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## Attitudes and Perceptions of Host Communities and Refugee Adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements, Western Uganda

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**Keywords:**

Attitudes and  
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Host Communities,  
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Settlements.

The researcher investigated the effects of attitudes and perceptions of host communities on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements by integrating Social Cohesion and Integration Theory by Émile Durkheim (1892) and the Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement. A descriptive and correlational research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. A sample of 400 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents. Data collection was done using questionnaires where 380 filled questionnaires while an interview guide was used to collect data from key informants. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS Version 22 software, and qualitative data were thematically analysed. Findings revealed that attitudes and perceptions positively and significantly affect refugee adaptability. The study concluded that attitudes and perceptions had a significant positive effect on refugee adaptability. The study recommends implementing community engagement programs that promote empathy and understanding toward refugees in order to improve refugee adaptability. These initiatives could include awareness campaigns that highlight the contributions of refugees to the local economy and culture.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Attitudes and perceptions of host communities towards refugees encompass the settled feelings and interpretations that influence how refugees are viewed and treated, which can vary from acceptance to hostility, significantly affecting integration efforts (Schweitzer et al., 2021). On the other hand, refugee adaptability refers to the capacity of refugees to adjust to new environments, which includes economic and social integration, and is crucial for their well-being and the stability of host communities; successful adaptability is often facilitated by supportive policies and community engagement (Mastorillo et al., 2016; Kälin & Scharfenort, 2020).

Globally, the refugee crisis has escalated, with over 26 million refugees worldwide as of 2023 (UNHCR, 2023). Refugee adaptability in host communities is crucial for their successful integration; however, this adaptability often encounters significant challenges due to the attitudes and perceptions of host communities. Negative perceptions can lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and increased tensions, ultimately hindering refugees' ability to adapt and thrive. For instance, in countries such as Germany and the United States, studies have shown that local populations may view refugees as burdens rather than contributors, impacting social cohesion (Schweitzer et al., 2021).

In Africa, the situation is particularly complex, with approximately 7.5 million refugees residing on the continent (UNHCR, 2023). Countries like Kenya and Ethiopia host large numbers of refugees but often struggle with local resource limitations. Host communities may perceive refugees as competitors for jobs and social services, leading to increased

tensions and conflict (Kälin & Scharfenort, 2020). This perception is influenced by historical inequalities and socio-economic challenges, which often exacerbate negative attitudes towards refugees.

East Africa is a significant refuge for displaced populations, hosting over 3 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR, 2023). Uganda, in particular, has adopted progressive policies allowing refugees to work and access public services. However, despite these policies, host community attitudes remain mixed. Positive perceptions are often found in areas where refugees contribute economically, but negative attitudes arise from competition for resources and cultural differences (Baker & O'Neill, 2022). This duality complicates the landscape for refugee adaptability, requiring ongoing community engagement and dialogue.

Uganda is notable for its relatively open refugee policy, which permits refugees to settle in designated areas and grants them access to land for farming. Despite these supportive measures, refugee adaptability is still challenged by host community perceptions. Research indicates that while some community members view refugees positively for their economic contributions, others express concerns about resource allocation and cultural integration (Mastorillo et al., 2016). The coexistence of these perceptions creates a complex environment for refugees, necessitating strategies that foster mutual understanding and cooperation.

In specific contexts such as the Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, the dynamics of refugee adaptability are particularly pronounced. Kyaka II,

primarily hosting Congolese refugees, has experienced both integration and conflict due to competition for resources (Hovil, 2021). Similarly, Kyangwali, which accommodates refugees faces tensions related to land use and cultural differences. The attitudes of host communities in these settlements vary widely, influenced by local economic conditions and historical relationships with refugees (Rudolph, 2020). Understanding these local dynamics is essential for developing strategies that promote positive interactions between refugees and host communities, enhancing adaptability and fostering social cohesion.

### Statement of the Problem

Ideally, refugee adaptability in host communities such as Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements in Uganda should be smooth and mutually beneficial, with host communities embracing refugees and supporting their integration into the social, economic, and cultural fabric of local society. Uganda's progressive refugee policy grants refugees access to land, freedom of movement, and public services, aiming to foster peaceful co-existence and self-reliance (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM], 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Despite these policies, host community attitudes and perceptions towards refugees remain mixed and, in many cases, negative, leading to difficulties in refugee adaptability. In both Kyaka II and Kyangwali, increasing competition over scarce resources such as land, water, and employment opportunities has fueled resentment and social tensions (Kigozi, 2022; Refugee Law Project, 2023). Furthermore, Kyaka II hosts over 130,000 refugees, while Kyangwali accommodates nearly 125,000, straining local services and resources (UNHCR Uganda, 2024). As a result, refugees face social exclusion, discrimination, limited access to livelihoods, and insecurity, undermining their social integration and mental well-being (Kasozi, 2023). Although strategies such as community sensitization programs, livelihood projects, and joint host-refugee development initiatives have been

implemented to promote social cohesion (OPM, 2023), tensions persist, especially in areas where development assistance does not equally benefit both refugees and hosts or where environmental degradation has worsened (Refugee Law Project, 2023). If these issues are not adequately addressed, the consequences could include increased social unrest, reduced refugee self-reliance, deepening poverty among both hosts and refugees and weakened national and local stability in refugee-hosting areas. Therefore, more targeted and inclusive interventions are urgently needed to foster positive host community attitudes, ensure equitable resource distribution, and strengthen peaceful coexistence for sustainable refugee adaptability. Hence, in this article, the researcher investigated the effects of attitudes and perceptions of host communities on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements.

### Objective

To investigate the effects of attitudes and perceptions of host communities on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements.

### Hypothesis

Attitudes and perceptions of host communities have no significant positive effects on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

This study was anchored on two main theories: the Social Cohesion and Integration Theory, originally developed by Émile Durkheim (1892) and later expanded by David et al. (2016), and the Refugee in Flight Theory, introduced by Kunz (1973) and further advanced by Van Hear and Bakewell (2018).

The Social Cohesion and Integration Theory highlights three critical components necessary for

building cohesion: (1) the establishment of social connections, (2) a shared sense of belonging to a geographic community, and (3) a collective commitment to the common good. Key ideas within the theory include the importance of shared values, equality, and the enhancement of quality of life. It stresses the need for strong interpersonal ties and the cultivation of shared norms to foster societal stability, helping individuals feel part of a larger, interconnected community and thereby reducing risks of division and conflict. The theory supports inclusive policies that guarantee equal opportunities, uphold justice, and ensure fair resource distribution to bridge social and economic disparities and promote belonging, especially among marginalized groups. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of social capital encompassing trust, networks, and social relationships as a foundation for cooperation, collective action, and improved access to resources, ultimately strengthening societal resilience and well-being.

