that the success of refugee laws depends on adequate resources, institutional capacity, and sustained political commitment. Therefore, while the Refugees Act, 2006 marked a significant advancement in refugee protection, its effectiveness has continued to depend on the broader political, economic, and administrative environment within which it operates.

4.6.3 The Refugees Regulations, 2010

The enactment of the Refugees Regulations, 2010 marked an important step in operationalizing the provisions of the Refugees Act, 2006. While the Act established the legal principles governing refugee protection in Uganda, the Regulations provided detailed procedures and administrative mechanisms for implementing these principles. The Regulations strengthened Uganda's refugee governance framework by clarifying processes relating to refugee status determination, documentation, rights, obligations, and institutional responsibilities. Together with the Refugees Act, 2006, they formed the foundation of Uganda's modern refugee protection system during the NRM era.

The Refugees Regulations, 2010 were enacted pursuant to the Refugees Act, 2006 to provide practical guidance for the administration of refugee affairs in Uganda. The Regulations established procedures for refugee status determination, appeals, issuance of identification documents, management of refugee settlements, and coordination among government institutions responsible for refugee protection. According to the Regulations, refugee status determination was to be conducted through legally recognized procedures involving the Refugee Eligibility Committee and the Appeals Board. The Regulations further outlined the responsibilities of the Office of the Prime Minister in refugee administration and protection. The Regulations reinforced the rights recognized under the Refugees Act, 2006 by providing mechanisms through which such rights

could be exercised and protected. As stated in the Refugees Regulations, 2010, their purpose was to facilitate the implementation of refugee protection measures consistent with Uganda's national and international obligations.

Lomo et al. (2001), writing during the reform process that preceded the legislation, argued that effective refugee protection required legal provisions that were not only recognized in law but also supported by clear administrative procedures. They observed that refugee governance depended upon the establishment of institutions capable of implementing protection standards in practice. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees similarly noted that effective refugee protection requires "fair and efficient asylum procedures" supported by appropriate administrative structures and documentation systems.

The practical importance and occasional friction of these regulations was later underscored by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in their report, *Refugee Status Determination: A Study of the Process in Uganda* (2018). The NRC noted that while the 2010 Regulations created a clear, rights-based legal pathway for documentation, administrative bottlenecks sometimes delayed the issuance of physical ID cards. A Key Informant Interview with a settlement-based legal aid provider confirmed this gap between policy and practice:

> *The 2010 Regulations were a masterpiece on paper. They gave us the Appeals Board and clear RSD steps, replacing the arbitrary power of the past. But in reality, getting that physical ID card could take months. Without it, a refugee couldn't easily open a bank account or register a business, showing that a progressive regulation is only as strong as the administrative capacity backing it. (KII with Legal Aid Officer, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

The Refugees Regulations, 2010 complemented the Refugees Act, 2006 by transforming broad legal principles into operational procedures. Whereas the Act established refugee rights and state obligations, the Regulations provided the administrative framework necessary for implementation. This contributed to greater consistency and predictability in refugee governance by defining the roles of institutions responsible for refugee management. The Regulations strengthened procedural protection by establishing formal mechanisms for refugee status determination and appeals. This reduced the likelihood of arbitrary decisions and enhanced compliance with international refugee protection standards. The introduction of clearer documentation procedures also improved

refugees' ability to access services and exercise rights recognized under national law. Furthermore, the Regulations reinforced Uganda's commitment to a rules-based refugee protection system. Through providing guidance on institutional coordination and refugee administration, they contributed to improved governance within refugee settlements and host communities. The Regulations therefore served as an important bridge between legal commitments and practical implementation. The adoption of these Regulations demonstrated that refugee protection required more than legislative reform alone. Effective protection depended upon administrative structures capable of translating legal rights into everyday practice. Consequently, the Refugees Regulations, 2010 became a critical component of Uganda's refugee governance framework during the NRM period.

Scholars agree that legal protection frameworks are most effective when supported by clear implementation mechanisms. Goodwin-Gill and McAdam argue that refugee rights can only be realized when states establish procedures capable of enforcing legal protections and ensuring access to asylum. Their analysis suggests that administrative regulations play an essential role in translating international and national legal commitments into practical outcomes. Lomo et al. (2001) similarly maintain that institutional arrangements and procedural safeguards are fundamental to effective refugee governance. They contend that refugee legislation must be accompanied by operational structures that facilitate implementation and accountability. Ahimbisibwe (2020) argues that Uganda's refugee protection framework became stronger following the adoption of both the Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugees Regulations, 2010 because the two instruments collectively provided legal recognition of refugee rights and procedures for their enforcement. From this perspective, the Regulations constituted an important advancement in Uganda's transition from a restrictive refugee control regime towards a comprehensive refugee protection system grounded in law and institutional practice.

4.6.4 Rights-based integration and self-reliance

Following the enactment of the Refugees Act, 2006, Uganda's refugee protection framework increasingly adopted a rights-based and self-reliance approach. The NRM government moved away from earlier policies that viewed refugees primarily as recipients of humanitarian assistance and instead promoted policies that enabled them to participate in economic and social life. This approach was grounded in the belief that refugees should be empowered to sustain themselves

while contributing to the development of host communities. Consequently, Uganda became internationally recognized for implementing one of the most progressive refugee protection models in Africa.

The foundation of this approach can be traced to the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), introduced in 1999 by the Government of Uganda and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The strategy sought to reduce refugee dependency on humanitarian aid by promoting access to land, agricultural production, education, healthcare, and income-generating activities. According to the Government of Uganda and UNHCR (1999), the objective of the strategy was to "*empower refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they will be able to support themselves*."

The Refugees Act, 2006 reinforced this policy direction by granting refugees the right to work, engage in business activities, access education, move freely within the country, and benefit from social services. Unlike many refugee-hosting countries that restricted refugee movement and employment, Uganda allowed refugees to participate in local economies and interact with host communities. According to Betts et al. (2019), Uganda's refugee policy framework was designed to provide refugees with "freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to public services." Similarly, the World Bank (2016) noted that Uganda's refugee settlements were intended not merely as places of protection but as areas where refugees could pursue livelihoods and contribute to local economic development. Doyel (2022) further observed that Uganda came to be regarded internationally as a "paragon of self-reliance" because of its efforts to integrate refugee welfare into broader development planning rather than relying exclusively on humanitarian assistance.

This integration of services is most visibly manifested in the shared infrastructure of Kiryandongo today, a direct, tangible result of the NRM-era policy shift away from parallel systems. The foundational investments made during this period evolved into a robust, shared service network. This includes Primary Schools such as Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, Ematong Primary School, St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, Arnold Primary School, Beth Cole Nursery School, and Panyadoli Primary School (serving the trading centre). At the secondary level, institutions like the government-aided Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and the community-supported St. Mary's Secondary School serve a mixed population of refugee and national pupils. Similarly,

health integration is anchored by shared facilities, including Panyadoli Health Centre IV (the main referral facility for both populations), Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II. An FGD with local market traders and health workers corroborated this shared reality:

> *The genius of this policy is that we stopped building 'refugee clinics' and 'national clinics'. We built one system for everyone. When a refugee mother and a Ugandan mother wait in the same line at Panyadoli HC IV, or their children sit in the same classroom, the artificial barrier between them disappears. The market and the school do not know who is a refugee and who is a citizen; they only know a shared community. (FGD with Local Market Traders and Health Workers, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).*

The adoption of a rights-based and self-reliance framework represented a significant departure from traditional refugee management approaches that emphasized encampment and long-term dependence on relief assistance. By recognizing refugees as active participants in economic and social development, the NRM government sought to create conditions that would allow refugees to achieve a degree of independence while reducing pressure on humanitarian agencies. The allocation of land within refugee settlements enabled many refugees to engage in agricultural production and household income generation. Access to employment and business opportunities also created avenues through which refugees could contribute to local markets and regional economic activity. These measures helped transform refugee settlements from purely humanitarian spaces into socio-economic communities where refugees and host populations could interact and share resources. The policy further strengthened social cohesion by extending public services such as education, health care, and water infrastructure to both refugees and host communities. This approach reduced tensions that might otherwise arise from perceptions of unequal assistance and encouraged greater cooperation between the two populations. However, the effectiveness of self-reliance policies varied across settlements and refugee populations. Increasing refugee numbers, declining donor support, environmental pressures, and limited economic opportunities often constrained refugees' ability to achieve genuine self-sufficiency. While legal rights existed, practical access to livelihoods and services frequently depended on the availability of resources and local implementation capacity. Consequently, the realization of self-reliance remained uneven despite the progressive policy framework.

Scholars have viewed Uganda's rights-based refugee model as an important innovation in refugee governance. Betts et al. (2019) argue that Uganda's approach challenged conventional humanitarian models by providing refugees with opportunities to participate in economic life rather than confining them to aid dependency. They contend that granting rights such as freedom of movement and access to employment creates conditions that enhance refugee resilience and contribute to local development. Ahimbisibwe (2020) similarly argues that Uganda's refugee policy reflects a shift towards developmental approaches to refugee protection, where refugees are regarded as potential contributors to economic growth rather than as burdens on host societies. The World Bank (2016) supports this position by noting that refugee-inclusive development policies can generate benefits for both displaced populations and host communities when adequately supported. Nevertheless, some scholars caution against portraying the Ugandan model as entirely successful. Kaiser (2006) and later researchers argue that self-reliance policies may place excessive responsibility on refugees in contexts where economic opportunities remain limited. They maintain that legal rights alone cannot guarantee sustainable livelihoods without corresponding investments in infrastructure, markets, and public services. Thus, while Uganda's rights-based and self-reliance framework represents a significant advancement in refugee protection, its long-term effectiveness depends on sustained financial, institutional, and political support.

4.6.5 Effectiveness of refugee laws in governing integration

The refugee protection framework established under the NRM government between 1986 and 2014 was generally more effective than previous refugee governance systems in Uganda. Through institutional reforms, the enactment of the Refugees Act, 2006, the Refugees Regulations, 2010, and the adoption of a rights-based approach, the government created a legal and administrative environment that expanded refugee rights and strengthened protection mechanisms. These reforms improved Uganda's capacity to receive, protect, and manage refugees while enhancing compliance with international refugee protection standards.

Evidence from government reports, international organizations, and scholarly literature indicates that refugee protection improved significantly during the NRM period (Republic of Uganda, 2006, 2010). The Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugees Regulations, 2010 provided refugees with legal rights relating to movement, employment, education, access to justice, and social services. These

rights were supported by institutional structures within the Office of the Prime Minister and by partnerships with humanitarian and development agencies. The Self-Reliance Strategy introduced in 1999 sought to enable refugees and host communities to sustain themselves through access to land and livelihood opportunities. According to the Government of Uganda and UNHCR (1999), the objective was to "*empower refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they will be able to support themselves*." This represented a departure from traditional refugee assistance models that relied heavily on long-term humanitarian aid. International assessments frequently recognized Uganda's refugee framework as one of the most progressive in Africa. Betts et al. (2019) observed that Uganda provided refugees with "*freedom of movement, the right to work and access to public services,"* rights that were often restricted in many refugee-hosting countries. Similarly, Doyel (2022) described Uganda as a "*paragon of self-reliance*" because of its efforts to integrate refugee protection with development initiatives. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also acknowledged Uganda's commitment to refugee protection, noting that refugees were allowed to "live, work and move freely" while benefiting from services provided within refugee-hosting areas.

The effectiveness of refugee protection under the NRM government can be assessed through both legal and practical dimensions. Legally, the enactment of the Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugees Regulations, 2010 significantly strengthened refugee protection by aligning domestic legislation with international and regional refugee instruments. These reforms replaced the restrictive framework that had existed under the Control of Alien Refugees Act and established clearer procedures for refugee recognition and protection. Institutionally, the strengthening of refugee governance structures improved coordination between government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and development partners. The Office of the Prime Minister assumed a more prominent role in refugee administration, facilitating policy implementation and oversight. The establishment of formal refugee status determination procedures further enhanced legal protection and reduced uncertainty regarding refugee recognition. The rights-based framework also contributed to improved refugee welfare. Refugees were granted opportunities to engage in economic activities, access education and healthcare, and participate in local development processes. These measures reduced dependence on humanitarian assistance and promoted greater interaction between refugees and host communities. The effectiveness of the framework was further demonstrated by Uganda's ability to host large refugee populations while maintaining

relative policy consistency and adherence to international protection principles. The continued influx of refugees from neighboring countries suggested that Uganda was widely perceived as a place of refuge offering legal protection and opportunities for rebuilding livelihoods.

The NRM period was a turning point in Uganda's refugee protection history. Betts (2021) argues that Uganda's refugee policies created one of the most progressive protection systems globally by combining legal protection with opportunities for self-reliance. He contends that the framework provided refugees with rights and freedoms that are uncommon in many refugee-hosting states. Ahimbisibwe (2020) similarly maintains that the reforms introduced during the NRM era transformed refugee governance from a security-oriented model into a protection-oriented system grounded in international legal standards. According to him, the combination of legislative reform, institutional development, and refugee-inclusive policies strengthened Uganda's capacity to provide protection to displaced populations. The World Bank (2016) further argues that Uganda's refugee policies contributed to both refugee welfare and local development by encouraging shared access to services and economic opportunities. From this perspective, the effectiveness of refugee protection extended beyond legal safeguards to include broader socio-economic outcomes.

The available evidence indicates that refugee protection under the NRM government was considerably more effective than in earlier periods. The legal reforms, institutional arrangements, and rights-based policies adopted between 1986 and 2014 established a framework that enhanced refugee protection, strengthened compliance with international standards, and contributed to Uganda's emergence as a leading refugee-hosting country in Africa.

However, scholars and contemporary reports also caution that progressive legal frameworks do not automatically erase implementation challenges. The World Bank's *An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management* (2016) praised the overall framework but warned that the "30–70% aid sharing policy" (targeting 30% of services to host communities) often struggled to materialize fully due to funding shortfalls, occasionally leading to resource competition. Furthermore, investigative reports, such as *ISS Today* (January 16, 2019), exposed instances of fraud and corruption in refugee operations, highlighting that progressive laws require vigilant oversight to prevent exploitation. As one district planner summarized:

> *The NRM era gave us the best refugee laws in Africa. The 2006 Act and 2010 Regulations are brilliant. But a law is only as effective as the budget and the integrity*

of the people implementing it. We have the rights on paper; the ongoing struggle is ensuring the resources match the rhetoric. (KII with District Community Development Officer, Kiryandongo, 07th October 2025).

4.7 Emerging issues in refugee integration

The analysis of the laws from 1954 to 2014 brought out four emerging issues that had not been resolved by the end of the study period. The first is citizenship. Section 18 of CARA excluded the years spent as a refugee from counting towards naturalisation, and although the Refugees Act of 2006 replaced CARA, it left naturalisation to the Constitution and the citizenship law, under which refugees in practice could not become citizens. As a result, refugees who had lived in Kiryandongo since 1990, and many of their children born in Uganda, remained refugees in 2014 (Republic of Uganda, 1995, 2006; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012). The second is the gap between rights on paper and rights in practice: the rights to work and to move freely granted in 2006 were used mainly by refugees who could afford to leave the settlement, while assistance remained tied to residence in the settlement (Betts et al., 2019).

The third emerging issue is land. Every refugee law since 1960 assumed that government could always provide land for settlement, yet the use of Kiryandongo's land for Kenyans in 2008, for Ugandans displaced by the Bududa landslide in 2010 and for South Sudanese refugees from 2014 shows growing competition for the same land among different groups of displaced people, and smaller plots for each new arrival (The New Humanitarian, 2010; UNHCR, 2008). The fourth is the sustainability of the open-door policy itself. Because the rights granted by the 2006 Act depended on international funding, aid cuts and rising anti-refugee sentiment raised the question whether the law could be implemented without donors (Gidron & Titeca, 2025). These issues show that the move from control to rights in 2006 did not end the history of refugee law in Uganda, but opened new questions about citizenship, land and financing.

4.8 Key findings and new knowledge

This chapter has shown that the law governing refugee integration in Uganda between 1954 and 2014 passed through two main phases. From 1960 to 2006, the Control of Alien Refugees Act, enacted by the colonial government and retained by every post-independence government, treated refugees as aliens to be controlled: it confined them to settlements, gave wide powers to settlement commandants, restricted their movement and excluded their years of residence from counting

towards citizenship. Within this framework, Uganda's accession to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol in 1976 and its practical tolerance of refugees' economic participation produced some integration, but integration depended on administrative goodwill rather than enforceable rights. The Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010 marked a critical juncture, replacing control with rights to work, movement, education, health and land use, although their effectiveness was limited by inadequate resources and the continued confinement of most assistance to settlements. The next chapter examines the initiatives through which the government implemented these laws in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.

The new knowledge contributed by this chapter is threefold. First, Uganda's refugee law was born as a law of control rather than of integration: the archival evidence shows that CARA was drafted in 1959–1960 in direct response to the arrival of Rwandan refugees and followed the Sudan-specific ordinance of 1955 (Long, 2012; Uganda Protectorate, 1955). Secondly, between 1960 and 2006 integration took place in spite of the law rather than because of it, through the administrative tolerance of "free-living" refugees and of refugees' economic activities that UNHCR files record from the late 1960s (Betts, 2021). Thirdly, the Refugees Act of 2006 was a critical juncture in law but not in practice, because the settlement model inherited from 1960 continued to determine where refugees received assistance, which confirms the path dependence predicted by historical institutionalism.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE REFUGEES IN KIRYANDONGO REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, 1954–2014

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the second objective of the study, which was to assess the forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement between 1954 and 2014. The chapter first traces the establishment and development of the settlement, since refugees had to be settled before they could be integrated, and then examines the initiatives implemented by successive governments, together with humanitarian agencies and local authorities, to promote coexistence and integration between refugees and host communities.

For each period, the evidence obtained from oral testimonies and archival and documentary sources is presented first, and is then discussed in relation to the literature. The discussion follows the historical periods used in Chapter Four: the late colonial period, the first Obote government, the Idi Amin government, the UNLF, Obote II and Okello Tito's governments, and the NRM government up to 2014.

5.1 Establishment and development of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

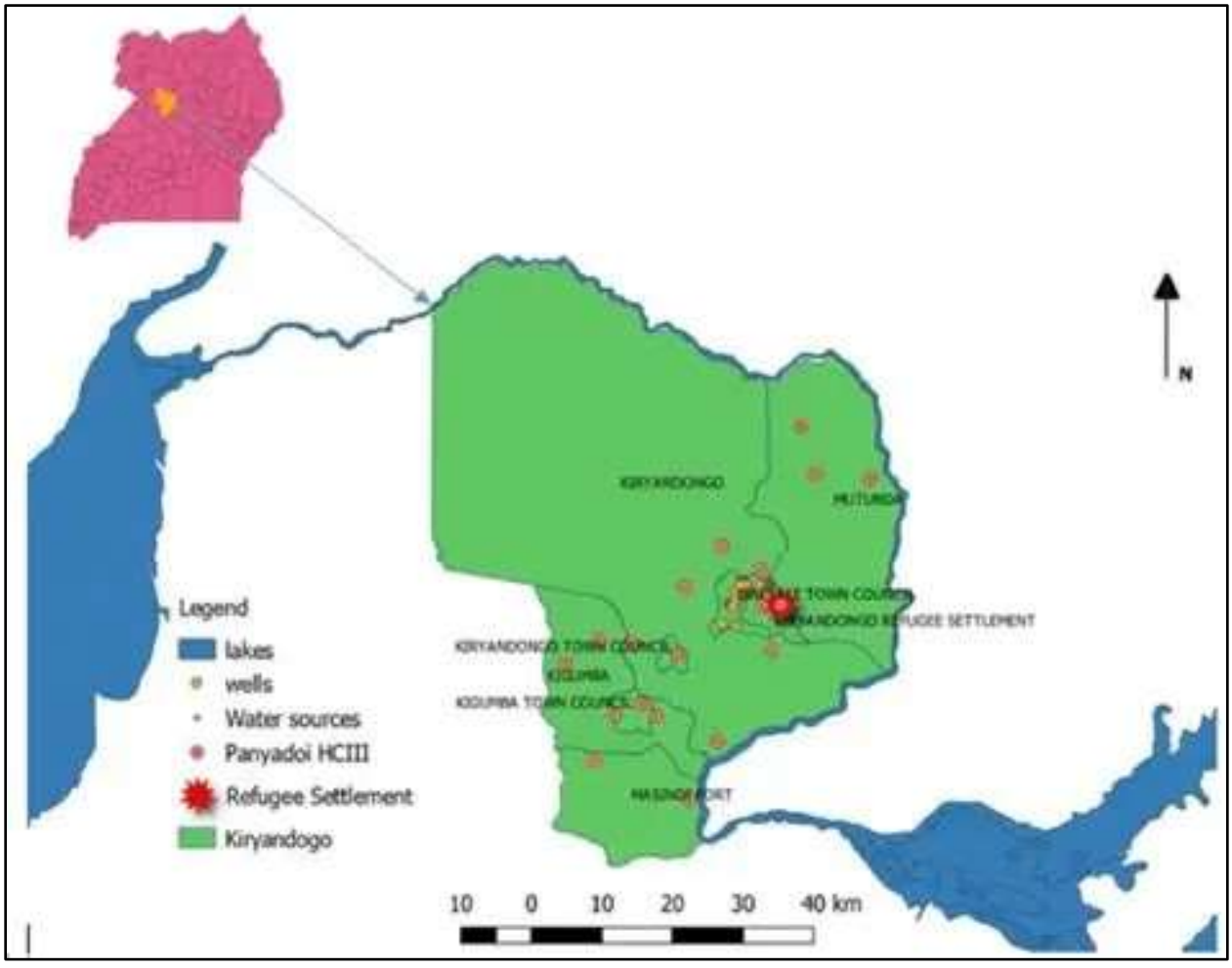
The origin

Oral testimonies collected during field research show how the settlement developed from the 1990s. One refugee elder explained that when refugees arrived in Kiryandongo in the early 1990s, the area was largely undeveloped and covered by bush, but refugees were gradually allocated land for cultivation and settlement, and schools, health centers and markets were later established with support from government and humanitarian agencies. A local leader similarly explained that

> *Kiryandongo was selected because government authorities believed refugees could survive through agriculture while coexisting with host communities, and that the settlement later expanded with the arrival of refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Kenya (KII with host community elder, 10th October, 2025)*

The oral accounts are consistent with the documentary and published evidence, which traces the origins of the settlement further back, to the colonial period. Enos (2016) shows that the area was first used in 1954, when the British colonial administration, in collaboration with the Bunyoro Native Administration, allocated land in Kiryandongo to accommodate Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising. This was one of the earliest government settlement initiatives in the area, and it later influenced the settlement policies adopted after independence.

