



Socio-Economic Impact of Migration Patterns on Indigenous Communities in Western Uganda from the 1940s to Present: A Case Study of Bakiga Settlement in the Bunyoro Sub-Region (Specifically Kibaale, Kagadi and Kakumiro)

Samuel Asiimwe¹ , Peter Sekiswa² 

¹History Department, School of Education and Humanities, Kampala University, Kampala, Uganda

²Faculty of Education and Humanities, Gulu University, Gulu, Uganda

Email: bsasiimwe@gmail.com, jocekiswaa@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Asiimwe, S. and Sekiswa, P. (2026) Socio-Economic Impact of Migration Patterns on Indigenous Communities in Western Uganda from the 1940s to Present: A Case Study of Bakiga Settlement in the Bunyoro Sub-Region (Specifically Kibaale, Kagadi and Kakumiro). *Open Access Library Journal*, 13: e15850.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1115850>

Received: August 5, 2026

Accepted: September 5, 2026

Published: September 8, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This article examines the socio-economic impact of Bakiga migration on indigenous Banyoro communities in western Uganda from the 1940s to the present, focusing on Kibaale, Kagadi, and Kakumiro districts. Using a historical research design, the study draws on data from 300 respondents collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and documentary review. Guided by Migration Theory, Political Economy Theory, Social Change Theory, and Dependency Theory, the study investigates the drivers of migration and its long-term effects on host communities. The findings show that population pressure, land scarcity, poverty, environmental constraints, and colonial resettlement policies were the principal drivers of Bakiga migration. While migration enhanced agricultural productivity, commercialization, market expansion, and cultural interaction, it also intensified land disputes, resource competition, and concerns over political representation and cultural identity. The study concludes that Bakiga migration has significantly shaped socio-economic development in Bunyoro and recommends strengthening land governance, inclusive development, conflict resolution, and intercultural dialogue to promote sustainable coexistence.

Subject Areas

History

Keywords

Socio-Economic, Migration Patterns, Indigenous Communities, Bakiga Settlement, Western Uganda and Bunyoro Sub-Region

1. Introduction and Historical Background of the Study

Migration has been a significant factor in shaping population distribution, economic development, and social transformation in Africa. It has enabled communities to seek better livelihoods, access resources, and improve socio-economic opportunities. However, migration can also create challenges related to land ownership, resource allocation, social relations, and political representation. Understanding the long-term effects of migration is therefore essential for explaining changes within host communities and regional development.

In Uganda, internal migration has contributed greatly to demographic and socio-economic changes. One of the notable migration movements was the settlement of Bakiga communities from the densely populated Kigezi highlands into the Bunyoro sub-region from the 1940s. This movement was influenced by push factors such as population pressure, land scarcity, environmental challenges, and poverty in Kigezi, as well as pull factors including fertile land and economic opportunities in Bunyoro. Colonial resettlement programmes further facilitated Bakiga settlement in Buyaga and Bugangaizi areas, which later became part of Kibaale, Kagadi, and Kakumiro districts.

The settlement of Bakiga migrants transformed the socio-economic and demographic structure of Bunyoro. Migrants introduced intensive agricultural methods, expanded commercial farming, and contributed to the growth of local markets. However, increased settlement also influenced traditional systems of land ownership, resource management, and social organization. Interactions between Bakiga migrants and indigenous Banyoro communities affected cultural practices, social relationships, and local political dynamics, making migration an important factor in shaping the region's contemporary socio-economic landscape.

The study is guided by Migration Theory, Political Economy Theory, Social Change Theory, and Dependency Theory as complementary analytical frameworks rather than merely using them to confirm the findings. Each theory guided the interpretation of specific aspects of Bakiga migration and its long-term consequences for indigenous Banyoro communities.

Migration Theory guided the analysis of the causes, patterns, and continuation of Bakiga migration from Kigezi to Bunyoro. The analysis classified evidence according to push and pull factors, including population pressure, land scarcity, poverty, environmental constraints, availability of fertile land, employment opportunities, and colonial resettlement policies. The theory also informed the interpretation of how kinship networks and established migrant communities encouraged subsequent migration. This enabled the study to explain not only why

migration occurred but also why settlement continued over several decades.

Political Economy Theory guided analysis of the relationship between migration, power, land, institutions, and resource distribution. Data concerning land acquisition, ownership, and access to natural resources, political representation, and local governance were examined to determine how different groups benefited from or experienced constraints within changing socio-economic structures. The theory was particularly useful in interpreting land disputes, competition over resources, and concerns regarding political influence and representation as outcomes of unequal access to productive resources and institutional power.