Furthermore, the Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement Theory examines the trajectories and experiences of displaced individuals. Kunz characterizes refugees as persons compelled to escape their home countries due to violence, persecution, or conflict, outlining a four-stage process beginning with a triggering event that prompts flight. While the theory provides valuable insights into the dynamics and pathways of the refugee movement, it has certain limitations. It does not fully address the intricate socio-economic and political drivers of displacement and places greater emphasis on movement rather than the underlying causes. Additionally, it offers limited attention to the prolonged challenges refugees encounter in host countries, such as integration difficulties, barriers to accessing essential services, and the struggle to achieve social cohesion.

### **Effects of Attitudes and Perceptions of Host Communities on Refugee Adaptability in Host Communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements**

A significant body of literature has examined the impact of host communities' attitudes and perceptions on refugee adaptability. Positive attitudes such as empathy and acceptance foster a more welcoming environment and enhance refugee integration. For instance, Renner (2015) postulates that Host Communities' Attitudes and Perceptions being determinants of Refugee Adaptability play a crucial role in shaping the adaptability of refugees. These factors are often interrelated, creating a complex web of influence on the overall refugee experience. Renner conducted a comprehensive study in a European host community, revealing that positive attitudes and perceptions of refugees fostered their sense of belonging, leading to improved adaptability. Conversely, negative attitudes were linked to social exclusion, making it more challenging for refugees to adapt.

Lambert (2017) examined the role of stereotypes in a North American context and found that when refugees were stereotyped as unskilled and potential security threats, they faced difficulties in accessing employment and social integration, impeding their adaptability. He reaffirms that Research has consistently shown that stereotypes and prejudice can hinder the adaptability of refugees. Negative stereotypes held by the host community can lead to discrimination and exclusion. Relatedly, Hynie et al. (2012) conducted a study in Canada, highlighting the importance of intercultural understanding. He found out that Positive perceptions of host communities as being open to learning about refugee cultures and backgrounds were associated with improved adaptability, as refugees felt more accepted. Hynies concluded that Effective communication between refugees and host communities is critical for adaptability. The perception of a welcoming and open host community can facilitate integration (Hynie et al., 2012).

Although the existing literature underscores the importance of host communities' attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes in shaping refugee

adaptability, with studies focusing primarily on European, North American and Canadian contexts, there was a research gap in understanding how these dynamics specifically play out in African settings, particularly in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements in Uganda. While the influence of positive and negative attitudes on refugee adaptability is well-documented in Western contexts, similar studies in these Ugandan settlements are limited, leaving a gap in localized knowledge regarding the impact of host community perceptions on refugee integration and adaptability.

Jones (2022) conducted a comprehensive study examining the relationship between economic strains and community attitudes towards refugees, particularly in contexts where resource competition is evident. The research focused on various refugee-hosting areas, analyzing how local economic conditions influence perceptions of scarcity and, subsequently, attitudes toward refugees. Jones identified that economic challenges, such as unemployment, inflation, and limited access to basic services, can lead to heightened competition for resources among local populations. In environments where residents feel their economic security is threatened, attitudes towards refugees often become more negative. The study utilized both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to assess community sentiments, revealing that feelings of scarcity can breed resentment and hostility towards refugees, who may be perceived as competitors for jobs, housing, and social services.

Research by Bhabha (2018) delves into the complexities of host community perceptions toward refugees, emphasizing that negative stereotypes and preconceived notions can significantly influence interpersonal relations. Bhabha argues that these stereotypes often stem from fears about resource competition, cultural differences, and safety concerns. Such perceptions can lead to a climate of disrespect and marginalization, where refugees are not only viewed as outsiders but also as burdens, rather than as individuals deserving of dignity and

support. This aligns closely with the findings from the current study, where a majority of respondents expressed disagreement regarding the respectful treatment of refugees.

Kälin and Schrag (2017) present a more optimistic perspective on the interactions between host communities and refugees. They suggest that many communities have successfully integrated refugees, promoting mutual respect and coexistence. Their research indicates that when resources are shared and collaborative efforts are made such as joint community projects or cultural exchanges both host and refugee populations can benefit. This framework highlights the potential for positive relationships, suggesting that the quality of interaction often depends on the social and economic context in which these groups coexist.

Betts and Jones (2016) explored the dynamics of host community attitudes towards refugees in various contexts, particularly focusing on the impact of socio-economic conditions on these perceptions. They argued that in regions experiencing economic hardship, competition for resources can intensify negative sentiments towards refugees. Betts and Jones utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a deeper understanding of local perceptions. Their findings indicated that socio-economic factors, such as unemployment rates and access to services, played a critical role in shaping attitudes. In communities facing significant economic challenges, the influx of refugees was often viewed as an additional strain, exacerbating existing tensions and fostering hostility. Furthermore, the authors pointed out that these negative attitudes were not uniform; they varied significantly depending on local context, such as the history of interaction between hosts and refugees, cultural factors, and the degree of integration initiatives in place. This underscores the importance of localized assessments, as understanding the specific socio-economic and cultural landscape can help in designing effective



interventions to mitigate prejudice and promote social cohesion.

Zetter and Ruadel (2016) conducted a comprehensive study examining the attitudes of host communities toward refugees across multiple settlements. Their research revealed a nuanced perspective, where community members exhibited both supportive and resentful sentiments. On one hand, many host community members acknowledged the economic contributions refugees made, such as filling labour shortages and boosting local markets, which led to increased livelihoods for some residents. However, these positive views were often counterbalanced by feelings of competition over limited resources, such as land, water, and social services. The study highlighted that this ambivalence was influenced by various factors, including the length of time refugees had been in the area, the overall economic conditions of the host communities, and the effectiveness of local governance in managing the integration process.

Chiswick and Miller (2018) analyzed data in the United States and found that the availability of economic opportunities, such as jobs, positively affected refugees' adaptability. In addition, access to social services, such as language training and healthcare, contributed to a better quality of life and adaptability. Their analysis indicated that Economic and social factors within host communities can significantly influence refugee adaptability. Positive economic conditions and access to social services can facilitate integration and adaptation. Furthermore, Hainmueller & Hangartner, (2019) conducted a study in European host countries and found out that government policies promoting refugee integration positively affected host community attitudes. When host communities perceived government support, they were more likely to be receptive to refugees and support their adaptability. The study concluded that host country policies and government initiatives can shape the attitudes and perceptions of the host community. Pro-refugee policies and supportive government

measures can foster positive attitudes. However, the study did not mention friendly attitude and creating a sense of hospitality as important factors that help new refugees adjust to their new environment with less difficulty. A friendly attitude can make refugees feel more welcomed and accepted in their new communities and reduce social isolation and feelings of alienation which are obstacles to integration.

