

Access to Water and Conflicts among Refugees and Host Communities, A Case of Nakivale and Oruchinga Refugee Settlements in Western Uganda

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7641>

Received: 16 May 2023; Revised: 01 June; Accepted: 05 June 2023; Published: 01 July 2023

ABSTRACT

The increase in the number of refugees due to different situations that threaten human security has become a global problem manifested in societal, governmental and international levels (Steimel 2021). Uganda is among the top refugee-hosting countries in Africa and the world with 1.4million refugees (UNHCR, 2019). The government adopted an approach of accommodating refugees by placing them in settlements within communities and granting them access to basic resources like land, water and others services, which they at times share with host community members (Lomba, 2010). Uganda's progressive refugee policy has not effectively addressed the issue of land allocation and conflicts between refugees and host communities as land is continuously becoming scarce due to increase in population (Bjørkhaug, 2020). While several refugee-related studies have been conducted worldwide, little is known about the conflict between refugees and host-community in western Uganda-a gap this study hoped to address. The objective sought to examine how access to water leads to conflicts between refugees and host-communities of Nakivale and Oruchinga. The study was guided by Conflict theory propounded by (Bartos, 2002), as derived from the ideas of Karl Marx in 1848. A case study research design was adopted, where qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in data collection. The study found various probable causes of cash handout initiative conflicts between refugees and host communities in Nakivale and Oruchinga to include: Insufficient water sources to meet the needs of the refugees and host communities for their livelihood enterprises, agriculture and livestock. Inappropriate strategies for allocation of water to the refugees that do not put into the needs of the host communities and failure to separate water points for the refugees/host-community and their livestock. Also, it was found that climate change with its attendant impact on environmental degradation has exacerbated scarcity of water to the extent that most of the sources have dried up. The study concludes that failure to put good procedures/strategies for allocation of water resources to the refugees and putting into consideration the needs of the host communities will always lead to continuous conflicts between refugees and host communities in Nakivale and Oruchinga. Thus implies different water points for home consumption and animals should be separated as to maintain hygiene, host communities should also be considered when setting up water points for refugees as to minimise conflicts and as a way of promoting peaceful co-existence among refugees and host communities.

Key Words: Refugee, Host Community, Conflict, Water Access.

INTRODUCTION

The refugee crisis is not a new problem, but rather one that dates back to the earliest days of humanity (Manning, 2020). The world is presently experiencing an unmatched refugee influx which is a result of political, economic, and religious conflicts and internal wars. The refugee? problem ceased being a regional problem since it has become a global problem. It is important to note that the primary victims of the refugee

problem are always individuals (Steimel, 2010). Globally, more than 82.4 million people have faced different circumstances that have forced them to leave their homes to search for safety elsewhere (UNHCR, 2020). People have become refugees over time due to conflicts as well as persecution by oppressive governments, massive violations of human rights, war, internal conflicts, external aggression, ethnic and religious strife, direct political persecution, economic and natural disasters, and other factors that endanger their lives (Gil, 2007, 87-93). African countries are simultaneously the origins of refugees and host other refugees (Weidmann, 2009). Most refugees in African countries are placed in camps with the help of both the host government and the implementing agencies (Aristide et al, 2019). Refugees are mostly faced with problems that include persistent shortages of food, water, poor hygiene, and inadequate land for agricultural needs all of which have created direct consequences on the host communities (Hadijah, 2018).

In East Africa, Kenya has a history of hosting refugees since the early 1970s when it hosted Ugandans displaced by the political coups and tribal regimes of the time (Ali et al 2017).

In Uganda, rigorous involvement with refugees heightened in 1955 when Uganda hosted approximately 78,000 Southern Sudanese refugees (Katungi, 2019). In 1959/1960 again influxes of Congolese and Rwandese refugees entered the western part of Uganda. Since then, Uganda has played host to thousands of refugees from the following countries: Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. However, the majority of refugees in Uganda are comprised of the nationals of surrounding countries, viz.: Rwanda, Congo, Sudan, Burundi, and Kenya. The numbers from Kenya have been minimal compared with the rest. In the 1960s, five new settlements, namely Acholpii, Nakapiripirit, Nakivale, Kyaka and Kyangwali, were created in northern, eastern and western regions. Since then, the government of Uganda has adopted a policy of hosting refugees who are officially registered with the government and UNHCR in settlements as opposed to camps (Ginyera-Pinyewa, 1998; Government of Uganda 1999). Uganda is a signatory to several international legal frameworks/instruments meant to protect refugees. For instance, Uganda is a signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951, the 1969 OAU Convention as well as the 1976 Protocol on Refugees. Uganda Refugee Act of 2006 mirrored the known international standards for refugee protection, also enshrined within several preceding legal frameworks. This is where refugees have freedom of movement and the right to employment, education and health, as well as the right to start a business.

Currently, Uganda is among the top refugee-hosting countries in Africa and the world with 1.4 million refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Refugees are placed in settlements neighboring host communities and have access to basic resources like land, water and cash hand-outs (Lomba, 2010). They have the right to work, establish businesses, go to school, have freedom of movement and are also allocated land for shelter and agricultural use (Zetter, R. 2016).

