

LAND ACCESS AND USE IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE HOSTING DISTRICTS

A Desk Review on the Impact of Land Access on
Self-Reliance in Uganda's Refugee Response

October 2026





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ABOUT U-LEARN

The Uganda Learning Evidence Accountability and Research Network (U-Learn), an initiative of the Response Innovation Lab, is a learning and evidence platform dedicated to strengthening the use of evidence, learning and innovation in Uganda's refugee response.

Hosted by Save the Children Uganda, U-Learn works with partners across the refugee response to generate, curate and share evidence, facilitate learning and exchange, and support actors to translate knowledge into improved policies, programmes and practice.

Through research, learning reviews, knowledge products, and stakeholder engagement, U-Learn seeks to make learning accessible and actionable for those working to improve outcomes for refugees and host communities.

ABOUT URRI

The Uganda Refugee Resilience Initiative (URRI) is a multi-partner initiative that supports more resilient and sustainable approaches to Uganda's refugee response.

URRI brings together humanitarian, development and government actors to strengthen refugee and host-community resilience, with a focus on areas including self-reliance, livelihoods, localisation, climate and environmental resilience, financial inclusion and private sector engagement.

The initiative promotes collaboration, evidence use and learning to inform programming and contribute to longer-term solutions for refugees and their host communities in Uganda.

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Their contributions helped strengthen the analysis and ensure that the review reflects relevant perspectives and experiences from across the refugee response.

We also appreciate all stakeholders whose knowledge, resources and previous work informed this review.

U-Learn and Uganda Response Innovation Lab (URIL) team

Kampala,
October 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Land access at a glance

Key figures from Uganda's refugee response

Agriculture is central to refugee livelihoods in Uganda, but access to sufficient and productive land remains limited

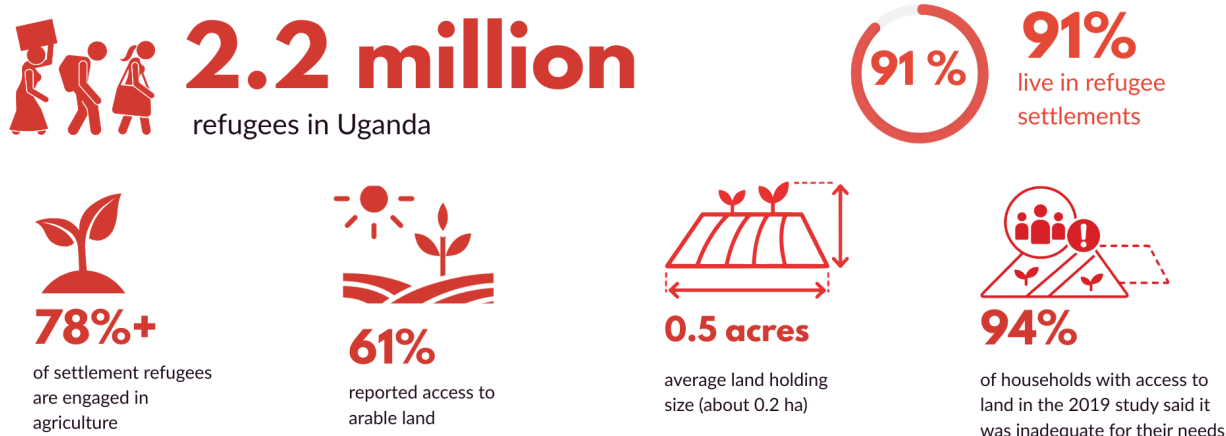


Figure: 1. Land access at a glance, Key figures from Uganda's Refugee Response

Note: Figures are from multiple sources and years. See full references in the report

Uganda hosts the largest refugee population in Africa – 1,959,525 people – with the majority arriving from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹ Since the 1950s, the Government of Uganda has allocated land to refugees in designated rural settlements, along with the right to work, move freely, and access social services. Uganda's refugee response framework is widely regarded as among the most progressive globally.² Research also indicates that Uganda's settlement-based approach is associated with better welfare outcomes, including higher dietary diversity, improved food security, and better economic self-reliance for refugees.³

Under the settlement model, land serves as the primary pathway to food security and self-reliance, with over 78% of settlement-based refugees engaged in agriculture.⁴ The median refugee household utilises 0.5 acres^{5,6} and research shows that economic benefits to the local economy are greatest when humanitarian assistance combines cash transfers with land for agriculture, with each household allocated land contributing an estimated USD 220 annually to

- 1 Government of Uganda, UNHCR (2026). Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga>
- 2 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c855c9d1-557a-5fc7-b06f-46ead1486395>
- 3 Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (2023). Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make?. Available at: https://www.jointdatacenter.org/literature_review/refugee-economies-in-uganda-what-difference-does-the-self-reliance-model-make/
- 4 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c855c9d1-557a-5fc7-b06f-46ead1486395>
- 5 U-Learn / Charter4Change (2023). The Realities of Self-reliance within the Ugandan Refugee Context. Available at: https://charter4change.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/u-learn-and-reach_livelihoods-assessment-report_final_final.pdf
- 6 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda. Available at: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/08/200720_nakivale_settlement_profile_web.pdf

Uganda's economy.⁷ The most recent national food security survey in Uganda found that 61% of refugees reported access to arable land, while a 2025 analysis estimated that 82% had some form of access when leased and borrowed land is included.⁸

However, studies indicate that access does not equate to sufficiency. A 2019 assessment across eleven refugee-hosting districts reported that 94% of households with land access considered it inadequate to meet food needs during the latest harvest.⁹ The 2020 Uganda Refugee Vulnerability Study reinforced this finding, noting that around 70% of refugees reported insufficient land for cultivation. Only 9% of households reported possession of more than half an acre, and just 3% had access to more than one acre. The viability of agriculture also varies considerably across settlements: while refugees in Lobule, Moyo, Kyangwali, Rwamwanja, and Kyaka II generally reported having access to some land for cultivation, more than 90% of refugees in Bidibidi and Adjumani reported having none. Moreover, even where land is available, refugees often lack secure use rights, and the plots allocated are frequently of inadequate quality.¹⁰

Land access within the refugee response is shaped by two distinct systems. In Western and South-Western Uganda, settlements are located on government-owned gazetted land. In Northern Uganda and the West Nile sub-region, settlements are established on community-owned customary land, gazetted as settlement areas through negotiations with community landowners, though underlying ownership remains with those communities.¹¹

The review finds that Uganda's settlement-based model is associated with better welfare outcomes than camp-based systems.

Access is nonetheless uneven across settlements and declining relative to population growth, with land agreements frequently undocumented and unenforced. This lack of documentation not only leaves refugees with insecure use rights but also exposes host communities to risks, as customary owners often lack formal recognition of their land interests. Without secure tenure, host households face uncertainty over boundaries, compensation, and long-term claims, making both refugee and host land rights vulnerable to contestation.

Current plot sizes and tenure conditions limit agricultural productivity, food security, and dietary diversity, while soil degradation and climate variability further reduce the productive value of available land. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities face additional barriers to land access. A range of emerging approaches, including land aggregation, block farming, tenure formalisation, legal empowerment, and intensive cultivation models, demonstrate what is achievable, although most operate at programme level rather than system scale.

7 ReliefWeb (2020). Economic Impact of Refugee Settlements in Uganda. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/economic-impact-refugee-settlements-uganda>

8 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025. Available at: <https://opm.go.ug/resource-center/#86-86-wpfd-refugees-p1>

9 REACH / Norwegian Refugee Council (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda. Available at: <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/owned-spaces-and-shared-places/owned-spaces-and-shared-places---refugee-access-to-livelihoods-and-property-in-uganda-september-2019.pdf>

10 World Food Programme, the Government of Uganda, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda. Available at: https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WFP_DP-Analysis-Uganda-Refugees.pdf

11 International Refugee Rights Initiative (2018). My Children Should Stand Strong to Make Sure We Get Our Land Back: Host Community Perspectives of Uganda's Lamwo Refugee Settlement. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/my-children-should-stand-strong-make-sure-we-get-our-land-back-host-community>

It concludes with recommendations for strengthening the response:



Support access to land documentation through formal legal channels. All land negotiations for refugee land access and settlements should result in written, certified agreements covering duration, permitted activities, and conditions for return. Since refugee access to land often extends beyond gazetted settlement plots into host community land, accelerating the registration of customary land for host households would provide secure tenure and reduce disputes. Formal registration would also enable host communities to rent land more confidently to refugees, creating a trickle-down effect that expands refugee access while safeguarding community rights.



Tailor programming to demography, geography, and tenure type. Approaches in customary-tenure West Nile and Acholi differ from those needed in gazetted south-western settlements. Programming and policy engagement should be grounded in district- and settlement-level realities rather than applied uniformly.



Complement land-based livelihoods with off-farm and market-linked opportunities. Evidence indicates that refugees in commerce and skilled employment tend to achieve better welfare outcomes than those relying solely on subsistence farming. Off-farm programming should build on rather than replace agricultural activity, particularly for households transitioning toward greater income diversity.



Incorporate climate resilience and land regeneration into all land-based programming. Investments in soil health, water harvesting, drought-tolerant varieties, and agroforestry should be standard practices. Land tenure agreements should include provisions protecting long-term land improvements from short-term eviction risk.



Scale up documented good practices from institutional to system level. Tenure formalisation, land aggregation, block farming, and intensive cultivation models have shown results in specific programmes but are not yet available across all settlements. The priority is transferring these practices into government systems so they continue beyond project funding.



Review the settlement system to reflect current population scale. The plot allocation framework dates to the 1950s; both refugee and host populations have more than tripled since. A structured review involving government, UNHCR, civil society, and communities should assess whether current allocation criteria remain appropriate and what adjustments are needed.



Dedicate resources to address the specific barriers facing marginalised groups. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities face barriers not resolved by general improvements to the allocation system. Responses should include adapted tools for persons with disabilities, gender-responsive allocation processes, and a defined pathway for youth to access independent plots.



Invest in increasing awareness of housing, land, and property rights. Many refugees and host community members are unaware of their rights regarding land access, tenancy terms, and dispute mechanisms. Awareness through accessible formats, multiple languages, and trusted community channels would strengthen all other land governance investments.



Support generation and dissemination of evidence on the economics of land access. A gap exists in comparative data on returns from land-based agriculture versus off-farm livelihoods. Generating this evidence requires primary research and collation of data held by government and implementing organisations — and dissemination is as important as generation.

1. GLOBAL REFUGEE-HOSTING APPROACHES

This chapter situates Uganda's refugee-hosting model within the broader global context of forced displacement. It outlines the main approaches to refugee hosting worldwide before examining Uganda's distinctive settlement-based system, in which access to land, freedom of movement and the right to work are intended to support refugee self-reliance.

1.1. The scale of forced displacement

As of December 2025, an estimated 117.8 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, persecution, violence, and human rights violations. This figure has nearly doubled in the past decade.¹² Of these, approximately 35.6 million were recognised refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the remainder comprising internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and stateless people. Over 100 countries actively host refugee populations, with nearly 70% of refugees living in low- and middle-income countries neighbouring their countries of origin.¹³

1.2. Approaches to refugee hosting

By the end of 2025, the ten largest refugee-hosting countries were Colombia, Germany, Türkiye, Uganda, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chad, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Ethiopia.¹⁴ These countries adopt three broad approaches to managing refugee populations: camp-based hosting, urban or dispersed integration, and settlement-based hosting. UNHCR data indicates that urban or dispersed arrangements — in which refugees live independently in cities, towns, and rural areas without being formally designated to a camp or settlement — represent the most prevalent approach globally. An estimated 78% of refugees live outside formal camps in urban or non-camp settings.¹⁵

Although Bangladesh does not rank among the top 10 refugee-hosting countries, it hosts the world's largest single refugee camp complex located in Cox's Bazar district. At the end of 2025, Cox's Bazar hosted approximately 1.1 million refugees, predominantly Rohingya from Myanmar, across more than 30 formal settlements. Within this complex, Kutupalong has remained the world's largest refugee camp since 2018.¹⁶ Chad and Ethiopia, which rank among the top 10, also primarily host refugees in designated camps. Recent legal reforms in Ethiopia have introduced integrated living arrangements that grant refugees freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to social services.¹⁷ Under camp-based hosting, as documented by UNHCR, income generation is limited, and access to basic needs, such as food, is primarily provided through humanitarian assistance.¹⁸

In Colombia, Germany, Türkiye, Iran, Jordan, and Lebanon, refugees are largely integrated into urban or peri-urban settings. Colombia hosts millions of Venezuelans under the Temporary Protection Statute, allowing them to settle and work directly in cities and towns. In Germany, once asylum applications are processed, refugees move into decentralised housing with integration focused on access to labour markets and social services. In Türkiye, over 90% of

12 UNHCR (2025). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>

13 UNHCR (2025). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025.

14 International Organization for Migration (2026). World Migration Report 2026. Available at: <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int>

15 USA for UNHCR / UNHCR (2025). What is a Refugee Camp? Definition and Statistics. Available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/>

16 UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2025). Largest Places Hosting Refugees: Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/refugees-largest-places.html>

17 Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa (2025). Kakuma Refugee Camp: A Case Study in Integration amid Global Humanitarian Retrenchment. Available at: <https://sihma.org.za/Blog-on-the-move/kakuma-refugee-camp-a-case-study-in-integration-amid-global-humanitarian-retrenchment?lang=en>

18 UNHCR (2025). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025.

approximately 3.2 million refugees live in urban and peri-urban communities, working informally in manufacturing, agriculture, services, or small businesses.¹⁹ In Pakistan, approximately one-third of Afghan refugees live in formal camps, while the majority reside in urban centres and work informally.²⁰