Molina (2016) studied a host community in Australia, revealing that strong community organizations and social networks played a vital role in helping refugees adapt. These networks provided emotional support, guidance, and practical assistance. The literature also suggests that strong community and social capital within the host community can positively influence refugee adaptability. When refugees are connected to supportive networks, they experience smoother integration (Molina, 2016). Therefore, the above literature has highlighted clearly that the attitudes and perceptions of host communities have a profound impact on the adaptability of refugees. Positive attitudes such as lack of prejudice, effective communication, supportive policies and community capital can all facilitate the integration and adaptability of refugees. Conversely, negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviours can impede their ability to thrive in their new environment. Understanding these dynamics is essential for policymakers and practitioners working to improve the refugee experience and promote successful adaptation in host countries.

Another study conducted by (Taylor, Zhu, 2016) to compare the effect of refugee influx on host communities taking more than two refugee camp case studies indicated that Refugee demand for local goods and services boosts local incomes (and spending) which, in turn, generates additional rounds of expansive effects in the local economy. Host-country households do not receive any World Food Program cash transfers in this setting, but their real incomes increase by \$41 per refugee at Camp 1

and \$69 per refugee at Camp 2. Such large spillovers and benefits were absent in the case of in-kind assistance (camp 3). Refugees trade some of the food aid for money, which reduces its value and causes food prices to decline (whereas food prices increase in the case of cash-based assistance). Hence, resident agricultural producers suffer. The multiplier effect for the local economy is only 25% and remains within the refugee camp, rather than entering the host economy. Nevertheless, the study did not examine the relationship between host communities' attitudes and perceptions and refugee adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements which this study investigated to fill the existing gap.

One especially rigorous evaluation was performed jointly by the World Food Program (WFP) and a team of researchers based at the University of California (Taylor, Filipinski, et al., 2016). They investigated the impact of three Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda on host communities by feeding micro survey data into localized general equilibrium models. Thus, they estimate not only the aggregate effects but also identify the contributions of individual channels: labour market effects, price effects, and spillovers to the national economy. The policy setting differs across the camps in that refugees received cash-based assistance via mobile phone transfers in two camps, but in-kind assistance in the third. In addition, Taylor, Filipinski, et al. (2016) identify highly positive effects for residents within a 10km radius of the cash camps. An additional refugee increases the total real annual income in the area by US\$205 (camp 1) and \$253 (camp 2). These amounts are equivalent to 63% and 96% of baseline per capita income around each camp and exceed the value of per-refugee WFP assistance, indicating substantial multiplier effects (Taylor, Filipinski, et al., 2016). Economic spillovers arise as refugee households and businesses in the camps purchase goods and services from businesses outside the camps that are owned by residents.

According to Luecke, & Schneiderheinze, (2017), altogether the study identifies substantial positive economic effects of refugee hosting for the local community. Importantly, the authors only incorporate effects that result from the direct interaction of refugees and residents in labour and good markets, to the exclusion of the economic effects of constructing, maintaining, or expanding the refugee camps. Such activities add to the positive economic impacts. Additionally, camp workers spend most of their salaries on locally produced goods and services. As the study does not account for such expenditures, it likely represents a lower-bound estimate of the impact of hosting refugees on the host economy. However, the studies focused primarily on the economic impact of refugee camps on host communities yet the current study looked at how host community attitude and perception relates to refugee adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements in Uganda.

World Bank Group. (2017) suggests that communities that host refugees are likely to experience significant changes in relative prices. There is no general presumption about how changes in relative prices or the price level will affect the welfare of residents overall. However, significant changes in relative prices will almost certainly be associated with gains and losses for particular groups of residents. For example, farmers who own land will normally benefit from higher food prices, whereas rural residents without their land will suffer. Lower prices for labour-intensive goods and services benefit consumers but are probably associated with lower wages for some categories of workers (due to the inflow of refugees).

Employment is the variable that is investigated most often in the studies reviewed by Verme and Schuettler (2019). Yet, two out of three studies do not detect a significant impact. Among those studies that identify a significant relationship, only slightly more than half (19 vs 14 percent of all studies) find negative effects on residents. The results differ sharply across refugee situations, in part because the

socioeconomic characteristics of refugees (language skills, education, work experience, etc.) determine to a large extent how refugees compete with residents in the labour market. Besides employment, wages are the most relevant indicator of labour market performance. Once again, the studies reviewed by Verme and Schuettler (2019) show fairly balanced results: most estimates are insignificant and of the significant estimates, (only) slightly more are negative than positive. Importantly, negative effects tend to be limited to the short term.

The authors found that the more time that has passed since the refugee inflow, the less negative the impact is on residents' wages. There is some evidence that refugees contribute to their host economy through their country-specific knowledge and networks in both, their country of origin and their host country. By facilitating communication and reducing the cost of international transactions, they may help to expand bilateral trade, especially once the country of origin moves towards post-conflict reconstruction. The possible role of refugees in helping to expand international trade between their host and home countries mirrors the positive impact of immigrants in general on international trade (Genc, 2014). In the case of refugees, this effect is likely to be larger the better the refugees are integrated into their host economy.

For physical infrastructure development, the impact of a refugee influx is unambiguously positive. The region around a refugee camp typically experiences improved road access and transportation, benefiting not only refugees but also making transport cheaper and more convenient for host communities and thus contributing to socio-economic development (Maystadt and Verwimp, 2014; Miller, 2018). However, the studies reviewed by Verme and Schuettler (2019) largely focus on labour market outcomes such as employment and wages, with limited attention to how these economic impacts intersect with host communities' attitudes and perceptions, which are crucial for refugee

adaptability. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, where the socio-economic integration of refugees may be significantly influenced by the host communities' perceptions, yet this aspect remains underexplored in the existing literature.

Betts and Loescher (2011) argue that community involvement is essential for building trust and unity, suggesting that positive interactions between host community members and refugees can enhance well-being and lead to more favourable outcomes for both groups. Their research emphasizes how collaborative community efforts, such as joint participation in cultural or recreational activities, can facilitate understanding and mitigate tensions arising from shared resources. In contrast, Crisp (2010) offers a more nuanced view, noting that while some host communities may actively engage with refugees, significant barriers often exist that hinder full integration. His work highlights the complexities of refugee-host dynamics, particularly in areas where resources are limited and competition for these resources can breed resentment. Crisp points to cultural differences and differing social norms as additional factors that can complicate relationships between refugees and host communities.

Mastorillo et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive analysis of these disparities, highlighting how systemic barriers often inhibit refugees from fully participating in local economies and communities. One significant barrier is the lack of legal recognition or documentation, which can restrict refugees' access to public services and employment opportunities. Many refugees face difficulties obtaining work permits or legal status, leading to underemployment or informal work that is often low-paying and lacks security. This situation exacerbates economic instability and contributes to a cycle of poverty, making it challenging for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency.