Figure 1: Map of Kiryandongo District showing the location of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement



Source: District boundaries and OPM settlement data, 2025

During the colonial period, refugee administration in Uganda was shaped largely by British security and administrative interests. Refugees were settled in designated areas to facilitate supervision, control, and provision of relief services. Settlement approaches increasingly focused

on land allocation and agricultural self-reliance in order to reduce dependence on direct relief assistance. Refugee settlements established during this period also reflected broader colonial policies of population management, labor control, and border regulation within the protectorate (Betts, 2021; Rockenbach, 2018).

The modern establishment of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement occurred in 1990 when the Government of Uganda officially gazetted land in Kiryandongo for refugee settlement, particularly for Sudanese refugees fleeing the second civil war in South Sudan. The settlement was established on former ranch land that had earlier been gazetted during the 1970s under Amin's government. Approximately 3,250 acres of land were allocated to accommodate refugees relocated from Acol-Pii Refugee Settlement following insecurity in northern Uganda. The first refugee population mainly consisted of Acoli refugees from South Sudan who had fled attacks associated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) (Kaiser, 2000).

The establishment of Kiryandongo reflected Uganda's evolving refugee policy that promoted settlement rather than encampment. Refugees were allocated plots of land for cultivation and settlement with the aim of promoting self-reliance and reducing dependence on humanitarian assistance. The settlement programme was implemented through collaboration between the Government of Uganda and humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Oxfam, InterAid Uganda, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which supported food distribution, healthcare services, water supply, education, and settlement infrastructure (Kaiser, 2000).

Government reports from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Uganda Gazettes, and UNHCR records indicate that Kiryandongo later became one of the major refugee settlements in Uganda because of its strategic location and agricultural potential (UNHCR Archives, Phelps to Chipman, *Relocation of 54,000 Sudanese refugees currently in N. Uganda*, 14 March 1990, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, Farah, *Note to the file: Mission to south-western Uganda*, 1991, as cited in Betts, 2021). The settlement gradually developed into an important refugee-hosting area under Uganda's self-reliance strategy. Its location along the Kampala–Gulu highway also contributed to increased trade, mobility, and interaction between refugees and host communities, particularly within Bweyale trading centre (Murahashi, 2021). Figure 2 shows the entrance to the settlement as it appeared during the fieldwork.

Figure 2: Entrance to Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher on 08th October 2025

Demographic composition of refugees in Kiryandongo settlement

The demographic composition of refugees in Kiryandongo Settlement changed considerably over time due to refugee influxes from different countries within the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions. During the early 1990s, the majority of refugees in the settlement were Acholi refugees from southern Sudan (now South Sudan) who shared certain cultural and linguistic similarities with communities in northern Uganda (Kaiser, 2000).

Over time, the settlement became more diverse as refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, and other neighboring countries settled within the area. Records from UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister indicate that South Sudanese refugees later formed the largest refugee population in Kiryandongo following the outbreak of conflict in South Sudan in 2013.

The refugee population consisted of different ethnic groups, languages, religions, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity created opportunities for social interaction, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation, although it also generated occasional tensions arising from language barriers, cultural differences, and competition over land and social services.

Women and children constituted the largest proportion of the refugee population within the settlement. Many households were headed by women because of war, displacement, and family

separation. Humanitarian agencies therefore directed considerable attention toward child protection, education, maternal healthcare, and prevention of gender-based violence within the settlement.

Interview findings further revealed that population diversity influenced patterns of interaction within the settlement. One participant explained that refugees came from different countries and spoke different languages such as Arabic, Swahili, Dinka, Nuer, Acholi, and Kinyarwanda, which initially created communication difficulties. However, the participant noted that over time refugees and host communities gradually adapted to coexistence. Another participant observed that the continued arrival of refugees increased pressure on land and social services but also created opportunities for trade, employment, and interaction between refugees and Ugandans.

5.2 Forms of government initiatives in fostering refugees' integration

5.2.1 pre-colonial antecedents: incorporation of migrants and displaced persons (before 1894)

Before the British Protectorate was established in 1894, the area that later became Kiryandongo lay within the kingdom of Bunyoro-Kitara, where there were no refugee laws in the modern sense. Oral evidence collected from Banyoro elders in the host villages around the settlement shows that people fleeing war, famine or succession disputes, including those displaced by Buganda's wars against Bunyoro in the time of Omukama Kabalega (1870–1899), were received as guests of the clan (abagenyi) and placed under the Mukuru w'ekika (clan head), who allocated them land near his homestead in return for labor and respect for local custom (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 06th October 2025; Karugire, 1980). These practices are relevant to this study because they formed the customary background against which the colonial government asked the Bunyoro Native Government to provide land at Kigumba in 1954, and because Banyoro participants still described the reception of refugees in these terms.

One elderly participant interviewed during this study explained that before colonial boundaries were established, movement of people was regarded as a normal social occurrence rather than an international issue. According to the participant, communities in Bunyoro and neighboring areas often accommodated strangers fleeing wars or famine through clan sponsorship and communal land allocation. The participant observed that newcomers were expected to respect local customs, participate in communal labor, and gradually become part of the host society. Although these

practices were not governed by written laws, they promoted peaceful coexistence and mutual support among different communities.

The precolonial period did not feature "refugee policies" in the modern statist sense. Instead, integration of displaced persons occurred through three primary mechanisms: kinship incorporation (through clan adoption and invented ancestry), clientage and labor attachment (where newcomers pledged service to patrons in exchange for land and protection), and economic interdependence (where displaced groups contributed agricultural or pastoral labor to host communities).

Reinforcing this historical continuity, an elderly participant from the Bunyoro region, recalling ancestral narratives passed down through generations, noted:

> *Before the white man drew lines on the map, a stranger fleeing war in Buganda or Ankole was treated as a guest of the clan. The clan head would allocate a piece of land near the homestead. The stranger was expected to help in the gardens, and in return, they were protected as one of our own. It was not called 'refugee status'; it was simply the law of hospitality.*

This oral account corroborates historical analyses indicating that the conceptualization of displacement as a strictly "international" or "legal" issue was a later colonial imposition, replacing earlier, more fluid mechanisms of social absorption.

5.2.2 Late colonial administration (1954–1962)

5.2.2.1 Land allocation for refugee settlement

The study established that land allocation was one of the earliest government initiatives employed by the British colonial administration to facilitate the settlement and social integration of refugees in Uganda between 1954 and 1962. Through designated settlement schemes, refugees were provided with land for residence and cultivation, enabling them to establish livelihoods while maintaining interaction with surrounding host communities.

Archival records from the Uganda Protectorate administration indicate that the colonial government adopted organized settlement schemes to accommodate increasing numbers of refugees arriving from neighboring territories, particularly Sudan, Rwanda, and Kenya (Uganda

Protectorate, 1955; TNA, CO 822/2494/7, Acting Governor of Uganda to Secretary of State for the Colonies, *Ruanda refugees*, 22 January 1960, as cited in Long, 2012). The findings show that refugees were settled on designated land under the supervision of colonial administrators, district officials, and Native Authorities. Areas such as Nakivale were opened to accommodate Rwandan refugees, while parts of Kiryandongo were utilized from 1954 when the British administration instructed the Bunyoro Native Government to receive refugees fleeing the Mau Mau conflict in Kenya.

Contemporary news reports from the era corroborates this administrative action. *The Uganda Argus* (October 14, 1954) reported on the formalization of this arrangement, noting that the colonial government had secured a 49-year lease agreement with the Bunyoro Native Authority to utilize the Kigumba area (now Kiryandongo) for the resettlement of displaced persons. The report highlighted that the initial allocation involved approximately 5,000 acres of designated land, explicitly intended to move refugees away from border tensions and into structured, agriculturally viable zones under local oversight.

Evidence from oral interviews conducted during this study further indicates that land formed the foundation upon which refugee settlement was organized. On 08th October 2025 an elderly participant explained that:

> *Refugees were given land where they could build homes and cultivate crops for food. Most of them depended on farming after arriving.*

Another participant stated that:

> *The chiefs identified land and showed refugees where to settle. They were expected to cultivate and support themselves.*

Interview findings further revealed that refugees used the allocated land for crop cultivation, livestock keeping, and homestead establishment. Participants explained that agricultural activities brought refugees into regular contact with surrounding communities through labor exchange, local markets, and shared use of natural resources. Colonial administrative records also indicate that refugee settlements were established in rural areas where sufficient land was available for agricultural production. Settlement authorities considered farming an important means through which refugees could sustain themselves while reducing pressure on government resources.

The findings indicate that land allocation functioned as both a settlement mechanism and a social integration strategy. Through providing refugees with access to land, the colonial administration enabled them to establish livelihoods within host communities rather than remaining entirely dependent on relief assistance. Agricultural production created opportunities for interaction between refugees and local populations through cultivation, trade, exchange of labor, and use of community services. The evidence further shows that integration occurred primarily through every day economic activities. Refugees who cultivated land participated in local markets, exchanged agricultural produce, and developed relationships with neighboring communities. At the same time, the allocation of land under the supervision of colonial authorities maintained administrative control over refugee populations. Refugees were therefore integrated economically and socially within rural communities while remaining subject to colonial settlement regulations. The study also found that the involvement of chiefs and Native Authorities in identifying settlement land linked refugee administration to existing local governance structures. This arrangement facilitated acceptance of refugee settlements within host areas because local leaders participated directly in the settlement process.

These findings are consistent with Rockenbach (2018), who argues that colonial refugee policies in Uganda relied heavily on rural settlement schemes that combined land allocation with agricultural production. The findings also support Betts (2021), who notes that access to land became a central feature of Uganda's refugee management approach because it promoted self-sufficiency while reducing dependence on state support. However, the present study extends these arguments by demonstrating that land allocation was not merely an economic intervention. Evidence from oral testimonies shows that access to land created opportunities for daily interaction between refugees and host communities through farming, trade, and social exchange. Consequently, land allocation served as an early government initiative through which social integration was pursued during the late colonial period.

5.2.2.2 Establishment of organized refugee settlements

The study established that the establishment of organized refugee settlements constituted a major government initiative employed by the British colonial administration to facilitate the management and social integration of refugees in Uganda between 1954 and 1962. Through designated settlement areas, the colonial government provided refugees with structured environments where

accommodation, agricultural production, administration, and social services could be coordinated under official supervision.

Findings from archival sources indicate that the colonial administration increasingly adopted organized settlement schemes in response to growing refugee inflows from neighboring territories during the 1950s. Refugee movements associated with the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the Torit Mutiny in Sudan, and the Rwandan social revolution necessitated more systematic approaches to refugee accommodation and administration. Archival records further indicate that Nakivale Refugee Settlement was established in 1958 primarily to accommodate Rwandan refugees fleeing political instability and violence. Refugees were settled in designated zones where land was allocated for residence and cultivation under government supervision. Historical evidence also shows that parts of Kiryandongo were utilized from 1954 when the British administration directed the Bunyoro Native Government to accommodate refugees fleeing unrest in Kenya.

Interview findings obtained during the study reveal that settlement schemes introduced a more organized approach to refugee accommodation compared to earlier informal arrangements. On 08th October 2025 one participant explained:

> *Government officials identified places where refugees could stay together and receive assistance while cultivating land.*

Another participant stated:

> *The settlements had leaders, regulations and designated areas for farming. Refugees were not simply left to settle anywhere.*

Participant further explained that settlement authorities worked closely with local chiefs and Native Authorities in identifying settlement areas, resolving disputes, and coordinating relations between refugees and surrounding communities.

The lived experience of this organized structure was recalled by a participant who lived in the Kigumba area during the late 1950s:

> *The government did not just let people scatter. They drew lines. There was a specific area for the refugees to build their grass-thatched houses, and a separate block for farming. But the market was in the middle. That is where the refugees and the locals*

met every week to sell maize and beans. The layout itself forced us to interact, even if the rules were strict.

This testimony illustrates that while the settlements were designed for administrative control, their spatial organization inadvertently created designated zones for routine socio-economic exchange. Settlements were administered through settlement commandants and district officials who supervised land allocation, population registration, and settlement activities, Refugees were generally expected to reside within designated settlement boundaries where government authorities could monitor their welfare and activities. The findings indicate that organized refugee settlements provided an institutional framework through which refugee integration could be managed. In concentrating refugee populations within designated areas, the colonial administration was able to coordinate land allocation, agricultural production, security, and basic social services more effectively than would have been possible under scattered settlement arrangements.

The evidence further indicates that settlement schemes created regular contact between refugees and host communities. Refugees participated in local markets, exchanged labor, accessed shared water sources, and engaged in agricultural production alongside neighboring populations. These interactions facilitated social and economic relationships between refugees and host communities. However, the findings also show that the settlement system was designed to maintain administrative control over refugee populations. Refugees were expected to remain within designated areas and were subject to regulations governing movement and settlement administration. Consequently, the settlements promoted interaction with host communities while simultaneously maintaining official oversight of refugee activities. The study further found that the involvement of Native Authorities and local chiefs in settlement administration strengthened cooperation between government institutions and host communities. This reduced resistance to refugee settlement and facilitated the incorporation of refugees into existing local social and economic structures.

These findings support Rockenbach (2016), who argues that colonial refugee settlement schemes in Uganda were designed around organized rural settlements that combined refugee accommodation, agricultural production, and administrative supervision. The findings are also consistent with Long (2012), who observes that colonial governments increasingly relied on

structured settlement arrangements to manage refugee movements while addressing security and administrative concerns. However, the present study demonstrates that organized settlements served purposes beyond administration and control. Evidence from oral testimonies indicates that settlements provided spaces through which refugees established economic and social relations with host communities. The findings therefore show that organized refugee settlements functioned as both administrative institutions and mechanisms through which refugee integration was pursued during the late colonial period.

5.2.2.3 Agricultural self-reliance through settlement farming

The study established that the promotion of agricultural self-reliance through settlement farming was a major government initiative employed by the British colonial administration to facilitate refugee integration between 1954 and 1962. Refugees were encouraged to engage in crop cultivation and livestock keeping within designated settlements in order to support themselves economically while reducing dependence on government assistance.

Archival records indicate that colonial refugee policy emphasized the establishment of rural settlements where refugees could engage in agricultural production, Refugees arriving from Rwanda, Sudan, and Kenya were allocated land not only for residence but also for cultivation. Colonial administrators considered farming essential for refugee welfare because it enabled refugees to produce food and generate income while limiting expenditure on relief support. Government reports further indicate that refugee settlements were deliberately established in areas with sufficient agricultural potential. Settlement authorities encouraged refugees to cultivate food crops and participate in livestock rearing as part of broader settlement management programmes.

Interview findings obtained during this study reveal that farming constituted the main economic activity within refugee settlements during the late colonial period. On 08th October 2025 one participant one explained:

> *Most refugees depended on cultivation because that was the easiest way to survive after arriving in the settlements.*

Another participant stated:

> *Families were given land to farm and many of them produced food for their homes and sometimes sold the surplus in nearby markets.*

Participant explained that refugee farmers frequently interacted with host communities through agricultural activities. Refugees exchanged labor, shared farming knowledge, hired local workers, and participated in local produce markets. In some areas, host communities also benefited from increased agricultural production associated with refugee settlement activities.

Government data from the period supports this observation of mutual economic benefit. The *Uganda Protectorate* Annual Report on Agriculture (1959) noted that refugee settlements in the Bunyoro region, including Kigumba, had successfully produced a surplus of cassava and maize, with local market records showing a 15% increase in regional crop trade volume attributed to refugee-host community bartering. On 08th October 2025 one elderly participant from host-community farmer confirmed this dynamic, stating:

> *The refugees brought new ways of planting and worked very hard. We would exchange our local seeds for their labor during planting season, and later, we would buy their surplus sorghum at the Bweyale market. We depended on each other for survival.*

Historical records relating to settlements such as Nakivale indicate that agricultural production formed an important component of settlement administration. Refugees were expected to utilize allocated land productively while settlement authorities supervised farming activities and land utilization.

The findings indicate that settlement farming facilitated refugee integration by creating opportunities for sustained interaction between refugees and host communities. Agricultural activities brought refugees into contact with local populations through labor exchange, trade, transportation of produce, and shared access to markets. Through these interactions, refugees gradually became incorporated into local economic systems. The evidence indicates that farming reduced dependence on direct government support and enabled refugees to contribute to local economic activity. Refugees who cultivated crops and reared livestock participated in commercial exchange with surrounding communities, thereby strengthening economic relationships between the two groups.

The study also found that agricultural self-reliance promoted stability within refugee settlements. Refugees who were able to meet part of their livelihood needs through farming were less likely to depend entirely on relief assistance. This enabled settlement authorities to manage growing refugee

populations with limited government resources. However, farming-based integration was not without challenges. In some areas, increasing demand for cultivation land occasionally generated disagreements regarding land boundaries and resource use. Despite these difficulties, agricultural production remained one of the principal avenues through which refugees established social and economic relationships with host communities during the late colonial period.

These findings are consistent with Rockenbach (2018), who argues that colonial refugee settlements in Uganda were designed around agricultural production as a means of promoting refugee self-sufficiency. The findings also support Chambers (1979), who observes that rural settlement programmes in Africa frequently relied on farming as a mechanism for reducing refugee dependence on relief assistance. However, the present study extends these arguments by demonstrating that settlement farming functioned not only as an economic activity but also as a means of facilitating everyday interaction between refugees and host communities. Evidence from oral testimonies indicates that farming created opportunities for trade, labor exchange, and social contact, thereby contributing to refugee integration within local communities. The findings therefore establish that agricultural self-reliance constituted both an economic and social integration initiative during the late colonial administration.

5.2.2.4 Use of native authorities and chiefs in refugee administration

During the late colonial period, the administration relied on Native Authorities and local chiefs to assist in the management of refugees settled in different parts of Uganda. Chiefs acted as intermediaries between the colonial administration, host communities, and refugee populations. They participated in land allocation, settlement supervision, conflict resolution, and communication of government directives to refugees. Through these functions, chiefs became important actors in facilitating interactions between refugees and local communities.

Archival records indicate that the colonial administration worked through established Native Authority structures when managing refugee populations entering Uganda from neighboring territories. Correspondence relating to refugee settlement administration shows that local chiefs were instructed to identify suitable settlement areas, monitor refugee activities, and report emerging concerns to district officials. Records from the Provincial Administration reveal that local authorities were expected to ensure peaceful coexistence between refugees and host populations and to assist in implementing government policies concerning refugee settlement. The

Uganda Argus reported in 1958 that district officials and local chiefs were actively involved in supervising refugee settlement activities in southwestern Uganda, particularly in areas receiving Rwandan refugees. The newspaper noted that local administrative structures were being used to coordinate settlement arrangements and maintain order among refugee communities.

Oral testimony from participants in Kiryandongo further confirmed the involvement of local leaders in refugee administration. On 09th October 2025 one participant explained that:

> *The chiefs were the people who worked closely with government officers. They showed refugees where to settle, handled small disputes and linked refugees with the local population. (Oral interview with host community member Kiryandongo, 09th October 2025).*

Another participant recalled:

> *When disagreements arose between refugees and local residents, the local chiefs would normally intervene before the matter reached higher government offices. (Oral interview with host community member, Kiryandongo, 09th October 2025).*

Government reports from the period also indicate that refugee administration depended heavily on local government structures because colonial officials were few in number and could not directly supervise all settlement activities, Chiefs therefore became the primary contact between refugees and the state.

The use of Native Authorities and chiefs facilitated social integration by creating channels through which refugees could interact with host communities. Since chiefs were already recognized leaders within local communities, their involvement enabled refugees to access land, local markets, and administrative services through existing community structures rather than through isolated systems. Chiefs also helped reduce tensions between refugees and host populations by mediating disputes and promoting adherence to local norms and regulations. Their involvement enabled refugees to become familiar with local administrative practices while simultaneously allowing host communities to participate in refugee-related decisions. This arrangement encouraged regular contact between the two groups and reduced the likelihood of social isolation. However, the system also reinforced state control over refugee populations. Chiefs were expected to monitor refugee movements and report activities to colonial authorities. As a result, refugee participation in local

society occurred within a framework of administrative supervision rather than complete freedom of movement. Despite this limitation, the use of local leadership structures created opportunities for interaction and coexistence that contributed to the broader process of social integration.

The findings of this study are consistent with Moro (2004), who argues that local government institutions played an important role in managing refugee affairs in Uganda and in maintaining order within refugee settlements. Similarly, Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2003) observe that local administrative structures significantly influenced the nature of interactions between refugees and host communities. The findings also support Jacobsen (2005), who contends that refugee integration is more likely to occur when refugees are incorporated into existing local governance arrangements rather than being administered through entirely separate systems. Likewise, Verdirame and Harrell-Bond (2005) argue that access to local administrative structures enhances refugees' ability to participate in social and economic life. However, this study extends these arguments by demonstrating that during the late colonial period, Native Authorities and chiefs were not merely administrative agents of government. They also served as practical mediators between refugees and host communities, facilitating everyday interactions that contributed to social integration within refugee-hosting areas. Their role therefore went beyond governance and became an important mechanism through which refugees were incorporated into local social structures.