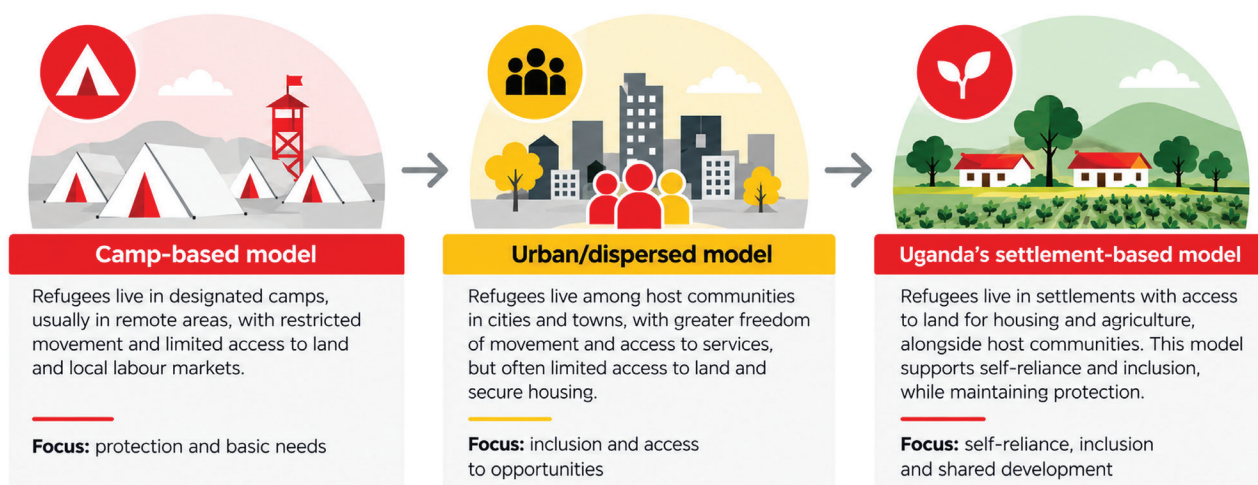


Figure: 2. Refugee settlement-based models around the world

1.3. Uganda's settlement-based model

Among the 10 countries hosting the largest number of refugees, Uganda's approach is unique: the country adopted a settlement-based approach to refugee hosting, in which refugees are either self-settled or allocated land plots for housing and cultivation, provided they are registered and comply with refugee regulations. Refugees are also granted the right to work, access to social services, and freedom of movement under the Refugees Act of 2006.²¹

Uganda's approach to refugee hosting has been settlement-based since the 1950s, when the first large-scale arrivals prompted the allocation of designated land areas in the West Nile sub-region.²²

Uganda's settlement-based approach rests on the principle that refugees should be treated as economic agents capable of achieving self-reliance.²³

The country operates thirteen officially gazetted rural settlements across twelve refugee-hosting districts. In Western and South-Western Uganda, the six settlements are Nakivale (Isingiro District), Oruchinga (Isingiro District), Kyaka II (Kyegegwa District), Rwamwanja (Kamwenge District), Kyangwali (Kikuube District), and Kiryandongo (Kiryandongo District). In Northern Uganda and the West Nile sub-region, the seven settlements are Bidibidi (Yumbe District) – currently the largest settlement in Uganda – Rhino Camp (Madi-Okollo and Terego Districts), Imvepi (Terego District), Palabek (Lamwo District), Adjumani (Adjumani District), Palorinya (Obongi District), and Lobule (Koboko District).²⁴

The vast majority of refugees – approximately 91% – reside in settlements, while the remaining 9% are concentrated

19 UNHCR (2025). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025.

20 UNHCR (2025). Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025

21 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c855c9d1-557a-5fc7-b06f-46ead1486395>

22 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/self-reliance-strategy-1999-2003-refugee-hosting-areas-moyo-arua-and-adjumani-districts>

23 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

24 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

in urban areas, particularly Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono Districts and in peri-urban areas such as Arua city and Koboko Municipality. The refugee population originates from 34 different countries, with South Sudan accounting for 55.1%, the Democratic Republic of Congo for 30.9%, and the remaining 14% spread across 32 other nations. Demographically, women and children make up 78 percent of the refugee population. Youth aged 15–24 represent 25%, older adults (60 years and above) comprise 3%, and more than half (55%) are under the age of 18.²⁵

Refugees in urban areas access housing and livelihoods through private urban land and labour markets, operating under tenure conditions and livelihood dynamics that differ from those in officially designated rural settlements.²⁶

Over 78% of refugees in settlements are engaged in agricultural activities compared with approximately 5% of urban refugees.²⁷ Studies identify agriculture as the most accessible economic starting point for many refugee households, given relatively low capital requirements.²⁸ Crop production in both northern and western Uganda settlements includes maize, groundnuts, cassava, beans, rice, and horticulture (okra and tomatoes in the northern settlements, and fruit in western settlements). In Northern settlements, other value chains include sesame, sunflower, soybean, and sorghum. In Western settlements, additional crops include bananas, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes.²⁹

The amount of land available for these activities and the conditions under which it is accessed are central to self-reliance in Uganda's refugee response. A Self-reliance Technical Brief published in 2025 identifies land quantity and quality as the primary constraints on refugee self-reliance across Uganda's refugee-hosting districts.³⁰

The conditions that shape land access practices, tenure security, and agricultural outcomes across the response are examined in Section 2.

Uganda hosts 13 officially gazetted refugee settlements across 12 districts. Settlements in the Northern and West Nile are located on customary land, while those in the Western and South-Western regions are on gazetted land.

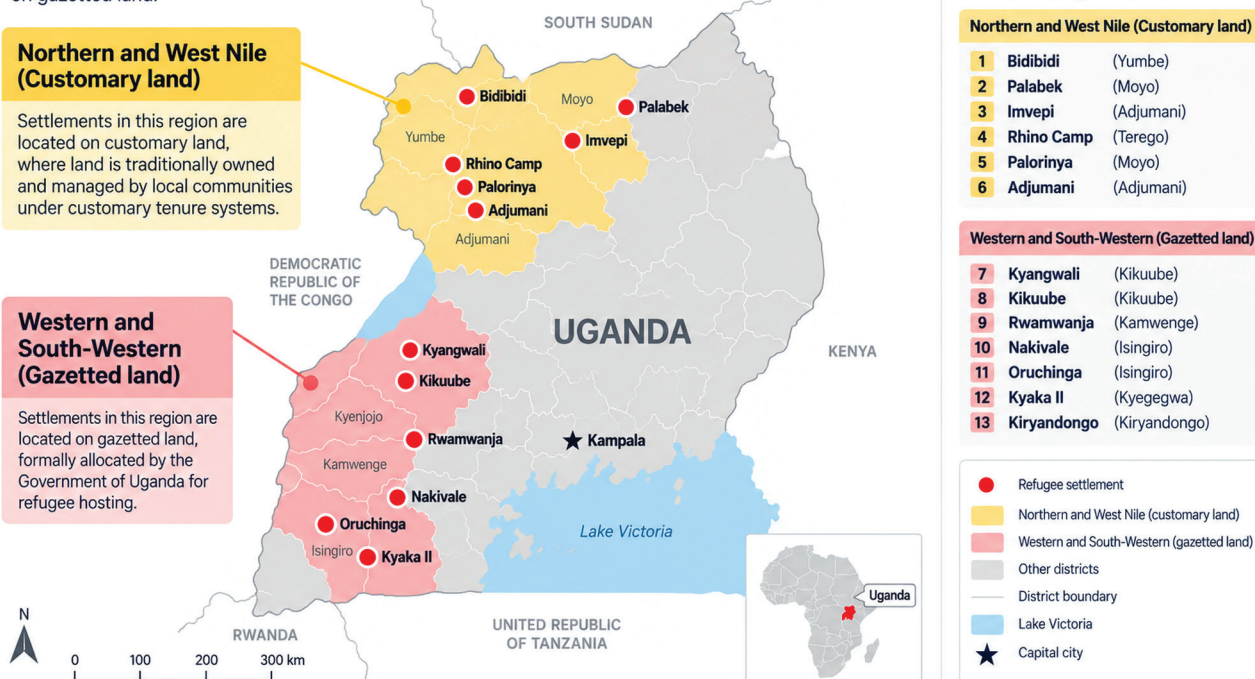


Figure 3. Refugee settlements and hosting districts

25 Office of the Prime Minister (ND). Refugee Management. Available at: <https://opm.go.ug/refugees/>

26 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

27 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

28 Overseas Development Institute (2019). The Refugee Response in Northern Uganda: Resources Beyond International Humanitarian Assistance. Available at: <https://media.odi.org/documents/12595.pdf>

29 U-Learn Uganda (2022). Value Chain Assessments in Refugee Hosting Districts in Uganda – A desk review. Available at: <https://ulearn-uganda.org/value-chain-assessments-in-refugee-hosting-districts-in-uganda-a-desk-review/>

30 U-Learn Uganda (2025). Self-Reliance Technical Brief. Available at: <https://ulearn-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Self-reliance-technical-brief-Final-20-08.pdf>



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Refugees in urban areas access housing and livelihoods through private urban land and labour markets, operating under tenure conditions and livelihood dynamics that differ from those in officially designated rural settlements.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING LAND ACCESS AND USE IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE-HOSTING DISTRICTS

All land officially allocated to refugees in Uganda's formal settlements is managed by the Office of the Prime Minister, which serves as the statutory custodian of settlement land and all matters related to refugee response management.³¹ This is in line with the policies established by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, which provides policy direction, national standards, and coordinates all matters concerning lands, housing, and urban development.

The Refugees Regulations of 2010 establish that refugees residing in designated settlements should receive access to land for cultivation or pasturing.³² For households seeking additional land, the primary options are negotiating informal and formal rent of host community land individually or through forming groups.³³ The quantity and quality of land allocated to refugee households in Uganda depend largely on land availability, government and settlement planning policies, and population pressures within refugee-hosting areas.

2.1. Legal frameworks

Land rights in Uganda are governed by an integrated legal framework combining constitutional mandates, statutory provisions, and customary practices, which together regulate ownership, access, use, and dispute resolution.

The 1995 Constitution of Uganda places all land in the citizens of Uganda and recognises four distinct tenure systems namely: customary, freehold, mailo, and leasehold.³⁴

1. **Under customary tenure**, land is communally held, clan-administered, and without formal individual title.
2. **Freehold tenure** grants full, permanent, unconditional, and transferable ownership of registered land.
3. **Leasehold** grants rights to a piece of land for a defined term.
4. **Mailo** tenure grants permanent ownership in perpetuity measured in square miles (localised as "mailo") but creates a dual system where registered landowners coexist with protected tenant (kibanja) occupants.



Customary

Communally held land, usually administered through clans or local customary structures, without formal individual title.



Freehold

Full, permanent and transferable ownership of registered land.



Leasehold

The right to use land for a defined period under agreed terms.



Mailo

Permanent ownership measured in 'mailo', often with registered owners and protected kibanja tenants on the same land.

31 Government of Uganda (2006) Refugees Act 2006. Available at: <https://www.ngobureau.go.ug/en/law-and-regulations/refugee-act-2006>

32 Government of Uganda (2010) Refugee Regulations, 2010. Available at: https://media.ulii.org/media/legislation/129254/source_file/4e7166d225678a6b/ug-act-si-2010-9-publication-document.pdf

33 U-Learn / Charter4Change (2023). The Realities of Self-reliance within the Ugandan Refugee Context.

34 Government of Uganda (1995). Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. Available: https://www.ngobureau.go.ug/sites/default/files/laws_regulations/2020/12/Uganda%20Constitution%201995.pdf

Figure: 4. Land tenure systems

In the northern and eastern regions where most refugee settlements are located, customary tenure is the dominant system, accounting for an estimated 75 to 84% of all land parcels nationally.³⁵

The primary legislation governing refugees is the Refugees Act of 2006, Cap 312 which rests on four pillars: access to land, the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to social services.³⁶

Most refugees in south-western Uganda settlements primarily access land bought by and gazetted by the government, while in many Northern settlements gain access to land through arrangements negotiated by the government with customary landowners.

Another legal framework governing land access and use in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts is the Refugee Regulations of 2010. In regulation 65, it elaborates the land pillar in the Refugees Act of 2006 by granting refugees in designated settlements reasonable access to land for cultivation or pasturing, while specifying that allocated land may not be sub-let or sold by the refugee household. Refugees are also not permitted to hold freehold interest in land in Uganda within this regulation.³⁷ Formal leasehold arrangements are possible in principle but remain uncommon in practice, with most access to additional land done through undocumented verbal agreements.

2.2. Institutional frameworks

The institutional architecture for refugee land governance involves several bodies. The Office of the Prime Minister's Refugee Department is the primary custodian of all settlement lands, responsible for surveying, allocating, and overseeing household plots.³⁸ The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development provides policy direction, national standards, and coordinates all matters concerning lands, housing and urban development, including administering the national land tenure policy, the regulation of customary land boards, and the issuance of Certificates of Customary Ownership. The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries provides technical guidance on agricultural land use and extension services in settlement areas. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has a role in social protection frameworks and livelihood programming that intersects with land-based livelihoods. District Local Governments and District Land Boards execute decentralised demarcation, monitor rental agreements, and mediate land disputes. The judiciary provides statutory adjudication of escalated disputes through magistrate courts.

