

**An Investigation on Cultural Crisis of Congolese Refugees on Host Communities in  
Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, Uganda**

By

Kobusingye Hasifa

Department of Political science

Islamic University in Uganda

[Kobusingye.hasifa@iuiu.ac.ug](mailto:Kobusingye.hasifa@iuiu.ac.ug)

Luwemba Musa Maswanku

Department of Political science

Islamic University in Uganda

[Luwemba.musa@iuiu.ac.ug/luwemba20@gmail.com](mailto:Luwemba.musa@iuiu.ac.ug/luwemba20@gmail.com)

Dr.Muyingo rajab

Department of Mass Communication

Islamic University in Uganda

[Muyingo.rajab@iuiu.ac.ug](mailto:Muyingo.rajab@iuiu.ac.ug)

**Abstract**

Using a sample of 200 refugees, this study examined the cultural crisis experienced by Congolese refugees in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, Uganda. With an emphasis on employment, household income, agricultural production, and small business operations, the study investigated the effects of refugee presence on local economies. To obtain a thorough grasp of the cultural crises among Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, this study used a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. This method was thought to be appropriate for capturing both statistical patterns and more in-depth qualitative understandings of the real-life experiences of refugees, members of the host community, and other

stakeholders. Data on the cultural crises among Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement were obtained using a questionnaire as part of the quantitative method. Contextual elements that influence the economic ties between refugees and host communities, such as sociocultural dynamics, local policies, and community viewpoints, could be examined thanks to the qualitative method, which was made possible by interviews. A thorough understanding of the economic exchanges between host communities and refugees was provided by the data gathered through focus groups, interviews with important stakeholders, and household surveys. Traditional beliefs and practices, religious diversity and conflicts, gender roles and family structures, and views of social hierarchy and status were all found to differ. Finally, language hurdles, variations in traditional beliefs, religious diversity, gender roles, and ideas of social hierarchy are the main causes of the cultural crisis between Congolese refugees and host populations in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Tensions between the two groups are frequently caused by these cultural differences, which make it difficult for them to integrate, interact socially, and access resources. Nonetheless, these difficulties can be lessened with focused interventions including language instruction, cross-cultural exchange initiatives, gender awareness campaigns, and fair access to social services. A comprehensive strategy that promotes social inclusion, mutual understanding, and sustainable resource management is necessary to advance peaceful coexistence and long-term. Finally, language hurdles, variations in traditional beliefs, religious diversity, gender roles, and ideas of social hierarchy are the main causes of the cultural crisis between Congolese refugees and host populations in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Tensions between the two groups are frequently caused by these cultural differences, which make it difficult for them to integrate, interact socially, and access resources.

**Key Words: Refugees, Kamwenge, Rwamwanja**

## **Introduction**

Globally, the traditional model of refugee camps as temporary shelters is being re-evaluated. Many camps have evolved into semi-permanent settlements, influencing both the refugees and the host communities. This evolution necessitates a shift towards more sustainable and integrated approaches. For instance, in Kenya's Dadaab camp Hovil, (2017), efforts are being made to transform the camp into a more livable urban settlement, addressing issues of precarity and dependency UNHCR. (1951). Similarly, in Turkey's Kilis, Syrian refugees have revitalized the city center, leading to social transformations that benefit both refugees and locals. These examples highlight the importance of integrating refugees into local communities to foster mutual development and reduce tensions.

In Africa, the presence of refugees has led to diverse cultural interactions. In Lebanon, for example, the village of Baysour, predominantly Druze, has welcomed displaced Shiite families from southern Lebanon. Despite initial apprehensions, the two communities have cohabited peacefully, with shared spaces fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. This case illustrates how cultural integration can be achieved through community initiatives and shared experiences, leading to harmonious coexistence.

Uganda stands out for its progressive refugee policies, granting refugees access to land, education, and employment opportunities Kreibaum (2014). The Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, for instance, hosts a significant number of Congolese refugees who have been integrated into the local community. Refugees engage in agriculture, education, and local markets, contributing to the economy and cultural diversity. This integration has led to the formation of informal social networks and increased trust between refugees and host communities. However, challenges persist, including competition for resources and cultural misunderstandings. Efforts are ongoing to address these issues through community dialogues and inclusive policies. While Uganda's inclusive policies have facilitated positive interactions, the continuous influx of refugees strains resources, leading to potential tensions. In settlements like Nakivale, both refugees and host communities face challenges related to land access and resource allocation. Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles can exacerbate these issues, underscoring the need for transparent governance and equitable resource distribution. Despite these challenges, the shared experiences have also led to cultural exchanges, with refugees introducing new skills and traditions, enriching the social fabric of host communities Omata, (2019). While Uganda's refugee policy promotes co-existence, the settlement's cultural differences have led to conflicts, marginalization, and strained relations. Developing methods that promote unity, understanding, and peaceful coexistence between host communities and refugees requires an understanding of the nature of this cultural dilemma.