Social Change Theory guided the examination of how prolonged interaction between Bakiga migrants and indigenous Banyoro transformed social structures, livelihoods, cultural practices, and community relationships. Evidence concerning agricultural practices, commercialization, education, intermarriage, language, cultural exchange, shared institutions, and changing patterns of cooperation was coded and interpreted as indicators of social transformation. The theory therefore helped explain how migration produced new forms of social interaction and adaptation over time.

Dependency Theory was applied to examine inequalities in access to land, resources, economic opportunities, and development benefits. The analysis considered whether historical settlement arrangements and subsequent socio-economic relationships created patterns in which some groups gained greater access to productive resources or economic opportunities than others. Evidence concerning marginalization, resource inequalities, land competition, and perceived exclusion was therefore examined within the broader context of historical and institutional power relations.

The four theories were applied collectively rather than independently. Migration Theory explained the movement and settlement process; Political Economy Theory examined power and resource distribution; Social Change Theory interpreted transformations in social and cultural relations; and Dependency Theory helped explain persistent inequalities emerging from these processes. The researcher compared these theoretical interpretations with oral testimonies, focus group discussions, interviews, archival records, government documents, and secondary literature through triangulation. This approach provided a multidimensional explanation of how Bakiga migration transformed the socio-economic and cultural landscape of Bunyoro from the 1940s to the present.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a historical qualitative research design to investigate the socio-economic impact of Bakiga migration on indigenous communities in western Uganda, specifically focusing on the Bunyoro sub-region from 1940 to the present. Historical qualitative research is particularly suitable for understanding social, economic, and cultural processes over time, as it emphasizes the systematic col-

lection and interpretation of past and present events through multiple sources of evidence [1] and [2].

A historical qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the dynamics of Bakiga migration, the factors that promoted settlement, and the subsequent socioeconomic changes in indigenous Banyoro communities. The design prioritizes understanding causal relationships, patterns of social change, and structural transformations rather than statistical generalization. By examining archival records, oral histories, government reports, and secondary literature, the study reconstructs historical processes and evaluates their enduring impact on land tenure, resource distribution, cultural interaction, and contemporary challenges and opportunities.

2.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in the Bunyoro sub-region, specifically in districts with significant Bakiga settlements, including Kakumiro, Kagadi, and Kibaale. These districts were selected based on historical migration patterns [3] [4], diversity in socio-economic conditions, and representativeness of broader settlement trends. The region features a mix of upland and lowland agricultural zones, which influenced both migration decisions and resource utilization.

2.3. Study Population

The study population consisted of indigenous Banyoro households, Bakiga migrant households (including first-generation and long-term settlers), and key informants such as local leaders, elders, and officials from district land offices and agricultural extension services. The target population encompassed approximately Kagadi 470,000 Kakumiro 420,000 and 230,000 Kibaale households across the selected districts, following the report of the National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) and from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) in Uganda 2026.

2.4. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sample Size

Using [5] formula, a total of 300 households (175 Bakiga and 125 Banyoro) were selected. This was complemented by 112 key informant interviews and 188 FGDs.

Explanation of Table 1:

The study involved 300 respondents from Kagadi, Kakumiro, and Kibaale districts, comprising 175 Banyoro (58.3%) and 125 Bakiga (41.7%) to capture perspectives from both host and migrant communities. Data were collected through 112 key informant interviews (37.3%) and 188 focus group discussion participants (62.7%). Key informants provided historical and institutional insights, while FGDs captured collective community experiences of migration, land use, and cultural interaction. Geographical coverage included Kagadi (36.7%), Kakumiro (32.7%), and Kibaale (30.6%), ensuring representation of areas significantly af-

fectured by Bakiga settlement and variations in socio-economic and political dynamics.

Table 1. Distribution of study respondents by ethnicity, data collection method, and study area.

Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ethnic Composition	Banyoro respondents	175	58.3
	Bakiga respondents	125	41.7
	Total Respondents	300	100
Data Collection Method	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	112	37.3
	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) participants	188	62.7
	Total Respondents	300	100
Study Area Coverage	Kagadi District	110	36.7
	Kakumiro District	98	32.7
	Kibaale District	92	30.6
	Total Respondents	300	100

Source: Researcher primary data (2026).