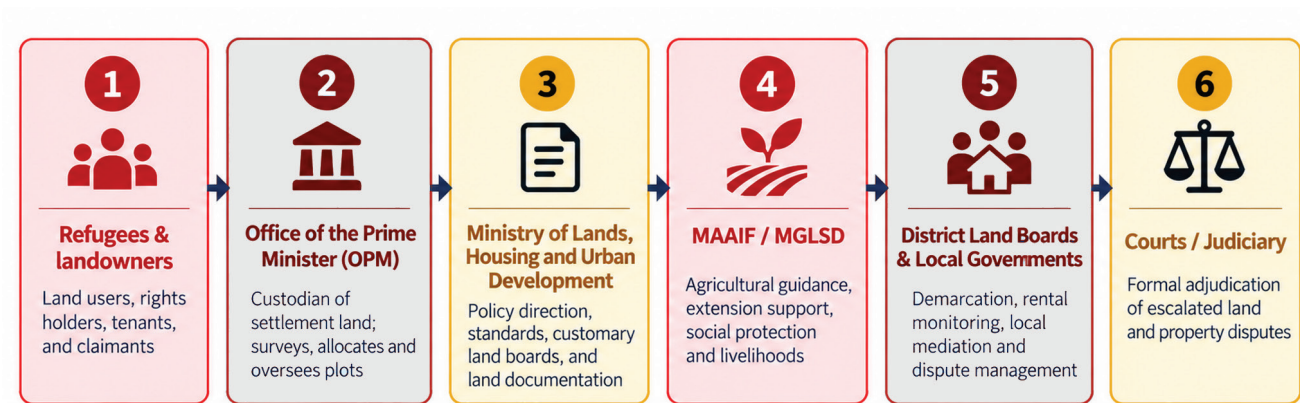


Figure: 5. Land use governance structure

35 Refugees International (2026). Uganda's Generous Open-Door Refugee Policy Is Breaking Down. Available at: <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/ugandas-generous-open-door-refugee-policy-is-breaking-down/>

36 Government of Uganda (2006). The Refugees Act 2006.

37 Government of Uganda (2010). Refugees Regulations, 2010. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natleg-bod/2010/102127>

38 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

2.3. Policy frameworks and strategies

The National Development Plan IV recognizes the importance of inclusive land and natural resource governance and provides a national development framework that supports secure and sustainable access to land for refugees and host communities as part of Uganda's integrated refugee response.³⁹

The Uganda Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) – developed collaboratively between the Government of Uganda, UNHCR, and donors – formalised the principle that land allocation to refugees should be the primary vehicle for household food security.⁴⁰ In 2022, the Government of Uganda launched the Settlement Transformation Agenda II (STA II), a framework designed to operationalize national refugee legislation while promoting self-reliance among refugees and advancing social development in host communities. The agenda is structured around six core objectives: land management, sustainable livelihoods, governance and rule of law, peaceful co-existence, environmental protection, and community infrastructure.⁴¹ The STA is aligned with Uganda's National Development Plans (NDP IV), thereby integrating refugee issues into national development planning.⁴² This inclusion has created the basis for comprehensive responses that address the needs of both refugees and Ugandan nationals in hosting areas, while also establishing entry points for line ministries and development partners – foundations that continue to shape Uganda's current refugee response model.⁴³

Uganda also adopted several complementary national and international frameworks, including the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework following the 2016 New York Declaration, and the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment strategic framework (ReHoPE).⁴⁴ These frameworks have influenced Uganda's refugee response, including land access. The CRRF strengthened Uganda's settlement-based, land-sharing approach by preserving it during periods of large refugee influxes, linking land allocation for agriculture directly to the National Development Plan, and turning humanitarian land use into a basis for rural development. The framework also solidified the principle that 30% of developmental and infrastructural benefits tied to land use and settlements directly support host communities, reducing friction over scarce land and resources.

ReHoPE builds on the CRRF as a key component of Uganda's comprehensive response to displacement, bridging the gap between humanitarian and development interventions. In the context of land, it shifts land allocation and use from short-term relief toward sustainable regional planning, promoting shared community infrastructure, environmental protection, and joint livelihood opportunities for both refugees and host populations. National strategies from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development – including frameworks on financial inclusion – are also relevant to land access where they shape the conditions under which refugees can access credit or formalise land-related agreements.⁴⁵

2.4. Land tenure systems

Uganda has four constitutionally recognised tenure systems – customary, freehold, mailo, and leasehold – are all present in refugee-hosting districts and shape how land is accessed, documented, and protected. Customary land tenure is the main form of land ownership in Northern Uganda and West Nile, where land is held by individuals, families, or communities and administered through clan structures and local councils, without formal title documentation.⁴⁶ This tenure system faces increasing pressure in refugee-hosting areas. Limited documentation of land rights creates tenure insecurity and contributes to frequent disputes over land ownership, boundaries, and access.

39 GoU. National Planning Authority (2025). NDP IV. Available at: <https://npa.go.ug/national-development-plan/>

40 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review.

41 Government of Uganda/ Office of the Prime Minister (2022). Settlement Transformation Agenda II. Available at: <https://opm.go.ug/wpfd/file/sta-ii-2022-2027/>

42 Government of Uganda/National Planning Authority. National Development Plans. Available at: <https://npa.go.ug/national-development-plan/>

43 UNHCR (2017) Comprehensive refugee response framework, Uganda: The way forward. Available at: <https://library.health.go.ug/sites/default/files/resources/CRRF%20brochure%20.pdf>

44 UNHCR (2022). Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2022-2025. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/inter-agency-uganda-country-refugee-response-plan-ucrrp-2022-2025>

45 Government of Uganda / Ministry of Finance (2022). Private Sector Engagement Strategy for the Uganda Refugee Response. Available at: <https://psdpi.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/publications/Private%20Sector%20Engagement%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Uganda%20Refugee%20Response.pdf>

46 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

In addition, while customary tenure is formally recognised by law, Uganda's Private Sector Engagement Strategy for the refugee response notes that financial and legal institutions do not consistently treat customary land certificates as equivalent to freehold titles, weakening their enforceability in formal proceedings and limiting their use in transactions such as renting, leasing, or as collateral for credit.⁴⁷

In Western and South-Western Uganda, the land is predominantly government-gazetted. This provides a more formally documented basis for land allocation and use than customary land in the north. A UNHCR field assessment noted that approximately 30 square kilometres of gazetted settlement land in the south-west has been reported as lost to encroachment by host community members, reducing the area available for refugee allocation.⁴⁸ This indicates that the security of tenure for refugee settlements remains vulnerable, even where land is formally gazetted, and underscores the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, community sensitization, and coordinated land management to safeguard space for refugee hosting.

2.5. Geographical context

The reviewed literature identifies geography as another factor affecting land access and use in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts. Studies note that refugee-hosting regions differ in terms of soil type, climate, agricultural potential, and the practical conditions under which land can be accessed and cultivated.⁴⁹

West Nile sub-region and Northern Uganda have large expanses of land, parts of which are physically accessible but of variable soil fertility. Studies indicate that a significant portion has low capacity for sustained productive agriculture under current climate and soil conditions. Certain zones experience irregular or limited rainfall, and some settlement areas are situated on low-lying land with poor drainage. For instance, a 2025 area-based assessment of Nyumanzi settlement in Adjumani district found that 84% of the population had experienced prolonged dry spells and 99% had experienced extreme heat in the preceding five years, with farmers reporting reduced crop yields, deteriorating seed stocks, and significant post-harvest losses as a result.⁵⁰ Soil degradation from continuous cultivation has added to these difficulties over time.⁵¹

In Western and South-Western Uganda, the land is more suitable for cultivation. However, the total area available for allocation is smaller compared to that of the northern region, and with population growth, the scope for expanding individual holdings or accessing additional land from host community members is correspondingly limited. For instance, a UN-Habitat spatial profile of Nakivale settlement in South-western Uganda found that despite relatively more favourable soil conditions, production and productivity remain low due to small plot sizes and limited access to quality inputs.⁵²

Evidence on regional differences suggests that approaches for land access in the north do not always apply in the south-west, and vice versa. Studies note that programming and monitoring frameworks that account for geographic variation are associated with more effective outcomes than uniform approaches.

47 Government of Uganda / Ministry of Finance (2022). Private Sector Engagement Strategy for the Uganda Refugee Response.
48 UNHCR Uganda, Livelihoods and Development Unit (2024). Status Update on Refugee Access to Land Practices in the Settlement. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111023>

49 World Food Program, GoU, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda.

50 IMPACT Initiatives / U-Learn (2025). Living with Climate-Related Hazards: Impacts and Community Responses among Refugees and Hosts in Nyumanzi Settlement, Adjumani, Uganda. Available at: <https://ulearn-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Climate-Research-report-July-2025.pdf>

51 ResearchGate (2024). Impact of Refugee Settlements on Land Degradation in Uganda. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384394162_Impact_of_refugee_settlements_on_land_degradation_in_Uganda

52 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda.

REGIONAL CONTEXT MATTERS

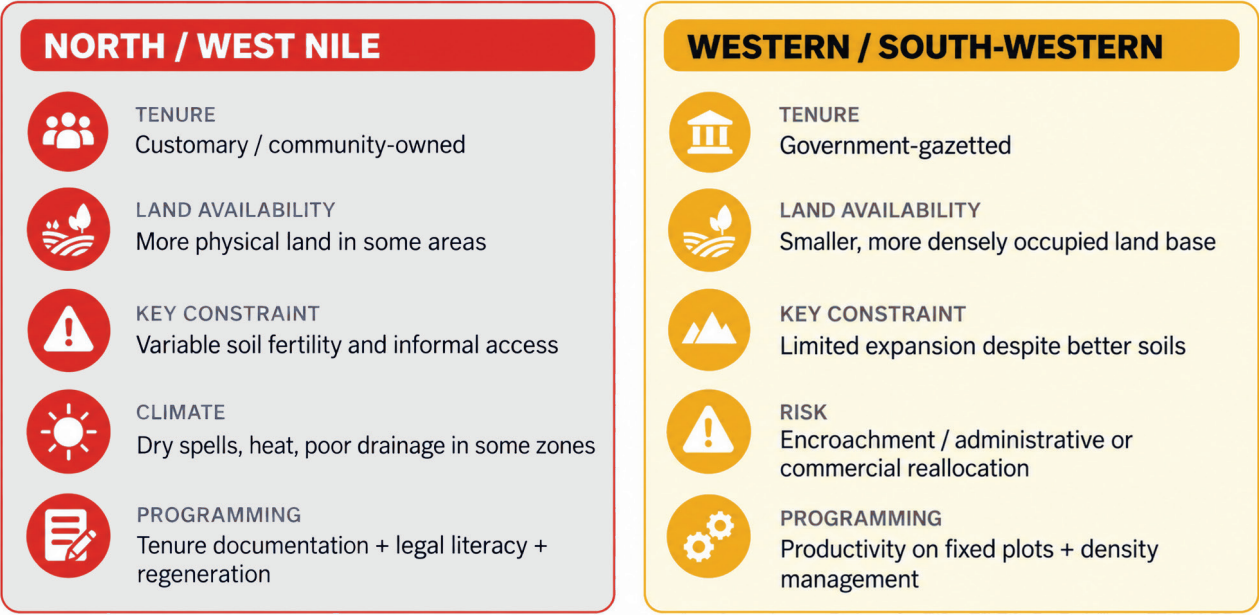


Figure: 6. Regional differences showing why context matters



3. SUCCESSES, LIMITATIONS, AND RISKS OF LAND ACCESS IN REFUGEE-HOSTING DISTRICTS

The Government of Uganda has cumulatively allocated an estimated 3,300 square kilometres of land to refugee settlements since the 1940s.⁵³ Although there is limited available information on the economic expenditure on refugees in Uganda, the Government of Uganda's cost of hosting refugees in terms of land provision was estimated at approximately USD 30 million in the financial year 2016/17.⁵⁴

3.1. Successes in land access

Evidence from economic modelling and field assessments indicates that the investment in land allocation generates returns across both refugee and host community populations, although the evidence on the amount of economic returns is also limited. In terms of land access, a study estimated that each additional refugee household given land and cash food assistance generates approximately USD 1,106 of annual income in the surrounding local economy, with host-country agriculture identified as the largest beneficiary sector.⁵⁵ Separate field analysis estimated that each refugee household given land contributes around USD 220 annually to the Ugandan economy.⁵⁶

Over 78% of refugees in Uganda's rural settlements with land are engaged in agricultural activities,⁵⁷ with recorded positive impact on self-reliance and food security.

The Self-Reliance Strategy launched in 1999 produced documented improvements in food security in the districts it covered⁵⁸, and a comparative analysis of refugee welfare across Uganda and Kenya (which majorly applies camp-based refugee hosting), found that refugees in Ugandan settlements record higher dietary diversity, and better calorie intake than counterparts in encampment settings.⁵⁹ The right to work and move freely, embedded in the 2006 Refugees Act⁶⁰ is consistently identified in comparative studies as the most significant driver of these outcomes.⁶¹

53 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review.

54 World Bank (2016). An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

55 American Journal of Agricultural Economics (2024). Economic Impact of Giving Land to Refugees. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajae.12371>

56 ReliefWeb (2020). Economic Impact of Refugee Settlements in Uganda. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/economic-impact-refugee-settlements-uganda>

57 World Bank (2016). Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

58 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review.

59 Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (2023). Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make?

60 Republic of Uganda (2006). The Refugees Act, 2006 (Act No. 21 of 2006). Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4e66e0f62.pdf>

61 Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (2023). Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make?

3.2. Limitations and constraints in land access and use



Figure 7. Plotsize comparison - land size and self-sufficiency (illustrative comparison, base on desk review findings)

Alongside evidence of successes, a range of research and field assessments also notes constraints. The primary constraint is the quantity of land available. A 2023 livelihoods assessment covering settlements across Uganda found that the median land holding reported by refugee households with access to land was 0.5 acres, compared with two (2) acres for host community members in surrounding areas.⁶² A 2019 assessment across eleven refugee-hosting districts reported that 94% of households with land access considered it inadequate to meet food needs during the latest harvest.⁶³ A 2024 assessment by REACH found that only 29% of refugees reported having access to additional land outside their settlements – 36% in West Nile and 19% in the South-West – primarily through rental arrangements. Of those who rented additional land, 71% could access one acre or less, with 41% renting half an acre or less. A UN-Habitat spatial profile of Nakivale settlement estimated that between one and two acres per household is the threshold for food self-sufficiency through cultivation.⁶⁴ This gap between the median refugee holding and the estimated minimum for self-sufficiency is a recurrent finding across multiple assessments.

Land quality is another limiting factor. Research indicates that land allocated to refugees is frequently less fertile than that of surrounding host communities, that subdivision of plots to accommodate new arrivals steadily reduces household allocations, and that continuous cultivation without rotation diminishes soil productivity within a few seasons.⁶⁵ A 2004 mid-term review of the Self-Reliance Strategy covering Moyo, Arua, and Adjumani districts found that land-based self-reliance was not achievable in areas with poor soil quality, limited rainfall, or restricted accessibility.⁶⁶ Since 2016, Uganda's refugee population increased by 217%, while the quantity of land accessible per household has not expanded commensurately.⁶⁷

Evidence also points to variation in who benefits from land access. Research in Nakivale found that 80% of Congolese refugees who arrived before 2012 had access to land, compared with 17% of those who arrived after 2012, a disparity that a 2019 research brief on Nakivale settlement attributes to the finite land supply.⁶⁸ A 2019 research brief on Uganda's self-reliance model found that not all refugee communities engage in subsistence agriculture regardless of land availability, attributing this to differences in prior livelihood experience and cultural orientation toward farming — factors that aggregate statistics do not always capture.⁶⁹

Assessments indicate that the nature of land access limitations also differs between regions. In West Nile and

62 U-Learn / Charter4Change (2023). The Realities of Self-reliance within the Ugandan Refugee Context.

63 REACH / Norwegian Refugee Council (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda.

64 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda.