A sizable population of Congolese refugees escaping violence and instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are housed in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Kamwenge District, Uganda. Tensions and difficulties between the host and refugee groups are signs of a cultural crisis brought on by the entry of these refugees. The unique cultural customs, dialects, and social mores of the Congolese refugees occasionally conflict with those of Kamwenge's native populations. As a result, there are now problems including rivalry for resources, disparities in traditional beliefs, and challenges integrating into society.

## **Method**

To obtain a thorough grasp of the cultural crises among Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, this study used a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. This method was thought to be appropriate for capturing

both statistical patterns and more in-depth qualitative understandings of the real-life experiences of refugees, members of the host community, and other stakeholders. Data on the cultural crises among Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement were obtained using a questionnaire as part of the quantitative method. Contextual elements that influence the economic ties between refugees and host communities, such as sociocultural dynamics, local policies, and community viewpoints, could be examined thanks to the qualitative method, which was made possible by interviews.

Members of the host community and Congolese refugees living in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Kamwenge District made up the study population. Important players in community relations and refugee management will also be involved. To capture a wide range of economic implications, such as work status, income sources, and involvement in local economic activities, a sample of 200 refugees was chosen. To guarantee a representative sample of the larger refugee population, these refugees were selected using a straightforward random sampling procedure.

**NGO Officials:** These include key stakeholders working in the settlement who are involved in refugee welfare and economic integration programs. Their perspectives are crucial for understanding the role of external aid, policies, and development initiatives in mitigating or exacerbating economic disparities. 10 NGO officials were purposively selected for interviews to gather insights on the roles and interventions of humanitarian organizations in supporting refugees and host communities.

**Game Park Officials:** These are local authorities involved in the management of the nearby game park, which plays a significant role in the local economy. The interaction between the game park and the host community is essential in understanding how natural resources influence local economies. 5 park officials were selected based on their direct involvement with both refugee and host community activities related to land, resources, and economic development.

Regarding the Data Collection Instruments, a structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data from refugees regarding their economic activities, income levels, and the impact of refugee status on their economic wellbeing. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and

Likert scale questions to gather data on various economic indicators. The questionnaire was designed to ensure that data collected would be both comparable and statistically analyzable, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends in the economic experiences of refugees.

The interview guide was semi-structured, allowing for in-depth conversations with NGO officials, game park authorities, and selected refugees to capture qualitative data. The flexibility of the interview guide allowed respondents to share their perspectives and experiences in detail, offering insights that went beyond what could be captured through the questionnaire. The combination of a questionnaire and interview guide was selected to balance the need for quantitative data with the need for richer, contextual qualitative insights.

For data analysis, Quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) to present an overview of refugee economic activities and their contributions to the host community. Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns related to the role of NGOs, local authorities, and community perceptions. The integration of these two data sets provided a comprehensive understanding of the economic impact of Congolese refugees in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and provided informed consent before participating. Confidentiality was maintained, and respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Additionally, the study was designed to avoid causing any harm to the refugees or local communities, ensuring that data collection methods respected cultural sensitivities and the rights of vulnerable populations.

### **Findings and Discussions**

A significant **70% (n=140)** of the sampled Congolese refugees reported language as a major cultural barrier affecting their integration into the host community. The dominant languages in Kamwenge District, such as Runyankore- Rukiga, differ from Lingala and Swahili, which most Congolese refugees speak. Studies by **Betts et al. (2019)** highlight that language differences often lead to misunderstandings, exclusion from economic and social activities, and difficulties in accessing services such as healthcare and education.

### **Differences in Traditional Beliefs and Practices**

**60% (n=120)** of respondents acknowledged conflicts arising from differing traditional beliefs and practices. Congolese refugees often maintain strong cultural practices, including communal resource-sharing and extended family structures, which sometimes contrast with the more individualistic approach of Ugandan host communities. **Lwanga-Ntale (2020)** found that host communities may view refugees' cultural customs as strange or intrusive, leading to misunderstandings and friction in daily interactions.