2.5. Sampling Techniques

Given the qualitative and historical nature of the study, the researcher used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select participants who can provide rich, detailed, and relevant information [6] [7]. The aim is not statistical representativeness but rather depth and relevance of data to achieve the research objectives.

Purposive Sampling

Participants were selected deliberately based on their knowledge, experience, or position related to Bakiga migration and its impacts. This includes:

Elders and long-term residents who witnessed or inherited accounts of early Bakiga settlement.

Local leaders and opinion leaders who understand community governance, land allocation, and social relations.

Key informants with administrative or scholarly expertise regarding migration, land use, and socioeconomic development in Bunyoro [8] [9].

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was employed to identify additional participants through referrals from initial respondents. This method is especially useful for historical research, where some individuals with specialized knowledge or lived experience may not be immediately known to the researcher. Initial participants help locate others who can provide complementary or corroborative information [3] [10].

Sample Size Determination

In this qualitative research, data saturation was guided by the principle of sample size. Data collection continues until no new themes or insights emerge [2]. For this study, an estimated sample size includes:

20 - 30 semi-structured interviews with Bakiga and Banyoro community members.

8 - 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 10 - 19 participants per group to capture collective experiences and perspectives.

112 key informant interviews (KIIs) with local leaders, historians, government officials, and NGO representatives to provide historical and policy context.

2.6. Sources of Data

To effectively investigate the socioeconomic impact of Bakiga migration on indigenous Banyoro communities, this study employed a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The historical qualitative research design adopted for this study necessitates triangulating multiple data sources to enhance the validity, credibility, and comprehensiveness of findings [2] [7]. Using both primary and secondary sources allows the researcher to reconstruct historical migration processes while examining contemporary consequences of long-term coexistence.

Primary Data

Primary data are first-hand data collected directly from participants and field observations. In this study, primary data served to capture the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of indigenous Banyoro and Bakiga migrants, providing insight into socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes over time. Key sources of primary data include:

Oral interviews—Semi-structured interviews was conducted with elders, local leaders, opinion leaders, and members of both Bakiga migrant and indigenous Banyoro communities. These interviews aim to document: Historical factors that prompted Bakiga migration (push and pull factors), Socioeconomic changes experienced by indigenous communities, such as changes in labor patterns, income, and market participation, Land and resource allocation dynamics, including conflicts and negotiation processes, Cultural interactions, intermarriage, and social adaptation mechanisms and Contemporary challenges and opportunities arising from long-term coexistence.

Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility, allowing respondents to describe experiences in their own words while ensuring alignment with the research objectives [3] [10].

Focus group discussions (FGDs)—FGDs were conducted with groups of 6 - 10 participants from both communities to facilitate collective memory reconstruction, validate individual interview accounts, and encourage discussion of social, cultural, and economic interactions over time. These discussions are particularly valuable for exploring shared experiences and community-level perspectives on migration impacts [4] [9].

Key informant interviews (KIIs)—KIIs were conducted with government officials, local council representatives, and historians who have knowledge of migration patterns, land policies, and socioeconomic transformations in Bunyoro. These informants provide contextual information and complement the narratives obtained from community members [8] [11].

Field observations—Observations of current land use, agricultural practices, market interactions, and community structures will supplement interview data, providing visual and contextual evidence of long-term socioeconomic and cultural changes [2].

Secondary Data

Secondary data are existing records, documents, and scholarly publications that provide historical, economic, and social information relevant to the research topic. In this study, secondary data sources included:

Archival Records—Colonial and post-colonial government documents, land registries, census reports, and agricultural records are critical for reconstructing the historical context of Bakiga migration. These documents provide evidence of land allocation policies, population movements, and administrative interventions that influenced settlement patterns [8] [11] [12].

Published literature—Scholarly articles, books, and reports provide theoretical and empirical background on migration, socioeconomic change, and cultural interactions in Uganda and similar contexts [3] [9] [10]. These sources inform the conceptual framework and assist in triangulating findings from primary data.

Government and NGO reports—Reports from local government offices, development agencies, and NGOs provide contemporary statistics on land distribution, population demographics, economic activities, and social interventions in Bunyoro [4]. These sources help to contextualize contemporary challenges and opportunities resulting from historical migration.