65 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/11/3/410>

66 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review.

67 Egmont Institute (2024). The Politics of Food and the Myth of the Self-Reliant Refugee in Uganda. Available at: https://egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2024/06/Nina-Soudan_Policy_Brief_346_vFinal.pdf

68 University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre (2019). Uganda's Self-Reliance Model: Does it Work? RSC Research in Brief 11. Available at: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/ugandas-self-reliance-model-does-it-work>

69 University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre (2019). Uganda's Self-Reliance Model: Does it Work? RSC Research in Brief 11.

Northern Uganda, the dominant limitations are the informality and instability of supplementary land access: most arrangements beyond the official plot are verbal, undocumented, and can be revoked at any point. Studies report that land quality in parts of this region is also more variable, with some settlement zones on rocky, low-lying, or poorly drained soils that are associated with lower agricultural productivity even where physical access is available.⁷⁰

In Western and South-Western Uganda, settlement land is gazetted government land, meaning it is formally documented in statutory records and administered by the state. However, the total land area is smaller and more densely occupied, leaving limited scope for individual households to expand beyond their standard allocation. Research in some south-western settlements found that plot sizes were insufficient for meaningful surplus production even where soil quality is better.⁷¹

It should also be noted that much of the evidence on land access and agricultural outcomes in Uganda's refugee response is mostly disaggregated, focusing on the settlement level. Most data on land holdings, productivity, and livelihoods was collected prior to 2020, and recent cuts to humanitarian aid have resulted in a focus on basic assistance, with limited budgets available for research. This constrains the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn and reinforces the need for ongoing, systematic data collection.

3.3. Risks: Conflict, degradation, and funding constraints

Land-related disputes are a noted protection concern in Uganda's refugee response. A 2019 research brief on Uganda's self-reliance model found that approximately 32% of households with access to cultivable land in Nakivale had experienced at least one land dispute, with conflicting ownership claims and boundary disagreements as the primary drivers.⁷² In West Nile settlements, a growing number of host community landlords who originally provided land to the government for refugee housing are seeking to reclaim that land or prefer to lease it directly to refugee families at commercial rates, reducing what is available for allocation by the government.⁷³

Access to formal justice for land-related disputes is limited in many refugee-hosting districts.

Gaps in legal aid provision and court accessibility have been identified for both refugees and host communities, with language barriers, distance, and cost among the factors that reduce access for customary land claimants.⁷⁴

Climate variability is a reported factor in resource-related conflicts between refugee and host communities. Development practitioners operating in refugee-hosting districts have characterised climate change as a driver of insecurity in these areas, with implications for how land and natural resource governance is approached.⁷⁵

Environmental degradation is a further risk. Studies of land cover change in and around refugee settlements document significant losses of grassland, woodland, and cropland, attributed to continuous demand for firewood, bush-burning, mono-cropping, over-cultivation, and infrastructure construction.⁷⁶ A study on land use in Bidibidi settlement found that the establishment process for the settlement was so rapid – with initial planning and road construction reportedly completed in approximately three days – that tribal leaders and district officials were not consulted, resulting in environmental degradation that the study attributes to the absence of participatory planning from the outset.⁷⁷

70 UNHCR (2004). Self-Reliance Strategy (1999-2003) for Refugee Hosting Areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani Districts, Uganda: Report of the Mid-term Review.

71 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda.

72 University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre (2019). Uganda's Self-Reliance Model: Does it Work? RSC Research in Brief 11.

73 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

74 Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), Republic of Uganda (2025). The JLOS Bulletin, April 2025. Available at: https://jlos.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/THE-JLOS-BULLETIN-APRIL-2025_FINAL.pdf

75 Daily Monitor (2026). Climate Stress Fuels Conflict between Locals and Refugees. Available at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/climate-stress-fuels-conflict-between-locals-and-refugees-5509576>

76 ResearchGate (2024). Impact of Refugee Settlements on Land Degradation in Uganda.

77 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda.

A UNHCR field assessment conducted in 2025 across five settlements found that land rental prices outside standard allocations have been increasing, driven by growing demand, infrastructure improvements, and the presence of mid-dlemen who add margins to prices agreed with landowners. At the time of the assessment, rental prices ranged from UGX 45,000 to 200,000 per acre per year in Bidibidi to UGX 200,000 to 560,000 in south-western settlements. The same assessment noted that humanitarian organisations paying above-market rental rates to secure land for project activities had in some cases contributed to permanent price increases that outlasted the project period, reducing affordability for individual refugee households over time. A related protection concern documented in the assessment is that the search for affordable farmland is pushing some refugees to farm at considerable distances from settlements – including near the border with South Sudan in Palabek – a practice associated with security risks and, due to the distances involved, with children being left as de facto household heads during critical farming periods.⁷⁸

Reduced funding in the humanitarian sector has affected all of the above areas. By 2023, 35% of required humanitarian funding for Uganda's refugee response had been secured.⁷⁹ By mid-2025, reductions in international development assistance left the response funded below required levels; food rations were reduced twice in a single year, peace-building and social cohesion initiatives were paused, and government capacity to conduct land surveys, demarcation, and allocation was limited.⁸⁰

The Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan 2026–2030 indicates that USD 850 million is required to host refugees in 2026 alone. In the context of declining humanitarian resources and rising needs, a prioritisation exercise was undertaken, tiering activities by urgency. Under this framework, land-related activities were distributed across two tiers. Tier 1, defined as lifesaving and protection activities that address immediate survival, safety, and dignity, includes, among other things, plot demarcation for shelter, requiring USD 183,900 for 32,000 people, and USD 13.4 million for refugees to access arable land for production. Tier 2, defined as core sector interventions essential to achieving sector objectives in the short and medium term, includes demarcation and allocation of plots for agricultural purposes estimated at USD 183,900 for 32,000 people, and construction of semi-permanent shelters for persons with specific needs at USD 148,500 for 636 people.⁸¹ The UCRRP estimates that over 140,000 projected new arrivals may lack adequate shelter to establish themselves in the settlements due to prioritisation.



78 UNHCR Uganda (2025). Unpublished document

79 Refugees International (2026). Uganda's Generous Open-Door Refugee Policy Is Breaking Down.

80 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

81 Government of Uganda, UNHCR (2026). Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP).

3.4. Policy enforcement and implementation of agreements

Several reports indicate that the legal entitlements granted to refugees under the Refugee Act of 2006 are not always reflected in practice. While the Refugee Act of 2006 grants refugees reasonable access to land for cultivation, it does not provide specific guidance on mechanisms for implementing or enforcing that entitlement. The official standard allocation was historically 50x50 metres for combined residential and agricultural use. Following the large refugee influxes of 2012 and 2013, plot sizes were reduced to 30 by 30 metres for residential areas and 50x50 metres for arable land.⁸²

Due to continued population growth in settlements, some households report receiving a single 30x30-metre plot for both shelter construction and agricultural use.⁸³ In a 2020 study, some refugee households reported receiving no more than 20x20 meters of land for shelter, and only 9% reported possession of more than half an acre.⁸⁴ A 2020 field assessment covering settlements across Northern Uganda found that households allocated a shelter plot do not automatically receive a separate cultivable plot, and that, in some cases, shelter structures occupy the entire allocation for larger households.⁸⁵ As of March 2017, 55% of settlement-based refugees had access to arable land for household food production, with rates varying across settlements.⁸⁶ In 2025, land acquisition efforts by the Office of the Prime Minister added 150 acres and demarcated 1,400 new plots in one West Nile settlement.⁸⁷

A 2019 multi-settlement assessment covering settlements in the Northwest, Midwest, and Southwest of Uganda found that, among refugee households accessing land beyond their officially allocated shelter plot, only 10% of such arrangements were covered by a formal written agreement. Of the small proportion of households accessing extra land for shelter through renting or for free with the owner's permission, only 15% had a formal agreement..⁸⁸

A 2024 assessment of Housing, Land, and Property challenges in West Nile settlements found that land a refugee household accesses beyond its official allocation is typically negotiated verbally with a clan member or individual host landowner, without a written agreement, and that such arrangements can be revoked at the discretion of the landowner without formal remedy available to the refugee household.⁸⁹ Evictions from rented agricultural land have been documented – in some cases after land has been cleared and planted, and in others just before harvest.⁹⁰ Evidence from financial institutions indicates that even where customary land certificates have been issued, they are not consistently honoured as collateral, meaning that formalised customary rights provide limited leverage for agricultural investment even for host communities.⁹¹

82 World Bank (2016). An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

83 Overseas Development Institute (2019). The Refugee Response in Northern Uganda: Resources Beyond International Humanitarian Assistance.

84 World Food Program, GoU, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda.

85 Overseas Development Institute (2019). The Refugee Response in Northern Uganda: Resources Beyond International Humanitarian Assistance.

86 Oxford University Press, Refugee Survey Quarterly (2024). When Legal Inclusion Is Not Enough: The Uganda Model of Refugee Protection on the Brink of Failure. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdad022>

87 Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda (2025). OPM Department of Refugee Management Annual Report 2025.

88 Norwegian Refugee Council / REACH (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda.

89 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements. Available at: <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/hlp-challenges-and-best-practices/hlp-challenges-and-best-practices-in-west-nile-settlements.pdf>

90 Norwegian Refugee Council / REACH (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda.

91 Government of Uganda / Ministry of Finance (2022). Private Sector Engagement Strategy for the Uganda Refugee Response.

Memoranda of understanding between government and host communities regarding land used for refugee settlements present a related challenge. A study of host community perspectives in Lamwo refugee settlement found that landowners described a memorandum of understanding with an open time frame that did not specify when or under what conditions their land would be returned, and that several landowners reported being unable to access the document.⁹² A 2026 study on land sharing in Northern Uganda found that in Adjumani District, none of the host-community landowners interviewed held a written agreement documenting the terms under which their land was occupied by the settlement.⁹³ Research notes that where neither landowners nor refugees hold enforceable documentation, both populations face uncertainty about the durability of the arrangements.⁹⁴

Risks also present differently across regions. Evidence from West Nile and Northern Uganda identifies the primary land-related risks as eviction from informally accessed land, mid-season revocation of verbal agreements, and environmental degradation linked to rapid settlement growth; research also notes that climate-related water scarcity contributes to competition for resources between refugees and host communities.⁹⁵

The risks documented in the literature for Western and South-Western Uganda centre more on commercial and administrative reallocation of gazetted settlement land. Even though freehold or leasehold tenure is operative, and land relationships are more formally documented, this does not eliminate the possibility of contestation, as documented cases in Western Uganda illustrate. For instance, at Kyaka I, land gazetted in the 1960s was partially de-gazetted after a refugee population repatriated, and fraudulent land titles were subsequently processed by private individuals.⁹⁶ A 2024 directive to excise land from Kyaka I and II for commercial development threatened the tenure of over 130,000 long-settled residents before the decision was reversed.⁹⁷ These cases show that the degree of tenure security does not always align with practice.



Figure 8. Land allocation over time - how household plot allocations have changed over time. (Illustrative comparison based on desk review findings)

92 International Refugee Rights Initiative (2018). My Children Should Stand Strong to Make Sure We Get Our Land Back: Host Community Perspectives of Uganda's Lamwo Refugee Settlement.

93 Oxford Academic, Journal of Refugee Studies (2026). Land for Refugees: Sharing and Exchanging in Northern Uganda. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/39/1/217/8374823>

94 International Refugee Rights Initiative (2018). My Children Should Stand Strong to Make Sure We Get Our Land Back: Host Community Perspectives of Uganda's Lamwo Refugee Settlement.

95 Daily Monitor (2026). Climate Stress Fuels Conflict between Locals and Refugees.

96 New Vision (2018). Facts about Govt Land and Resettlement of Ugandans in Kyaka. Available at: <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1481895/about-govt-land-resettlement-ugandans-kyaka>

97 Daily Monitor (2024). Museveni Rescinds Eviction of 130,000 Residents from Kyegegwa Land. Available at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-rescinds-eviction-of-130-000-residents-from-kyegegwa-land-4792676>

4. INCLUSION IN LAND ACCESS: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

The land access constraints described in Section 3 are documented across refugee households to varying degrees. Within that broader context, certain population groups face additional barriers shaped by demographic characteristics and social position. These groups include women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Child-headed households also face specific constraints, though published evidence on this group in the context of land access in Uganda's refugee response is limited.



4.1. Women: Unequal access and limited decision-making power

Nationally, women make up half the population and contribute an estimated 70 to 80% of agricultural labour, and yet hold recognised rights to only around 7% of land.⁹⁸ Research indicates that this disparity is reproduced in both natal and marital households through customary and statutory norms that consistently privilege male claimants. The 2023/24 national household survey found that 58% refugee households are headed by women, with more female-headed households (74%) in the Northern refugee stratum compared to the Southwestern stratum (50%).⁹⁹

However, the higher percentage of female-headed households does not result in equitable access to land. A 2024 assessment of HLP challenges across Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, and Imvepi settlements assessment found that female household heads navigate land allocation and supplementary land negotiations within a system in which customary norms condition land access and control on the approval of a male figure.¹⁰⁰ A World Bank assessment of Uganda's progressive approach to refugee management, drawing on surveys in Nakivale and Rwamwanja, found that male-headed households accessed approximately 1% more gazetted land and 13% more customary land than female-

98 Critical Social Thinking, University College Cork (2011). Women's Rights to Land Ownership in Uganda. Available at: <https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/uganda/gender-7/1275-women-s-rights-to-land-ownership-in-uganda-policy-and-practice/file>

99 Government of Uganda (2025). Uganda National Household Survey Report. Available at: <https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Uganda-National-Household-Survey-Report-20232024.pdf>

100 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements.

headed households.¹⁰¹ Another 2024 assessment found that concerns about eviction from shelters and farming plots were among the most commonly cited reasons for which female refugees sought legal aid services in West Nile settlements.¹⁰²

A study on water and land conflicts in Uganda's refugee settings found that women's participation in land-related decision-making forums is limited, with women regularly absent from both formal and informal forums where land allocation and natural resource management decisions are made.¹⁰³ The same evidence notes that women are reported to carry primary responsibility for fetching water and collecting firewood – activities that bring them into contact with contested land and resource boundaries – yet are not consistently present in the forums where those resources are governed. A 2024 assessment of refugee protection and gender dynamics in Uganda found that gender biases continue to favour men in property and housing decisions, and that women in urban settings where land markets are informal face higher exposure to exploitation.¹⁰⁴ Restrictive social norms and discriminatory legal or customary practices, including restrictions on women's rights to own or control land, can limit their economic opportunities, including their ability to engage in paid work and generate income.¹⁰⁵

Public statements by senior government officials have called for gender-responsive land registration and simplified legal literacy processes for rural women.¹⁰⁶ The IASC guidance on Gender in Humanitarian Action calls for women's participation in land-release activities to support equitable access to land and ensure that women's needs and priorities are reflected in decisions concerning land use and allocation.¹⁰⁷

The available evidence indicates a gendered dimension to land access in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts, but insufficient to establish its scale, variation or evolution across locations and population groups. The limited availability of sex-disaggregated data within the refugee population is a significant constraint to assessing differences in land access and tenure security between women and men, as well as differences among women themselves. More systematic and comparable data would therefore be needed to establish the extent of these disparities and to assess changes in women's access to and control over land over time.