In terms of healthcare, Mastorillo et al. (2016) note that refugees often encounter difficulties navigating



health systems due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with the healthcare framework, and limited availability of culturally competent services. These obstacles can result in unmet health needs, higher rates of chronic illnesses, and poorer overall health outcomes compared to host community members. Additionally, educational access is another critical area of concern. Many refugee children face obstacles such as language proficiency, discrimination, and the lack of support systems within schools. This can lead to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates, further entrenching social inequalities. Mastrorillo et al. argue that these disparities reinforce social stratification, as refugees become marginalized within their host communities, fostering tensions that can manifest as resentment or conflict. Furthermore, Ager and Strang (2008) argue that social ties between refugees and host communities can be influenced by various factors, including historical relationships, economic conditions, and cultural differences.

Kauffmann (2016) focused on the impact of stereotypes and perceptions on refugee integration. Key Contributions: Kauffmann highlights how negative stereotypes can significantly hinder the integration process, leading to mistrust and conflict between refugees and host communities. This work underscores the importance of addressing prejudices and promoting positive narratives to improve relationships and facilitate the successful inclusion of refugees in host societies. Furthermore, Mastrorillo et al. (2016) examine the social and economic challenges faced by refugees, emphasizing how social stratification can perpetuate prejudice and inequality. Mastrorillo et al. argue that systemic barriers—such as limited access to resources—reinforce negative perceptions of refugees. Their findings suggest that without addressing these barriers, achieving positive refugee-host relationships remains challenging.

More still, Ager & Strang (2008) are known for their framework on refugee integration, which

emphasizes the importance of social cohesion. They propose that successful integration is contingent upon several factors, including the support of host communities, access to services, and the fostering of mutual understanding. Their research highlights the need for targeted initiatives that build empathy and connection between refugees and host populations, essential for achieving long-term social stability. More so, Zetter (2012) focused on the implications of refugee policies and the socio-economic impacts of refugee presence in host communities. He raises concerns about competition for resources and how this can lead to negative perceptions of refugees, suggesting that public policies must consider local contexts to mitigate tensions. His research underscores the importance of recognizing the contributions refugees can make to host communities and the necessity of collaborative resource management.

Crisp (2010) critiques the adequacy of existing support systems for refugees, arguing that many countries lack effective frameworks to facilitate refugee integration. He emphasizes that without sufficient support, refugees often face marginalization and struggle to access basic services. Crisp advocates for comprehensive policies that address the needs of both refugees and host communities, highlighting the interconnectedness of their well-being.

Mastrorillo et al. (2022) provide a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing refugee adaptability, emphasizing that it is a multifaceted process shaped by a variety of interrelated elements. The study revealed that access to economic opportunities is crucial for refugee adaptability. Additionally, legal status plays a significant role in determining the level of adaptability for refugees. More so, social networks/strong social ties—both within refugee communities and between refugees and host communities are instrumental in promoting adaptability. Furthermore, due to insufficient support structures for integration, initiatives aimed at creating regular opportunities for cultural

exchange are essential (Smith et al., 2023; Johnson & Lee, 2023).

In their case study for Kenya, Enghoff et al. (2010) note that 80 percent of host community respondents report increased use of buses, pick-ups and taxis. Typically, such commercial transportation is used to go to the refugee camps to trade, visit relatives, access health facilities, or collect or buy food (Enghoff, 2010). Mabiso (2014) these researchers concluded that a refugee influx can improve market efficiency and trade dynamism, in part because of road investments made by international organizations “given the strong link between road accessibility and economic development” (Ogude, 2018, p. 13). Especially in remote areas, better road infrastructure may reduce the prices of traded goods (Casaburi, Glennerster and Suri, 2013), raising real incomes.

Researchers have presented forms of attitudes and perceptions held by the host community which influence refugee adaptability. Foremost, welcoming and inclusive attitudes are one of the forms common among host communities. A study in northern Uganda found that refugees reported feeling welcomed by host communities, which helped them to integrate into local social networks and economic opportunities (Omata, 2011). Nonetheless, while existing research highlights the positive economic impacts of refugee influxes, such as improved transportation and market efficiency, there is a research gap in understanding how these economic changes influence host community attitudes and perceptions, which are critical for refugee adaptability. Specifically, in the context of Uganda, where over 1.4 million refugees are hosted, the interplay between infrastructure development and host community perceptions, and how these factors together impact refugee adaptability in settlements like Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements needed to be investigated.

Koren and Biller-Andorno (2019) established that perceptions of shared culture and values are another form of attitude held by host communities. They

found Ugandan host communities viewed refugees from neighbouring countries positively due to perceived similarities in language, food and religion. This cultural understanding facilitated refugees' social adaptation. However, Kagolo (2019) established some negative forms of perceptions such as fear of economic competition in which case some Ugandans expressed concerns that refugees were dominating small businesses and taking scarce jobs, a perception that has increased tensions in areas with large refugee populations. In addition, security and criminality fears held by host communities affect refugee adaptability.

A study in West Nile, Uganda, found host community stereotypes of refugees as passive recipients of aid hindered self-reliance efforts like farming or entrepreneurship (Alix-Garcia et al., 2020), while Difficulties in communicating due to linguistic differences posed challenges for Congolese refugee children integrating into Ugandan schools according to Betts et al. (2014). The study concluded that a combination of cultural unfamiliarity factors also slowed host-refugees' ability to form social connections. In relation to investigating host community attitudes and perceptions of refugee adaptability in the foregone literature reviewed, the researcher appreciates the different scholars who highlighted the economic effects of refugee influx on host communities. The literature demonstrates that the host communities hold to the belief that the demand for goods and services by refugees can positively impact the local economy, leading to increased incomes for host-country households. However, the nature of the assistance provided, whether in cash or in-kind, can have different outcomes on local agricultural producers and food prices. Understanding these economic dynamics is important for evaluating how host communities perceive and adapt to the presence of refugees and can inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting positive attitudes and fostering integration. This study seeks to investigate how the attitudes and perceptions of host

communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements influence the adaptability of refugees.

## METHODS

The research utilized a pragmatist philosophy, which served as a robust framework for analyzing the practices related to policy frameworks and refugee adaptability in the Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements in western Uganda. A descriptive and correlational research design was employed due to its effectiveness in uncovering potential relationships between variables in real-world contexts. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aimed to provide a well-rounded and thorough understanding of the topic being explored. The study's population comprised refugees living in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements within Kyegegwa and Kibale districts, local community members in the vicinity, humanitarian and NGO personnel, officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, and local government leaders. The total population was reported to be 516,023 individuals (UNHCR, 2021; Uganda Refugee Statistics Report, April 2024). Specifically, the refugee population in Kyaka II was approximately 133,584, alongside about 128,600 host community members. Additionally, Kyangwali settlement was home to around 125,039 refugees distributed across 42,428 households.