Despite Uganda's progressive refugee policy which allows refugees the right to work and significant freedom of movement and the contribution of refugees to the local economy by expanding consumer markets for local goods, and opening new markets, there has been a rise in disputes between refugees and host communities over issues water access in settlements and host communities. (Ahimbisibwe, 2019). Although a delicate balance is required to reconcile these competing interests for water access, it appears that appropriate steps have not been taken for a practical remedy to the standoff.

While host communities of Nakivale and Oruchinga refugee settlements were initially hospitable to refugees, they seem to be developing xenophobic tendencies against them, calling for their repatriation as it became evident that many may not be able to return "home", and as competition for land, water and other resources heightened (Turyamureeba, 2018). Nakivale and Oruchinga have become the epicenter of contrivances where host populations are constantly in conflict with refugees. Host communities have developed a fear of having long adverse effects on water access for their crops, animals, and home consumption as most water sources are drying up and are not allowed access to water points from refugee

settlements freely. (Bjørkhaug, 2020). It is, therefore, against the above background that the study focused on how water resources are allocated among refugees and host communities of Nakivale and Oruchinga, given the fact that Uganda has always been considered a safe haven for refugees (Iazzolino, 2014)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted a descriptive research design with the use of mixed research methods (qualitative and quantitative). Mixed methods approaches were used in the study as they helped to gain a more complete picture than a standalone quantitative or qualitative study. Descriptive studies on the other hand tend to make a more accurate presentation of a particular phenomenon that has been the subject of prior research, but has not been well exhausted (Cooper, 2006). It helps in understanding how a specified or identified population reacts or is affected by specific stimuli (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). This design helped in analyzing and synthesizing the behaviors and attitudes of refugee and host communities of Nakivale and Oruchinga.

Target Population

The study targeted a total number of 13,575 households from both refugee settlements and host communities, which was carefully selected from the UNHRCR 2020 report and the office of the prime minister of Uganda (OPM). According to this report, there are 131,486 refugees in the Nakivale refugee camp, comprising 4953 households. Oruchinga settlement camp has 6,852 refugees, comprising 2862 households (UNHCR, 2019b). Nakivale host community has a total population of 39,654 people comprising 3302 households, while the Oruchinga host community has 10,598 people comprising 2458 households.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Stratified purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents. The respondents were classified into different strata corresponding to their geographical location; those in the settlements and host communities. In each strata, purposive sampling was then used to select households that were included in the study. The same approach was used in the identification of the refugee and host community leaders. On the other hand, the sample size for the quantitative data was derived using the Slovene formula, where a total of 389 respondents from Nakivale and Oruchinga settlements and host communities were sampled. 25 key informants were derived for the qualitative data, using respondents from UNHCR, OPM, and Isingiro Local Government.

Method of Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using narrative analysis as it involves examining and recoding data gotten from interviews or other visual/audio data. This method is used in interpretivism paradigms in research because it helps interpret individuals' everyday lives and gives them context in line with research objectives. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical packages. The data obtained from the field were organized, classified, transformed and analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. The quantitative data helps to validate the qualitative results to increase the reliability, correctness and generalization of final results for a broad and in-depth interpretation and understanding of the study. All tests of association between the variables in the study were carried out using the Chi-Square method.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Water access and Conflicts among Refugees and Host Communities

The results of the study objective are summarised in table 1 below

Table 1: water access and Refugee/Host community conflicts in Nakivale and Oruchinga.

Sn	Parameter	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un decided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	P-Value
B1	Communities have their separate water sources different from those of refugees	213	25.8%	29.0%	0.0%	35.5%	9.7%	*0.043§
B2	Animals and people use separate water points	213	3.2%	29.0%	3.2%	48.4%	16.1%	.149
B3	Comprehensive research is done when constructing water sources for water safety	213	3.2%	16.1%	19.4%	38.7%	22.6%	*.000§
B4	Host communities also benefit from water sources drilled for refugees	213	3.2%	58.1%	0.0%	6.5%	32.3%	*.000§
B5	As a result of refuge settlements, water resource conflicts have been recorded	213	32.3%	54.8%	3.2%	3.2%	6.5%	.655
B6	There is sufficient water for livelihood enterprises, agriculture and livestock	213	16.1%	6.5%	3.2%	41.9%	32.3%	*.008§
B7	There are proper procedures/strategies for allocation of water resources to the refugees	213	18.8%	34.4%	0.0%	40.6%	6.3%	*.001§

Chi-square test of association; Significance conducted at 0.05% level; Values with * are significant.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, the results summarised in Table 1 indicated that 54.8% of the communities use their water sources where they are not allowed to share water sources with the refugees and feel discriminated against on the issue of water access. The remaining 45.5% of whom share water sources with refugees noted that they use force to access the water source in refugee settlements which was indicated as a source of conflicts. This is where agencies for example UNHCR construct bore holes for refugees where host communities at times are not considered. This divides refugees and local people where each group attaches belonging to their source of water with their identity. An interview with the community leader revealed that;

“Boreholes are normally constructed in the refugee settlements... and such is usually based on the size of the communities. Government and partners identify the position that can easily be accessed [by all refugees] and a borehole or water tank is constructed. Host communities at times force themselves to get water from refugee water points because of the long distance they face when accessing their source. (KI 3, Community Leader, Oruchinga, June 16th June 2021).”