4.2. Youth: Perception of responsibility and limited pathway to independent access

Land allocations to refugees are made at the household level to an adult head of household; young adults who are not yet heading their own households have no individual entitlement to a plot. Research indicates that in such cases, young adults rely on a sub-allocation from the family holding, which assessments consistently find to be below the threshold for food self-sufficiency in most settlements.¹⁰⁸ The World Bank assessment of Uganda's progressive approach to refugee management found that young refugees are less likely to access community land than older heads of household, with the probability of access to customary land increasing by approximately 9% and to gazetted land by approximately 2% with each additional year of age.¹⁰⁹ Available policy documents do not provide a defined pathway for young people to access an independent plot as they reach adulthood. When young adult refugees marry, they cannot apply for a new allocation. This has reportedly resulted in few (26%) young people being engaged in agriculture.¹¹⁰

101 World Bank (2016). An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

102 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements.

103 Oxfam / UN Women (2023). Women on the Margins of Resource Management: Water and Land Conflicts in Uganda's Refugee Settings. Available at: <https://uganda.oxfam.org/what-we-do-programmes/thematic-goal-1-resilient-livelihoods/advocacy-womens-land-and-property>

104 ReliefWeb (2024). Towards Inclusive Protection: Understanding Refugee Experiences and Gender Dynamics in Uganda. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/towards-inclusive-protection-understanding-refugee-experiences-and-gender-dynamics-uganda-april-2024>

105 IASC (2018) Gender in Humanitarian Action Handbook. Available at: <https://www.gihahandbook.org/>

106 Parliament of Uganda (2025). Stakeholders Urge Prioritisation of Women in Land Governance. Available at: <https://www.parliament.go.ug/news/3950/stakeholders-urge-prioritisation-women-land-governance>

107 IASC (2018) Gender in Humanitarian Action Handbook.

108 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda.

109 World Bank (2016). An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management.

110 World Food Program, GoU, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda.

Other field-level reporting from northern Uganda's settlements notes that fewer young people are interested in agriculture compared to older community members. Whether this reflects an occupational preference, a response to limited land availability, or a combination of both is not clearly established in the reviewed literature. This gap warrants further investigation, as programming responses for youth in the refugee response may need to be calibrated differently from those designed for older farming households. A 2025 programme evaluation from West Nile settlements reported some results from programmes linking youth to agripreneurship, value chains, and off-farm income generation, but noted that outcomes remain limited by underdeveloped market linkages and infrastructure.¹¹¹

4.3. Persons with disabilities: Exclusion from decision-making and assumptions about productive capacity

Available evidence indicates that land access barriers faced by persons with disabilities in Uganda's refugee response are among the least systematically documented. Participatory research conducted in Arua, Yumbe, Nwoya, and Omoro districts found that family members frequently allocate smaller or lower-quality plots to relatives with disabilities, based on assumptions about reduced productive capacity, and that these assumptions are reinforced when adapted equipment or accessible farming methods are not provided.¹¹²

Drastic reductions in humanitarian funding in 2025 led to the introduction of a vulnerability-categorisation system for food assistance, under which refugees classified in the lowest priority group – Category 3, covering 63% of all refugees – no longer receive food support. A 2025 assessment by Humanity and Inclusion covering 1,280 refugees with disabilities across eight Ugandan settlements found that persons with disabilities were among those disproportionately affected, with 42% of households with children with disabilities and 35% of people with disabilities excluded from all food aid as a result. Nearly 9 in 10 of those excluded reported a wish to appeal, though the assessment notes that most would likely be able to receive assistance until new funding was allocated.¹¹³ Among refugees in the lowest-priority category – comprising 63% of the overall refugee population – approximately 35% reported turning to agriculture as a primary coping strategy in the absence of other assistance.¹¹⁴ One study highlighted a case where a visually-impaired legal guardian to six children under 15 years of age had been excluded from land allocation and was in the process of being removed from food assistance.¹¹⁵

Persons with disabilities may experience stigma, inaccessible information, and limited participation in decisions concerning housing, land and property.

Both customary and statutory systems may present barriers where reasonable accommodation is unavailable or disability-related needs are not adequately considered in land governance, settlement planning and land-based livelihoods.¹¹⁶

Evidence from targeted interventions indicates that these barriers can be reduced. Disability-inclusive livelihoods programmes combining accessible farming training with arrangements for shared or hired land access have shown measurable improvements in nutritional outcomes.¹¹⁷ An agricultural programme launched in 2026 in Adjumani and

111 Cordaid International (2025). Building Sustainable Livelihoods through Climate-Resilient Agriculture in Ugandan Refugee Settlements. Available at: <https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/building-sustainable-livelihoods-through-climate-resilient-agriculture-in-ugandan-refugee-settlements/>

112 Light for the World (2023). Food Security: People with Disabilities in Uganda Share Barriers and Solutions through Photography. Available at: <https://www.light-for-the-world.org/news/food-security-people-with-disabilities-in-uganda-share-barriers-and-solutions-through-photography/>

113 Humanity and Inclusion (2025). In Uganda, People with Disabilities Are Largely Overlooked by Humanitarian Aid. Available at: <https://www.humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/news/in-uganda-people-with-disabilities-are-largely-overlooked-by-humanitarian-aid>

114 Humanity and Inclusion (2025). In Uganda, People with Disabilities Are Largely Overlooked by Humanitarian Aid.

115 World Food Program, GoU, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda.

116 IASC Task Team (2019). Guidelines on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Available at: https://inter-agencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20the%20Inclusion%20of%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%2C%202019_0.pdf

117 National Library of Medicine (NCBI / PMC) (2025). Disability-Inclusive Graduation Programme Intervention on Social Participation among Ultra-Poor People with Disability in North Uganda. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC12044952/>

surrounding districts, developed in partnership with the national union representing persons with disabilities, called for agricultural technologies to be designed for accessibility from the outset.¹¹⁸ A cluster-randomised trial across four northern Ugandan districts found that the strongest outcomes for persons with disabilities are achieved when livelihood support is bundled with financial inclusion, social protection, and social empowerment components, rather than delivered as a standalone agricultural or land access intervention.¹¹⁹

These findings are broadly consistent with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Team guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. The guidance identifies participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations as an important component of inclusive programming and highlights the need to identify and address barriers to participation and access. These include the participation of persons with disabilities and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; consideration of disability-related requirements in housing, land and property decisions; provision of accessible information, reasonable accommodation and adapted technologies; protection and safeguarding; capacity strengthening of OPDs; and the collection and analysis of disability-disaggregated data.

The IASC guidance also notes that local OPDs may be absent, have limited capacity, or may not adequately represent all persons with disabilities in an affected population, particularly in contexts of displacement. In such circumstances, it describes engagement with persons with disabilities and their families at community level, the establishment or strengthening of peer-support and representative groups, and engagement with regional or national OPD networks as possible approaches. The guidance further emphasises the importance of cross-sectoral coordination to accommodate the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.¹²⁰

During the 2025 Global Disability Summit, Uganda made commitments that align with the IASC guidelines, including commitments to strengthen disability inclusion in development planning and budgeting, improve disability-disaggregated data, strengthen the capacity and representation of organisations of persons with disabilities, and localise and disseminate the IASC guidelines.¹²¹ For the land-access context, these commitments provide an opportunity to strengthen the visibility of disability within existing land and refugee-response systems and to generate more systematic evidence on how disability affects access to and use of land in refugee-hosting districts. This is particularly relevant given the limited evidence currently available on the scale and distribution of these barriers, and on how they vary across different groups of persons with disabilities and across displacement and host-community settings.

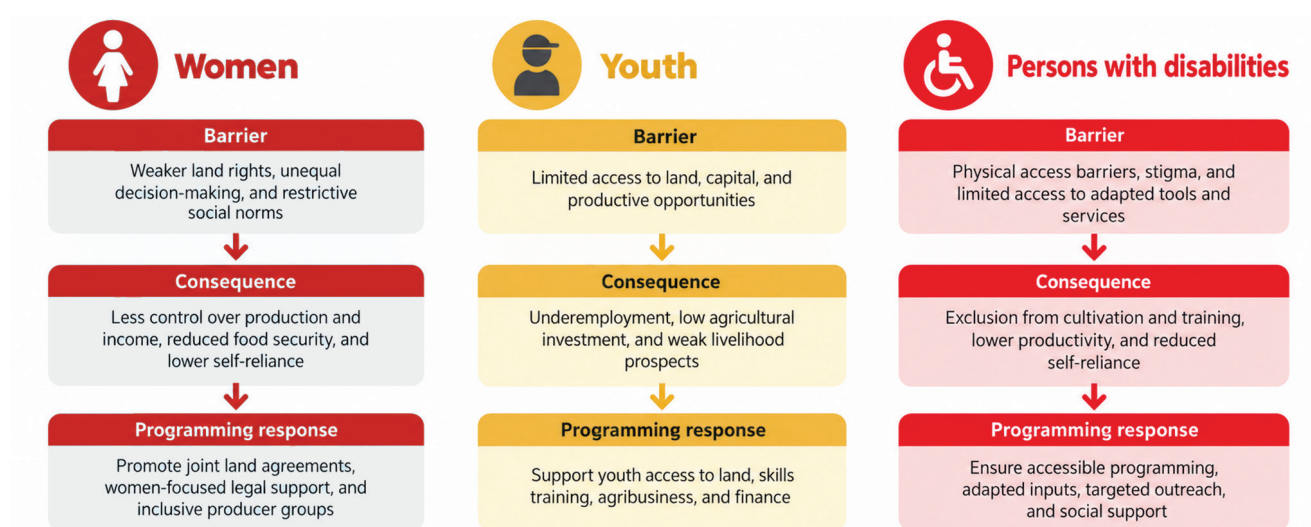


Figure 9. Inclusion barriers and responses - how land access constraints affect different groups

118 Nile Post (2026). ECO-Food Uganda Agriculture Project Restores Hope for Persons with Disabilities. Available at: <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/335558/eco-food-uganda-agriculture-project-restores-hope-for-persons-with-disabilities>

119 National Library of Medicine (NCBI / PMC) (2025). Disability-Inclusive Graduation Programme Intervention on Social Participation among Ultra-Poor People with Disability in North Uganda.

120 IASC Task Team (2019). Guidelines on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

121 Global Disability Summit (2025). Overview of Commitments for GDS 2025. Available at: <https://gds.idata.tools/overview>



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Women carry primary responsibility for their households, yet remain underrepresented in the decisions that shape access to land and natural resources.”

5. IMPLICATIONS OF UGANDA'S APPROACH TO LAND ALLOCATION IN REFUGEE-HOSTING DISTRICTS

The way land is allocated and accessed in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts carries implications across multiple sectors of the refugee response. Research indicates that where households have access to sufficient, productive land under conditions that support investment, the model is associated with progress toward self-reliance. Where those conditions are not in place, evidence from multiple assessments suggests that complementary interventions are associated with better outcomes.¹²² This chapter examines the implications for economic productivity, climate resilience and environmental management, agricultural practice, and food security and nutrition, as well as the cross-cutting implications for inclusion.

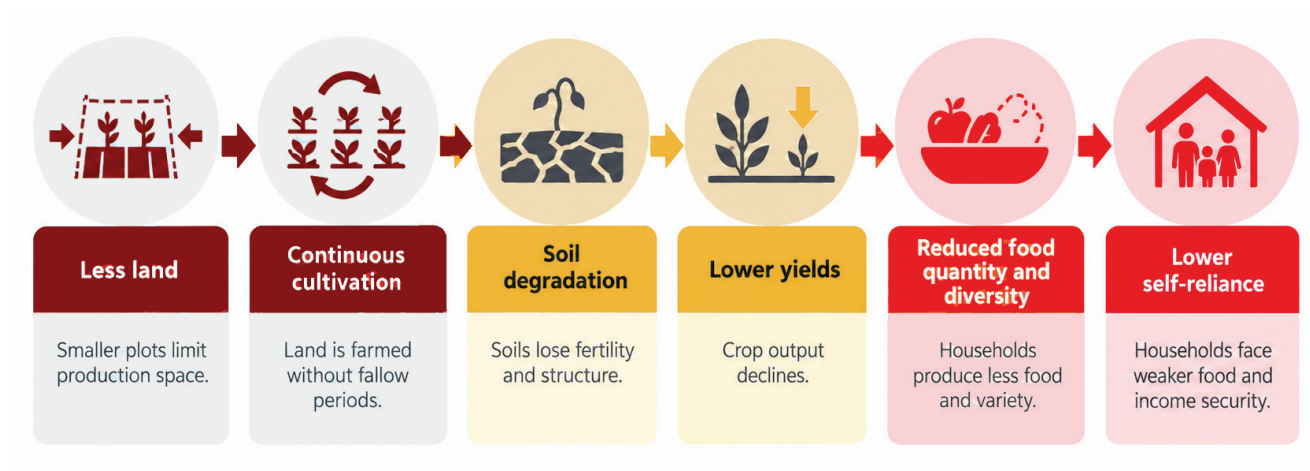


Figure: 10. Implications for self-reliance - How reduced land access can affect household outcomes

5.1. Economic productivity: Returns across land-based and other livelihood sectors

Research indicates that households with access to more land tend to achieve better economic outcomes, but that returns from small-plot subsistence agriculture are reported to be lower than from commerce, skilled employment, or value-added processing. A comparative analysis of refugee livelihoods across sectors in Uganda found that agricultural households tend to record lower incomes and welfare outcomes than those engaged in commerce or other

122 World Food Program, GoU, UNHCR (2020). Analysis of Refugee Vulnerability in Uganda.

non-farm activities.¹²³ This finding does not discount the value of land access particularly for households with limited capital and few alternatives, but it underscores the importance of supporting a range of livelihood pathways alongside agriculture.