The sample size of 400 refugees and host communities was used to provide quantitative data and 23 respondents from Humanitarian/ NGO staff, Officials from the Office of the Prime Minister and Local Government host leaders (both politicians and civil servants) were used for interviews. The key informants were expected to have vast knowledge about host communities' attitudes and perceptions about refugees and their adaptability. The sample size of 400 was determined using the formula developed by Slovic (1960). That is,  $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ . From the formula,  $n$  = sample of respondents needed for this study,  $N$  = study population and  $e$  = level of precision (0.05). Slovic's formula was used because the population

was large and the researcher could not afford to collect data from the whole population.

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

- $n = 516,023 / (1 + 516,023 (0.05^2))$
- $n = 516,023 / (1 + 516,023 (0.0025))$
- $n = 516,023 / (1 + 1290.0575)$
- $n = 516,023 / (1291.0575)$
- $n = 400$  respondents

The total sample size of respondents for the two selected refugee settlements was 400. However, the researcher further derived the sample size for each refugee settlement from which data was collected as follows;

$$\text{For Kyaka II refugee settlement, } n = \frac{262,184}{516,023} \times 400 = 203 \text{ respondents}$$

$$\text{For Kyangwali settlement, } n = \frac{253,839}{516,023} \times 400 = 197 \text{ respondents}$$

The researcher utilized simple random sampling to choose refugees and host community members for quantitative data collection. A complete list of all individuals from both groups in the Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements was obtained from the camp commandant for refugees and local leaders for host communities. From this list, the researcher selected a subset of participants, resulting in a total of 203 refugees and 195 host community members, culminating in 400 respondents who completed questionnaires for quantitative data. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that each individual had an equal chance of being included in the study, enhancing the generalizability of the results. In addition to simple random sampling, purposive sampling was employed, relying on the researcher's judgment to select individuals who were deemed most representative of the population or capable of providing the most relevant data.

The researcher specifically selected ten staff members from humanitarian NGOs, two local government political leaders, five staff members from the Office of the Prime Minister, and six civil servants from local government. These individuals participated in interviews guided by predetermined questions. For data analysis, the researcher employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations to categorize and interpret the findings. Additionally, inferential statistics, including simple regression analyses, were utilized to test the hypothesis. Qualitative data were organized into various themes based on the

interview guide, with responses coded and themes developed for further analysis, presented as verbatim statements from the key informants.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings on the effects of attitudes and perceptions of host communities on refugee adaptability at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. The researcher collected data to ascertain the level of agreement using strongly agree (SA), agree (A) not sure (N), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) as a descriptive analysis of attitudes and perceptions of host communities was done and the findings were recorded in Table 4.1 as follows;

**Table 4.1: Descriptive Analysis of Attitudes and Perceptions of Host Communities**

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements show a welcoming and friendly attitude towards refugees, creating a sense of hospitality.	44(11.6%)	60(15.8%)	16(4.2%)	160 (42.1%)	100(26.3 %)	2.44	1.34
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements treat refugees with respect and honour their dignity.	42(11.1%)	55(14.5%)	13(3.4%)	165(43.4%)	105(27.6 %)	2.38	1.32
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements hold negative or prejudiced attitudes towards refugees	32(8.4%)	45(11.8%)	18(4.7%)	170(44.8%)	115(30.3 %)	2.32	1.30
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements show hostility towards refugees	85(22.4%)	125(32.9%)	0(0.0%)	100(26.3%)	70(18.4%)	3.00	0.65
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements are worried or feel unsafe because of the presence of refugees	95(25.0%)	135(35.5%)	0(0.0%)	82(21.6%)	68(17.9%)	3.10	0.295
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements make an effort to involve refugees in community activities and events, creating a sense of unity and trust.	85(22.4%)	105(27.6%)	0(0.0%)	102(26.8%)	88(23.2%)	3.00	0.65
There is equal access to resources and services for both refugees and host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements	35(9.2%)	45(11.8%)	0(0.0%)	170(44.7%)	130(34.2 %)	2.96	1.27

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements demonstrate empathy and concern for the challenges and experiences faced by refugees	52(13.7%)	68(17.9%)	20(5.3%)	140(36.8%)	100(26.3%)	3.19	0.590
Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements tend to make assumptions or hold preconceived notions about refugees.	95(25.0%)	135(35.5%)	0(0.0%)	82(21.6%)	68(17.9%)	4.21	1.00
There are instances of bias and stereotypes against refugees in the attitudes and behaviors of host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements	114(30.0%)	138(36.3%)	0(0.0%)	72(18.9%)	56(14.8%)	3.48	1.45

**Source: Primary data (2024)**

The study findings in Table 4.1 indicate that host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements show a welcoming and friendly attitude towards refugees, creating a sense of hospitality had a mean score of 2.44, with a standard deviation of 1.34 which suggests a general low agreement with the statement. Only 27.4% of respondents (11.6% strongly agreed and 15.8% agreed) perceive that the host communities are welcoming and friendly towards refugees. In contrast, 68.4% (42.1% disagreed and 26.3% strongly disagreed) do not agree, indicating that a significant portion of the population does not see the host communities as hospitable towards refugees.

The study findings in Table 4.1 on the statement that host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements treat refugees with respect and honour their dignity indicated a mean score of 2.38 and a standard deviation of 1.32, revealing a low level of agreement with the idea that refugees are treated with respect and dignity. Only 25.6% of respondents (11.1% strongly agreed and 14.5% agreed) believe that the host communities treat refugees respectfully, while 71% (43.4% disagreed and 27.6% strongly disagreed). The similar standard deviation suggests that the opinions are fairly distributed, with a majority leaning towards the negative.

Furthermore, study findings in Table 4.1 indicated that Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements hold negative or prejudiced attitudes towards refugees had a mean score of 2.32 and a standard deviation of 1.30, indicating that 8.4% of the respondents strongly agreed and 11.8% agreed. However, 44.8% disagreed and 30.3% strongly disagreed with this statement, suggesting that the majority of respondents do not perceive the host communities as overtly prejudiced. The consistency of the standard deviation implies some variation in responses but overall reflects a predominantly neutral or negative view.

Table 4.1 on the item of host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements shows hostility towards refugees showed a mean score of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.65 indicating a more divided perception, with a higher mean suggesting a moderate level of agreement. A significant portion, 55.3% of respondents (22.4% strongly agreed and 32.9% agreed), believe that there is hostility towards refugees, while 44.7% (26.3% disagreed and 18.4% strongly disagreed) did not share this view. The lower standard deviation reflects less variation in responses, suggesting that respondents are more consistent in their opinions on this matter, with a slight leaning towards agreeing that there is hostility.