The results indicated that 64.5% of the households share water points with their animals which contaminate the water, making it dirty for people to consume especially from the swamps. As a result, host community people are forced to struggle to encroach on the water points in the refugee settlement thus creating conflicts. It was also noted that water is not enough to serve all the population and their animals as stated by one of the leaders that some sources dry up;

“We wake up very early in the morning to go and fetch water where we spend most of the morning time instead of going to our gardens to dig. When it is dry season, we have to fetch water from the river which is also being used by animals. For example, now a jerrican of water is 500/ and we cannot afford it all the time thus resorting to walking long distances to the river where even host community chase us saying that we are fetching water for their animals.” (KI 11, refugee leader Nakivale 19th June 2021).”

It was also noted that the beneficiaries are not consulted when putting up water points in the settlement in clarity of distance and security as attested by 61.3% of the respondents. These findings indicate that procedures on who to consult are truly in place for proper identification, construction and distribution of water resources though not followed at all. This shortfall causes conflicts as the study findings also established that there is an association between stakeholders’ consultation during the allocation of water resources to the refugees and conflict with the host community.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The ability to have access to water is a challenge that affects refugees in the settlements/camps. A 2015 report by the International Water Association (IWA) indicates that more than 50% of refugees worldwide are unable to secure the required minimum of 20 liters of water a day per person, or even water to support their livelihoods (IWA, 2015). In Nakivale and Oruchinga settlements water is mainly sourced from the constructed boreholes, which are also known to occasionally run dry. The attempt to use Lake Nakivale, Rwarunga River, as an alternative source creates conflicts between the host community and refugees referring to it as trespass to host community resources. This mostly happens when refugees use the water source for their animals during the dry season.

Furthermore, the study results show that boreholes and water tanks are only set up in refugees’ communities and are not considered when suffering similar water scarcity.

The water resources are thus insufficient to meet the needs of the refugees and host communities for livelihood enterprises, agriculture and livestock. The procedures/strategies for the allocation of water resources to the refugees do not put into consideration the needs of the host communities. The obvious result of such is that the host communities will attempt to share on the water resources that have been set apart to address the water needs of the refugee communities subsequently leading to conflict.

By putting into consideration of water scarcity, the selection of settlements should be done such that they settle in places that have already established water sources used by host communities. This will fully accommodate the new refugee entrants by adopting a catchment-wide approach where the host communities can also benefit from the same (Laura, 2020). Such an approach would foster peaceful co-existence of both the refugees and host communities and also provide co-benefits to both groups of people as it hardly possible to separate the two groups.

In all the different settlements for refugees, the water resources and facilities are usually shared with the host communities of these settlements. It is estimated that in the Nakivale settlement, 40% of the beneficiaries of the water resources are host community members.

The refugee settlements themselves do not have enough water sources for their consumption. For instance, in Nakivale more than 24 of the 76 villages have no access to reliable water sources within the boundaries of their villages (WFP/UNHCR/OPM, 2012). Furthermore, the few available water points are contaminated as the same is shared with livestock. Such issues coupled with the fact the refugees and host communities are usually hesitant to pay user fees to maintain and repair boreholes whenever they break down create

problems of water scarcity in both settlements and host communities. Refugees consistently report shortages in water supply besides having issues accessing other amenities (REACH, 2018). The ultimate result of this is that the refugees and host communities will scramble for minimal water resources resulting in water conflicts. Given the above, different water points for home consumption and animals should be separated to maintain hygiene and minimize conflicts among refugees and host communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In spite Nakivale and Oruchinga being the oldest refugee settlements in Uganda, and having a progressive refugee management approach which has been widely hailed as compassionate and smart, still conflicts have been recorded among refugees and host community. As opposed to other countries, the refugee policies allow the refugees to participate in economic activities, own their own business, access other social services as part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Since both the refugees and host communities have related water needs, when constructing water points like boreholes, such should be situated in places where both groups have access. Long distances to water points or very long waiting hours by either the refugees or host community can be a precursor to conflict over water resources.

Access to the natural water points like lakes and rivers should be regulated so that farming and related economic activities do not take place in the protected areas or water reserves. Failure to do so will spoil the water bodies with silt, chemical contaminants, refuse subsequently leading to scarcity and eventually conflicts over water will emerge between the refugees and host communities.

Water points for the animals should be different from those used by people. Animals waste contaminates the water which is likely to cause a number of illnesses. When the water is contaminated by animals, the refugees and host communities will start struggling for the few clean water points subsequently resulting into conflict.

Survey should always be done in order to locate ideal places for water sources that do not dry up during dry season.

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