Scale is another limiting factor. With a median holding of 0.5 acres, well below the one to two acres estimated as the minimum for food self-sufficiency, most refugee households produce at subsistence level or below, with limited capacity to generate a marketable surplus or diversify into higher-value crops.

Credit access is an additional constraint. Because refugees cannot own land, they have no asset to offer as collateral for loans. Without access to credit, households are limited in their ability to purchase improved inputs, irrigation equipment, or post-harvest storage, investments that would increase returns from available land. Available evidence suggests that land access, under current conditions, supports household food production more than income generation for the majority of refugee households.

5.2. Environmental and natural resource management

Uganda's refugee-hosting districts experience variable weather patterns. An analysis of precipitation and vegetation index data from 1981 to 2024 across Uganda's refugee-hosting districts found that climate extremes occur episodically and often differ between northern districts, which have a single rainy season, and southern districts, which have two.¹²⁴ Research suggests that as climate variability increases, smaller per-household land areas and degraded soils are associated with higher rates of crop failure and greater competition for water and natural resources.¹²⁵

Tenure security also has implications for climate adaptation. Evidence indicates that farmers without certainty of access to a given plot in subsequent seasons are less likely to invest in soil conservation, water harvesting structures, or perennial crop systems.¹²⁶ Research consistently notes that tenure security is associated with higher rates of climate-smart agricultural investment.¹²⁷

Environmental and natural resource changes have been documented in and around refugee settlements. A study examining land cover change in Ugandan refugee settlements recorded losses of grassland, woodland, and cropland, attributed to firewood collection, charcoal production, bush-burning, mono-cropping, over-cultivation, and infrastructure construction.¹²⁸ Practices that prioritise short-term yield – including certain chemical inputs used on land without a fallow period – are identified as factors in soil degradation. Clearing trees and shrubs for agricultural land is also associated with reduced moisture retention and soil stability.

5.3. Agricultural practice: Plot size as the primary constraint

The primary constraint on agricultural practice in Uganda's refugee settlements is the amount of land available. Across all regions and tenure systems, evidence from multiple studies points to plot sizes that are insufficient to support practices such as crop rotation, intercropping, mulching, and adequate plant spacing.¹²⁹ A study on land use in the Bidibidi settlement notes that on a 30-by-30-metre plot, a household has limited capacity to rotate crops, leave land fallow, or accumulate organic material for mulching, given agronomic requirements for these practices.¹³⁰ This is a recurrent finding across both the north and the south-west of the country.

In Northern and West Nile regions, the instability of supplementary land access is an additional factor shaping agricultural practice. Verbal arrangements for land use beyond the official allocation may be revoked mid-season, which

123 Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement (2023). Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make?

124 ScienceDirect / Global Food Security (2026). Uneven Hydroclimatic Risk and Land Access Constraints Challenge Refugee Agricultural Self-Reliance in Uganda. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666154326003121>

125 Daily Monitor (2026). Climate Stress Fuels Conflict between Locals and Refugees.

126 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda.

127 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda.

128 ResearchGate (2024). Impact of Refugee Settlements on Land Degradation in Uganda.

129 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda.

130 MDPI Land (2022). Using Land to Promote Refugee Self-Reliance in Uganda.

reduces the incentive to invest in perennial crops, irrigation infrastructure, or soil improvement measures.¹³¹ Evidence indicates that where access is uncertain, land tends to be cultivated in non-rotational ways that affect long-term fertility.¹³²

In Western Uganda's gazetted districts, the statutory basis of tenure provides, in principle, a more stable framework. The UN-Habitat spatial profile of Nakivale settlement in South Western Uganda found that agricultural production and productivity remain low, with limited access to quality inputs and appropriate technologies, and that self-reliance outcomes have not consistently improved over time at that settlement.¹³³ Uncertainty from past de-gazettement cases is noted as a factor affecting investment decisions among some long-settled households.¹³⁴

5.4. Food security and nutrition: Production quantity, dietary diversity, and soil health

A multi-settlement assessment found that among settlement-based refugee households reporting some form of land access, 94% reported that their land was insufficient to provide adequate food in the most recent harvest.¹³⁵ The same assessment concluded that the practical issue is not access to land in formal terms, but access to land of adequate quantity, fertility, moisture, and tenure security to support productive investment.¹³⁶ Food assistance has historically served as a complement to subsistence cultivation, covering nutritional gaps during dry seasons and in crop-failure years.

With food rations reduced in 2024 and 2025, households that previously combined partial cultivation with partial food assistance have seen their support from both sources decline. Evidence indicates that the most recently arrived refugees, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households have been more affected.¹³⁷

A 2023 study on land access, livelihoods, and dietary diversity in northern Uganda found that nutrition outcomes are affected not only by the quantity of food produced but by its diversity, and that pressure to maximise yields from small plots and focus on market-demanded crops is associated with reduced dietary variety.¹³⁸ Evidence from northern Uganda's fragile food systems indicates that ownership of or access to agricultural land has a significant effect on food sovereignty and dietary resilience, but that the type and diversity of what is grown on that land matters alongside the quantity produced.¹³⁹ Programming that focuses exclusively on yield or market output without addressing dietary diversity may increase income without proportionately improving nutritional outcomes.

131 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements.

132 U-Learn / Charter4Change (2023). The Realities of Self-reliance within the Ugandan Refugee Context.

133 UN-Habitat (2020). Nakivale Settlement Profile, Isingiro District, Uganda.

134 Daily Monitor (2024). Museveni Rescinds Eviction of 130,000 Residents from Kyegegwa Land.

135 Norwegian Refugee Council / REACH (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda.

136 Norwegian Refugee Council / REACH (2019). Owned Spaces and Shared Places: Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing, Land, and Property in Uganda.

137 Humanity and Inclusion (2025). In Uganda, People with Disabilities Are Largely Overlooked by Humanitarian Aid.

138 Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems (2023). Land Access, Livelihoods, and Dietary Diversity in a Fragile Setting in Northern Uganda. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sustainable-food-systems/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1178386/full>

139 Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems (2023). Land Access, Livelihoods, and Dietary Diversity in a Fragile Setting in Northern Uganda.

Summary of key barriers to land access and use in Uganda's refugee hosting districts

The sections in this chapter examine how Uganda's approach to land allocation shapes outcomes across agricultural practice, economic productivity, food security and nutrition, and environmental management, and how specific population groups — women, youth, and persons with disabilities — face additional barriers within this system. The matrix below summarises the key barriers identified across these dimensions.

TABLE 1:

MATRIX SHOWING THE KEY BARRIERS TO LAND ACCESS AND USE IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE HOSTING DISTRICTS

Barriers	Agricultural Practice	Food Security	Nutrition	Environmental Mangement	Economic Productivity	Inclusion
1. Insufficient plot sizes (median 0.5 acres vs 1–2 acres estimated for food self-sufficiency)	●	●				
2. No land ownership / collateral for agricultural credit					●	
3. Continuous cultivation and declining soil fertility	●	●		●		
4. Climate variability: heat, dry spells and flooding		●		●		
5. Population pressure on a fixed land base	●	●				
6. Reduced food assistance increases dependence on insufficient land		●	●			
7. Pressure to maximise yields reduces dietary diversity			●			
8. Women: smaller allocations and reduced decision-making power					●	●
9. Youth: no independent land entitlement for non-household heads					●	●
10. Persons with disabilities: smaller/lower-quality plots and reduced complementary assistance		●				●

● indicates a dimension directly affected by the barrier.

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When land is limited,
secure access and more
productive use of small
plots can strengthen
food production and self-
reliance.”



6. EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES AND PROGRAMMING MODELS

A number of good practices and programmes are improving the way land is accessed in Uganda's refugee-hosting districts. These initiatives address the central challenge of limited plot sizes and insecure tenure by testing models that expand, reorganise, or stabilise access to land. The approaches documented here range from collective arrangements such as land aggregation and block farming, to tenure formalisation, community-based mediation, and intensive use of small allocations. While most operate at sub-national scale and are facilitated by humanitarian or development organisations, they provide valuable lessons on how refugees and host communities can negotiate, secure, and make more effective use of land.

6.1. Land aggregation

Land aggregation involves bringing together fragmented or individually small land holdings into a consolidated area that a group of refugee households can cultivate collectively. Rather than each household relying on its standard 30x30 metre allocation, members pool their negotiating capacity and resources to secure a larger, contiguous piece of host community land. Documented examples in West Nile settlements include groups that have collectively negotiated access to 100 acres or more, enabling production at a scale that allows some market-oriented output in addition to household consumption.

The approach requires third-party intermediation – typically a humanitarian or development organisation – to facilitate negotiations with host community landowners, structure the agreement, and support coordination among group members. A 2026 study on land sharing in Northern Uganda found that where aggregated land has been cleared and made productive, some landowners have subsequently sought to reclaim it or renegotiate terms.¹⁴⁰ A study on formalising land rental contracts in West Nile found that aggregation arrangements paired with written, witnessed documentation of the terms, including a clear duration, conditions for renewal or return, and evidence of the landowner's title, have generally proved more stable than those founded on verbal agreement.¹⁴¹

6.2. Block farming

Block farming is an approach in which individual household allocations within a settlement are pooled and jointly cultivated as a contiguous block, rather than being farmed separately. The model is typically facilitated by an intermediary organisation working in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister and is oriented toward collective food production and market supply rather than individual subsistence. A block-farming initiative in Bidibidi settlement supported by Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) opened 478 acres of farmland for over 2,200 registered members across eighty-one farmer groups, with harvests feeding school meal programmes.¹⁴² A separate programme in Bidibidi, implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, docu-

140 Oxford Academic, Journal of Refugee Studies (2026). Land for Refugees: Sharing and Exchanging in Northern Uganda.

141 Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) (2025). The Impact of Formalizing Land Rental Contracts on Refugee-Host Interactions and Agricultural Production in Uganda. Available at: <https://poverty-action.org/impact-formalizing-land-rental-contracts-refugee-host-interactions-and-agricultural-production>

142 New Vision (2025). Block Farming Project Opens 478 Acres of Farmland for Refugees in Bidibidi. Available at: https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/agriculture/block-farming-project-opens-478-acres-of-farm-NV_220689_042026

mented improvements in food production volumes and self-reliance indicators for participating households.¹⁴³

Programme documentation notes that block farming arrangements can, under certain conditions, create competition for contiguous arable land, potentially affecting local land rental prices.¹⁴⁴

6.3. Tenure formalisation

Tenure formalisation approaches focus on converting informal, undocumented land access arrangements into written, legally grounded agreements that provide greater security to both the landowner and the refugee household. This approach involves two major steps: first, supporting host-community landowners in obtaining Certificates of Customary Ownership for their land, thereby establishing a formally recognised title, and second, facilitating a written lease or tenancy agreement between the landowner and a refugee farmer or group.

A programme supported by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and ZOA in West Nile and other regions between 2020 and 2024 applied this sequence, supporting rural authorities and communities to demarcate land boundaries and issue certificates to rights holders. By the end of the second phase, the ownership of over 1,800 plots had been clarified and documented, and close to 1,000 lease agreements between landowners and land users had been facilitated.¹⁴⁵ Written agreements that set out the duration of the arrangement, the rights and obligations of both parties, and conditions for renewal provided a degree of predictability that verbal arrangements did not.¹⁴⁶

A study on the effects of formalising land rental contracts in Uganda's West Nile region found that tenure formalisation is associated with increased tenure security, higher agricultural investment, and improved relations between refugee tenants and host community landlords.¹⁴⁷ The same study notes that formalisation alone does not guarantee enforcement in the absence of accessible dispute resolution mechanisms.

6.4. Legal empowerment

Complementing tenure formalisation, a legal assistance programme supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council operating across Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, and Imvepi assisted over 37,000 refugees and host community members on Housing, Land and Property issues between June 2021 and May 2024 through legal awareness sessions, individual counselling, and direct legal assistance.¹⁴⁸ The programme developed standardised land-sharing templates and facilitated boundary mapping in response to the most frequently reported dispute types: contested plot boundaries,

143 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Block Farming Model for Refugees in Bidibidi Settlement. Available at: <https://www.nrc.no/resources/briefing-notes/block-farming-model-for-refugees-in-bidibidi-settlement>

144 ReliefWeb / ZOA (2023). Research Terms of Reference: Access to Land among Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/research-terms-reference-access-land-among-refugees-and-host-communities-uganda-uga2306-august-2023-v1>

145 GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit) (2024). Achieving Food Security for Displaced Persons Thanks to Settled Land Rights — Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU). Available at: <https://www.giz.de/en/newsroom/news/land-rights-for-displaced-persons-in-uganda>

146 GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit) (2024). Achieving Food Security for Displaced Persons Thanks to Settled Land Rights — Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU).