Regarding host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements are worried or feel unsafe because of the presence of refugees, the mean score of 3.10 and a very low standard deviation of 0.295 show a notable level of agreement, indicating that the host community members tend to feel worried or unsafe due to the presence of refugees. A significant majority, 60.5% of respondents (25.0% strongly agreed and 35.5% agreed), express concern over safety, while only 39.5% (21.6% disagreed and 17.9% strongly disagreed).

The study findings regarding the statement "Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements make an effort to involve refugees in community activities and events, creating a sense of unity and trust" showed a relatively normal distribution, with 85 respondents (22.4%) strongly agreeing, 105 respondents (27.6%) agreeing, 0 respondents selecting neutral, 102 respondents (26.8%) disagreeing, and 88 respondents (23.2%) strongly disagreeing, for an average response of 3.00 with a standard deviation of 0.65. This suggests that while over half of respondents agreed that host community members make an effort to involve refugees, close to half disagreed as well, indicating differing experiences and opinions among the survey participants on this issue.

Study findings concerning the statement "There is equal access to resources and services for both refugees and host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements" showed that the majority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Specifically, 35 respondents (9.2%) strongly agreed, 45(11.8%) agreed, 0 respondents selected neutral, 170(44.7%) disagreed and 130(34.2%) strongly disagreed, resulting in a mean of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 1.27. This indicated that most respondents believe there is unequal access to resources and services between refugees and host community members in these settlements, with over three-quarters of respondents

disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement about equal access.

From Table 4.1, study findings on host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements demonstrate empathy and concern for the challenges and experiences faced by refugees" revealed that 52 respondents (13.7%) strongly agreed, 68 respondents (17.9%) agreed, 20 respondents (5.3%) were neutral, 140 respondents (36.8%) disagreed, and 100 respondents (26.3%) strongly disagreed (Mean= 3.19, Standard deviation= 0.590). This indicates that there were mixed experiences reported among respondents, with over half agreeing to some extent that host community members demonstrated empathy, but close to two-fifths disagreeing as well, suggesting differing perspectives on levels of empathy expressed toward refugees within the settlements.

Host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements tend to make assumptions or hold preconceived notions about refugees showed that 95 respondents (25.0%) strongly agreed, 135 respondents (35.5%) agreed, 0 respondents were neutral, 82 respondents (21.6%) disagreed, and 68 respondents (17.9%) strongly disagreed, resulting in an average response of 4.21 out of 5 with a standard deviation of 1.00. This implies that most participants believe host community members in these settlements do tend to make assumptions or hold preconceived notions about refugees, as over half of respondents agreed with this statement, while under two-fifths disagreed.

The study findings on the statement that there are instances of bias and stereotypes against refugees in the attitudes and behaviours of host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements indicated that 114 respondents (30.0%) strongly agreed, 138 respondents (36.3%) agreed, 0 respondents were neutral, 72 respondents (18.9%) disagreed, and 56 respondents (14.8%) strongly disagreed (Mean=3.48 and the standard deviation of 1.45).

A respondent at Kyangwali refugee settlement was asked how she perceived the attitudes and perceptions of the host communities towards refugee adaptability at Kyangwali settlement: she said;

*I would say the attitudes of local Ugandans towards refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali have generally been positive. When the settlements were first established, there was some uncertainty and tension as integration was a new experience for both sides. However, over time as social and economic relations developed, perceptions have improved tremendously. Many Ugandans speak proudly of how refugees have contributed new skills and livelihood activities to the local economy. They have helped boost areas like construction, trade and agriculture by providing labour and starting small businesses. This economic interaction has fostered acceptance (Key Informant from Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, July, 2024).*

*Additionally, through shared public services and community spaces like schools, water sources and markets, interfaces between refugees*

*and hosts have multiplied. Children especially have grown up learning and playing together, fostering social bonds. Of course, challenges still remain like competing for limited resources at times. But successful awareness campaigns by aid agencies have further reduced any fears or tensions. Hosts now recognize refugees as neighbours in need of support rather than threats. If I had to characterize it, I would say local attitudes have transformed from indifference to one of social solidarity. Refugees are widely perceived as fellow community members contributing to local progress rather than outsiders. (Key Informant from Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, July, 2024).*

#### Assessment of Refugee Adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements

Descriptive analysis was also done to examine the indicators of refugee adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements and the following were the findings;

**Table 4.2: Refugee Adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements**

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std
Refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements actively participate in community activities and events, which helps them feel like they belong and are integrated into the community	70(18.4%)	95(25.0%)	0(0.0%)	120(31.6%)	95(25.0%)	2.80	1.50
Refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements have achieved economic self-sufficiency and reduced tendencies of reliance on aid.	75(19.7%)	82(21.6%)	0(0.0%)	125(32.9%)	98(25.8%)	2.77	1.52
Refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements have the same educational opportunities for both their children and adults as the host community members.	124(32.6%)	158(41.6%)	0(0.0%)	52(13.7%)	46(12.1%)	3.69	1.37
Refugees have made advancements in learning and becoming proficient in the local language(s) spoken in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements	100(26.3%)	108(28.4%)	0(0.0%)	92(24.2%)	80(21.1%)	3.15	1.08

Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std
Refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements have access to sufficient healthcare services and facilities, which contribute to their overall health and well-being	128(33.7%)	160(42.0%)	0(0.0%)	50(13.0%)	42(6.3%)	3.74	0.92
Refugees at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlement are aware and have equal access to legal and civil rights as the host community members.	148(38.9%)	160(42.1%)	0(0.0%)	40(10.5%)	32(8.4%)	3.93	0.84

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

From Table 4.2, the study results for statement one indicated varying levels of agreement regarding refugees' participation in community activities and events in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. Specifically, 18.4% strongly agreed and 25.0% agreed that such participation helps refugees feel integrated and belong. However, a significant 31.6% disagreed, and another 25.0% strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean score of 2.80, coupled with a standard deviation of 1.50, suggests a generally neutral to disagreeing stance on the effectiveness of community participation in fostering a sense of belonging. The high standard deviation indicates considerable variability in responses. This implies that while some refugees find community involvement beneficial for integration, a substantial portion felt that these activities were not effective or might not adequately address their needs for belonging and integration.

From Table 4.2, the study findings showed that most respondents either disagreed or were neutral about refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements achieving economic self-sufficiency and reducing reliance on aid, with 125(32.9%) disagreeing and 98(25.8%) strongly

disagreeing. There was also a significant proportion who agreed, with 75(19.7%) indicating strongly agree and 82(21.6%) agreeing. However, overall the central tendency was neutral to disagree as indicated by the mean of 2.77. There was also high variability in the responses as shown by the standard deviation of 1.52.