This mediating role is vividly captured in the recollection of a local elder who served as a youth messenger for a sub-county chief in the late 1950s:

> *When a refugee's cattle strayed into a local farmer's garden, the matter did not go to the distant District Commissioner in Masindi. It was brought to the local Mukuru W'ekika. The Mukuru W'ekika would call both parties, assess the damage, and order the refugee to compensate the farmer with a portion of their harvest or labor. Because the chief was respected by both sides, the dispute ended there, and peace was maintained.*

This practical, localized justice system was instrumental in preventing minor resource conflicts from escalating into broader communal hostility, thereby laying the early groundwork for social cohesion in the area.

5.2.3 First Obote government (1962–1971)

5.2.3.1 Settlement farming as an integration strategy

During the Obote I administration (1962–1971), settlement farming became one of the principal government strategies for managing and integrating refugees into Ugandan society. Building upon the colonial settlement model, the government allocated agricultural land to refugees, particularly Rwandan, Sudanese and Congolese refugees, and encouraged crop cultivation and livestock keeping as a means of achieving self-sufficiency. The policy aimed to reduce dependence on relief assistance while enabling refugees to contribute to local agricultural production and rural development.

Government records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that refugee settlements established during the 1960s were designed around agricultural production (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 10C, Box 4, ARC-2B4, *12th session of the Executive Committee*, 30 October 1964, as cited in Betts, 2021). Refugees were allocated plots of land for cultivation and were expected to sustain themselves through farming activities. District administrative reports from southwestern Uganda show that Rwandan refugees were settled on agricultural land under government supervision and encouraged to cultivate crops alongside surrounding communities.

Charsley (1968), in his study of population growth and development in northeast Bunyoro, observed that a restricted Rwandan refugee settlement established in 1964 later evolved into a farming settlement in which refugee families were allocated approximately ten-acre plots for cultivation. He notes that the settlement attracted agricultural activity and contributed to local economic development through increased production and labor participation. Similarly, Splansky (1971) reported that after earlier attempts at cooperative farming proved ineffective, refugee households were allocated individual plots of farmland. By the late 1960s, many refugee families had begun producing agricultural surpluses beyond subsistence requirements. The study further noted that government expenditure in support of refugee settlements stimulated economic activity in neighboring trading centers. Reports from the Uganda Argus during the mid-1960s frequently referred to government efforts to establish self-supporting refugee communities through agriculture. One report observed that refugee settlements were expected to become productive agricultural units capable of supporting resident populations while reducing pressure on government resources.

A Focus Group Discussion with elderly host-community farmers in Kiryandongo corroborated this economic interdependence, highlighting how policy translated into daily reality:

> *We did not see them just as refugees; we saw them as extra hands during the planting season. The government gave them land, yes, but it was the shared hoeing and the Saturday markets at Bweyale that made us one people. We exchanged cassava cuttings for their labor. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 09th October 2025).*

A report in *The Uganda Argus* (August 12, 1967) highlighted the tangible results of this policy, noting that refugee settlements in the Bunyoro region had produced a recorded surplus of 150 tons of maize that year, much of which was sold in local district markets, directly injecting capital into the host community's economy. Oral testimonies obtained during this study also support these findings. One participant stated:

> *Most refugees depended on farming. Government gave them land to cultivate and many exchanged labor and farm produce with local people. (Oral interview with a host community, Kiryandongo, 10th October 2025).*

Another participant recalled that:

> *The refugees worked in their gardens and sold some of their harvests in nearby markets. They became part of the local farming economy. (Oral interview with host community elder, Kiryandongo,10th October 2025).*

Figure 3 illustrates settlement farming in Kiryandongo today. Although the photograph was taken during fieldwork in 2025, it shows the continuation of the household plot farming that began in the 1960s.

Figure 3: Refugee households cultivating allocated plots in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement (present day)

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher on 10th October 2025

Settlement farming facilitated social integration by creating regular interaction between refugees and host communities within a shared agricultural environment. Through cultivation, refugees engaged in labor exchange, shared farming knowledge, accessed local markets, and participated in economic activities that connected them to surrounding populations. The policy also reduced dependence on relief assistance and enabled refugees to contribute to local production. As refugee households became economically active, relationships emerged through trade, transportation of produce, acquisition of farming inputs, and participation in community agricultural activities. These interactions gradually incorporated refugees into local socioeconomic networks. However, settlement farming was not solely an integration measure. The government also viewed agricultural settlements as a means of controlling refugee populations and limiting movement to designated rural areas. Refugees were expected to remain within settlement boundaries and utilize allocated land under administrative supervision. Consequently, integration occurred within a controlled settlement framework rather than through unrestricted participation in wider Ugandan society. Despite these limitations, settlement farming provided an avenue through which refugees

established livelihoods, interacted with host populations, and became participants in local economic life during the Obote I period.

The findings of this study support Rogge (1981), who argues that refugee settlement schemes in Africa provided opportunities for self-sufficiency while facilitating integration into rural host communities. His assessment of refugee settlement programmes identifies Uganda as one of the countries where agricultural settlements enabled refugees to participate in local economic systems rather than remaining entirely dependent on external assistance. The findings also agree with Charsley (1968) and Splansky (1971), who demonstrate that government-supported refugee settlements in Uganda were organized around agricultural production and land allocation. Their studies show that refugee farming contributed to local economic activity and encouraged interaction between refugees and neighboring communities. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Betts (2021), who argues that Uganda has historically linked refugee settlement policies to broader development objectives by promoting refugee self-reliance through productive economic activities. Although Betts discusses a broader historical period, the evidence from the Obote I era demonstrates that this approach had earlier foundations in the agricultural settlement policies of the 1960s. However, this study extends existing scholarship by showing that settlement farming functioned not only as an economic strategy but also as a social integration mechanism. While previous studies primarily focus on production, self-sufficiency, and rural development, the evidence from Kiryandongo indicates that farming created everyday interactions through labor exchange, trade, and community engagement, thereby contributing to the social integration of refugees within host communities.

5.2.3.2 Expansion of refugee settlements

During the Obote I administration (1962–1971), the government expanded refugee settlements in response to increasing refugee inflows from neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda and Sudan. The expansion of settlements was intended to accommodate growing refugee populations while maintaining administrative oversight and promoting economic self-sufficiency. New settlement areas were established and existing ones enlarged under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, often with support from international humanitarian agencies, Through this expansion, the government sought to manage refugee populations while facilitating their incorporation into rural communities.

Government records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that refugee numbers increased significantly during the 1960s, creating pressure on existing settlement facilities, As a result, additional land was allocated for refugee settlement, particularly in southwestern Uganda where large numbers of Rwandan refugees were accommodated. Grundy (1968) observed that the number of Sudanese refugees in East Africa increased considerably during the decade, with Uganda receiving a substantial proportion of those displaced by conflict in southern Sudan (now South Sudan). The growing refugee population required the government to establish and expand settlement areas capable of accommodating new arrivals. District administrative reports from Ankole, Bunyoro, and West Nile reveal that refugee settlements were enlarged to provide residential and agricultural land for incoming refugee households, Settlement expansion was accompanied by the appointment of administrative personnel responsible for supervising settlement activities and coordinating assistance programmes.

UNHCR operational reports from the late 1960s similarly noted continued cooperation with the Ugandan government in developing settlement infrastructure and supporting refugee accommodation (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 1, Box 324, 21/UGA/RWA, *A meeting with the Uganda delegates to the Executive Committee*, 28 October 1968, as cited in Betts, 2021). These reports documented efforts to establish additional settlement space, distribute agricultural land, and provide basic facilities for refugee populations. The Uganda Argus reported on several occasions during the 1960s that government authorities were opening new settlement areas and extending existing ones to address increasing refugee arrivals. Newspaper coverage portrayed settlement expansion as a practical response to both humanitarian needs and rural development objectives.

Archival data from a 1969 UNHCR operational update noted that the expansion of settlements in the Bunyoro region involved the deliberate allocation of an additional 2,500 acres of land to accommodate new Sudanese and Rwandan arrivals, specifically sited adjacent to existing host villages to "foster natural economic symbiosis, A Key Informant Interview host community member on 10th October 2025) with a former sub-county development officer reflected on this intentional spatial planning:

> *The directive from Kampala was clear: do not isolate them. When we expanded the settlement boundaries in the late 1960s, we ensured the new plots bordered the local*

> *villages. This meant they had to use the same footpaths to the market and the same river crossings, which naturally forced interaction and broke down initial suspicions. (KII with Former Local Administrator, Kiryandongo, 11st October 2025).*

Oral testimony collected during this study also points to the continued growth of refugee settlements during the Obote period. One participant stated that:

> *As more refugees arrived, government identified additional land and expanded settlement areas. Refugees were settled near communities that were already established. (Oral interview with community elder, Kiryandongo, 11st October 2025).*

Another participant recalled:

> *The settlements kept growing because people continued arriving from neighboring countries. New villages were created and services gradually followed. (Oral interview with community member, Kiryandongo, 11st October 2025).*

The expansion of refugee settlements facilitated social integration by bringing refugees into sustained contact with host communities. As settlement areas expanded, refugees increasingly shared physical spaces, transportation routes, water sources, markets, and agricultural environments with local populations. These interactions encouraged the development of social and economic relationships between the two groups. Settlement expansion also enabled the government to distribute refugees across different regions rather than concentrating them in a few overcrowded locations. This reduced pressure on existing settlements and created opportunities for refugees to participate in local economic activities. The establishment of new settlements often stimulated demand for labor, agricultural inputs, and commercial exchange, thereby strengthening connections between refugees and host communities. At the same time, settlement expansion remained closely linked to government objectives of population management and security. Refugees were generally directed to designated settlement areas where their activities could be monitored by state authorities. Consequently, while expansion increased opportunities for interaction, it also maintained a system of administrative control inherited from earlier refugee policies. Nevertheless, the establishment and enlargement of settlements provided an important framework through which refugees accessed land, livelihoods, and community networks. The

expansion of settlements therefore contributed to the gradual incorporation of refugees into the social and economic life of refugee-hosting areas.

The findings of this study support Pirouet (1988), who argues that Uganda responded to large refugee influxes during the 1960s by establishing and expanding settlement schemes designed to accommodate displaced populations while maintaining public order. Her work demonstrates that settlement expansion became a central feature of Uganda's refugee policy during the post-independence period. The findings are also consistent with Watson (1991), who observes that refugee settlements provided an organized framework through which refugees could access land, housing, and livelihood opportunities while interacting with surrounding communities. Similarly, Adelman and Suhrke (1996) note that settlement development became an important component of international and governmental responses to refugee displacement in the Great Lakes region. Furthermore, the findings agree with Grundy (1968), who highlights the rapid increase in refugee populations in East Africa and the consequent need for governments such as Uganda to develop mechanisms for accommodating displaced persons. The expansion of settlements represented one such mechanism through which Uganda managed rising refugee numbers. However, this study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that settlement expansion was not merely an administrative response to population growth. Evidence from Kiryandongo indicates that the enlargement of settlements created additional opportunities for everyday interaction between refugees and host communities through shared markets, agricultural activities, transport networks, and local services. Settlement expansion therefore contributed not only to refugee accommodation but also to the broader process of social integration.

5.2.3.3 Provision of social services through government–humanitarian collaboration

During the Obote I administration (1962–1971), the Ugandan government promoted the social integration of refugees through collaboration with humanitarian organizations in the provision of essential social services. As refugee numbers increased following conflicts in neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda and Sudan, the government recognized that refugee welfare could not be sustained through land allocation and agricultural settlement alone. Consequently, government agencies worked alongside international organizations, missionary groups, and voluntary agencies to provide education, health services, water facilities, and community welfare programmes within refugee settlements. These services were intended not only to meet

humanitarian needs but also to facilitate interaction between refugees and host communities and to encourage refugees' participation in local social and economic life.

Government records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that refugee settlements established during the 1960s were planned to include basic social infrastructure such as schools, health centers, and water points. Annual administrative reports show that district authorities frequently coordinated with humanitarian agencies to extend these services to refugee populations. A Ministry report of 1967 noted that "government departments and voluntary agencies continued to cooperate in the provision of educational and medical facilities within refugee settlement areas," acknowledging the joint responsibility for refugee welfare. UNHCR operational reports from the late 1960s similarly document partnerships between the Ugandan government and humanitarian organizations in supporting refugee settlements. These reports indicate that educational materials, medical supplies, and technical personnel were supplied through collaborative arrangements involving government ministries and international agencies. A UNHCR report observed that assistance programmes sought to promote "normal community life through the provision of social and welfare services necessary for self-supporting settlements. Newspaper reports from the period also documented these developments. The Uganda Argus reported on several occasions that schools and health facilities established in refugee-hosting areas served both refugee and local populations. Such arrangements created opportunities for daily interaction between refugees and Ugandan citizens, particularly among children attending schools and families accessing health services.

This collaborative model laid the groundwork for the integrated service delivery seen in Kiryandongo today. While specific facilities have been upgraded over the decades, the foundational principle of shared access remains evident in modern infrastructure such as the Panyadoli Health Centre IV (the main referral facility for both populations), Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II. An FGD with female community health workers highlighted the enduring social impact of this shared model:

> *When the clinics and water points were built, they were for everyone. A mother from the village and a mother from the settlement would sit on the same bench waiting for immunization. That is where the real integration happened not in government offices,*

but in the waiting rooms. (FGD with Community Health Workers, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).

Figure 4: A water facility serving refugees and host communities in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher on 13th October 2025

Oral testimonies collected during this study further support these findings. On 13th October 2025 a participant from Cluster G explained that:

> *The government worked with church organizations and aid agencies to build schools and clinics. Refugee children studied with local children, and people met regularly at health centers and community activities. This helped us to know one another better. (Oral interview with host community member, Kiryandongo, 13rd October 2025)*

Another participant recalled:

> *When services came to the settlement, even people from nearby villages benefited. The schools and medical centers were shared, and that reduced separation between refugees and the host community. (Oral interview with host community member, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025)*

The provision of social services through government–humanitarian collaboration facilitated refugee social integration in several ways. First, access to education enabled refugee children to interact with host-community children within shared learning environments. Schools became important spaces for language acquisition, socialization, and the development of interpersonal relationships across community boundaries. Through daily interaction, children and their families developed social networks that extended beyond refugee settlements. Health services provided common meeting points for refugees and local residents. Shared access to clinics and health centers encouraged regular contact between the two populations and reduced perceptions that refugees were isolated from surrounding communities. These interactions fostered familiarity and contributed to peaceful coexistence. The provision of social services strengthened refugees' sense of belonging within Ugandan society. Access to education, healthcare, and community welfare programmes improved living conditions and enabled refugees to participate more fully in social life. Rather than remaining dependent recipients of relief, refugees increasingly became members of functioning communities with access to institutions similar to those used by host populations. The collaboration also benefited host communities by extending social infrastructure into previously underserved areas. As local residents gained access to schools, health centers, and water facilities established within refugee settlements, positive relations between refugees and hosts were encouraged. The sharing of services reduced competition over resources and created mutual interests in maintaining community facilities.

The findings of this study correspond with the arguments of scholars who view social service provision as a significant mechanism for refugee integration. Adelman and Suhrke (1996) argue that refugee policies are more likely to promote successful integration when humanitarian assistance is linked to community development initiatives that benefit both refugees and host populations. The evidence from Uganda demonstrates that government–humanitarian collaboration created shared institutions that encouraged interaction and social inclusion. Similarly, Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) contend that access to education and social services enhances refugees' participation in host societies by creating opportunities for everyday social engagement. The integration experiences reported by participants in Kiryandongo support this interpretation, particularly regarding schools and health facilities that brought refugees and local residents together. Mulumba (2014) further argues that Uganda's refugee policy tradition has historically been characterized by efforts to provide refugees with access to social services

alongside local populations. Although much of her analysis focuses on later periods, the evidence from the Obote I era indicates that elements of this approach were already emerging during the 1960s through government cooperation with humanitarian organizations. However, Krause (2014) cautions that the availability of social services alone does not automatically guarantee full social integration, as broader political, economic, and cultural factors also shape refugee–host relations. This observation is relevant to the Ugandan case because, despite improvements in education and healthcare, challenges associated with resource limitations and growing refugee numbers continued to affect integration outcomes. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that government–humanitarian collaboration in the provision of social services constituted an important initiative that facilitated refugee social integration during the Obote I period.

5.2.3.4 Refugee access to education and skills development programmes

During the Obote I administration (1962–1971), the Ugandan government facilitated refugee social integration by promoting access to education and vocational skills development within refugee settlements. Recognizing that long-term refugee welfare required more than immediate humanitarian assistance, government authorities, often in collaboration with missionary organizations and humanitarian agencies, supported the establishment of schools and training programmes for refugee children and adults. These initiatives aimed to improve literacy, develop practical skills, and prepare refugees for productive participation in both settlement and national economic activities.

Government administrative records from the 1960s indicate that educational facilities were established in major refugee settlements with support from district authorities and voluntary agencies. Reports from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs show that refugee children were enrolled in primary schools established within settlements, while efforts were made to ensure that educational services met national standards. UNHCR reports from the late 1960s also document educational assistance programmes implemented in refugee-hosting areas. These reports indicate that schools received teaching materials, trained personnel, and infrastructural support through partnerships involving the Ugandan government and international organizations. A UNHCR report noted that education was regarded as an important component of refugee self-reliance because it prepared refugees “for productive participation in community and economic life.” Newspaper reports published in the Uganda Argus during the period similarly

referred to educational initiatives undertaken in refugee settlements. Several reports described the construction of classroom blocks, the recruitment of teachers, and efforts to provide educational opportunities to displaced populations arriving from neighboring countries.

The early educational initiatives of the 1960s established the precedent for the fully integrated school system present in Kiryandongo today. The foundational community schools built during this era eventually evolved into institutions like Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, and later, government-aided institutions like Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and St. Mary's Secondary School, all of which currently serve a mixed population of refugee and national pupils. A Key Informant Interview with a retired headteacher emphasized this continuity:

> *The policy from the very beginning was that the school bell rings for everyone. Refugee children and local children sat on the same wooden benches, learned the same national curriculum, and played the same games. That shared education is the strongest thread of integration we have. (KII with Retired Educator, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).*

Oral testimonies collected during this study confirm the existence of educational and skills-development initiatives. One Participant recalled that:

> *Schools were established in the settlement, and children attended classes together. Some adults were also taught practical skills such as carpentry and farming methods. These activities helped refugees become more independent. (Oral interview with KII, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).*

Another participant explained that:

> *Education helped refugees interact with Ugandans. Children learned together, while adults who received training could work and support their families. This reduced dependence on aid. (Oral interview with a refuge, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025). Historical studies also support these observations.*

Charsley (1968) noted that educational facilities formed part of refugee settlement programmes established for Rwandan refugees in Uganda, while Splansky (1971) observed that self-settlement

and organized settlement schemes frequently incorporated educational services as part of broader integration efforts.

Access to education and skills development facilitated refugee social integration in several ways. First, schools provided opportunities for regular interaction between refugee and host-community children. Through shared learning environments, students developed friendships, acquired language skills, and became familiar with local cultural practices. Such interactions helped reduce social barriers between refugees and Ugandan communities. Educational opportunities enhanced refugees' capacity to participate in economic activities. Literacy and vocational training improved employability and enabled refugees to engage more effectively in agriculture, trade, and skilled occupations. As refugees became economically productive, they developed stronger links with surrounding communities and contributed to local development. Skills-development programmes promoted self-reliance among adult refugees. Training in agriculture, carpentry, tailoring, and other practical activities reduced dependence on external assistance and enabled refugees to support their households through productive labor. Economic participation strengthened their integration into local markets and social networks. The educational initiatives also contributed to long-term integration by equipping younger generations with knowledge and skills that enabled them to interact more effectively within Ugandan society. Through providing refugees with opportunities for personal development and social advancement, the government helped create conditions that encouraged inclusion rather than marginalization.

The findings of this study align with the arguments of scholars who regard education as a central mechanism for refugee integration. Dryden-Peterson (2016) argues that education enables refugees to build social relationships, acquire essential skills, and participate more effectively in host societies. The evidence from Uganda demonstrates that educational opportunities within refugee settlements contributed to these outcomes by promoting interaction and participation. Similarly, Hovil (2016) contends that access to education strengthens refugees' ability to establish meaningful connections within host communities and improves prospects for long-term integration. The experiences reported by participants support this view, particularly regarding shared schooling and skills acquisition. Betts (2021) further argues that refugee self-reliance policies are more effective when accompanied by investments in human capital development, including education and vocational training. The Ugandan government's support for educational programmes during the Obote I period reflects this principle, as training and learning opportunities enhanced refugees'

capacity for productive engagement. However, Ager and Strang (2008) caution that education alone cannot guarantee successful integration if broader structural barriers persist. While educational programmes promoted social interaction and economic participation, challenges associated with limited resources, infrastructure constraints, and growing refugee populations sometimes restricted their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that access to education and skills development constituted an important government initiative that facilitated refugee social integration during the Obote I administration.

5.2.4 Idi Amin government (1971–1979)

5.2.4.1 Continuation and expansion of refugee settlements

Following his assumption of power in January 1971, President Idi Amin maintained and expanded Uganda's refugee settlement programme as a major government initiative for managing and integrating refugee populations. Although the Amin regime is often remembered for political repression and the expulsion of Asians in 1972, evidence indicates that the government continued to accommodate African refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) through organized settlement schemes. Existing settlements inherited from the Obote administration were maintained, while new settlements were established and others expanded to accommodate increasing refugee populations. These settlements were intended to provide refugees with access to land, housing, agricultural opportunities, and social services while facilitating their incorporation into local communities.

Government records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the 1970s indicate that refugee settlements remained the primary framework through which refugees were accommodated in Uganda. Administrative reports show continued government supervision of established settlements and the allocation of resources for their maintenance. Refugee settlements in southwestern Uganda and West Nile continued to receive refugees arriving from neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda and Sudan. UNHCR operational reports from the period similarly document Uganda's continued reliance on organized settlements as the preferred approach to refugee management (UNHCR Archives, *Report on a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Culture and Community Development*, 7 March 1978, as cited in Betts, 2021). These reports indicate that international assistance was channeled toward improving settlement infrastructure, agricultural production, education, and health services. UNHCR records further show that the

Ugandan government collaborated with international agencies in upgrading existing settlements and establishing new facilities for newly arriving refugees. Archival records also point to the establishment and expansion of settlements such as Ibuga for refugees from Zaire and settlement arrangements in Karamoja for Sudanese refugees. Government correspondence with UNHCR demonstrates efforts to secure financial and technical assistance for these programmes. By the mid-1970s, refugee settlements had become important centers of agricultural production and community development.