147 Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) (2025). The Impact of Formalizing Land Rental Contracts on Refugee-Host Interactions and Agricultural Production in Uganda. Available at: <https://poverty-action.org/impact-formalizing-land-rental-contracts-refugee-host-interactions-and-agricultural-production>

148 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements.

denial of agreed supplementary access to land, and eviction from rented agricultural land.¹⁴⁹ A technical review of fit-for-purpose land administration in Uganda recommends a nationally adopted strategy using simplified, participatory, and technology-supported tools to document land rights at scale to extend these approaches beyond individual programme boundaries, noting that such a national implementation plan has not yet been Developed.¹⁵⁰

6.5. Intensive land use on small allocations (Optimised land use model–OLUM)

Approaches have been employed to increase the productivity of existing small allocations. Evidence from several settlements suggests these approaches are associated with improvements in food production from standard plots.¹⁵¹

Vertical and kitchen garden models, in which planting is structured upward rather than outward, using stackable containers, sack mounds, raised beds, or trellis systems, allow multiple crops to be grown within a very small footprint. These techniques have been documented in several West Nile and South-Western settlements as a means of improving food production and dietary diversity on standard 30x30 metre plots. For instance, a programme supported by a consortium led by Action Against Hunger in Adjumani and several other districts in Uganda implements OLUM, combining vertical cultivation with training in soil health, water conservation, pest management, and post-harvest handling, supported by community-based input access systems. This programme has reached over 24,000 farmers with reported increase in income and dietary diversity.¹⁵² Resources produced by the Response Innovation Lab and U-Learn document similar approaches across Uganda settlements, with positive outcomes noted for household nutrition where consistent technical support is provided.¹⁵³

6.6. Improved/resilient seed varieties for small plots

Improved seed varieties designed to produce higher yields from smaller or lower-quality plots have also been introduced, with some operated through national initiatives such as the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) refugee project. This initiative introduces fast-maturing and climate-resilient varieties suited for refugee contexts. It has been piloted in Rwamwanja and Kyaka II refugee settlements.¹⁵⁴

6.7. Digital land rights verification

A pilot programme in Uganda's West Nile region implemented by Commonlands, CEFORD and CARE International tested a community-based digital platform for land rights verification, designed to enable landowners to establish verifiable claims and build a credit record, with particular focus on marginalised groups such as women.¹⁵⁵ The platform operates through a collective verification system in which community members confirm each other's land claims through a shared trust network, generating a digital record that can be used as the basis for financial transactions and formal lease agreements. The pilot is implemented through a local NGO with established community presence across twelve districts of West Nile, – using existing Village Savings and Loans Associations whose trust and mutual accountability structures were already in place – as the entry point. Fifty-five (55) VSLA groups are participating in the pilot. The programme combines the digital tool with support for digital literacy and access to devices, recognising that technology-based approaches to land documentation require investment in both the platform and users' capacity to

149 Norwegian Refugee Council (2024). Housing, Land and Property Challenges and Best Practices in West Nile Settlements.

150 MDPI Land (2021). Fit for Purpose Land Administration: Country Implementation Strategy for Addressing Uganda's Land Tenure Security Problems. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/10/6/629>

151 Women Initiative for Holistic Community Transformation (WHOCOT) Uganda (2024). Optimized Land Use Model (OLUM): Climate-Smart Land Use for Refugee and Host Communities. Available at: <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/our-solutions/food-security-livelihoods/refugees-putting-down-roots-in-uganda/>

152 Action Against Hunger (2024). A Single Plot, A World of Difference: Optimized Land Use Model (OLUM). Available at: <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/story/a-single-plot-a-world-of-difference/>

153 U-Learn Uganda (2025). Self-Reliance Technical Brief.

154 NARO (ND). NARO Refugee Project. Available at: <https://naro.go.ug/naro-refugee-project/>

155 Commonlands / CEFORD / CARE International Uganda (2024). Commonlands Digital Land Rights Platform: West Nile Uganda Pilot. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111023>

engage with it effectively. The pilot is at an early stage and independent evaluation of its scalability and replicability across different settlement contexts has not yet been published.



Figure: 11. Good Practices - Seven programming models and what they solve



Vertical and kitchen gardens are helping households produce more food and improve dietary diversity from standard 30 × 30 metre plots.”

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7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are drawn from the evidence reviewed and are intended to inform programming, policy engagement, and research within Uganda's refugee response.



Support access to documentation for refugee and host communities through formal legal channels. All negotiations for community land to be used in refugee settlements should result in written, certified agreements specifying the duration of use, permitted activities, compensation arrangements, if applicable, and conditions for the return of the land. Where such agreements do not currently exist, including for land already in use, a process of retrospective documentation should be supported. Investment in legal documentation capacity at the district level and clear communication of the agreement terms to the originating land communities are prerequisites for this.



Tailor programming approaches based on demography, geography, and tenure type.

Interventions appropriate in customary-tenure West Nile, such as supporting land title acquisition, facilitating clan-level negotiation, and providing legal literacy, differ from those needed in gazetted Western Uganda settlements, where the priorities are productivity enhancement on fixed plots, density management, and protection against commercial reallocation. Programming, monitoring, and policy engagement should be explicitly grounded in district- and settlement-level tenure realities rather than applied uniformly across a diverse system.



Complement land-based agricultural livelihoods with off-farm and market-linked opportunities.

Evidence indicates that refugees engaged in commerce, value addition, and skilled employment tend to achieve better welfare outcomes than those relying solely on subsistence farming on small plots. Off-farm activities require capital, skills, and market access; assessments note that these are not widely available to refugee households in settlement contexts. Investments in vocational training, financial literacy, market infrastructure, and agro-processing, calibrated to what is economically viable in each region, would generate complementary income streams. Field evidence suggests that for many settlement-based households, agriculture is the most accessible starting point given capital and market constraints; off-farm programming should therefore build on rather than replace agricultural activity, particularly for those transitioning toward greater income diversity.



Incorporate climate resilience and land regeneration as core components of land-based programming.

Investments in soil health, water harvesting, drought-tolerant varieties, and agroforestry should be standard elements of agricultural support, not features limited to specialist projects. Climate-resilient and regenerative approaches are relevant for degraded land, where restoring soil health and vegetation cover can bring land back into productive use and expand the effective land base available to settlements. All land tenure agreements should include provisions that protect long-term improvements to land from short-term eviction risk.



Support scale-up of documented good practices and innovations from institutional to system level.

Approaches including legal empowerment and tenure formalisation, land aggregation, block farming, and intensive cultivation on small plots have been demonstrated to produce results within specific institutional programmes. These practices are not yet available across all settlements, and their sustainability depends on project funding cycles. The priority is not developing new models but supporting the transfer of good practices to a broader set of actors and their embedding within government systems, so that they continue when project funding ends.



Review the settlement system to reflect the surge in refugee and host population numbers.

The plot allocation framework was established in the 1950s for a refugee population a fraction of today's scale. Both refugee and host populations have more than tripled since the system was designed. Research found that refugees who arrived before 2012 accessed more land than those who arrived after, as the fixed land supply was progressively subdivided. A structured review process involving government, UNHCR, civil society, and refugee and host community representatives should assess whether the current allocation model, including plot sizes, allocation criteria, and its relationship to national land administration systems – is appropriate for the scale and conditions of the current response, and what adjustments would be needed to make it more sustainable.



Dedicate resources to address the unique challenges of marginalised groups at community, institutional, and policy levels. Evidence reviewed indicates that women, youth, and persons with disabilities face additional barriers to land access and agricultural productivity that are not resolved by general improvements to the allocation system. Addressing them requires specific and sustained resources: adapted tools and techniques for persons with disabilities, gender-responsive allocation processes and legal literacy for women, and a defined pathway for youth to access land as they transition to independent households. Evidence from programme implementation suggests these needs are most effectively addressed when reflected in settlement planning, institutional budgets, and policy frameworks, rather than only through time-limited programme components, and when resources are directed at community, institutional, and policy levels.



Invest in increasing awareness of housing, land, and property rights across all settlements. Published assessments indicate that many refugees and host community members are unaware of their legal rights regarding land access, the terms of their tenancy or allocation, and the mechanisms available to contest disputes or evictions. Increasing this awareness through accessible formats, multiple languages, and trusted community channels would strengthen the effectiveness of all other land governance investments and support communities to engage more effectively with formal dispute resolution processes.



Support the generation and dissemination of evidence on the economics of land access and use. An evidence gap exists regarding the comparative economic returns of agriculture, off-farm employment, commerce, and value-chain participation in Uganda's refugee response. Generating this evidence will require primary research, structured consultations with refugee and host community members, and the collation of data already held by government agencies and implementing organisations. Dissemination is as important as generation: evidence that is produced but not shared does not inform programming or policy. Government bodies and organisations that hold relevant administrative data, including records on land allocation, agricultural output, and household income, should be encouraged to make these available for analysis and use.

8. CONCLUSION

Land access is central to Uganda's refugee response and continues to shape self-reliance and wellbeing outcomes for refugees, host communities, and the districts where they are hosted. Comparative studies find that settlement-based refugees in Uganda record better outcomes across a range of welfare indicators than refugees in camp-based systems in the region.

However, the reviewed evidence identifies several areas warranting attention:

- Uganda's legal framework grants refugees the right to access land, but the absence of enforceable, documented agreements for customary land and land accessed through private arrangements leaves both refugees and host community landowners without adequate legal protection – refugees against eviction, and landowners against uncertainty over the terms and duration of land use.
- Livelihood opportunities alongside land-based agriculture are limited, and available evidence indicates that agriculture alone at current plot sizes is unlikely to generate incomes above subsistence level for most refugee households.
- Climate and environmental considerations are insufficiently integrated into land use programming, despite evidence that soil degradation, extreme heat, and erratic rainfall are already reducing the productive value of available land.
- Land access conditions for women, youth, and persons with disabilities remain constrained by both the allocation system and prevailing social norms.

Several studies suggest that a review of the settlement model, including its plot allocation logic and its relationship to national land tenure systems, would provide a basis for adapting the system to current conditions, given that the framework was designed for a refugee population that was much smaller than it is now. The reviewed literature also points to several related areas where programming and policy engagement could be strengthened. Formalising land access arrangements through documented, enforceable agreements would provide greater protection for both refugees and host community landowners. Complementing land-based agriculture with off-farm and market-linked livelihood opportunities would address the income limitations that small plot sizes impose. Integrating climate resilience and environmental management into land use programming would reduce the risk of further soil degradation and productivity loss. Addressing the specific land access barriers facing women, youth, and persons with disabilities requires dedicated resources at community, institutional, and policy levels, rather than through time-limited programme components.

However, the evidence is limited. For instance, data on the comparative economic returns of land-based and non-land-based livelihoods in Uganda's refugee response is particularly scarce. Generating, documenting, and sharing evidence in these areas – including data held by government agencies and implementing organisations – would strengthen the analytical basis for future programming and policy engagement.

Nonetheless, the reviewed literature documents a range of emerging good practices, including land aggregation, block farming, tenure formalisation, legal empowerment, and intensive cultivation models. Most of these have been demonstrated at programme level and within specific settlements. The evidence suggests that scaling these practices from institutional to system level, and embedding them within government systems rather than project cycles, would extend their reach and sustainability across the response.

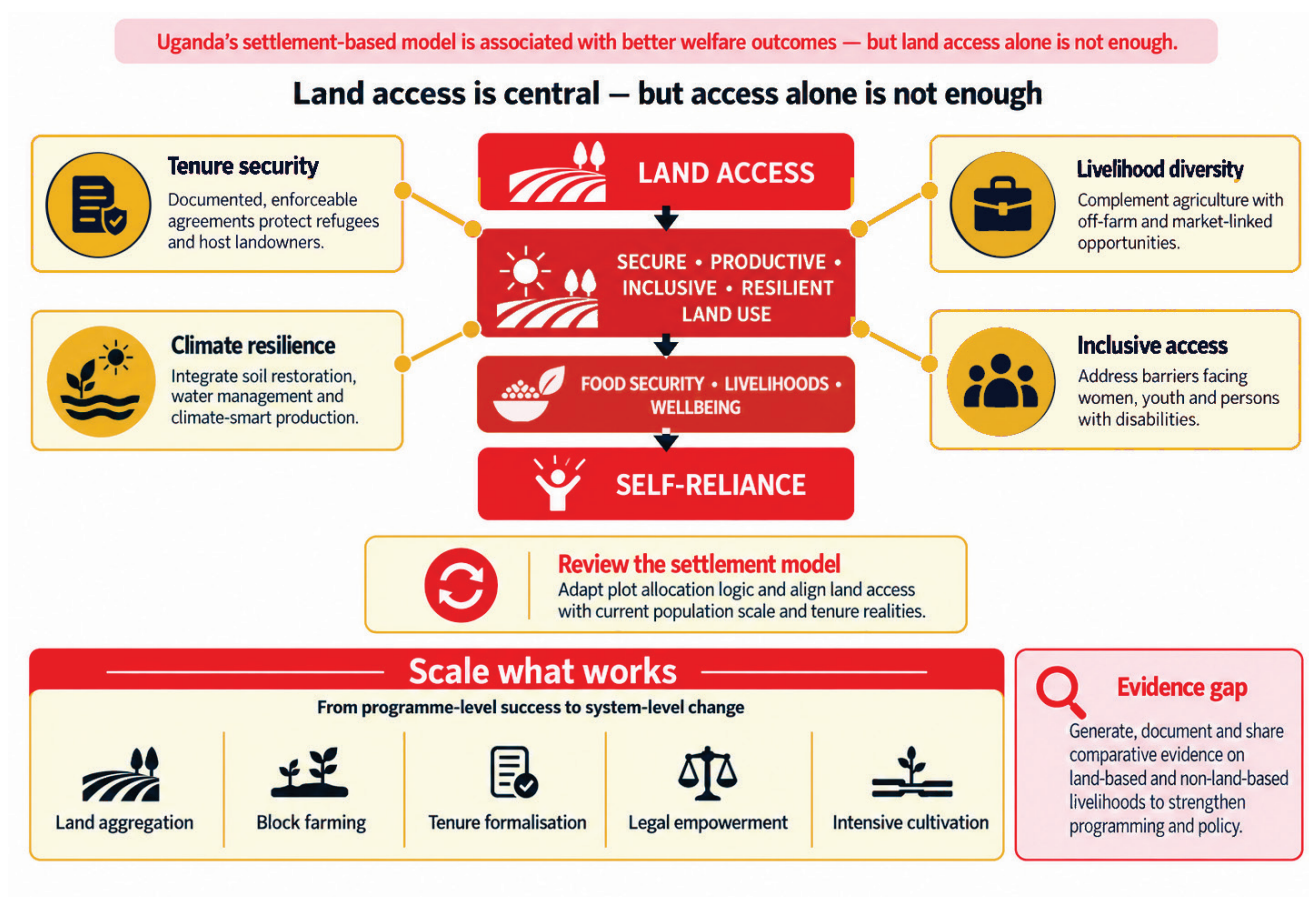


Figure: 12. Key conditions linking land access to self-reliance in Uganda's refugee response.