Regarding the third statement that examined perceptions of educational opportunities for refugee and host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, the majority of respondents, 32.6% strongly agreed and 41.6% agreed that refugees and host communities have the same educational opportunities for both children and adults. However, 13.7% disagreed and 12.1% strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean response was 3.69 indicating that on average respondents somewhat agreed with the statement, but there was a standard deviation of 1.37 showing some variability in individual responses. This implies that while most people felt refugees and hosts had equal access to education, over a quarter of respondents perceived some level of inequality in educational opportunities between the two groups

From the study findings in Table 4.2, the results reflect a generally positive view of refugees' progress in learning and becoming proficient in the local languages spoken in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. Precisely, 26.3% of respondents strongly agreed and 28.4% agreed that refugees have advanced in language proficiency. In contrast, 24.2% disagreed and 21.1% strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean score of 3.15 indicated a tendency toward agreement with the notion that refugees are making notable progress in learning local languages, while the standard deviation of 1.08 reveals moderate variability in responses. This suggests that there was a perception of significant improvement in language skills among refugees, though some still feel that progress may not be as substantial or widespread. The data imply that while many refugees are successfully learning the local languages, there may be ongoing challenges for others, highlighting the importance of continued support and resources to enhance language acquisition and integration.

The study results in Table 4.2 revealed a strong positive perception regarding refugees' access to sufficient healthcare services and facilities in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. A notable 33.7% strongly agreed and 42.0% agreed that the available healthcare services significantly contributed to their overall health and well-being. In contrast, only 13.0% disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean score of 3.74 indicated a general agreement that healthcare access was adequate, while the standard deviation of 0.92 reflects relatively low variability in responses. This suggests a consensus that healthcare services in these settlements were generally perceived as sufficient and beneficial for the refugees' health.

The implication is that while the majority of refugees were likely to be receiving adequate healthcare, ongoing assessments and improvements are essential to address any gaps or emerging needs, ensuring that all refugees have equitable access to necessary health services.

Regarding the statement that refugees at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlement are aware and have equal access to legal and civil rights as the host community, the majority of respondents strongly agreed (38.9%) or agreed (42.1%) that refugees are aware of and have equal access to the same legal and civil rights as hosts. However, 10.5% disagreed and 8.4% strongly disagreed. The mean response was 3.93 showing overall agreement with the statement. The lower standard deviation of 0.84 indicates greater consensus in responses compared to the previous statement on education. While most respondents feel refugees have equal legal and civil rights protections as locals, over 18% perceived some level of inequality. This implies that according to survey respondents, refugees have relatively good awareness of and access to their legal and civil rights, but a minority view that protections as unequal compared to the host community.

### **Hypothesis Testing: Attitudes and Perceptions of Host Communities Have no Significant Positive Effects on Refugee Adaptability in Host Communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements**

The third hypothesis was that attitudes and perceptions of host communities have no significant positive effects on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. This hypothesis was tested and the results were obtained as indicated below;

**Table 4.3: Attitudes and Perceptions of Host Communities and Refugee Adaptability at Kyaka II and Kyangwali Settlements**

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error		
1	0.275 <sup>a</sup>	0.076	0.072	0.58624		
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	7.702	1	7.702	22.411	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	93.825	378	0.344		
1	Total	101.527	379			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstand. Coefficients		Stand. Coefficients	t	Sig.
			Std. Error			
	(Constant)	B		Beta		
		2.706	0.234		11.563	0.030
	Attitudes and perceptions					
1		0.307	0.065	0.275	4.734	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Refugee Adaptability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Attitudes and perceptions of host communities

The regression results in Table 4.3 show an R-squared of 0.076, indicating that 7.6% of the variation in refugee adaptability at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements is explained by the variances in attitudes and perceptions of host communities. However, the model failed to explain 92.4% of the variation in attitudes and perceptions of host communities. This means that there are other factors associated with refugee adaptability which were not explained by the model.

The regression results in Table 4.3 also revealed that the overall model was significant. The model was found to be significant ( $F=22.411$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). The high residual sum of squares (93.825) as shown in the table indicates that the model does not explain all the variations in refugee adaptability and there are other factors that account for a higher proportion of the variation in refugee adaptability. The study further determined the beta coefficients of attitudes and perceptions of host communities. The results reveal that attitudes and perceptions of host communities are statistically significant in explaining refugee adaptability at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. This is supported by  $\beta =$

0.307,  $t=4.734$ ,  $p<0.000$ . The results imply that a unit change in attitudes and perceptions of host communities leads to a positive change in refugee adaptability at the rate of 0.307. The study findings imply that positive shifts in these attitudes and perceptions lead to improved refugee adaptability. This underscores the importance of fostering positive community interactions and addressing the host community's feelings to enhance the integration and adaptability of refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements.

### Hypothesis Decision

From the study findings in Table 4.3, the hypothesis that attitudes and perceptions of host communities have no significant positive effects on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements was rejected and it was concluded that attitudes and perceptions of host communities have significant positive effects on refugee adaptability in host communities at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. The rejection of the hypothesis regarding the attitudes and perceptions of host communities suggests that these social factors play a vital role in shaping refugee



adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. The findings indicate that positive attitudes and perceptions among host community members significantly enhance the integration and adaptability of refugees, fostering a more supportive environment.

This underscores the importance of community engagement and awareness-raising initiatives to cultivate positive interactions between refugees and local residents. By improving understanding and attitudes, stakeholders can facilitate better integration outcomes, ultimately benefiting both refugees and host communities through enhanced social cohesion and mutual support.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In relation to the effects of attitudes and perceptions of host communities on refugee adaptability at Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, the findings from the study indicated that host community members in the Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements exhibit a generally low level of agreement regarding the welcoming and friendly attitude towards refugees, reflected in a mean score of 2.44 and a standard deviation of 1.34. This suggests that the perception of hospitality is not strongly felt among the respondents, with only 27.4% acknowledging a welcoming demeanour, while a substantial 68.4% express disagreement. The findings are in agreement with Jones (2022) who argued that economic strains and competition for resources lead to increased hostility towards refugees. Jones highlighted that local perceptions of scarcity can significantly impact attitudes, making it crucial to consider economic contexts when assessing community responses to refugee populations.

The findings from the study in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements indicate a low level of agreement among host community members regarding a welcoming attitude towards refugees which partially aligns with the Social Cohesion and Integration Theory. This theory emphasizes that social cohesion is a dynamic process that relies on

positive interactions, mutual understanding, and shared goals between groups. A mean score of 2.44 with significant variation (standard deviation of 1.34) suggests that the host community's attitudes may be shaped by specific contextual factors, such as resource competition, historical relations, or socio-economic disparities, which the theory identifies as critical in shaping integration outcomes. However, the findings also highlight challenges in fostering cohesion, demonstrating that without deliberate efforts like structured interactions and inclusive policies that the theoretical principles of Social Cohesion may not naturally manifest.