Oral testimony collected during this study confirms the continuation of settlement programmes under Amin. One participant noted that:

> *Even when Amin came to power, refugees continued to receive land in settlements. The settlements were expanded because more refugees were arriving from neighboring countries. People cultivated crops, built homes, and lived alongside Ugandan communities. (Oral interview with a community elder, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).*

Another participant recalled:

> *The government still encouraged refugees to stay in organized settlements. New areas were opened, and services such as schools and health centers continued to operate with support from aid agencies. (Oral interview with a refuge, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025)*

Historical studies provide additional support for these observations. Gould (1974) noted that refugee settlements in Uganda continued to operate under government supervision during the Amin period. Betts (2021) similarly observes that Uganda maintained and expanded settlement-based approaches to refugee assistance, supported by international organizations and development partners.

The continuation and expansion of refugee settlements facilitated social integration in several ways. First, settlements provided refugees with secure access to land for residence and agricultural production. This enabled refugee households to establish stable livelihoods and reduced dependence on emergency relief assistance. Economic self-sufficiency encouraged interaction with local communities through trade, labor exchange, and market participation. Settlement

expansion reduced overcrowding in existing refugee-hosting areas and enabled the orderly accommodation of new arrivals. Organized settlement planning created opportunities for the provision of schools, health facilities, water sources, and community services that supported both refugees and host populations. Shared access to these services promoted regular interaction and strengthened social relations between the two groups. The settlement system encouraged long-term residence and community formation. Refugees were able to establish homes, cultivate land, and participate in local economic activities, creating conditions that facilitated their incorporation into the social and economic life of surrounding communities. The settlements therefore functioned not merely as places of refuge but also as spaces through which integration could occur. The government's willingness to continue investing in settlement programmes despite broader political instability demonstrates that refugee settlements remained an important component of national refugee policy throughout the Amin era. Through these settlements, refugees gained opportunities to rebuild their lives while developing social and economic ties with Ugandan society.

The findings of this study support the argument of Betts (2021) that Uganda's refugee settlement model has historically been based on the provision of land and opportunities for self-reliance rather than prolonged encampment. The continuation and expansion of settlements during the Amin period demonstrate the persistence of this approach despite changes in political leadership. Similarly, Pirouet (1988) argues that refugee settlements in Uganda provided an environment through which refugees could establish livelihoods and become incorporated into local communities. The evidence from this study indicates that settlement expansion enabled refugees to access land, services, and economic opportunities that promoted social integration. Watson (1991) further contends that many refugees experienced relatively greater opportunities for mobility and community participation during the Amin period than under previous administrations. The maintenance and growth of settlement programmes contributed to these opportunities by providing a foundation for economic and social engagement. However, Soi de (2020) argues that refugee policies under Amin were often shaped by political considerations, including the regime's desire to cultivate support among refugee populations and strengthen its influence in border regions. This interpretation suggests that while settlement expansion promoted refugee integration, it also served broader political objectives of the state. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that the continuation and expansion of refugee settlements constituted a

significant government initiative that facilitated refugee social integration during the Amin administration.

Archival data from a 1976 UNHCR operational report on Uganda specifically highlighted the greater Kiryandongo (then Kigumba) area, noting that the settlement had successfully transitioned into a semi-permanent agricultural community where "refugee and host populations increasingly share local market facilities and primary health outposts" This shared infrastructure was corroborated by a Focus Group Discussion on 13th October 2025) with elderly host-community members in Kiryandongo, who recalled the tangible impacts of this expansion:

> *In the 1970s, the settlement boundaries expanded right up to our villages. The government and aid agencies-built boreholes and small dispensaries that we both used. We farmed side-by-side, and the refugees brought new crop varieties and farming techniques that eventually benefited our own gardens. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 13th October 2025).*

This testimony illustrates that settlement expansion during this era was not merely a spatial exercise, but a catalyst for shared resource utilization and agricultural knowledge exchange.

5.2.4.2 Promotion of refugees' freedom of movement and economic participation (free-living policy)

During the Amin administration (1971–1979), the Ugandan government adopted a relatively flexible approach to refugee mobility, commonly reflected in what was described in policy and humanitarian reports as the "free-living" arrangement. Under this approach, refugees were not strictly confined to settlements but were allowed to move, reside, and work in different parts of the country. This initiative enabled refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and Zaire to engage more actively in rural and urban economic activities, including agriculture, petty trade, and wage labor. Unlike the more restrictive settlement controls associated with the earlier Obote administration, the Amin government permitted a broader level of movement, which contributed to increased interaction between refugees and host communities.

Administrative records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs during the 1970s indicate that refugee supervision systems were adjusted to allow greater mobility of registered refugees. While settlement command structures remained in place, enforcement of strict residency controls was

reduced in several regions. District reports from West Nile and southwestern Uganda document increasing cases of refugees residing outside designated settlements and participating in local economic activities without formal restriction. UNHCR operational documents from the mid-1970s similarly describe a shift in Uganda's refugee management approach, noting that many refugees were living among host populations rather than remaining exclusively in organized settlements. A UNHCR field report observed that refugees were increasingly "integrated into the rural economy through farming, livestock keeping, and market participation," and that mobility contributed to improved self-reliance outcomes. Archival correspondence between UNHCR and Ugandan authorities further indicates that refugee mobility was tolerated and, in some cases, encouraged as part of broader self-reliance strategies (UNHCR Archives, Fonds 11, Series 1, Box 324, 21/UGA/RWA, *A meeting with the Uganda delegates to the Executive Committee*, 28 October 1968, as cited in Betts, 2021; UNHCR Archives, *Uganda report on UNHCR activities 1979*, as cited in Betts, 2021). These documents highlight that refugees were able to access land informally, engage in seasonal labor, and participate in trading networks linking rural and urban centers.

Oral testimonies collected in this study confirm the existence of increased mobility during this period. Participant stated:

> *People were not forced to stay only in settlements. Many refugees moved to nearby towns to work or trade, while others continued farming in villages with local people. (Oral interview with a refuge, 13th October 2025).*

Another participant noted that:

> *Refugees were working freely. Some were farmers, others were traders in local markets. They mixed with Ugandans in daily life, and there was no strict restriction on movement. (Oral interview with a host community member, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).*

Scholarly accounts also support these observations. Gould (1974) notes that refugee populations in Uganda during the early 1970s experienced relatively open movement patterns compared to other refugee-hosting contexts in Africa. Betts (2021) further observes that Uganda's refugee system allowed significant economic participation outside formal settlements, particularly in agriculture and informal trade.

The promotion of refugee freedom of movement facilitated social integration by increasing direct interaction between refugees and host communities. As refugees moved beyond settlement boundaries, they engaged in everyday economic and social activities with Ugandans in markets, farms, and local trading centers. These interactions contributed to the formation of social ties, mutual dependence, and shared livelihoods. Economic participation outside settlements also improved refugee self-reliance. Through engaging in wage labor, agriculture, and trade, refugees were able to generate income and support their households without exclusive reliance on humanitarian assistance. This economic independence strengthened their ability to participate in local economies and increased their visibility within host communities. The relaxation of movement controls further contributed to the gradual blending of refugee and host populations in rural and peri-urban areas. Shared economic spaces reduced social separation and created conditions for everyday cooperation. Refugees and Ugandans often worked together in agriculture, shared markets, and participated in informal exchange systems that reinforced social integration. However, the flexibility of movement also created uneven outcomes. While some refugees benefited from increased opportunities, others experienced insecurity due to lack of formal protection mechanisms outside settlements. The absence of strict regulatory systems in some areas meant that access to services such as education and health care varied across regions. Despite these limitations, the overall effect of increased mobility was greater social and economic interaction between refugees and host communities.

The findings align with Pirouet (1995), who argues that Uganda's refugee policy historically allowed significant movement and interaction between refugees and host populations, particularly in rural areas. This mobility contributed to the gradual incorporation of refugees into local social and economic structures. Watson (1991) similarly observes that refugee life in Uganda during the 1970s was characterized by a high degree of interaction with surrounding communities, with many refugees engaging in farming and trade alongside Ugandans. The evidence from this study confirms these patterns of integration through everyday economic activity. Betts (2021) further argues that refugee self-reliance is strengthened when movement restrictions are relaxed, allowing refugees to access wider labor markets and economic opportunities. The Ugandan case during the Amin period demonstrates how mobility contributed to refugee participation in local economies and reduced dependency on humanitarian aid. However, Soi de (2020) cautions that the apparent openness of refugee mobility under Amin should be understood within a broader political context,

where refugee populations were also used strategically to support regime interests in border regions. This revealed that while freedom of movement facilitated integration, it was not solely driven by humanitarian considerations but also by political and security calculations.

This "free-living" phenomenon was extensively documented by Charsley (1974) in his seminal study of self-settled refugees in the Kigumba (Kiryandongo) area. Charsley noted that by the mid-1970s, a significant portion of the refugee population had moved outside formal settlement boundaries to engage in independent farming and petty trade, effectively blending into the local rural economy. A Key Informant Interview on 13th October 2025) with a retired local market chairman vividly captured this era of economic blending:

> *During the 1970s, you could hardly tell who was a refugee and who was a local at the Bweyale market. The 'free-livings' brought surplus maize, beans, and charcoal to sell. They paid local market dues, rented rooms in trading centers, and their children played together with ours. The freedom to move made them our neighbors, not just camp dwellers. (KII with Retired Local Market Chairman, Kiryandongo, 13th October 2025).*

This everyday economic interdependence, facilitated by relaxed movement controls, laid a durable foundation for social cohesion that outlasted the political regime itself.

5.2.4.3 Refugee recruitment into state structures (military, civil service and administration)

During the Amin administration (1971–1979), the Ugandan government promoted the integration of certain refugee groups through their incorporation into state institutions, including the military, civil service, and public administration. Unlike previous governments that primarily viewed refugees as beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance, Amin increasingly regarded refugee communities as potential political allies and sources of manpower. Refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and Zaire were recruited into various government structures and, in some cases, appointed to positions of influence within the state. Through these opportunities, refugees gained access to employment, political participation, and social recognition, thereby strengthening their integration into Ugandan society.

Government records and historical accounts indicate that the Amin regime recruited substantial numbers of refugees into the Uganda Army and other security institutions. Following the 1971 coup, Amin sought to strengthen his support base and relied heavily on individuals from border

communities, including refugees from neighboring countries. Military recruitment records and intelligence reports from the period show that Sudanese and Rwandan refugees were incorporated into the armed forces and other state security agencies. Historical studies also document the appointment of refugees to senior administrative and political positions. Mamdani (2001) notes that several refugees occupied influential roles within Idi Amin Dada's government, while Soi de (2020) identifies instances where refugees were appointed to positions within the civil service and local administration. These appointments provided refugees with opportunities for participation in public affairs and access to state resources. Archival records further indicate that refugee communities were not confined solely to settlement areas but increasingly participated in government-supported economic and administrative activities. Correspondence between government officials and district administrators refers to refugees serving as local officials, agricultural extension workers, and intermediaries between refugee communities and state institutions.

Oral testimony collected during this study supports these observations. One participant explained:

> *During Amin's time, some refugees worked with government offices and security agencies. They were trusted by the government and became part of public administration in some areas. (Oral interview with host elder 14th October 2025).*

Another participant recalled:

> *There were refugees who joined the army and others who got government jobs. This made them feel accepted because they were participating in national affairs like other citizens. (Oral interview with elder Kiryandongo, 14th October 2025)*

Historical evidence also indicates that some refugee leaders acted as representatives of their communities in dealings with government authorities, further strengthening links between refugee populations and state institutions.

The recruitment of refugees into state structures facilitated social integration by creating opportunities for direct participation in national institutions. Through employment in the military, civil service, and local administration, refugees became active contributors to state functions rather than remaining isolated recipients of humanitarian support. Such participation strengthened their sense of belonging and increased their visibility within Ugandan society. Employment within

government institutions also enhanced economic integration. Refugees who secured positions in public service obtained stable sources of income and developed professional relationships with Ugandan colleagues. These interactions expanded social networks and encouraged greater incorporation into local communities. The inclusion of refugees in administrative roles further promoted communication between refugee populations and government authorities. Refugee representatives who worked within state structures often facilitated access to services, resolved disputes, and conveyed community concerns to government officials. This strengthened institutional links between refugee communities and the state. However, this form of integration was uneven and selective. Opportunities for participation were often concentrated among refugee groups perceived as politically useful to the regime. Consequently, integration into state structures was not available equally to all refugees. The initiative therefore combined elements of social inclusion with political calculation, reflecting broader characteristics of governance under Amin.

The findings support the argument of Soi de (2020) that refugee communities during the Amin period were integrated into state structures in ways that served both governmental and refugee interests. Refugees gained opportunities for employment and participation, while the regime benefited from expanded political support and administrative capacity. Similarly, Mamdani (2001) argues that Amin relied heavily on border populations, including refugees, to consolidate his authority following the 1971 coup. The recruitment of refugees into military and administrative institutions supports this interpretation and demonstrates how political considerations influenced integration policies. Prunier (1998) further notes that Rwandan refugees in Uganda acquired significant influence during the Amin era, particularly through their involvement in state institutions. The evidence presented in this study confirms that refugee participation extended beyond humanitarian programmes and included meaningful engagement in public affairs. Nevertheless, Watson (1991) observes that integration achieved through political patronage can be unstable because it depends on the continuation of a particular regime. This observation is particularly relevant to Uganda, where many refugees associated with Amin later faced suspicion and discrimination following his overthrow in 1979. Despite this limitation, the incorporation of refugees into state structures represented an important government initiative that promoted refugee social integration during the Amin administration by expanding opportunities for participation, employment, and public engagement.

The practical reality of this recruitment at the local level was confirmed by a Key Informant Interview with a former sub-county clerk who served during the late 1970s:

> *The regime needed educated people to run local offices, and many refugees had formal education. We had refugees working as clerks, agricultural extension workers, and even as local council advisors. Because they held official government letters of appointment, the host community had to respect them as state officials, which forced a level of social acceptance and interaction that didn't exist before. (KII with Former Sub-County Administrator, Kiryandongo, 14th October 2025).*

Archival newspaper coverage from the period reflects this policy in action; for instance, a 1977 report in The Uganda Argus highlighted government initiatives where refugee agricultural experts and clerical staff were formally deployed to assist local district farming cooperatives and administrative offices, thereby institutionalizing their role as active contributors to national development rather than mere dependents.

5.2.5 UNLF, Obote II and Okello governments (1979–1986)

The short-lived UNLF governments (1979–1980) and the Tito Okello Lutwa government (1985–1986) did not introduce new initiatives for refugees; existing settlements continued to operate with UNHCR support while government attention was absorbed by insecurity of the initiatives of this period were therefore those of the second Obote government, discussed below.

5.2.5.1 Maintenance of existing settlement structures

During the Obote II administration and the preceding transitional governments (1980–1985), the Ugandan government maintained the refugee settlement structures that had been established during earlier administrations. Despite the country's political instability, economic difficulties, and security challenges following the fall of Idi Amin, government authorities continued to recognize organized settlements as the principal mechanism for refugee accommodation and administration. Existing settlements remained operational, while new facilities such as Kyaka Settlement in Kabarole District were established to accommodate newly arrived refugee populations and to reduce pressure in border areas.

Evidence from contemporary reports indicates that the Ugandan government established a new refugee settlement at Kyaka in Kabarole District to accommodate approximately 15,000 refugees

who had been relocated from insecure border regions (Matheson, 1984). Similarly, Rogge (1981) observed that Uganda remained one of Africa's major asylum countries and continued to support rural refugee settlement schemes that had become largely self-supporting and integrated within local rural communities. Reports from the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA) and related development initiatives further show that government authorities continued to seek support for settlement infrastructure, including education, health, agriculture, and vocational services within refugee-hosting areas (Betts & Pitterman, 1984).

However, historical analysis reveals that this "maintenance" was also driven by strict population control motives. A retrospective report in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (February 11, 2010), analyzing the 1980–1985 period, documented how the Obote II regime actively strengthened the settlement model as a mechanism for surveillance, forcefully rounding up Rwandan and other refugees into designated zones to monitor their movements, which inadvertently fostered early anti-refugee sentiment among some host communities. A Focus Group Discussion with elderly host-community members in Kiryandongo reflected this dual reality:

> *In the early 80s, the government was very strict. They wanted all refugees in one place so they could count them and control them. But because we were neighbors, we still shared the same paths to the garden and the same water sources. The government's strict rules created tension, but our daily interactions kept the peace. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 14th October 2025).*

This showed that while state policy was restrictive, grassroots integration persisted through shared geography. The maintenance of refugee settlements provided an administrative framework through which refugees could access land, social services, and humanitarian assistance while remaining connected to surrounding host communities. Through preserving the settlement system rather than abandoning it during a period of national instability, the government ensured a degree of continuity in refugee management. The creation of Kyaka Settlement also demonstrated the state's continued commitment to organized refugee accommodation and reflected efforts to improve security and service delivery. Although settlement policies during this period were sometimes influenced by political and security concerns, they nevertheless provided opportunities for refugees to participate in agricultural production and local economic activities alongside host populations.

Scholars argue that organized settlement schemes remained an important mechanism for refugee integration in Uganda during the early 1980s. Rogge (1981) contends that Uganda's rural settlement programmes enabled refugees to achieve varying degrees of self-reliance while interacting with indigenous communities. Similarly, Betts and Pitterman (1984) maintain that the integrated rural development approach promoted within African refugee settlements sought to combine refugee assistance with broader community development through investments in agriculture, education, health services, and local infrastructure. These perspectives suggest that despite political challenges, the maintenance of settlement structures continued to contribute to refugee social integration.

5.2.5.2 Humanitarian assistance during political instability

During the Obote II period, the Ugandan government continued to facilitate humanitarian assistance for refugees despite widespread political instability, civil conflict, and economic constraints. Government agencies collaborated with international humanitarian organizations and donor governments to secure resources for refugee welfare and settlement management. These efforts enabled the continued provision of relief supplies, shelter materials, and essential social services to refugee populations residing within settlements.

Matheson (1984) reports that the Ugandan government obtained substantial international assistance from American, British, and European Economic Community sources to support refugee and returnee welfare programmes. The funding was used to provide relief items and construction materials intended to assist affected populations in rebuilding their livelihoods. In addition, ICARA initiatives and international development programmes during the early 1980s promoted support for refugee-hosting areas through investments in health, education, agricultural development, and training services (Betts & Pitterman, 1984). UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies continued to operate within Uganda and worked alongside government authorities in delivering assistance to refugee communities.

Government cooperation with humanitarian agencies helped sustain refugee welfare during a period characterized by insecurity and resource scarcity. The continuation of humanitarian programmes reduced the risk of severe deprivation among refugee populations and facilitated access to essential services that supported social integration. Educational opportunities, health services, agricultural inputs, and shelter assistance improved living conditions within settlements

while also generating benefits for neighboring host communities. Such interventions promoted interaction between refugees and local populations and reduced social tensions that might otherwise have emerged from competition over limited resources.

Archival records support this shared-benefit model. A 1983 UNHCR operational update for Uganda noted that humanitarian investments in the Bunyoro region, including the greater Kiryandongo area, were deliberately designed to upgrade existing local infrastructure, stating that "new boreholes and dispensary upgrades serve a combined population of refugees and nationals, preventing the creation of parallel, resentment-inducing systems" A Key Informant Interview on 14th October 2025) with a retired local health worker confirmed this enduring legacy:

> *Even during the hard times of the early 80s, the clinics and water points built with aid money were for everyone. A mother from the village and a mother from the settlement would sit on the same bench waiting for child immunizations. That shared waiting room was where the real integration happened, long before modern policies formalized it. (KII with Retired Community Health Worker, Kiryandongo, 14th October 2025).*

According to Betts and Pitterman (1984), refugee assistance programmes in Africa increasingly adopted integrated development approaches that linked humanitarian support to broader local development objectives. This approach recognized that refugee welfare and host-community development were interconnected. Chambers (1982) similarly argues that refugee assistance programmes were most effective when integrated into wider rural development strategies capable of benefiting both refugees and local residents. These scholarly perspectives indicate that humanitarian assistance during the Obote II period served not only relief objectives but also broader goals of social and economic integration.

5.2.5.3 Community-based cooperation between refugees and hosts

Between 1980 and 1985, refugee social integration continued to be supported through everyday cooperation between refugees and host communities in settlement areas. Although national politics and security concerns occasionally affected refugee relations, local interactions involving agricultural production, trade, education, and access to social services created opportunities for sustained engagement between refugees and Ugandan communities.

Studies of refugee settlements in Uganda during the early 1980s indicate that many settlement schemes functioned as rural communities where refugees participated in farming and economic activities alongside local residents (Rogge, 1981). The integrated rural development approach promoted by humanitarian agencies and development partners encouraged the sharing of infrastructure and services such as schools, health centers, water sources, and agricultural programmes between refugees and host populations (Betts & Pitterman, 1984). Furthermore, settlement policies enabled refugees to contribute labor and agricultural production to local economies, thereby strengthening community-level interactions.

Community-based cooperation promoted social integration by encouraging regular contact and mutual dependence between refugees and host populations. Shared access to land, markets, educational institutions, and health services facilitated social interaction and helped refugees become part of local community life. Economic exchanges arising from agricultural production and trade generated benefits for both groups and reduced the social isolation often associated with refugee displacement. While political developments occasionally strained refugee-host relations in certain regions, community-level cooperation remained an important avenue through which refugees established social networks and adapted to life in Uganda.