9. ANNEX: ACTOR MAPPING – LAND-RELATED INTERVENTIONS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE HOSTING DISTRICTS

The following tables map the principal actors implementing land-related interventions within Uganda's refugee response, by category, settlement footprint, and primary contribution to land access, agriculture, tenure security, or livelihoods.

TABLE 2:
ACTORS IMPLEMENTING LAND-RELATED INTERVENTIONS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NGOS

Organisations	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Land access and use focus
Danish Refugee Council	Imvepi, Kiryandongo, Lobule and Rhino Camp settlements	Land rehabilitation and shared-block aggregation; negotiates multi-acre plots with host landlords and finances landscape restoration.
ZOA Uganda	West Nile, Acholi, Bunyoro regions	Supports customary landowners to obtain Certificates of Customary Ownership; facilitates formal lease agreements between landowners and refugee households; dispute resolution and participatory boundary mapping.
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, Imvepi, Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area, South west and Mid West Refugee settlements, Kiryandongo, Arua	The NRC Information Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) Programme provides legal aid services on housing, land and property (HLP) including legal awareness, counselling, legal assistance, collaborative dispute resolution to resolve HLP disputes (e.g., mediation), capacity building and advocacy including Gender-responsive land access; Part of the Stand for her Land Campaign Uganda bringing Refugee voices to the land issues
Action Against Hunger	Adjumani District	Plot maximisation through bio-intensive micro-gardening, vertical planting structures, and micro-irrigation on standard plots.
AVSI Foundation	Palabek, Rhino, Kyangwali, Rwamwanja, Nakivale, Kyaka II, Imvepi, and Rhino Omugo	Commercial land access contracts linking refugee cooperatives to agribusiness markets through multi-year block-farming agreements.
Oxfam in Uganda	Several districts across West Nile, Karamoja, Eastern, Western, and South Western regions	Climate-resilient livelihoods and advocacy on inclusive ecosystem and natural resource management. Also developed a Land Rights Strategy for 2018 to 2021 whose vision was "a Uganda where all citizens, particularly Women and men are able to enjoy their land and natural resources rights and influence decisions that affect their lives."

Organisations	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Land access and use focus
Mercy Corps	Northeastern and western Uganda	Market-led block farming facilitated with District Land Boards; links land access to enterprise development and inputs; helps farmers increase productivity, secure access to land, and prepare for environmental shocks and stresses.
Save the Children Uganda	Kyegegwa	Consortium partner lead for URRI in Western Uganda. Activities in Kyegegwa reach both refugee and host communities through regenerative agriculture, environmental restoration, and targeted support to women and youth.
ActionAid International Uganda	Kiryandongo, Kyaka II	Gender-responsive land access; trains women's collectives in intensive backyard gardening and climate-resilient farming.
Lutheran World Federation	Several districts across Uganda	Environmental rehabilitation and agroforestry; boundary woodlots and fruit trees to restore degraded topsoil.
DanChurchAid Uganda	Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, Imvepi, Palorinya	Regenerative land management and soil and water conservation mapping under URRI.
Food and Agriculture Organization	All 13 gazetted settlements	Forest restoration and sustainable landscape management; agroforestry value chains and erosion control.
GiveDirectly	Kiryandongo, Nakivale	Unconditional cash transfers enabling households to rent larger plots beyond standard settlement allocations.
World Vision Uganda	Bidibidi, Lobule	In collaboration with the World Food Programme and the Office of the Prime Minister, distributed 398 acres of land acquired from the host communities to more than 10,000 refugee families in Bidibidi and Lobule Refugee Settlements.
CARE International in Uganda	Works across the response with sub-offices in Arua, Gulu, Kyangwali and Kyenjojo	Gendered land access via VSLAs and Women Empowerment Collectives; documents barriers to women's land inheritance, community-based digital platform for land rights verification
World Food Programme	All 13 gazetted settlements	Uganda Self-Reliance Index development and tracking; cash-based transfer modelling linked to land leasing and market access.
Catholic Relief Services	17 districts located in the Midwest, Rwenzori, and Elgon regions	Watershed protection and soil restoration in over-cultivated zones in coordination with local land committees.
ADRA Uganda	Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, Kyangwali	Agricultural input packages and household irrigation systems for plot optimisation through block farming.
CEFORD	Bidibidi, Imvepi, Lobule, Palorinya	Sustainable land management, soil fertility restoration, and vertical farming on restricted plot allocations.
LEMU Uganda	Palabek, Bidibidi, Rhino Camp	Customary land rights documentation, community boundary mapping, legal aid, and alternative dispute resolution.

Organisations	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Land access and use focus
Action for Climate Change and Environmental Conservation (ACCEC)	Refugee-hosting areas	Climate resilience and sustainable land use promotion; supports communities to adopt climate adaptation measures that reduce land degradation and improve soil health in refugee-hosting areas.
ALIGHT Uganda	Isingiro; Kyegegwa	Legal assistance and protection services for refugees, including support with land-related disputes and tenure security across south-western settlements.
Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)	Policy level	Continental-level advocacy promoting agroecology, food sovereignty, and community control over land and natural resources, including in refugee-hosting contexts.
National Land Coalition Uganda (NLC Uganda)	- Adjumani District – Settlements such as Nyumanzi, Pagirinya, and Maaji. - Yumbe District – Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement Arua - Rhino Camp and Imvepi. - Terego District – Rhino Camp settlement. - Madi Okollo - Rhino Camp. - Obongi District – Palorinya Refugee Settlement. - Koboko District – Transit and reception areas for refugees.	National coordination and advocacy platform for inclusive land governance; brings together over 35 actors to promote gender-responsive land policies, strengthen customary tenure systems, and influence land governance frameworks affecting refugee-hosting districts.
PADEAP (Pan-African Development Education and Advocacy Programme)	Kampala	Legal aid and rights-based advocacy for urban refugees; addresses barriers to land access, documentation, and housing through the Refugee Advocacy Programme.
Caritas Uganda	Isingiro (Nakivale), Kamwenge (Kyaka II), Kikuube (Kyangwali)	Community-based land governance through dialogue between refugees and host communities; facilitates equitable land use and social cohesion.
Catholic Centre for Legalaid Services (CCLAS)		Legal aid, dispute resolution, and community sensitisation on land and property rights for vulnerable populations including refugees.
Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) Uganda	Farmer networks	Farmer-led advocacy for equitable access to land and agricultural resources for smallholder farmers; national and regional policy engagement on inclusive land governance frameworks.
Facilitation for Peace and Development (FAPAD)	Adjumani, Yumbe, Arua, Terego, Madi-Okollo, Obongi	Peacebuilding and conflict resolution through community dialogue and mediation on land-related disputes between refugees and host communities.

Organisations	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Land access and use focus
GIZ Uganda	Rhino Camp; Bidibidi; Imvepi	Formalised land leasing through the Responsible Land Policy Uganda (RELAPU) programme; facilitates structured, legally binding land lease agreements between host community land-owners and refugees, with over 1,800 plots documented and close to 1,000 lease agreements facilitated in Terego and Arua Districts.
Habitat for Humanity Uganda	Isingiro, Kyegegwa, Kamwenge, Adjumani, Yumbe	Land tenure security strengthening as a foundation for sustainable settlements; supports land registration processes and settlement planning in refugee-hosting contexts.
Joint Effort to Save the Environment	Kyegegwa, Kamwenge, Isingiro	Sustainable land use through climate-smart agriculture, agro-forestry, and soil conservation; reduces environmental pressure caused by high population density in settlement areas.
Justice Centres Uganda (JCU)	Nationwide, including Kampala, Arua, Gulu, Mbarara (serving Nakivale), Hoima (Kyangwali)	State-supported legal aid services on land, housing, and property rights for refugees and vulnerable populations; legal counselling, mediation, and representation in land disputes.
Ker Alur; Lango; Ateker	Arua Terego Madi Okollo Yumbe Koboko Obongi	Traditional and cultural institutions that oversee land allocation, mediate disputes, and facilitate customary land agreements between host communities and refugees in northern Uganda.
KRC	Yumbe, Arua, Madi-Okollo, Kyegegwa, Kamwenge, Kikuube	Community-level land conflict resolution through trained Community Peace Keepers and a Conflict Early Warning system in Bidibidi settlement; addresses boundary disputes, high rental costs, fraudulent transactions, and overlapping ownership claims.
Land and Equity Movement in Uganda (LEMU)	Yumbe, Adjumani, Arua, Terego, Madi Okollo, Obongi, Lamwo District	Strengthens customary land governance systems through community-level documentation, dispute resolution, and capacity building; advances women's land rights and supports more stable and predictable land access arrangements for refugees and host communities.
Saferworld	Adjumani, Nwoya, Amudat, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, broader West Nile region (incl. Yumbe, Arua)	Conflict-sensitive approaches to land and natural resource governance; facilitates community dialogue, joint conflict analysis, and peaceful resolution of land-related disputes between refugees and host communities.
SARD-Net	Adjumani, Arua, Koboko, Yumbe, Lamwo	Sustainable agricultural practices and soil conservation to improve land productivity and resilience in refugee-hosting areas.
The Adjumani District Elders Forum	Adjumani	Customary land governance and mediation through traditional authority; facilitates engagement between host community land-owners, refugees, government actors, and humanitarian agencies, supporting locally grounded land access arrangements.

LAND ACCESS AND USE IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE HOSTING DISTRICTS

Organisations	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Land access and use focus
Tree Talk Plus	Rhino Camp (Arua) and Imvepi (Terego) through its role in the Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) network	Environmental restoration and sustainable land management through agroforestry and Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR); reduces pressure on land resources in refugee settlement areas.
Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity (UCLF)	Arua, Yumbe, Adjumani	Legal aid, advocacy, and community sensitisation on land rights for vulnerable populations including refugees; addresses unlawful evictions, fraudulent land transactions, and overlapping land claims.
Uganda Law Society	Country wide	Legal representation, dispute resolution, and rights awareness on land governance for communities with limited access to formal legal systems, including in refugee-hosting contexts.
Voluntary Action for-Development (VAD)	Arua Terego Madi Okollo Yumbe Obongi Adjuman and Koboko	Sustainable livelihoods and natural resource management to strengthen equitable land use practices for refugee and host communities in the West Nile sub-region.
Women Initiative for Holistic Community Transformation (WHOCOT Uganda)	Arua / Terego District	Implements a climate-smart land use model for small and fragmented plots; promotes intensive and sustainable land use through vertical gardens, sack mounds, raised beds, drought-resistant crops, and training on soil health, water conservation, pest management, and post-harvest handling.
TPO Uganda	Nakivale, Kyaka II, Bidibidi, Rhino Camp	Peaceful coexistence dialogue and joint natural resource management councils.
PALM Corps	Rhino Camp, Imvepi, Kiryandongo	Block-farming intermediation between host landowners and refugee farming groups.
PICOT Uganda	Bidibidi, Lobule	Farmer Field Schools on rainwater harvesting, organic soil management, and crop rotation.
LANDnet Uganda	Kyaka II, Nakivale, Kyangwali	National land governance advocacy; tenure recognition, gender-equitable land rights, and anti-land-grabbing safeguards.

TABLE 3
ACTORS IMPLEMENTING LAND-RELATED INTERVENTIONS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Organisation	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Role and Land Access Focus
Office of the Prime Minister	All 13 gazetted settlements	Principal statutory authority for land allocation and settlement governance; oversees survey, plot demarcation, and partner operating permits.
Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development	National	National land tenure policy, customary land board regulation, and Certificates of Customary Ownership.
Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries	National	Agricultural land-use policy, soil conservation, and public extension services in settlement areas.
National Planning Authority	National	Integrates refugee land management into National Development Plan frameworks.
National Agricultural Research Organisation	Rwamwanja and Kyaka II	Piloting improved seed varieties designed to produce higher yields from smaller or lower-quality plots
The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development	National	Social protection frameworks and livelihood programming
District Local Governments and District Land Boards	Yumbe, Madi-Okollo, Terego, Adjumani, Isingiro, Kyegegwa, Kamwenge, Lamwo, Kiryandongo, Kikuube, Obongi, Koboko	Decentralised demarcation, rental-agreement monitoring, and property-line mediation.
The Judiciary of Uganda	All refugee-hosting districts	Statutory adjudication of escalated land, property, and eviction disputes through local magistrate courts.

TABEL 4:
ACTORS IMPLEMENTING LAND-RELATED INTERVENTIONS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE
PRIVATE SECTOR AND ACADEMIA

Organisation	Settlement(s) / District(s)	Role and Land Access Focus
Private Sector Foundation Uganda	All refugee-hosting districts	Co-authored the Private Sector Engagement Strategy for the Uganda Refugee Response; promotes secure commercial land leasing.
Commercial agribusiness and input providers such as BRAC, Omia Agribusiness Development Group in West Nile and Zahra Food Industries Ltd in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement	Across the response	Agricultural inputs, equipment and technical support, guaranteed buyback arrangements for refugee produce
Commercial banks and agri-lenders such as FINCA Uganda, Opportunity Bank Uganda Limited, Centenary Bank, VisionFund Uganda, Rural Finance Initiative (RUFi), Equity Bank, UGAFODE Microfinance Limited, and Uganda Development Bank	Across the response	Credit access enabling refugee associations to lease larger plots and purchase productive equipment.
Refugee Law Project, Makerere University	Kampala, Adjumani, Gulu, Kasese, Kiryandongo, Kitgum, Lamwo	Legal advocacy research on property rights and refugee access to formal justice.
Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)	Arua, Yumbe, Adjumani, Lamwo	Socio-economic evaluation of self-reliance strategy impacts on land tenure, productivity, and livelihoods
Makerere University (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences)	Kikuube, Kasese	Through the Makerere-Cambridge project Communities of Hosts and Refugees Transitioning to Climate Resilience (CHART-CR), conducts empirical research on the relationship between land tenure security and climate-smart farming adoption.



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