### **Religious Diversity and Tensions**

Religion plays a central role in both refugee and host communities, but differences in religious expression can lead to tensions. **55% (n=110)** of Congolese refugees reported feeling excluded from religious spaces or experiencing discrimination based on religious practices. While both communities have a mix of Christianity and Islam, variations in worship styles and leadership structures sometimes create divisions. **Omata (2021)** noted that religious institutions in Uganda have attempted to bridge this gap through interfaith dialogues and joint community projects.

### **Gender Roles and Family Structure Differences**

**50% (n=100)** of Congolese refugees stated that differences in gender roles have affected their relationships with the host community. In Congolese culture, women often have a more traditional domestic role, while Ugandan women in Kamwenge are more involved in economic activities such as trade and farming. **Mugisha & Mwesigwa (2018)** argued that such differences sometimes cause social tensions, particularly in mixed marriages or workplace interactions.

## **Perceptions of Social Hierarchy and Status**

The refugee status itself affects social interactions, as **65% (n=130)** of refugees felt that host community members looked down on them due to their displacement. **Dryden-Peterson & Hovil (2004)** documented similar findings, where long-term host communities often see refugees as temporary settlers with fewer rights. This perception fuels resentment, especially when humanitarian aid prioritizes refugee needs over those of the host population. The cultural crisis between Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja is shaped by deep-rooted differences in language, traditions, religious practices, gender roles, and social hierarchies. The findings align with broader studies on refugee integration, which emphasize that cultural adaptation requires proactive policies and community engagement. Addressing these cultural factors through language training, interfaith programs, and cross-cultural exchanges can enhance social cohesion and mitigate tensions.

## **Conclusions**

The findings reveal that the cultural crisis between Congolese refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement is shaped by complex socio-cultural differences. Language barriers, traditional belief disparities, religious diversity, gender role expectations, and social hierarchy perceptions contribute to tensions between the two communities. These cultural differences hinder integration, create misunderstandings, and, in some cases, escalate into conflicts over resources, social status, and community engagement.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improving relations through community-based initiatives, cultural exchange programs, and policy interventions. The findings align with global studies on refugee integration, which emphasize the importance of language training, interfaith dialogue, and mutual economic participation in reducing cultural tensions. Efforts by humanitarian organizations, local governments, and community leaders to facilitate cultural adaptation and inter-community engagement remain crucial in promoting peaceful coexistence.

Ultimately, addressing the cultural crisis requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes communication, inclusive policies, and mutual understanding between refugees and host communities. Sustainable solutions should focus on fostering respect for cultural diversity,

encouraging local participation, and bridging the gaps in education, employment, and social services to ensure long-term integration and harmony in Rwamwanja and beyond.

## **Recommendations**

The government, NGOs, and humanitarian agencies should establish language training programs to help Congolese refugees learn Runyankore-Rukiga and English, while also encouraging host communities to gain basic Swahili skills. This will enhance communication, reduce misunderstandings, and promote social integration.

Local authorities and refugee support organizations should implement cultural exchange programs such as joint community celebrations, shared market spaces, and interfaith gatherings. These initiatives can foster mutual understanding and tolerance between refugees and host communities.

Programs aimed at educating both refugees and host communities on gender roles and equality should be introduced to minimize conflicts arising from differences in family structures and economic participation. Economic empowerment projects, especially for refugee women, should be promoted to ensure self-sufficiency and integration into local markets.

To prevent host community resentment toward refugees receiving humanitarian aid, the government should ensure equal access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for both groups. Integrated service provision will reduce perceptions of unfair treatment and enhance peaceful coexistence.

Community-led conflict resolution and mediation committees should be established to address disputes between refugees and host communities. Training local leaders and refugee representatives in conflict management can promote peaceful solutions to cultural misunderstandings.

Religious and traditional leaders should be actively involved in fostering social cohesion by organizing dialogues that address cultural differences and promote shared values. Their influence can help bridge gaps and encourage peaceful cohabitation.



To address resource-based conflicts, local authorities should implement reforestation programs and sustainable land-use practices. Providing alternative energy sources, such as solar power and energy-efficient cooking stoves, can reduce deforestation and minimize tensions over natural resources.

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