Rogge (1981) argues that rural settlement schemes in Africa were most sustainable when refugees became integrated into the social and economic life of surrounding communities. Likewise, Chambers (1982) maintains that successful refugee programmes depended on strengthening relationships between refugees and host populations through shared development opportunities. Betts and Pitterman (1984) further contend that integrated rural development initiatives promoted cooperation by ensuring that refugee assistance generated benefits beyond settlement boundaries. These arguments support the view that community-based cooperation remained an important government-supported avenue for refugee social integration during the Obote II and transitional government period.

Nowhere was this community-based cooperation more visible than in the education sector. The integrated rural development approach of the early 1980s laid the foundational precedent for the fully shared school system present in Kiryandongo today. The community schools supported during this transitional era eventually evolved into the integrated institutions that currently serve both populations, such as Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill

Primary School, Victory Primary School, and Panyadoli Primary School in the trading centre. A Focus Group Discussion on 14th October 2025) with retired teachers and community members highlighted this continuity:

> *The policy, even in those difficult years, was that the school bell rings for everyone. Refugee children and local children sat on the same wooden benches, learned the same national curriculum, and played the same games. That shared education is the strongest, most durable thread of integration we have in this district. (FGD with Retired Educators and Community Leaders, Kiryandongo, 14th October 2025).*

This historical continuity demonstrates that the integration of social services was not a sudden modern invention, but a practice rooted in decades of shared community cooperation.

5.2.6 NRM government (1986–2014)

5.2.6.1 Refugee Self-Reliance Strategy

One of the most significant government initiatives aimed at fostering refugee social integration during the National Resistance Movement (NRM) period was the introduction of the Refugee Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999. Developed jointly by the Government of Uganda and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the strategy sought to move refugee assistance from a relief-oriented approach towards a development-oriented model. The policy was designed to enable refugees and host communities to become economically productive and less dependent on humanitarian aid while promoting their participation in local development processes. Through the SRS, the government sought to integrate refugee services into national systems and encourage refugees to contribute actively to local economies and community life.

Available evidence indicates that the Self-Reliance Strategy was officially launched in 1999 as a joint initiative of the Government of Uganda and UNHCR. The strategy had two principal objectives: empowering refugees and host populations to support themselves and integrating refugee services into existing government structures (Kaiser, 2005). In 2002, the Minister responsible for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees issued directives requiring administrative and political leaders in refugee-hosting districts to implement the strategy. The programme emphasized agricultural production, vocational training, skills development, and income-generating activities as mechanisms for reducing dependence on food aid and promoting economic participation (Jallow

et al., 2004). By 2005, government and humanitarian reports indicated that thousands of refugees had reduced their reliance on food assistance as a result of participation in self-reliance activities. The strategy was implemented in major refugee-hosting settlements, including those accommodating Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda.

The Self-Reliance Strategy represented a major shift in Uganda's refugee policy by treating refugees as potential economic actors rather than passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. Through agricultural production, small-scale business activities, vocational training, and participation in local markets, refugees were encouraged to interact more closely with host communities and contribute to local economic development. The strategy also strengthened cooperation between government institutions, humanitarian agencies, and refugee communities in the delivery of services and development programmes. Through linking refugee welfare to broader district development objectives, the government attempted to create conditions under which refugees and host populations could pursue shared economic interests.

Nevertheless, implementation challenges affected the achievement of some objectives. Refugees often had limited influence over programme design, while insecurity in some settlements, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to markets reduced opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, vulnerable groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households frequently faced greater difficulties in achieving self-reliance than the policy initially anticipated. Despite these limitations, the strategy established a framework through which refugee assistance became increasingly connected to local development and community participation.

Scholars regard the Self-Reliance Strategy as a landmark development in Uganda's refugee policy. Kaiser (2005) argues that the strategy marked a transition from humanitarian relief towards a development-oriented approach that sought to incorporate refugees into broader socio-economic structures. Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) similarly contend that the strategy created opportunities for local integration by promoting shared development between refugee and host communities. Betts (2021) further maintains that Uganda's self-reliance model recognized refugees as productive economic actors capable of contributing to local and national economies when provided with appropriate opportunities and support. However, Werker (2002), Meyer (2006), and Kaiser (2006) argue that implementation was constrained by structural challenges,

including settlement remoteness, inadequate resources, and limited refugee participation in decision-making. Collectively, these perspectives indicate that although the Self-Reliance Strategy faced practical limitations, it represented a significant government initiative aimed at fostering refugee social and economic integration during the NRM period.

The tangible shift from relief to development was captured in a Key Informant Interview with a former settlement commandant who served during the rollout of the strategy:

> *Before 1999, the narrative was about distributing rations. After the Self-Reliance Strategy, the government and UNHCR started talking about 'partnerships'. We started giving out seeds and tools instead of just food, and we actively encouraged refugees to join local village savings groups alongside Ugandan nationals. (KII with Former Settlement Administrator, Kiryandongo, 15th October 2025).*

This paradigm shift was also highlighted in contemporary media; a *New Vision* report (March 15, 2003) noted that in settlements like Kiryandongo, over 60% of refugee households had transitioned to growing their own food and engaging in petty trade, fundamentally altering the dynamic from one of dependency to one of mutual economic contribution.

5.2.6.2 Allocation of agricultural land to refugees

The allocation of agricultural land to refugees constituted a central government initiative for promoting refugee social integration during the NRM period (1986–2014). Building upon Uganda's long-standing settlement approach, the government allocated plots of land within refugee settlements for cultivation and residential use. This policy was intended to enable refugees to produce food, generate income, reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance, and establish sustainable livelihoods while interacting with surrounding host communities. Land allocation became one of the principal mechanisms through which refugee self-reliance and local integration were pursued.

Evidence from government and humanitarian records indicates that the NRM administration continued to establish and expand rural refugee settlements where refugees were provided with land for both farming and residence. Kaiser (2002) notes that land was officially gazetted by the Government of Uganda for Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo Settlement in 1990, after which refugee households were allocated plots for cultivation and housing. Similarly, Merkx (2000)

reports that local settlement programmes implemented in northern Uganda from the early 1990s made agricultural land available to Sudanese refugees with the expectation that farming activities would facilitate self-sufficiency and integration. This policy was concretely realized in Kiryandongo when the Government of Uganda officially gazetted the area for refugee resettlement in 1990, primarily to accommodate Acholi and Sudanese refugees fleeing conflict. Archival records confirm that by 1992, a formal plot allocation process began, granting refugee families specific acreage for housing and agriculture, followed by a major census and re-registration exercise in 1995 to formalize these land rights (UNHCR / Government of Uganda, 1995). A Focus Group Discussion with host-community farmers highlighted the social impact of this spatial proximity:

> *When the government gave them land next to ours in the 90s, we were worried at first. But soon, we were sharing hoes, borrowing seeds, and hiring each other for harvest. The land allocation didn't just give them a farm; it made them our farming partners. (FGD with Host Community Farmers, Kiryandongo District, 15th October 2025).*

Jacobsen (2002) further observes that Uganda's settlement policy viewed refugee access to land as an important means of developing underutilized areas while simultaneously creating livelihood opportunities for displaced populations. The Self-Reliance Strategy introduced in 1999 reinforced this approach by promoting agricultural production as the primary pathway towards economic independence.

Agricultural land allocation promoted refugee integration by enabling refugees to engage in productive economic activities that were similar to those of surrounding host communities. Through cultivation, refugees participated in local agricultural markets, exchanged labor and farming knowledge with host populations, and contributed to food production within refugee-hosting districts. Access to land also reduced dependence on food aid and encouraged long-term settlement, thereby strengthening social interaction between refugees and local residents. The policy generated benefits for both refugees and host communities. Refugees gained opportunities to establish livelihoods and support their households, while host communities benefited from expanded agricultural production, increased market activity, and improvements in local infrastructure associated with settlement development. The sharing of natural resources, trading opportunities, and farming activities fostered regular interaction and cooperation between refugees

and Ugandan communities. However, the effectiveness of land allocation varied across settlements. Population growth, environmental pressures, declining plot sizes, soil degradation, and limited market access sometimes reduced agricultural productivity. Some refugee groups also lacked farming backgrounds, making adaptation to agricultural livelihoods more difficult. Despite these challenges, land allocation remained one of the most visible and enduring government initiatives supporting refugee self-reliance and integration during the NRM era.

Scholars generally regard access to agricultural land as a defining feature of Uganda's refugee integration model. Jacobsen (2002) argues that Uganda's settlement policy differed from many refugee-hosting countries because it provided refugees with opportunities to pursue livelihoods through land-based production rather than confining them to long-term dependency on relief assistance. Payne (1998) similarly maintains that refugee settlement programmes were designed to facilitate the gradual integration of refugees into the social and economic life of host communities by enabling them to establish independent livelihoods. Betts (2021) further contends that access to productive assets, particularly land, enabled refugees to contribute to local economies and participate in broader development processes. Although Werker (2002) and Meyer (2006) identify challenges associated with settlement remoteness and agricultural limitations, they acknowledge that land allocation remained a fundamental component of Uganda's efforts to foster refugee self-reliance and local integration. Collectively, these scholars view agricultural land allocation as a cornerstone of the NRM government's refugee integration strategy.

Expansion of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement (1990–2014)

Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement experienced several phases of expansion as a result of continued refugee influxes from neighboring countries affected by political instability, civil wars, and ethnic conflict. The first major influx during the modern settlement period occurred in 1990 when Sudanese refugees were relocated from Achol-Pii Refugee Settlement because of insecurity in northern Uganda. Approximately 6,000 Acholi refugees were initially transferred to Kiryandongo, and by the end of 1990 the refugee population had risen to nearly 9,000 people (Mulumba, 2011).

The settlement continued to expand throughout the 1990s and early 2000s due to prolonged conflict in South Sudan and instability within the Great Lakes region. Refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya were later accommodated within the settlement. The continued influx of refugees required both the Ugandan government and

humanitarian agencies to expand infrastructure within the settlement, including roads, schools, health centers, water systems, and administrative facilities (Kaiser, 2000).

A major phase of expansion occurred following renewed conflict in South Sudan between 2013 and 2014. Uganda reopened and expanded Kiryandongo Settlement to accommodate large numbers of South Sudanese refugees fleeing violence and political instability transforming Kiryandongo into one of the largest refugee settlements in Uganda. Additional ranch clusters were opened to accommodate the growing refugee population while maintaining Uganda's policy of allocating land to refugees for cultivation and settlement.

5.2.6.3 Integration of refugee services into local government structures

During the NRM period (1986–2014), the Ugandan government increasingly pursued refugee social integration through the incorporation of refugee-related services into existing local government structures. Rather than maintaining entirely separate systems for refugees, government authorities sought to ensure that essential services such as health care, education, water provision, and local administration were delivered through district and sub-county institutions that served both refugees and host communities. This approach became particularly pronounced following the introduction of the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) in 1999, which sought to align refugee assistance with local development planning and government service delivery mechanisms.

Evidence indicates that the integration of refugee services into local government systems formed one of the central objectives of Uganda's refugee policy during this period. Kaiser (2005) notes that the Self-Reliance Strategy was specifically designed to incorporate refugee services into regular district government structures so that both refugees and host communities could benefit from shared service provision. Earlier institutional reforms also reflected this orientation. Nabuguzi observes that responsibility for refugee affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Local Government in 1987, a move intended to strengthen the participation of local authorities in refugee management and integration.

In practice, district administrations increasingly became involved in planning and supervising services within refugee-hosting areas. Orach and De Brouwere (2004) document how health services in refugee-hosting districts, particularly in north-western Uganda, were progressively integrated into district health systems, enabling both refugees and nationals to access the same

facilities. Similarly, Amisi and Juma (2002) report that local councils and grassroots administrative structures played an active role in refugee governance, dispute resolution, and community mobilization. These arrangements facilitated closer interaction between refugee communities and local government institutions while strengthening administrative coordination at the district level.

The integration of refugee services into local government structures promoted social integration by reducing institutional separation between refugees and host communities. When refugees accessed the same schools, health facilities, water systems, and administrative services as Ugandan citizens, opportunities for social interaction increased and distinctions between refugee and host populations became less pronounced. Shared service delivery also encouraged cooperation in the management of local resources and community development initiatives. The approach generated several practical benefits. Integrating refugee services into district systems improved coordination among government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and local authorities. It also enhanced the sustainability of services because infrastructure investments made for refugee populations frequently remained available to host communities. In districts hosting large refugee populations, the construction and expansion of schools, health centers, roads, and water facilities often benefited both groups simultaneously. Nevertheless, integration sometimes created challenges for local authorities. The rapid growth of refugee populations placed additional pressure on already limited district resources and service delivery systems. Health facilities and schools occasionally experienced overcrowding, while local governments often lacked sufficient financial and human resources to meet increasing demand. Despite these difficulties, the policy represented a significant shift away from parallel refugee administration towards a more inclusive model of governance and service provision.

Scholars generally regard the integration of refugee services into local government systems as one of the most innovative dimensions of Uganda's refugee policy. Kaiser (2005) argues that the Self-Reliance Strategy sought to move beyond traditional humanitarian assistance by embedding refugee welfare within broader district development frameworks. Mulumba (2014) similarly contends that integrating refugee and host-community services enhanced sustainability while fostering more positive social relations between the two populations. Orach and De Brouwere (2004) maintain that integrated health service delivery improved access to health care for both refugees and local residents while strengthening district health systems. Amisi and Juma (2002) further argue that the involvement of local administrative structures facilitated refugee

participation in community affairs and promoted coexistence with host populations. Although scholars acknowledge the resource constraints faced by local governments, they generally conclude that the integration of refugee services into local government structures constituted an important mechanism through which the NRM government advanced refugee social integration between 1986 and 2014.

The ultimate tangible outcome of this integration policy is visible in the shared infrastructure that defines Kiryandongo today. The foundational investments made during this era evolved into the robust, shared service network currently operating in the district. This includes Primary Schools such as Bidong Primary School, Can Rom Primary School, Panyadoli Hill Primary School, Victory Primary School, Ematong Primary School, St. Bakhita Nursery and Primary School, Arnold Primary School, Beth Cole Nursery School, and Panyadoli Primary School (serving the trading centre). At the secondary level, institutions like the government-aided Panyadoli Self-Help Secondary School and the community-supported St. Mary's Secondary School serve a mixed population. Similarly, health integration is anchored by Panyadoli Health Centre IV (the main referral facility for both populations), Panyadoli Health Centre III, Panyadoli Hills Health Centre II, and Nyakadot Health Centre II. A Key Informant Interview with a district health officer confirmed the success of this model:

> *The genius of the NRM-era policy was that we stopped building 'refugee clinics' and 'national clinics'. We built one clinic for everyone. When a refugee mother and a Ugandan mother wait in the same line at Panyadoli HC IV, the artificial barrier between them disappears. (KII with District Health Officer, Kiryandongo, 15th October 2025).*

5.2.6.4 The Refugees Act, 2006 and the expansion of refugee rights

The enactment of the Refugees Act of 2006 represented a significant government initiative aimed at promoting refugee social integration in Uganda during the NRM period. The Act replaced earlier refugee legislation and established a comprehensive legal framework that granted refugees a broad range of civil, social, and economic rights. Through recognizing refugees as individuals entitled to participate in social and economic life rather than merely recipients of humanitarian assistance, the legislation strengthened opportunities for integration within host communities. The Act

institutionalized many of the practices that had gradually emerged under Uganda's refugee settlement system and provided a legal foundation for refugee inclusion.

The Refugees Act of 2006 granted refugees several rights that directly supported their integration into Ugandan society. These included the right to freedom of movement within Uganda, the right to engage in employment and self-employment, the right to establish businesses, and access to education, health care, and other public services. The legislation also provided legal protection against discrimination and affirmed Uganda's commitment to international refugee protection standards. Government implementation of the Act enabled refugees residing in settlements such as Kiryandongo to participate more actively in economic and social activities beyond settlement boundaries. Refugees were permitted to travel, seek employment opportunities, engage in trade, and access services available to other residents. The Act therefore complemented the objectives of the Self-Reliance Strategy by creating a legal environment that supported refugee participation in local economies and community life.

The operationalization of this landmark legislation was widely celebrated as a turning point for refugee rights. As reported by Vanessa Akello in *UNHCR News* (June 22, 2009), the formal launch of the Refugee Act 2006 by Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi was described by UNHCR Representative Stefano Severe as "a model for Africa." The practical impact of this legal shift was articulated in a Focus Group Discussion on 15th October 2025) with refugee community:

> *Before 2006, moving outside the settlement felt illegal, even if we did it. After the Act, we had the right to work and move. We could legally rent shops in Bweyale, get business licenses, and travel to Kampala to sell our goods. The law gave us the dignity to be seen as residents, not just camp inmates. (FGD with Refugee Community, Kiryandongo, 15th October 2025).*

The Refugees Act 2006 promoted social integration by removing many of the legal restrictions that commonly isolate refugees in host countries. Freedom of movement enabled refugees to interact more regularly with host populations through employment, education, commerce, and social activities. Access to labor markets and business opportunities encouraged economic participation, while the right to access public services facilitated everyday interactions between refugees and Ugandan citizens. The legislation also strengthened the predictability and security of refugee life in Uganda. In providing legally recognized rights and protections, the Act enabled

refugees to make longer-term economic and social decisions, including investing in businesses, pursuing education, and participating in community development activities. Such opportunities contributed to the development of social networks that extended beyond refugee settlements. Despite these advances, practical challenges sometimes limited the full enjoyment of rights guaranteed under the law. Constraints such as limited employment opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, administrative barriers, and resource shortages occasionally reduced the effectiveness of implementation. Nevertheless, the legal protections established under the Act created a more favorable environment for refugee participation and integration than existed in many refugee-hosting states.

Scholars widely regard the Refugees Act 2006 as one of the most progressive refugee laws in Africa. Betts (2021) argues that Uganda's legal framework distinguishes itself by granting refugees substantial socio-economic freedoms, particularly the rights to work, move freely, and access public services. These provisions, according to Betts, enable refugees to become active participants in local economies and contribute to national development. Mulumba (2014) similarly contends that the rights-based approach adopted by Uganda enhanced refugee inclusion by facilitating greater interaction between refugees and host communities. Studies by international development agencies have likewise recognized the Act as a notable example of refugee protection legislation that combines humanitarian obligations with development objectives. Scholars maintain that the legal recognition of refugee rights created conditions conducive to self-reliance and social integration while reducing dependence on long-term humanitarian assistance. Although challenges remained in translating legal rights into practical outcomes, the Refugees Act 2006 is generally viewed as a landmark policy that strengthened Uganda's efforts to integrate refugees into social, economic, and community life during the NRM period.

5.2.6.5 Shared access to education, health and economic opportunities

During the NRM period (1986–2014), the Ugandan government promoted refugee social integration by facilitating shared access to education, health services, and economic opportunities for both refugees and host communities. Rather than establishing entirely separate social and economic systems, government policy increasingly encouraged refugees and local populations to utilize common institutions and participate in similar livelihood activities. This approach was

strengthened through the Self-Reliance Strategy and later reinforced by the Refugees Act 2006, both of which sought to integrate refugee welfare within broader local development processes.

Evidence indicates that refugee-hosting areas increasingly adopted service delivery arrangements that benefited both refugees and nationals. Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) observe that access to education and participation in local economic activities enabled refugees to establish social and economic relationships with host communities. Schools established within or near refugee settlements frequently enrolled both refugee and Ugandan children, creating opportunities for interaction through shared learning environments. Similarly, Orach and De Brouwere (2004) document the integration of health services in refugee-hosting districts, where health facilities were designed to serve refugees and host populations alike. Mulumba (2014) further notes that the sharing of health services improved access to medical care while strengthening cooperation between refugees and local communities. In addition, Krause (2014) reports that many services in refugee-hosting areas were progressively incorporated into national and district systems, enabling refugees and citizens to utilize the same facilities. Economic opportunities also became an important avenue for interaction. Refugees engaged in farming, petty trade, wage employment, and small-scale enterprises within local markets. Betts et al. (2014) note that refugee economic participation contributed to local commerce by creating demand for goods and services, expanding markets, and generating employment opportunities within refugee-hosting districts.

Shared access to education, health services, and economic opportunities promoted social integration by creating regular points of contact between refugees and host communities. Through common schools, health facilities, markets, and workplaces, refugees and Ugandan citizens interacted on a daily basis, fostering familiarity, cooperation, and mutual dependence. Such interactions helped reduce social isolation and strengthened community relationships. Educational institutions facilitated integration by bringing together children and families from different backgrounds, thereby promoting social interaction beyond settlement boundaries. Shared health services similarly created opportunities for cooperation while ensuring that investments in health infrastructure benefited entire communities rather than refugees alone. The integration of these services contributed to a perception that development initiatives in refugee-hosting areas served collective interests. Economic participation further strengthened integration by linking refugee livelihoods with local economies. Refugees sold agricultural produce, purchased goods from local traders, rented land, employed labor, and participated in regional markets. These activities

generated economic interdependence that extended beyond humanitarian assistance and encouraged peaceful coexistence between refugee and host populations. Despite these achievements, challenges occasionally emerged. Increased demand for services sometimes placed pressure on schools, health facilities, water resources, and local infrastructure. Competition over employment opportunities and natural resources occasionally generated tensions. Nevertheless, the overall policy of shared access provided an important foundation for sustained interaction and integration throughout the period.

Scholars generally regard shared access to social services and economic opportunities as an important component of Uganda's refugee integration framework. Dryden-Peterson and Hovil (2004) argue that participation in common educational and economic institutions facilitated meaningful interaction between refugees and host communities, thereby advancing integration. Orach and De Brouwere (2004) maintain that integrated health services improved access to care for both populations while strengthening local health systems. Mulumba (2014) similarly contends that shared service provision fostered cooperation and reduced social divisions within refugee-hosting areas. Krause (2014) argues that the incorporation of refugee services into broader national systems contributed to more inclusive development outcomes and enhanced social cohesion. Betts et al. (2014) further contend that refugees should be viewed as economic actors capable of contributing to local development rather than as passive beneficiaries of aid. Collectively, these scholars conclude that the sharing of educational, health, and economic opportunities constituted a significant government initiative that promoted refugee social integration during the NRM period from 1986 to 2014.