The study findings on the statement concerning perception regarding the treatment of refugees by host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements indicated a mean score of 2.38, coupled with a standard deviation of 1.32, suggesting that there was a low level of agreement among respondents about refugees being treated with respect and dignity. These findings agreed with Bhabha (2018) whose study indicated that host communities often harbour negative perceptions and stereotypes about refugees, which can lead to feelings of disrespect and marginalization. Nevertheless, the results disagreed with those of Kälin and Schrag (2017) who argue that in many contexts, host communities can foster mutual respect and coexistence through shared resources and communal interactions. While both sets of authors examine the dynamics between host communities and refugees, their conclusions highlight divergent perspectives regarding the overall treatment and integration of refugees.

The findings on the host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements generally hold negative or prejudiced attitudes toward refugees was disagreed by most of the respondents as revealed by a mean score of 2.32 and a standard deviation of 1.30. The findings disagree with those of Betts and Jones (2016) who reported more pronounced negative attitudes in certain refugee-

hosting areas, emphasizing that local socio-economic tensions can exacerbate prejudicial views. Thus, while there is some agreement regarding the presence of negative attitudes, the intensity and prevalence of these sentiments appear to vary significantly across different contexts, illustrating the need for localized assessments in refugee-hosting areas.

From the study findings, respondents agreed that the host community members in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements show hostility towards refugees as showed by the mean score of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.65 indicating a more divided perception, with a higher mean suggesting a moderate level of agreement. The findings concur with Zetter and Ruaudel (2016) who found that host communities in various refugee settlements often express mixed feelings towards refugees, highlighting both support and resentment. Their findings indicated that while some community members recognized the economic benefits brought by refugees, others felt threatened by resource competition.

The findings of the study regarding host community involvement in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements revealed a nuanced perspective on refugee integration. A significant portion of respondents over half expressed agreement that host community members actively engage refugees in community activities, which aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of social cohesion for successful refugee integration (Betts & Loescher, 2011). These studies suggest that community involvement fosters trust and unity, enhancing the overall well-being of both refugees and host communities.

However, the study results also indicated a notable dissent, with nearly half of the respondents expressing disagreement. This divergence echoes the findings of other researchers, such as Crisp (2010), who highlight the complexities and challenges of refugee-host relations, particularly in contexts marked by resource competition and

cultural differences. The relatively normal distribution of responses, coupled with an average score of 3.00, underscores the existence of varied experiences and opinions within the community, suggesting that while efforts to promote unity are evident, significant barriers remain. This duality in perceptions warrants further investigation into the underlying factors contributing to such disparities, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in refugee-host community interactions.

The study findings from Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements, where over half of the respondents agreed that host community members actively engage refugees in community activities, align with the principles of the Social Cohesion and Integration Theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of social processes, such as interaction, cooperation, and shared activities, in building cohesive and integrated societies. Active participation by host community members in communal activities involving refugees fosters mutual understanding and trust, which are essential for social cohesion. These findings suggest that, at least in part, the dynamics within these settlements reflect the theory's premise that structured and voluntary engagements contribute to stronger community bonds and a more inclusive society. However, the overall impact would depend on the quality and consistency of such interactions.

The study findings regarding access to resources and services in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements reveal a stark perception of inequality, as evidenced by the overwhelming majority of respondents over three-quarters disagreeing with the statement that refugees and host community members have equal access. This aligns with existing literature that frequently underscores the disparities faced by refugees in accessing essential services, such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities (Mastrorillo et al., 2016). For instance, Mastrorillo et al. (2016) highlight systematic barriers that often limit refugees' ability

to fully participate in the local economy and access vital resources, reinforcing social stratification and fostering tension between communities.

The findings regarding host community members' empathy and concern for the challenges faced by refugees in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements reflect a complex and divided perspective, echoing themes in the current literature on refugee-host relationships. While 31.6% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that host community members demonstrate empathy, a significant 63.1% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, highlighting a notable division in experiences and perceptions. This mixed response is in agreement with research by Ager and Strang (2008), who argue that social ties between refugees and host communities can be influenced by various factors, including historical relationships, economic conditions and cultural differences.

Some scholars, like Betts and Loescher (2011), emphasize that empathy can foster social cohesion and facilitate better integration outcomes, suggesting that positive interactions can lead to mutual understanding and support. However, the current study's results indicate that many respondents perceived a lack of empathy, which aligns with critiques from authors such as Kauffmann (2016), who highlight that socio-economic pressures and competition for resources can lead to a withdrawal of empathy and an increase in animosity toward refugees.

Regarding empathy and concern for refugees, the mean score was 3.19 (SD = 0.590), indicating mixed experiences; while a minority expressed some level of empathy, a substantial portion (63.1%) disagreed, reflecting scepticism about host community members' understanding of refugee challenges. This contrasts with current literature, which posits that empathy is crucial for fostering positive refugee-host relationships (Betts & Loescher, 2011).

Therefore, the findings highlight the need for policymakers to invest in community sensitization

programs that foster mutual understanding and reduce hostility between host communities and refugees. By promoting inclusive development projects and equitable access to services, tensions over resources can be minimized. Additionally, engaging local leaders and youth in peacebuilding initiatives can further strengthen coexistence. These actions can guide more effective and sustainable integration policies in refugee-hosting areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study findings indicated that perceptions of refugees' contributions to the community were mixed, with many respondents failing to recognize the potential benefits refugees could bring. This critical gap in acknowledgement underscores the importance of building inclusive communities and promoting understanding of refugees' roles.

The study demonstrated that attitudes and perceptions of host communities significantly affect refugee adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements. While there are positive instances of community engagement and recognition of refugee contributions, widespread negativity, biases, and perceptions of inequality persist. These findings suggest the need for targeted initiatives to promote social cohesion, empathy, and understanding between refugees and host community members.

## Recommendations

To improve attitudes and perceptions of host communities, the study recommended implementing community engagement programs that promote empathy and understanding toward refugees. These initiatives could include awareness campaigns that highlight the contributions of refugees to the local economy and culture. Organizing joint community events, such as cultural festivals or sports competitions, can create opportunities for positive interactions between refugees and host community members, fostering mutual respect and breaking down stereotypes. Educational programs in schools that incorporate lessons on diversity and inclusion would also help

cultivate a more welcoming environment for refugees from an early age.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on attitudes and perceptions of host communities and refugee adaptability in Kyaka II and Kyangwali settlements should consider longitudinal studies that track how these attitudes evolve over time.

Additionally, comparative research between the two settlements could uncover key differences in host-refugee dynamics based on demographic, geographical, or policy factors. Exploring how variables such as education, employment opportunities, and access to social services influence perceptions can help identify context-specific strategies for enhancing refugee adaptability.

Future studies should investigate the role of cultural exchange and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in shaping mutual perceptions and promoting peaceful coexistence.

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