The NRM government (1986–2014) adopted the most comprehensive refugee integration framework in Uganda's history up to that time. Through the introduction of the Self-Reliance Strategy, allocation of agricultural land, integration of refugee services into local government structures, enactment of the Refugees Act 2006, and promotion of shared access to education, health services, and economic opportunities, the government sought to move refugee management beyond emergency assistance towards long-term social and economic inclusion. Although implementation challenges persisted, these initiatives established conditions that enabled refugees to participate more actively in local communities and contributed significantly to refugee social integration within settlements such as Kiryandongo.

This shared-access model was later quantified and reinforced by national policy frameworks. A World Bank report, *An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management* (2014–2018), highlighted the institutionalization of the "30–70% aid sharing policy," where 30% of development services and infrastructure investments in refugee-hosting areas were deliberately targeted at the host community to ensure equitable benefit and mitigate resource competition. An FGD with local traders in the Kiryandongo trading centre corroborated this economic interdependence:

> *The refugees are our best customers, and we are their suppliers. They buy our charcoal; we buy their vegetables. The market does not know who is a refugee and who is a citizen; it only knows business. That is how we have survived and grown together. (FGD with Local Market Traders, Kiryandongo, 15th October 2025).*

5.3 Key findings and new knowledge

This chapter has shown that the main forms of government initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo between 1954 and 2014 were land allocation for residence and cultivation, settlement farming aimed at self-reliance, the provision of education, health and water services in collaboration with humanitarian agencies, and, after 1999, the integration of refugee services into local government structures. These initiatives originated in the colonial allocation of land at Kigumba in 1954, were adapted by the Obote and Amin governments, which expanded settlements and tolerated refugees' economic participation, and were formalized under the NRM government through the gazetting of Kiryandongo in 1990, the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999, the Refugees Act of 2006 and the reopening of the settlement in 2014. The initiatives promoted economic interaction between refugees and host communities, but they were implemented within a settlement framework that also served purposes of control. The next chapter examines the challenges that limited the integration that these initiatives sought to achieve.

The study identified land allocation and the integration of refugee services into district structures as the most critical government initiatives, because they were the only ones that brought refugees and host communities into daily contact over shared resources: land gave refugees a livelihood next to Banyoro farmers, while shared schools, health centers and boreholes gave both groups a stake in the same institutions. The new knowledge contributed by this chapter is that the history of Kiryandongo did not begin in 1990. The same land was used by successive governments for

Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising from 1954, for government ranches, for Sudanese refugees from 1990, for Kenyans displaced by post-election violence in 2008, for Ugandans displaced by the Bududa landslide in 2010 and for South Sudanese refugees from 2014. The testimonies of Banyoro elders also show that the customary reception of strangers under the Mukuru w'ekika (clan head) shaped how host communities understood and accepted the government's initiatives.

CHAPTER SIX

CHALLENGES OF REFUGEES' INTEGRATION AMONG HOST COMMUNITIES IN KIRYANDONGO, 1954–2014

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the third objective of the study, which was to examine the challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Kiryandongo between 1954 and 2014. Following the historical research design, the chapter analyses how refugee–host relations evolved from the colonial period to 2014. It draws on archival materials, government records, newspapers and published literature, and on oral testimonies collected from refugees, host community members, settlement administrators, government officials, religious leaders and humanitarian actors. The discussion focuses on the social, economic, political and institutional challenges that shaped integration in each historical period.

The history of refugee integration challenges in Uganda is closely linked to the country's broader political and regional history. Uganda has experienced repeated refugee influxes since the colonial period due to conflicts in neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and South Sudan. During the colonial era, refugee management mainly emphasized security and control rather than integration. Refugees were treated as foreigners whose movements and settlement had to be regulated by the colonial administration. After independence, Uganda continued receiving refugees, but changing political regimes and regional conflicts influenced the nature of refugee-host relations differently across time. During the Amin regime and subsequent governments, refugee settlements expanded, increasing interaction between refugees and local communities, especially in northern and western Uganda. Under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government, Uganda adopted one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa, promoting self-reliance, land allocation, and freedom of movement for refugees. However, despite these progressive policies, refugee integration has continued to face numerous challenges related to land pressure, competition over resources, environmental degradation, unemployment, social tensions, pressure on public services, and inequalities between refugees and host communities (Betts et al., 2019; Bohnet & Schmitz-Pranghe, 2019; Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021).

6.1 Pre-colonial antecedents: challenges of incorporating migrants and displaced persons (before 1894)

The study established that refugee integration during the pre-colonial period was largely informal and depended on kinship relations, patronage arrangements, and acceptance by local communities. Unlike later periods, there was no formal refugee policy, legal framework, or institutional system governing the reception and integration of displaced persons. Individuals and groups fleeing warfare, famine, political conflict, or inter-kingdom disputes were incorporated into receiving communities through clan structures, clientage relationships, and social alliances. However, integration was often conditional and unequal, creating challenges related to social status, access to land, resource use, and community acceptance.

Evidence regarding refugee integration during the pre-colonial period is mainly derived from oral traditions, colonial ethnographies, and modern historical reconstructions because no formal refugee records, newspapers, or legislative documents existed at the time. Roscoe's (1911) study of Buganda and Roscoe's (1923) account of Ankole describe how strangers and migrants could be incorporated into local communities through clan attachment and patron-client relationships. Oral traditions collected by colonial ethnographers indicate that newcomers were frequently required to establish kinship ties or demonstrate loyalty to local authorities before being accepted into host societies.

Cohen (1972) notes that incorporation into pre-colonial societies often depended upon social and political relationships rather than individual rights. According to his analysis, newcomers were generally absorbed through mechanisms of clan affiliation, labor obligations, and political patronage. Similarly, oral traditions associated with clan migration histories suggest that acceptance was frequently based on the ability of migrants to identify common ancestry or establish social links with existing communities. Mamdani (2001) further argues that access to resources and protection within many African societies was closely connected to membership in recognized social and political structures. Individuals who lacked such connections often occupied subordinate positions within host communities and depended heavily on local leaders for protection and access to resources.

The findings indicates that one of the major challenges of refugee integration during the pre-colonial period was the absence of an independent status for displaced persons. Integration

depended largely on the goodwill of local rulers, clan leaders, and host communities rather than on formal rights or legal protections. Consequently, newcomers often occupied subordinate social positions and were expected to provide labor, military service, or political loyalty in exchange for protection and access to resources.

Land access also presented an important challenge. Although land was generally more abundant than in later periods, access depended on acceptance within existing social structures. Newcomers who lacked kinship connections or political support could experience difficulties obtaining secure access to land for cultivation, grazing, or settlement. As competition for resources increased in some areas, host communities became more selective regarding the incorporation of outsiders.

Inter-kingdom warfare further complicated integration processes. Conflicts involving kingdoms such as Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, and Ankole frequently generated population movements and displacement. However, displaced persons were not protected by any formal refugee system and often depended on local political arrangements for survival. This made their position vulnerable and uncertain.

The study also found that cultural assimilation was often necessary for successful integration. Newcomers were expected to adopt local customs, respect existing authority structures, and participate in community obligations. Those unable to establish social acceptance faced exclusion or continued marginalization within host communities.

Scholars argue that refugee integration in pre-colonial African societies was characterized by conditional incorporation rather than rights-based inclusion. Cohen (1972) maintains that social integration was achieved through kinship formation, political alliances, and clientage systems that allowed newcomers to become part of existing communities while remaining subordinate to established authority structures. Mamdani (2001) similarly argues that inclusion within pre-colonial societies was closely linked to power relations and access to recognized social identities. to this perspective, displaced populations could be accommodated within host communities, but their acceptance depended largely on political utility, labor contributions, and social conformity rather than legal protection. Roscoe (1911, 1923) further demonstrates that clan structures played a central role in determining access to land, protection, and social membership. Consequently, refugee integration during the pre-colonial period was possible but often unequal, with newcomers required to negotiate their place within existing social hierarchies. The available evidence therefore

suggests that the principal challenges of refugee integration before colonial rule included conditional acceptance, limited resource access, social subordination, and dependence on local political authority.

This historical reality of conditional acceptance was echoed in a Focus Group Discussion on 16th October 2025) with host community, who reflected on the ancestral memory of incorporating displaced groups:

> *In those days, a stranger was not given land as a right. They had to prove their loyalty to the Mukuru W'ekika. They worked the hardest in the gardens and fought in the front lines during inter-kingdom wars. If they failed to assimilate or challenge the local customs, they were quietly pushed to the margins of the village. It was protection, yes, but it came with the heavy price of permanent subordination. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

This oral testimony underscores that even in the absence of formal legal barriers, social hierarchies presented a profound challenge to the genuine, equal integration of displaced persons.

6.2 Challenges of refugees' integration during the colonial period (1894–1962)

During the colonial period, refugee integration in Uganda increasingly became influenced by British colonial refugee settlement policies. Unlike the pre-colonial period where displaced persons were absorbed through kinship and social relationships, the colonial administration adopted a formal settlement system that concentrated refugees in designated areas. While this system enabled easier administration and delivery of humanitarian assistance, it also created several challenges that affected peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, archival records, government reports, and historical literature indicates that the major challenges included land acquisition and ownership disputes, competition over natural resources, unequal distribution of social services, settlement segregation, and growing resentment between refugees and host communities.

Land acquisition and ownership disputes

The findings showed that land acquisition for refugee settlements became one of the earliest challenges affecting refugee integration during the colonial period. Participants explained that the colonial administration acquired large tracts of land for refugee settlements through agreements with traditional leaders and local authorities, often without adequately consulting the communities that occupied or used the land. This created long-term grievances that affected relationships between refugees and host communities. A Key Informant Interview with a local historian explained that:

> *When the colonial government brought refugees and built dispensaries and boreholes inside the settlement fence, the surrounding villages felt cheated. We gave up the land, but the development stopped at the settlement boundary. That feeling of being bypassed started in the 1950s and never really went away. (KII with Local Historian, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

Similarly, members of the host community who participated in a Focus Group Discussion indicated that the land allocated to refugee settlements had previously been used for cultivation and grazing. They argued that although refugees required protection, many local people felt excluded from decisions regarding land allocation.

Archival evidence supports these findings. Records from the Uganda National Archives (Ref. AG/4/234, 1959) indicate that land for Nakivale Refugee Settlement was acquired through arrangements between the colonial administration and the Omugabe of Ankole with limited consultation of local cultivators. Historical studies by Bagenda et al. (2003) further note that the establishment of refugee settlements altered existing land ownership and land use patterns, creating tensions between refugees and host communities that continued long after settlement establishment. These findings suggest that colonial land acquisition policies laid the foundation for many of the land-related conflicts that later affected refugee integration in Uganda.

Competition over natural resources

The study found that increasing refugee populations placed considerable pressure on natural resources, particularly land, water sources, forests, and grazing areas. As refugee settlements expanded, both refugees and host communities increasingly depended on the same resources for

their livelihoods, resulting in competition and occasional disputes. During an FGD, one host community participant remarked:

> *Before the settlements became large, everyone collected firewood from nearby forests without many problems. Later, both refugees and local people depended on the same forests, and disagreements became common because the trees were disappearing. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

Another refugee participant explained:

> *We cultivated the land that was allocated to us, but sometimes the land was not enough. We looked for more land outside the settlement, which caused misunderstandings with local people. (FGD with Refugees, Kiryandongo District,16th October 2025).*

These views are consistent with Harrell-Bond (1986), who observed that prolonged refugee settlements gradually transformed cordial refugee-host relations into competition over scarce natural resources. UNHCR historical reports also indicate that increasing refugee populations in western Uganda placed pressure on land, water, and forest resources, particularly where host communities depended heavily on agriculture and livestock production. The findings therefore demonstrate that competition over natural resources became an important obstacle to refugee integration during the colonial period.

Unequal distribution of social services and humanitarian assistance

The study established that the concentration of government and humanitarian assistance within refugee settlements created perceptions of inequality among host communities. Participants reported that schools, health centers, boreholes, and roads were often developed inside refugee settlements while neighboring villages continued experiencing limited access to similar services. One participant during a Focus Group Discussion observed:

> *We watched roads being opened inside the settlement and boreholes being drilled there, yet our villages continued struggling to access clean water. Many people wondered why refugees received better services than the people who had given up their land. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

Similarly, a representative from a humanitarian organization explained:

> *Most donor support targeted refugees because that was the available funding. Unfortunately, this created the impression that host communities had been forgotten. (KII with NGO Representative, 16th October 2025).*

These findings correspond with Atukwatse (2023), whose study documented complaints from host communities questioning why development assistance largely benefited refugees. Harrell-Bond (1986) similarly argues that although humanitarian programmes improved services within refugee settlements, they unintentionally generated resentment among neighboring communities because comparable investments were rarely made outside the settlements. This unequal distribution of development services weakened social cohesion and made refugee integration more difficult.

Settlement segregation and limited interaction

The findings further revealed that colonial settlement policies physically separated refugees from host communities. Refugees lived within designated settlements administered separately from surrounding communities, limiting opportunities for regular social and economic interaction. One local government official explained:

> *The settlement had its own administration and services. Refugees mostly interacted among themselves, while local communities continued with their normal lives outside the settlement. (KII with Local Government Official, 16th October 2025).*

Participants in both refugee and host community discussions agreed that limited interaction reduced opportunities to build trust, establish friendships, and understand each other's cultures.

These findings are consistent with Kalyango and Kirk (2002) and Dryden-Petersen (2003), who argue that colonial settlement policies institutionalized the separation of refugees from host communities. Rather than promoting integration, the settlement approach reinforced the perception that refugees were outsiders living under a different administrative system. Consequently, the colonial settlement model limited meaningful social integration.

Growing resentment and negative attitudes

The study established that prolonged refugee presence gradually changed attitudes among sections of the host communities. Although refugees were initially welcomed, increasing pressure on land,

employment opportunities, and public services contributed to resentment and suspicion. A participant during a Focus Group Discussion commented:

> *At first people welcomed refugees because everyone thought they would return home after the fighting ended. As the years passed and the settlements expanded, many local people began feeling that refugees were benefiting more than the host communities. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

A refugee participant also noted:

> *Sometimes local people accused us of taking their land or receiving more support than they did, even when we were also struggling. (FGD with Refugees, 16th October 2025).*

Historical literature supports these observations. Harrell-Bond (1986; 2002) argues that refugee-host relations often deteriorated as displacement became prolonged and competition over limited resources increased. Pirouet (1988) similarly notes that refugee settlements gradually became centers of social and economic tension because both refugees and host communities competed for opportunities created through humanitarian assistance. The findings therefore indicate that negative attitudes and mistrust became significant barriers to refugee integration during the colonial period.

Scholars argue that colonial refugee policies created structural conditions that undermined refugee integration in Uganda. Harrell-Bond (1986, 2002) and Pirouet (1988) contend that while host communities initially welcomed refugees as protected persons and potential beneficiaries of development assistance, prolonged displacement transformed hospitality into competition over land, services, and economic opportunities. Their argument suggests that tensions were not primarily caused by refugee presence itself but by the unequal distribution of resources and the inability of existing systems to accommodate growing populations. Similarly, Bagenda et al. (2003) and Atukwatse (2023) maintain that the acquisition of land for refugee settlements frequently occurred without meaningful participation of host communities, generating grievances that persisted long after settlement establishment. Kalyango and Kirk (2002) together with Dryden-Petersen (2003) argue that settlement confinement institutionalized separation between refugees and host populations, thereby reducing opportunities for genuine integration. Furthermore, Kibreab (1989) and Jacobsen (2001) criticize the colonial assumption that refugees were

predominantly rural agriculturalists who could achieve self-sufficiency until repatriation. They argue that this assumption underestimated the long-term effects of protracted displacement, resulting in land scarcity, resource competition, and recurrent tensions between refugees and host communities. Overall, the colonial period established patterns of refugee management that would continue to influence refugee-host community relations in Uganda after independence.

6.3 Challenges of refugees' integration under the first Obote government (1962–1971)

Following Uganda's independence in 1962, the Obote I government maintained much of the refugee settlement system inherited from the colonial administration. Uganda continued to receive refugees, particularly from Rwanda and Sudan, while existing settlements such as Nakivale, Oruchinga, Acol-pii, and Kyangwali expanded considerably. Although the government remained relatively receptive to refugees during the early years of independence, increasing refugee numbers, political developments, and security concerns gradually created challenges that affected peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, government records, newspaper reports, and historical literature indicates that the main challenges during this period included pressure on land and resources, security concerns, political exclusion, settlement segregation, and the absence of clear pathways to citizenship.

Pressure on land and natural resources

The study found that the rapid increase in refugee populations during the Obote I period intensified pressure on land, grazing areas, water sources, and other natural resources. Participants explained that while host communities initially accepted refugees, increasing refugee numbers gradually reduced the amount of land available for cultivation and livestock grazing, leading to disputes between refugees and local residents. A participant during a Focus Group Discussion explained:

> *When the first refugees arrived, people shared land because they believed they would return home after peace was restored. As their numbers increased, there was less land for farming, and disagreements became more common. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

Similarly, a refugee participant stated:

> *The land allocated to refugee families became smaller as more refugees arrived. Some families looked for land outside the settlement, which created misunderstandings with*

neighboring communities. (FGD with Refugees, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).

These findings are consistent with refugee settlement reports and historical studies. Pirouet (1988) estimates that between 78,000 and 100,000 Rwandan refugees entered Uganda between 1959 and 1964, resulting in the expansion of refugee settlements in southwestern Uganda. Harrell-Bond (1986) further observed that prolonged refugee settlement increased competition over agricultural land and other natural resources, gradually weakening the positive relationship that had initially existed between refugees and host communities. By comparison, Kiryandongo alone hosted 82,971 refugees in January 2024 and Uganda as a whole 2,050,820 refugees and asylum seekers by September 2026 (UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2026), which shows how the pressure on land first experienced in the 1960s intensified in later decades.

Security concerns and political suspicion

The findings revealed that security concerns became a major challenge to refugee integration following the 1963 Inyenzi invasion of Rwanda by refugee fighters operating from Uganda. Participants explained that this event changed public attitudes towards refugees, who increasingly came to be viewed as possible security threats rather than victims of conflict. One Focus Group Discussion with elderly host community members recalled:

After the 1963 Inyenzi attacks, the mood changed. We used to trade freely, but after the government started the foreign national registration in 1969, refugees were suddenly viewed as spies or political threats. The trust we had built over years of farming together was erased overnight by political suspicion. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).

A local government official similarly explained:

Government became more interested in monitoring refugee activities because of fears that refugee settlements could be used for military activities against neighboring countries. (KII with Local Government Official, 16th October 2025).

These findings correspond with Soi de (2020), who argues that the Inyenzi attacks transformed refugee issues into national security concerns. Pirouet (1988) also notes that government

authorities increasingly viewed refugee settlements through a security perspective, leading to closer monitoring of refugee communities and growing suspicion among host populations.

Political exclusion and the Ugandanization policy

The study established that political decisions introduced during the late 1960s further complicated refugee integration. Participants indicated that the registration of foreign nationals and the Ugandanization policy strengthened distinctions between Ugandan citizens and refugees, making refugees feel less accepted within their host communities. One refugee participant explained:

> *After registration started, many refugees feared that government no longer wanted them in Uganda. Some people stopped interacting freely because they thought they would eventually be forced to leave. (KII with Refugee, 16th October 2025).*

Historical records support these experiences. Mamdani (2001) notes that the 1969 census of foreign nationals marked an important shift in government policy by distinguishing citizens from non-citizens. Contemporary newspaper reports also reflected increasing nationalist sentiments, portraying foreign nationals as competitors for employment and economic opportunities. The Ugandanization policy further encouraged the participation of Ugandan citizens in commerce and employment while reducing opportunities available to foreigners. These developments reinforced the perception that refugees were outsiders whose long-term presence in Uganda was becoming politically unacceptable.

Settlement policies and limited social integration

The findings further showed that the continuation of the refugee settlement system limited meaningful interaction between refugees and host communities. Refugees remained within designated settlements under separate administrative arrangements, reducing opportunities for everyday interaction and social integration. A representative from a humanitarian organization observed:

> *The settlements were expected to become self-supporting through agriculture, but they also kept refugees physically separated from surrounding communities. (KII with NGO Representative, 16th October 2025).*

Likewise, one refugee participant explained:

Most of our activities took place inside the settlement. We mainly interacted with local people during market days or when looking for casual work. (FGD with Refugees, 16th October 2025).

These findings agree with Betts (2021), who argues that the policy of refugee self-support emphasized agricultural production within designated settlements. Meyer (2006) similarly notes that settlement commandants exercised considerable authority over refugee movement and activities, limiting interaction with neighboring communities. Consequently, refugees remained socially and administratively separated from host communities, making long-term integration more difficult.

Absence of citizenship and long-term uncertainty

The study found that refugees continued to face uncertainty because there was no clear pathway to citizenship or permanent legal integration. Although many refugees had lived in Uganda for several years, they continued to be regarded as temporary residents whose future depended on political decisions rather than legal rights. A Key Informant explained:

Many refugees had established families and farms in Uganda, but they still did not know whether they belonged here permanently or would one day be required to leave. (KII with OPM Official, 16th October 2025).

Participants from the host community also indicated that refugees continued to be viewed as temporary guests rather than permanent members of society, regardless of how long they had lived in Uganda.

These findings are supported by Walker (2008) and Alenyo (2014), who argue that the absence of a legal pathway to citizenship maintained the distinction between refugees and citizens. Mamdani (2001) similarly observes that refugee status during the Obote I period remained legally and politically uncertain, reinforcing perceptions that refugees were outsiders despite their prolonged residence in Uganda.

The findings indicate that refugee integration during the Obote I period became increasingly constrained by the combined effects of rapid refugee population growth, competition over land and natural resources, growing security concerns following the 1963 Inyenzi invasion, political

measures such as the 1969 registration of foreign nationals and the Ugandanization policy, continued settlement segregation, and the absence of a clear pathway to citizenship. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, government records, newspaper reports, and historical literature consistently demonstrates that although Uganda maintained a relatively open refugee policy after independence, political and institutional developments gradually weakened refugee-host community relations and created significant barriers to long-term social integration.

6.4 Challenges of refugees' integration under the Idi Amin government (1971–1979)

The Amin regime represented a distinctive period in Uganda's refugee history. Unlike previous administrations, Amin adopted relatively open policies towards African refugees, particularly those from Rwanda, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Refugees enjoyed greater freedom of movement, access to employment opportunities, and participation in economic activities. New settlements were established while existing settlements were expanded and upgraded. Uganda also acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1976. Despite these developments, refugee integration continued to face significant challenges. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, government records, newspaper reports, international reports, and historical literature indicates that the major challenges included unequal distribution of development assistance, political patronage and militarization of refugees, competition for economic opportunities, insecurity regarding belonging and citizenship, and weak implementation of refugee protection frameworks.

Unequal Distribution of Development Assistance

The study found that the expansion and upgrading of refugee settlements during the Amin regime generated tensions between refugees and host communities due to perceived inequalities in access to development services. Participants reported that schools, health facilities, water sources, and roads were increasingly established within refugee settlements while neighboring host communities often remained underserved. A participant from the host community explained:

> *When new boreholes, schools, and health centers were built, many of them were inside the settlements. People in the surrounding villages felt forgotten even though they had given land for the settlements. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

Similarly, a local leader observed:

> *Many residents believed that aid organizations were concentrating their support on refugees while local communities continued facing the same development challenges. (KII with Community Leader, 16th October 2025).*

These findings correspond with historical evidence presented by Atukwatse (2023), where host community members questioned why refugee settlements received services such as boreholes while neighboring communities lacked similar support. Betts (2021) further notes that increased international assistance during Amin's government contributed to improvements in refugee welfare but also created perceptions of unequal treatment. Consequently, development interventions intended to support refugees unintentionally generated resentment among host communities and weakened social cohesion. Unlike the colonial period, when the inequality arose from the location of new services inside settlements built on land given up by host communities (section 6.2), the inequality under Amin arose mainly from the political favor that some refugees enjoyed through recruitment into state structures, which host communities interpreted as preferential treatment.

Political Patronage and Militarization of Refugees

The findings revealed that refugee integration during the Amin regime was heavily influenced by political considerations. Participants explained that some refugees were recruited into government institutions, military structures, and intelligence agencies, creating suspicion among sections of the host population. A retired district administrator explained:

> *Yes, some refugees got jobs in the district offices or joined the army under Amin. But to the local people, this didn't look like integration; it looked like the regime arming and*

empowering outsiders to keep us in check. When a refugee wore a uniform or carried a government letter, it created fear, not social cohesion. (KII with Retired District Administrator, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).

A participant during a Focus Group Discussion similarly stated:

People began associating some refugee groups with the government. This created mistrust because many believed refugees were receiving protection and opportunities that ordinary citizens could not access. (FGD with Host Community Elders, 16th October 2025).

These findings support the observations of Soi de (2020), who reports that refugees were recruited into the Uganda Army, State Research Bureau, and other government institutions. Mamdani (2001) similarly argues that refugee integration during this period became closely linked to political loyalty and military interests. As a result, refugees were increasingly viewed through a political and security lens rather than as civilians requiring protection, creating barriers to genuine social integration.

Competition for Employment and Economic Opportunities

The study established that greater freedom of movement enabled many refugees to engage in trade, employment, and business activities outside settlements. While this improved refugee livelihoods, it also increased competition for economic opportunities between refugees and host communities. A host community participant explained:

Refugees were opening businesses, looking for jobs, and renting houses in towns. Some local people felt they were competing for the few opportunities that were available. (FGD with Host Community Members, 16th October 2025).

A refugee participant also noted:

Living outside the settlement gave us opportunities to work and support our families, but some people accused us of taking jobs that belonged to Ugandans. (FGD with Refugees, 16th October 2025).

Historical studies support these findings. Betts (2021) estimates that by the late 1970s, a significant proportion of Rwandan refugees were living outside designated settlements and participating in

urban economic activities. While this facilitated economic integration, it also increased competition over employment, housing, and commercial opportunities, particularly in urban centers such as Kampala, Mbarara, and Fort Portal. Consequently, economic competition emerged as an important challenge affecting refugee-host community relations.

Uncertainty of Belonging and Citizenship

The study further found that refugee integration during the Amin regime remained uncertain because inclusion was often determined by political loyalty rather than legal rights. Participants observed that despite enjoying greater freedoms, refugees remained unsure about the permanence of their status and protection. A key informant explained:

> *People could be accepted today because they supported the government, but nobody knew what would happen if political circumstances changed. (KII with Former Local Government Official, 16th October 2025).*

Another participant noted:

> *Many refugees felt secure during Amin's rule, but there was always uncertainty because their future depended on politics rather than law. (FGD with Refugees, 16th October 2025).*

The findings are supported by the events surrounding the 1972 expulsion of Asians. According to the International Commission of Jurists (1974), the expulsion demonstrated that belonging, citizenship, and access to economic opportunities could be altered through political decisions. This created uncertainty not only among refugees but also among other groups regarding the security of their rights and long-term future within Uganda. The findings therefore suggest that refugee integration remained fragile because it was not grounded in predictable legal protections.

Weak Implementation of Refugee Protection Frameworks

The study found that although Uganda formally acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1976, practical implementation remained limited. Participants indicated that refugee management continued to rely largely on older administrative structures and regulations inherited from the colonial period. One participant explained:

> *The international agreements looked good on paper, but many of the systems used to manage refugees remained the same as before. (KII with NGO Representative, 16th October 2025).*

Similarly, a government official observed:

> *There was often a difference between what refugee policies promised and what was actually implemented on the ground. (KII with Government Official, 16th October 2025).*

These findings correspond with Betts (2021), who argues that although Uganda made important international commitments regarding refugee protection, implementation was constrained by existing administrative practices. The continued application of colonial refugee management structures limited the realization of many rights contained within international refugee instruments. Consequently, a gap remained between refugee protection policies and the realities experienced by refugees and host communities.

Regional Favoritism and Unequal Allocation of Resources

The study also established that refugee-related assistance was often concentrated in regions considered politically important by the regime. Participants reported that some areas received greater investments in refugee programmes and infrastructure than others, creating perceptions of regional favoritism. A participant explained:

> *People believed that some regions benefited more because they were politically important to the government. This created feelings of exclusion in other areas. (FGD with Host Community Members, 16th October 2025).*

Historical evidence cited by Betts (2021) indicates that international assistance was concentrated in refugee settlements located in strategically important regions such as West Nile and parts of southwestern Uganda. Host communities outside these areas often perceived refugee programmes as benefiting selected regions at their expense. These perceptions contributed to dissatisfaction and complicated refugee-host community relations. Scholars generally argue that Amin's refugee policies combined humanitarian openness with political calculation. Betts (2021) and Refugee History (2021) contend that refugee settlements were expanded and upgraded not only for

humanitarian purposes but also to strengthen political patronage networks and attract international assistance. According to these scholars, refugee policy became a mechanism through which resources could be directed towards strategically important regions and groups. Similarly, Soi de (2020) and Mamdani (2001) argue that Amin relied on refugee communities as an important source of political and military support. The recruitment of refugees into the army, intelligence services, and government structures facilitated integration for some groups while simultaneously generating suspicion among host communities. This made refugee integration highly dependent on political loyalty rather than legal rights. Pirouet (1988) and Watson (1991) acknowledge that many refugees experienced improved living conditions and greater freedom during the Amin period compared to earlier years. Nevertheless, they argue that these gains remained insecure because they were not supported by strong legal protections. The International Commission of Jurists (1974) further demonstrates that Amin's expulsion of Asians revealed the selective and conditional nature of inclusion under his government. While some refugee groups enjoyed considerable opportunities, others faced exclusion based on political and ethnic considerations. Scholars such as Betts (2021), Cultural Survival (1983), and Mamdani (2001) argue that the hostility experienced by many refugees after Amin's overthrow illustrates the weakness of politically driven integration. Communities that had appeared integrated during Amin's rule were later accused of supporting the regime and became targets of suspicion and persecution. This suggests that refugee integration under Amin was not rooted in durable social acceptance but rather in temporary political arrangements that collapsed when the regime fell from power.

6.5 Challenges of refugees' integration under the UNLF, Obote II and Okello governments (1979–1986)

The period between 1980 and 1985 was one of the most difficult phases in the history of refugee integration in Uganda. Following the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979, Uganda experienced political instability, economic decline, and widespread insecurity under the transitional governments and the subsequent Obote II administration. During this period, refugees, particularly those of Rwandan origin, increasingly became targets of political hostility and exclusion. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, government records, humanitarian reports, newspaper accounts, and historical literature indicates that refugee integration was undermined by state-sponsored violence, forced displacement, property confiscation, settlement confinement, insecurity, and growing mistrust between refugees and host communities.

State-Sponsored Violence and Forced Expulsion

The findings revealed that the 1982 mass expulsion of Banyarwanda constituted the greatest challenge to refugee integration during the Obote II period. Participants explained that the expulsions destroyed years of peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities, replacing cooperation with fear and hostility. During a Focus Group Discussion, one elderly participant recalled:

> *In 1982, the government turned neighbors against each other. People who had farmed side-by-side for a decade were suddenly instructed to seize each other's cattle and burn homes. It took twenty years of peace after that for people to even look each other in the eye again. (FGD with Host Community Elders, Kiryandongo District, 16th October 2025).*

A refugee participant similarly explained:

> *We left everything behind because remaining meant death. Our homes were destroyed, our animals were taken, and many families were separated. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings are supported by Cultural Survival (1983), which reports that government officials, local authorities, security personnel, and political actors coordinated the 1982 expulsions despite official claims that they were spontaneous community actions. African Update (1983) estimates that approximately 60,000 people of Rwandan origin were expelled between October and December 1982, while Watson (1991) documents testimonies describing the operation as an organized campaign of violence. The findings demonstrate that state-sponsored violence fundamentally destroyed refugee-host community relations during this period.

Property Confiscation and Loss of Livelihoods

The study established that confiscation of refugee property became another major obstacle to integration. Participants explained that displaced refugees lost land, livestock, homes, and businesses, while some members of the host communities occupied abandoned property. One participant explained:

> *When families fled, everything they owned remained behind. Some people took their cattle, harvested their crops, and occupied their homes. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

Another participant observed:

> *Once people benefited from taking refugee property, it became difficult to restore trust between neighbors. (KII with Community Elder, 17th October 2025).*

Historical evidence supports these findings. Braeckman (1995) estimates that approximately 16,000 homes were destroyed, about 45,000 cattle were lost, and nearly 80,000 people were displaced during the campaign. Mamdani (2001) similarly argues that both refugees and Ugandan citizens of Banyarwanda origin lost property regardless of their legal status. The findings indicate that economic losses created long-lasting divisions that continued to affect refugee integration long after the violence had ended.

Politicization of Refugee Identity

The study found that refugee identity increasingly became politicized during the Obote II government. Participants explained that refugees were portrayed as political opponents, security threats, and supporters of rival political groups, leading to increased discrimination and exclusion. A local government official stated:

> *Refugees were no longer seen simply as people seeking protection. Many government officials treated them as enemies or supporters of opposition groups. (KII with Local Government Official, 17th October 2025).*

Similarly, one participant explained:

> *People began fearing anyone associated with Rwanda because politics had entered community relationships. (FGD with Host Community Members, 17th October 2025).*

These findings agree with Mamdani (2001), who argues that ethnic identity became more important than legal citizenship during this period. Cultural Survival (1983) further reports that government actors actively mobilized local communities against refugees by portraying them as political and security threats. Consequently, political propaganda replaced the humanitarian principles that had previously guided refugee protection.

Settlement Confinement and Social Segregation

The findings further revealed that refugee settlement policies continued to limit integration with host communities. Participants explained that many refugees who had previously lived within communities were relocated to settlements such as Kyaka II, reducing opportunities for interaction with surrounding populations. A representative from a humanitarian organization explained:

> *Many refugees who had established themselves within communities were moved into settlements where government could monitor them more easily. (KII with NGO Representative, 17th October 2025).*

A refugee participant also noted:

> *Living in the settlement separated us from the people we had previously worked and traded with. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings correspond with evidence presented during the International Conference on Refugees in Africa (ICARA), which encouraged support for refugee settlements during this period. Betts (2021) argues that although settlement expansion was presented as humanitarian assistance, it also reinforced government control over refugee populations while limiting opportunities for long-term integration.

Insecurity, Fear, and Breakdown of Social Trust

The study established that widespread insecurity significantly weakened relationships between refugees and host communities. Participants explained that violence, intimidation, and repeated attacks created fear that prevented meaningful interaction between the two communities. One participant recalled:

> *After the expulsions, people feared each other. Refugees no longer trusted local communities, while local people feared being accused of helping refugees. (FGD with Host Community Members, 17th October 2025).*

Another participant stated:

> *Many families stopped interacting because nobody knew who would be arrested or attacked next. (KII with Religious Leader, 17th October 2025).*

These findings are consistent with UNHCR records indicating that thousands of refugees fled to Rwanda while others remained in refugee camps under difficult conditions. Continued attacks reported in Rakai, Masaka, Teso, and Lango between 1983 and 1985 further demonstrate that insecurity had spread beyond traditional refugee-hosting areas. The findings therefore indicate that fear and insecurity severely damaged the trust required for successful refugee integration.

Absence of Accountability and Weak Legal Protection

The study found that the failure to investigate or punish those responsible for violence against refugees reinforced exclusion and discouraged confidence in government institutions. Participants explained that many victims never recovered their property, while perpetrators faced little or no legal consequences. One participant explained:

> *People who committed violence against refugees were rarely punished. That made refugees lose confidence that government could protect them. (KII with Former Government Official, 17th October 2025).*

A refugee participant similarly observed:

> *There was nowhere to report because those responsible were often the same people expected to provide protection. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings agree with Decker (2022), who argues that expulsions during this period became instruments of state policy rather than isolated acts of violence. Prunier (1998) and Soi de (2020) further observe that the absence of protection contributed to the militarization of some displaced refugees, many of whom later joined armed movements such as the National Resistance Army. The findings therefore suggest that weak legal protection and impunity further undermined refugee integration.

The refugee integration challenges experienced during the Obote II period were primarily driven by the politicization of refugee identity. Refugees, particularly those of Rwandan origin, became targets of political mobilization as government officials and local leaders portrayed them as security threats and political opponents. This transformed refugee-host relations from coexistence into confrontation. The 1982 expulsions were not isolated incidents of local hostility but part of a broader political strategy that encouraged host community participation in refugee exclusion. The

redistribution of refugee property further intensified hostility. Land, livestock, and other assets abandoned by displaced refugees were acquired by local residents and political supporters. This created material incentives for participation in expulsions and reinforced the perception that refugee exclusion could generate economic benefits for host communities. Consequently, integration became increasingly difficult because refugees were viewed not only as outsiders but also as obstacles to local access to resources. The establishment of Kyaka II and the consolidation of refugees into settlements also weakened integration efforts. Although these policies were officially presented as humanitarian responses intended to improve refugee welfare, they effectively separated refugees from broader Ugandan society. By restricting movement and concentrating refugees in designated areas, the government limited opportunities for social interaction, economic cooperation, and long-term integration with host communities. The continued attacks in Rakai, Masaka, Teso, and Lango between 1983 and 1985 demonstrate that anti-refugee sentiment had spread beyond the regions traditionally associated with refugee settlement. The failure to investigate or punish perpetrators reinforced a culture of impunity and signaled that violence against refugees would be tolerated. As a result, refugees increasingly lost confidence in state protection and many sought alternative means of security, including participation in armed political movements.

Scholars generally agree that the refugee integration crisis of 1980–1985 was largely a product of state-sponsored exclusion rather than spontaneous community hostility. Mamdani (2001), Watson (1991), and Cultural Survival (1983) argue that the 1982 expulsions were deliberately organized by government actors who mobilized host communities against refugees and citizens of Banyarwanda origin. Their interpretation challenges official claims that the violence emerged from local grievances alone. Betts (2021) and Refugee History (2021) contend that initiatives such as ICARA and the establishment of Kyaka II reflected a contradiction within Uganda's refugee policy. While government officials presented these programmes as humanitarian efforts deserving international support, they simultaneously used them to strengthen settlement confinement and population control. According to these scholars, humanitarian rhetoric concealed policies that restricted refugee freedom and undermined integration. Prunier (1998) and Soi de (2020) further argue that the persecution of Banyarwanda refugees contributed to refugee militarization. Many displaced individuals eventually joined armed movements such as the National Resistance Army, illustrating how exclusion and insecurity can generate long-term political consequences. Decker

(2022) similarly views the 1982 expulsions as an example of expulsion used as statecraft, whereby governments employ displacement, property confiscation, and host community mobilization as instruments of political control.

6.6 Challenges of refugees' integration among host communities in Uganda under the NRM Government (1986–2014)

The coming to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in 1986 marked a significant shift in Uganda's refugee policy. The government adopted a more protection-oriented approach by granting refugees access to land for cultivation, promoting self-reliance, and introducing progressive legal and policy reforms such as the Self-Reliance Strategy (1999), the Development Assistance for Refugee-Hosting Areas (DAR) programme (2003), the Refugees Act (2006), and the Refugee Regulations (2010). Although these reforms improved refugee protection, they did not eliminate the challenges affecting refugee integration. Evidence from interviews, focus group discussions, government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature indicates that integration continued to be affected by unequal distribution of services, land conflicts, environmental degradation, settlement segregation, inadequate community participation, and competition over economic opportunities.

Unequal Distribution of Social Services and Humanitarian Assistance

The study found that one of the major challenges affecting refugee integration under the NRM government was the perception that refugees received better access to public services and humanitarian assistance than host communities. Participants explained that schools, health centers, boreholes, and other development projects were frequently established within refugee settlements, while neighboring communities experienced shortages of similar services.

A local headteacher explained:

> *On paper, the policy of shared education is brilliant. In reality, a classroom built for 40 pupils now holds 80. The refugee children are eager to learn, and we welcome them, but the government and NGOs do not proportionally increase the number of teachers or desks for the host community children. We are expected to absorb the shock, and it breeds quiet resentment among the parents who pay local taxes. (KII with Local Headteacher, Kiryandongo District,17th October 2025).*

Similarly, participants in a Focus Group Discussion stated that although host communities welcomed refugees, they expected development programmes to benefit both populations equally.

These findings agree with Jallow et al. (2004), whose Mid-Term Review of the Self-Reliance Strategy found that many host communities perceived refugee programmes as benefiting refugees more than local residents. Atukwatse (2023) similarly reports complaints from host communities regarding unequal access to boreholes, schools, and health services. The findings therefore indicate that perceived inequalities in service delivery weakened support for refugee integration.

Land Conflicts and Competition for Natural Resources

The study established that increasing refugee populations intensified competition over land, grazing areas, water sources, and agricultural resources. Participants explained that settlement expansion often resulted in disputes between refugees and host communities over land ownership, cultivation, and livestock grazing. One participant during a Focus Group Discussion explained:

> *As more refugees arrived, land became scarce. Sometimes crops were destroyed by animals, and arguments over boundaries became common. (FGD with Host Community Members, Kiryandongo District, 17th October 2025).*

Another refugee participant stated:

> *We depended on the land allocated to us, but some families needed more land for cultivation, which sometimes caused disagreements with neighboring communities. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings are supported by the World Bank (2016), which documented frequent disputes over land boundaries, grazing areas, and crop destruction in refugee-hosting districts. The report further indicates that expansion of refugee settlements occasionally displaced local communities, creating resentment toward both refugees and government authorities. Land competition therefore remained one of the most persistent challenges to refugee integration throughout the NRM period.

Environmental Degradation

The findings revealed that environmental degradation increasingly became a source of tension between refugees and host communities. Participants reported that growing refugee populations

contributed to deforestation, increased demand for firewood, pressure on water sources, and degradation of grazing land. A Focus Group Discussion with host community farmers revealed:

> *The government says we share the land, but the reality is our forests are disappearing. Our children now have to walk five kilometers to find firewood because the trees near the settlement are gone. When our goats wander into the refugee plots and are accused of destroying crops, it sparks fights. The environment is bearing the heaviest burden of this integration. (FGD with Host Community Farmers, Kiryandongo District, 17th October 2025).*

A refugee participant similarly explained:

> *Everyone depends on the same trees for cooking. As the population increased, it became difficult to find enough firewood. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings correspond with Atukwatse (2023), who identifies deforestation, water shortages, and competition over natural resources as recurring causes of conflict. The World Bank and FAO (2019) further documented significant loss of tree cover around refugee settlements due to increased demand for fuelwood and construction materials. The findings therefore indicate that environmental pressures complicated peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities.

Settlement Model and Limited Social Integration

The study further found that although Uganda adopted progressive refugee policies, the continued reliance on the settlement model limited meaningful social integration. Participants explained that refugees and host communities often interacted through markets, schools, or humanitarian programmes but continued living as separate communities. One refugee participant explained:

> *We traded with local people and attended some of the same schools, but most social activities remained separate. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

A local government official similarly observed:

> *The settlements simplified service delivery, but they also reduced opportunities for refugees to become fully integrated into surrounding communities. (KII with Local Government Official, 17th October 2025).*

These findings are consistent with Dryden-Petersen and Hovil (2003), who argue that integration of public services should not be mistaken for genuine social integration. Meyer (2006) and Kaiser (2005) similarly note that settlement policies continued to restrict refugee mobility and limited everyday interaction with host communities. Consequently, the settlement approach remained an important barrier to full social integration.

Limited Community Participation in Refugee Programmes

The study established that host communities were often inadequately involved in planning and implementing refugee programmes. Participants explained that many government and humanitarian initiatives were designed at national and international levels with limited consultation of local communities expected to share resources with refugees. A host community leader explained:

> *Most decisions came from government or NGOs. Local people were informed after decisions had already been made. (KII with Community Leader, 17th October 2025).*

Another participant observed:

> *People supported helping refugees, but they also wanted their views to be considered before programmes were introduced. (FGD with Host Community Members, 17th October 2025).*

These findings support Jallow et al. (2004), who found that limited dissemination of information about the Self-Reliance Strategy created misunderstanding among host communities. Doyel (2022) similarly argues that refugee programmes were implemented through a top-down approach that provided insufficient opportunities for local participation. This limited community ownership of refugee programmes and contributed to negative perceptions toward refugee integration.

Competition for Employment and Economic Opportunities

The study found that competition over employment, markets, and business opportunities also affected refugee integration. Participants explained that although refugees contributed to local economic development, some host community members believed they competed for scarce jobs, markets, and humanitarian support. One host community participant explained:

> *Refugees work hard and run businesses, but some local people believe they are taking opportunities that should first benefit Ugandans. (FGD with Host Community Members, 17th October 2025).*

A refugee participant stated:

> *Many of us started small businesses to survive, but sometimes local traders viewed us as competitors. (FGD with Refugees, 17th October 2025).*

These findings agree with Betts et al. (2014) and Betts (2021), who argue that refugees contributed to local markets, employment, and economic growth. However, the studies also note that these benefits were often overshadowed by perceptions that refugees received greater humanitarian assistance than host communities. As a result, competition over economic opportunities continued to affect refugee-host community relations throughout the NRM period.

Scholars generally agree that the NRM government introduced some of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa, but they differ regarding the extent to which these policies achieved meaningful integration. Dryden-Petersen and Hovil (2003) argue that while the Self-Reliance Strategy promoted important improvements in service provision and development planning, it failed to address the deeper political and social barriers that prevented local integration. Similarly, Meyer (2006) contends that bureaucratic integration of services should not be confused with genuine social integration, noting that refugees and host communities largely remained separate groups despite sharing administrative systems. Jallow et al. (2004) and Doyel (2022) argue that the Self-Reliance Strategy was implemented in a top-down manner that inadequately involved host communities. According to these scholars, local resistance emerged because communities were expected to absorb additional responsibilities without receiving sufficient resources or information. This contributed to perceptions of refugee privilege and undermined local support for integration initiatives. Atukwatse (2023) and the World Bank (2016) identify land management, resource competition, and unequal access to services as the most significant obstacles to peaceful

refugee-host relations. Their studies demonstrate that disputes over land, water, grazing areas, and humanitarian assistance remained recurring sources of conflict throughout the period. At the same time, Betts (2021) and Betts et al. (2014) argue that refugees made important contributions to local economies through trade, employment creation, and market development. However, these benefits were often less visible than the humanitarian assistance directed toward refugees, causing host communities to focus more on perceived inequalities than on economic gains. Consequently, the NRM period illustrates both the strengths and limitations of Uganda's refugee model. While legal reforms improved refugee protection and expanded opportunities for self-reliance, challenges relating to land, resources, social inclusion, and host community perceptions continued to hinder full integration between refugees and local populations.

6.7 Key findings and new knowledge

This chapter has shown that the integration of refugees in Kiryandongo and Uganda generally was constrained in every period, although the nature of the challenges changed. Under colonial rule and the first Obote government, the main challenges were land acquisition without adequate consultation of host communities, competition over natural resources, the concentration of services inside settlements and the security suspicion that followed the Inyenzi incursions of 1963. Under Idi Amin, the selective incorporation of refugees into state structures generated resentment, and under the second Obote government refugees, especially those of Rwandan origin, suffered violence and eviction. Under the NRM government, the progressive legal framework reduced legal barriers, but land pressure, environmental degradation, unequal distribution of services and cultural and language differences continued to limit integration. The next chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

The new knowledge contributed by this chapter is that many of the challenges of integration in Kiryandongo were produced by the government initiatives themselves rather than by refugees or hosts. The allocation of land without adequate consultation of host communities generated the land disputes of later decades; the concentration of services inside the settlement generated resentment among hosts until services began to be shared after 1999; and the political use of refugees under Amin and the persecution of the Banyarwanda under the second Obote government show that integration depended on the political interests of each regime. Integration in Kiryandongo was therefore shaped as much by politics and land as by humanitarian programmes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the general conclusion of the study, the recommendations arising from the findings, and areas for further study. Since the key findings of each objective were summarized at the end of Chapters Four, Five and Six (sections 4.8, 5.3 and 6.7), the conclusion is presented as a single answer to the general objective of the study.

7.1 General conclusion

The study set out to examine the Uganda government's initiatives to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014. It concludes that these initiatives evolved from colonial containment to a self-reliance model of integration, but that the evolution was path-dependent. The colonial government established the basic model in 1954, when it used land at Kigumba to settle displaced Kenyans, and in 1960, when the Control of Alien Refugees Act confined refugees to settlements, placed them under settlement commandants and denied them a path to citizenship. The first Obote, Amin, UNLF, second Obote and Okello governments retained this law and adapted the settlement model rather than replacing it, and the NRM government initially worked within it, through the gazetting of Kiryandongo in 1990 and the Self-Reliance Strategy of 1999. Only the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010 provided a rights-based legal basis for integration, and by 2014 their effect was still limited by inadequate resources and by the attachment of assistance to settlement residence.

This continuity explains why integration in Kiryandongo remained partial. Because successive governments relied on land allocation, settlement farming and shared services within a settlement framework designed as much for control as for integration, refugees became economically integrated through farming and trade in Bweyale long before they gained the legal and social standing of their hosts. The same reliance on land made competition over land and natural resources the most persistent obstacle to integration in every period, since governments responded to rising refugee numbers by allocating more land rather than by involving host communities in decisions. Historically, therefore, Uganda's celebrated "progressive" refugee policy was not a sudden innovation of the NRM era, but the outcome of sixty years of layering new rights and

programmes onto a colonial settlement system, in which economic integration advanced further than legal and social integration.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Since the study found that the legal framework became effective in providing for integration only after 2006, and that its effectiveness was limited by inadequate resources and by tying assistance to settlement residence (section 4.8), the Office of the Prime Minister and Parliament should ensure that the rights in the Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugees Regulations, 2010 are matched by budget allocations to refugee-hosting districts, and should review administrative practices that require settlement residence before refugees can access services.

Since the study found that land allocation has been the main instrument of integration since 1954, but that plot sizes shrank and land became the most persistent source of conflict with host communities (sections 5.3 and 6.7), the Office of the Prime Minister and Kiryandongo District Local Government should involve host communities and their leaders in decisions on land for refugees, document the boundaries and tenure of settlement land, and invest in agricultural productivity rather than continued expansion of land allocations.

Since the study found that the concentration of schools, health centers and water points inside settlements created resentment among host communities from the colonial period onwards (section 6.7), the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR and development partners should continue to plan services jointly for refugees and host communities within district development plans, so that new facilities serve both populations.

Since the study found that economic integration advanced further than social integration (section 7.1), Kiryandongo District Local Government, religious leaders and refugee and host community leaders should strengthen joint community structures, such as shared markets, cultural events and conflict-resolution committees, that bring refugees and hosts together beyond economic exchange.

Since the study found that many records on refugee administration before 1986 are missing or scattered (section 3.11), the Office of the Prime Minister and the Uganda National Archives should

collect, catalogue and preserve the records of refugee settlements, including Kiryandongo, to support future historical research and policy learning.

7.3 Areas for further study

The study could not fully establish how the settlement of Kenyans displaced by the Mau Mau uprising at Kigumba from 1954 ended, and how this colonial experience shaped the later gazetting of the land for refugees in 1990. This matters because it is the starting point of the settlement's history. Future historians could investigate it through the colonial files of the Bunyoro Native Government and Masindi District at the Uganda National Archives and the Colonial Office records at the National Archives, Kew, together with oral histories of older residents of Kigumba.

The study relied mainly on official and host-community perspectives for the period before 1990. A further study should examine the history of Kiryandongo from the perspective of the refugees themselves, for example a history of the Acholi refugees from southern Sudan (now South Sudan) who arrived in 1990, using life histories, to establish how refugees shaped government initiatives rather than only receiving them.

Since the study ended in 2014, a further study should examine whether the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework adopted in 2017 changed or continued the settlement model traced in this study in Kiryandongo, and a comparative historical study of Kiryandongo and an older settlement such as Nakivale would help to establish whether the patterns identified here apply to Uganda's settlement system as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

Research Title:

Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective

Principal Investigator

Mr. Opiro Bismark

Master of Arts in History, Gulu University

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to take part in this research, which seeks to examine how the Government of Uganda has supported integration of refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014. The findings will help in understanding the effectiveness of government policies, laws, and programs, as well as challenges affecting both refugees and host communities.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in either an interview or a focus group discussion. The session will last between 30–60 minutes. With your permission, notes may be taken and, where appropriate, an audio recorder may be used.

Risks and Benefits

Risks

There are no major risks expected in this study. However, some questions may remind you of past challenges or sensitive experiences. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Benefits

Although you may not benefit directly, your participation will help generate knowledge that can guide better government and community programs to support refugee integration.

Confidentiality

All the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not appear in any report or publication. Data collected will only be used for academic purposes and will be securely stored.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, please contact the Principal Investigator, Mr. Opiro Bismark, Faculty of Education and Humanities, Gulu University (Email: bismarkopiro@gmail.com; Tel: +256 785 412 532). If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chairperson, Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC), Juliana A Obika (PhD), Tel: 07729644491, Email: j.obika@gu.ac.ug, or the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), Plot 6 Kimera Road, Ntinda, Kampala, Tel: 0414 705500.

Consent Statement

I have read (or had read to me) the information above. I understand the purpose of this study and what my participation involves. I freely agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature/Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix II: Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussions

Research Title:

Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective

Principal Investigator

Mr. Opiro Bismark

Master of Arts in History

Gulu University

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to take part in this research, which seeks to examine how the Government of Uganda has supported the integration of refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement from 1954 to 2014. The findings will help in understanding the effectiveness of government policies, laws, and programmes, as well as the challenges affecting both refugees and host communities.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) consisting of 10–12 participants who share similar experiences or characteristics. The discussion will be held at a convenient community venue or another mutually agreed location and will last approximately 40–60 minutes. The discussion will be facilitated by the researcher with the assistance of a trained note-taker. It will be conducted in English or another language that participants are comfortable using. With your permission, notes will be taken and an audio recorder may be used. A separate Statement of Consent for Audio Recording will be provided for your approval before any audio recording is undertaken.

Risks and Benefits

Risks

There are no major risks expected in this study. However, some questions may remind you of past challenges or sensitive experiences. You may choose not to answer any question or leave the discussion at any time without any penalty.

Benefits

Although you may not benefit directly, your participation will help generate knowledge that can guide better government and community programmes to support refugee integration. A summary of the study findings will be made available upon request after completion of the study.

Confidentiality

All information shared during the discussion will be treated confidentially. Your name will not appear in any report or publication, and data collected will only be used for academic purposes and stored securely. The research data may be accessed only by the researcher, supervisors, Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) where necessary for ethical oversight.

Because this is a group discussion, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will keep information shared during the discussion confidential. Participants will therefore be requested to respect the privacy of others and not disclose information discussed during the Focus Group Discussion outside the group.

Cost Reimbursement

Participation in this study will not cost you anything. As appreciation for your time, you will be provided with light refreshments and reimbursement of reasonable transport costs after participating in the Focus Group Discussion.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part or withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Principal investigator

Mr. Opiro Bismark

Faculty of Education and Humanities

Gulu University

Email: bismarkopiro@gmail.com

Telephone: +256 785 412 532

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact:

Chairperson, Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC)

Name: Juliana A Obika (PhD),

Tel: 07729644491,

Email: j.obika@gu.ac.ug

OR

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST)

Plot 6 Kimera Road, Ntinda, Kampala

Tel: 0414705500

Consent Statement

I have read (or had read to me) the information above. I understand the purpose of this study and what my participation involves. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty, and that my identity will remain confidential. I freely agree to take part in this study. A copy of this informed consent form will be provided to me.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature/Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

Name of Witness: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix III: Consent Form for Audio Recording

Research Title

Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective

Principal Investigator

Mr. Opiro Bismark

Master of Arts in History

Gulu University

Purpose of Audio Recording

As part of this study, interviews and Focus Group Discussions may be audio-recorded to ensure that the information you provide is captured accurately. The recordings will be used solely for transcription and analysis for this research study.

The recordings will be treated with strict confidentiality and will only be accessed by the Principal Investigator, research supervisors, the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) where necessary for ethical oversight. The recordings will not be played to anyone outside the research team and will not be used for any purpose other than this study.

Your decision to allow or refuse audio recording will not affect your participation in this research. If you do not agree to be audio-recorded, the researcher will instead take written notes during the interview or discussion.

Statement of Consent

The purpose of the audio recording has been explained to me. I understand that the recording will only be used for research purposes, that it will be kept confidential, and that I may refuse audio recording without affecting my participation in this study.

Please tick (✓) one option below:

☐ **YES**, I voluntarily agree to have this interview/discussion audio-recorded.

☐ **NO**, I do not agree to have this interview/discussion audio-recorded.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature/Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

Name of Witness (where applicable): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix IV: Interview Guides

Consent

Dear Participant, my name is **Opiro Bismark**, a student at Gulu University pursuing a Master of Arts in History. I am conducting a research study titled **"*Uganda's Government Initiatives to Integrate Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, 1954–2014: A Historical Perspective*** as part of the requirements for the completion of my degree program. I kindly request your consent to participate in this study, which involves sharing your experiences and perspectives on the topic. Please be assured that your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Should you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A. Key informant interview guide (OPM officials, local government officials, NGO representatives and block leaders)

1. What position do you hold, and for how long have you worked or lived in Kiryandongo?
2. Which laws and policies have governed refugees in Uganda since you began working with refugees, and how were they applied in Kiryandongo?
3. How effective have these laws been in enabling refugees to settle, move, work, access services and live with host communities?
4. What do you know about the history of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, from the use of the land in the colonial period to its gazetting in 1990 and reopening in 2014?
5. What initiatives has the government, with its partners, implemented to integrate refugees in Kiryandongo (for example land allocation, farming support, schools, health, water)? When did each begin?
6. What challenges have affected the integration of refugees and host communities in Kiryandongo in different periods, and how were they handled?
7. Which records or documents on the history of the settlement exist, and where are they kept?

B. Interview guide for refugees

8. When and from where did you (or your family) come to Kiryandongo, and how were you received?
9. How was land allocated to you, and how has your access to land changed over time?
10. Which services (schools, health centers, water, markets) have you used, and do you share them with host community members?
11. What rights did you have to move, work and trade, and how did this change after the Refugees Act of 2006?
12. How have relations between refugees and host communities changed since you arrived? Give examples of cooperation and of conflict.
13. What has made it difficult for you to integrate with the host community?

C. Interview guide for host community members

14. For how long have you lived near the settlement, and what do you remember about how the land came to be used for refugees?
15. How were host communities involved in decisions about land and services for refugees in different periods?
16. In what ways have refugees and host community members worked, traded, studied or worshipped together?
17. What benefits and challenges has the presence of refugees brought to your community in different periods?
18. What, in your view, has helped or hindered peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities?

Appendix V: Focus Group Discussion Guide

1. How do refugees in Kiryandongo interact with local community members, and what activities or programs encourage these interactions?
2. How visible is the government's involvement in addressing refugee needs in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement?
3. What cultural practices or traditions have influenced relationships between refugees and the host communities in Kiryandongo?
4. What challenges do refugees face in accessing basic services such as education, healthcare, and housing within the settlement?
5. Have there been instances of conflicts between refugees and host communities, and how have these been resolved?
6. How familiar are refugees and host community members with the laws and policies governing refugee protection and integration in Uganda?
7. What factors hinder refugees from fully integrating into the social and economic fabric of the host community?
8. What practical steps can the government, NGOs, or host communities take to improve the integration of refugees in Kiryandongo?

Appendix VI: Observation Checklist

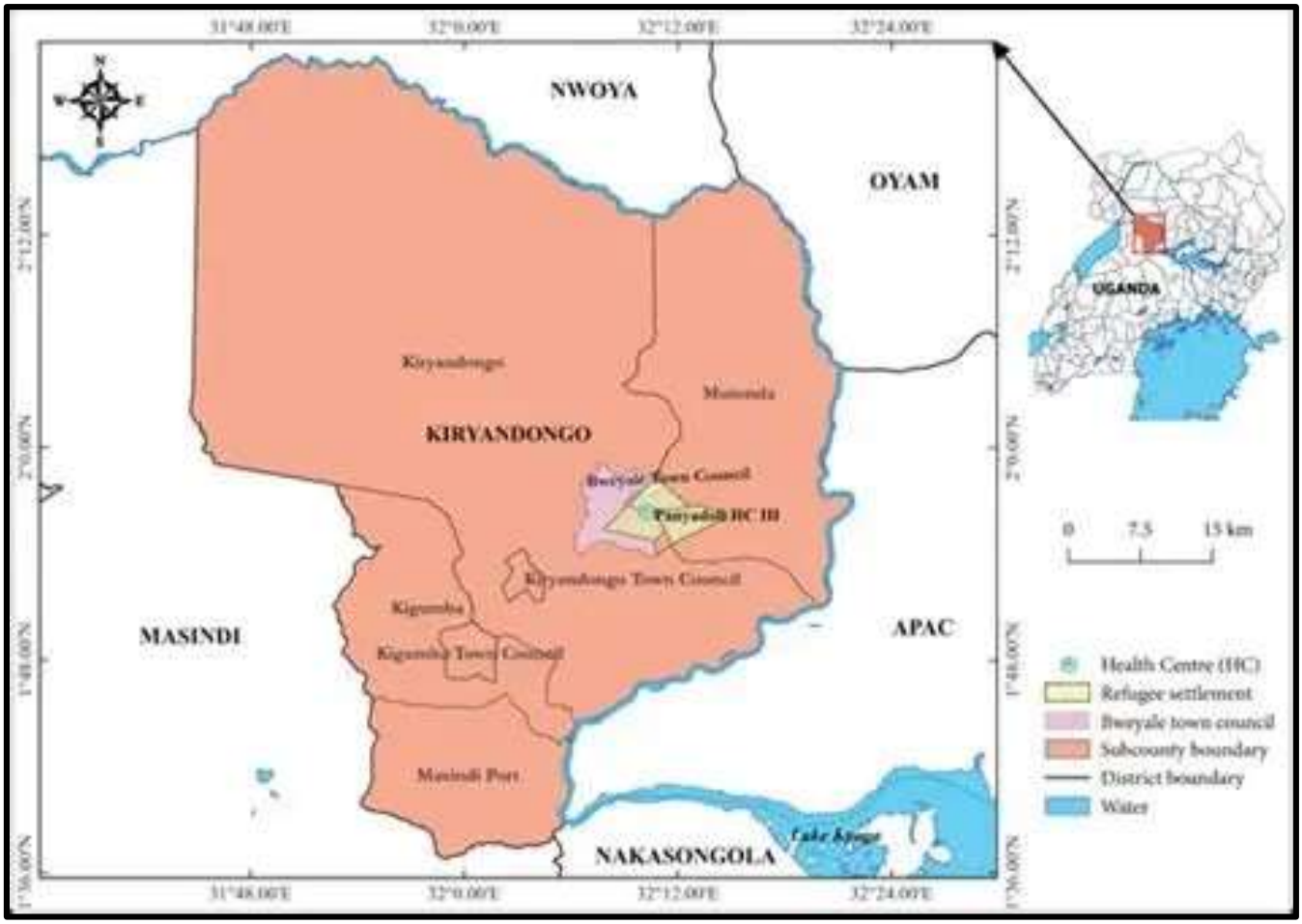
Cluster/location: _____ Date: _____ Observer: _____

9. Type of facility observed (school, health centre, water point, market, road, agricultural plots).
10. Year of establishment and agency that established the facility (from signboards or records).
11. Whether the facility is used by refugees, host community members or both.
12. Condition of the facility and evidence of congestion or shortage.
13. Interaction between refugees and host community members observed at the facility.
14. Size and use of agricultural plots, and evidence of environmental pressure (e.g., tree cutting, charcoal burning).

Appendix VII: Documentary Review Guide

15. Title, author/issuing office, date and repository (archive and file reference) of the document.
16. Type of document (law, statutory instrument, gazette notice, government or UNHCR report, correspondence, newspaper).
17. Provisions or information on refugee settlement, movement, work, services and citizenship.
18. Information on government initiatives in Kiryandongo or other settlements and their dates.
19. Information on challenges of integration and relations with host communities.
20. Authenticity and credibility checks (external and internal criticism) and corroborating sources.

Appendix VIII: Map Showing the Location of Kiryandongo District in Uganda



Source: UBOS district boundary data, 2025

Appendix IX: Introductory Letter, Ethical Approval and Research Clearance

GULU UNIVERSITY

P.O. BOX 166 GULU

TEL: +256471432922;

OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

20th August 2025

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Opiro Bismark (Reg No. 23/U/0629/MAH/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Arts in History, Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

UGANDA'S GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE REFUGEES IN KIRYANDONGO SETLEMTN CAMP: 1954-2019

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to him in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

GULU UNIVERSITY
20 AUG 2025
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

Yours faithfully,

pp. Arnold

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities

Appendix X: Field Photographs

Plate 1: Signpost of the UNHCR Field Unit, Kiryandongo, at the entrance of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher at Gulu-Kampala Highway on 06th October 2025. The photograph documents the fieldwork and the institutions referred to in Chapters Three and Five.

Plate 2: The researcher conducting an individual interview with one participant cluster C.

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher at 11:20am on 12th October 2025. The photograph documents the fieldwork and the institutions referred to in Chapters Three and Five.

Plate 3: A focus group discussion in progress with host-community, Cluster H on 14th October 2025

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher at 02;15pm on 12th October 2025. The photograph documents the fieldwork and the institutions referred to in Chapters Three and Five.

Plate 4: Signposts of Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement and partner agencies, Kiryandongo District

Source: Field data, photograph taken by the researcher at 02:25pm on 12th October 2025. The photograph documents the fieldwork and the institutions referred to in Chapters Three and Five.