Media reports and newspaper archives—Historical newspapers and local media coverage provide additional insights into migration events, conflicts, and community responses over time [11]. They are particularly useful for identifying major events that impacted both Bakiga migrants and Banyoro communities.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was guided by a historical qualitative approach, which emphasizes the systematic interpretation of textual, oral, and observational data to reconstruct past events and understand their long-term consequences on contemporary socioeconomic and cultural conditions [2] [7]. Historical qualitative analysis is particularly suited to studies involving migration over extended periods, as it allows for both chronological reconstruction and thematic interpretation of complex social processes.

The data collected from primary sources (semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations) and secondary sources (archival records, government documents, scholarly publications, and

media reports) are analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that address the research objectives.

Historical Qualitative Analysis Approach

The historical qualitative analysis in this study involved the following key steps:

Data Organization and Preparation

All data from interviews, FGDs, and KIIs are transcribed verbatim.

Field notes and observation records are systematically organized by themes, locations, and participant categories.

Archival and documentary materials are cataloged according to time periods, sources, and relevant events [8] [11].

Chronological Reconstruction

Events were organized chronologically to trace the migration of Bakiga into Bunyoro from 1940 to the present.

This step enables the identification of historical drivers of migration, such as land scarcity, population pressures, and colonial or post-colonial policies.

By linking historical events with contemporary socioeconomic outcomes, the study captures long-term patterns and structural transformations [9] [12].

Thematic Coding

Data were analyzed thematically using a coding framework based on the research objectives and theoretical framework (Migration Theory, Political Economy Theory, Social Change Theory, and Dependency Theory).

Key themes include: Factors promoting Bakiga migration, socioeconomic changes experienced by indigenous Banyoro communities, Land use, resource distribution, and cultural interaction and Contemporary challenges and opportunities arising from long-term coexistence.

Thematic coding allows for systematic comparison across different data sources and participant perspectives, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant issues [3] [10].

Content Analysis of Archival and Documentary Data

Historical documents, policy records, and archival materials were subjected to content analysis, identifying references to migration events, land policies, economic interventions, and social change.

Patterns, consistencies, and discrepancies between archival records and oral histories are examined to validate and triangulate findings [2] [4].

Triangulation

Data from multiple sources were compared to enhance credibility and reliability.

Triangulation involves cross-checking oral histories with archival records, official reports, and scholarly literature to identify convergent and divergent evidence [7] [8].

Steps that were taken in Historical Data Analysis

The data analysis was processed in a systematic sequence:

Familiarization—Reading and re-reading transcripts, field notes, and archival documents to gain a deep understanding of the data.

Coding and Categorization—Assigning codes to data segments based on themes derived from research objectives and theoretical frameworks.

Pattern Identification—Comparing codes across participants and data sources to identify recurring patterns, trends, and deviations.

Contextual Interpretation—Situating findings within historical, social, and economic contexts to provide explanatory insights.

Synthesis and Reporting—Integrating findings from primary and secondary sources into a narrative that addresses research objectives, highlighting cause-effect relationships, socioeconomic transformations, and contemporary challenges.

2.8. Literature Review

Internal migration has been a defining feature of Uganda's socio-historical landscape, shaping demographic patterns, economic activities, and social relations across regions. Among the numerous migration movements in the country, the settlement of the Bakiga originally from the southwestern highlands such as Kabale, Kisoro, and Rukungiri into the Bunyoro sub-region since the 1940s stands out for its long-term and multifaceted impact on indigenous communities, particularly the Banyoro. Significant research has examined migration dynamics in East Africa, including the movement of agrarian populations and the reconfiguration of land systems [8] [11] [13]; there remains a scholarly gap in contextualized, historical, and community-based analysis of Bakiga settlement in Bunyoro. Specifically, existing literature has insufficiently explored the socio-economic consequences of this internal migration on the indigenous host communities over an extended period and within local governance contexts.

Studies such as [8] and [9] have documented migration processes and broader agrarian change in Uganda and East Africa, but they do not fully capture the localized dynamics of ethnic coexistence, land allocation, and political competition that emerged from prolonged Bakiga settlement in Bunyoro. Similarly, [3] and [14] provide important insights into migration and land issues in western Uganda, yet they do not systematically address how these processes have reshaped indigenous livelihoods, social relations, and resource governance in host regions like Kagadi, Kibaale, and Kakumiro over several decades.

One of the most pressing challenges arising from the Bakiga settlement in the Bunyoro sub-region is the intensification of land conflict and tenure insecurity. Traditional land systems, once characterized by communal and negotiated access, have been transformed by increasing demand for land, leading to fragmentation, dispossession, and competing interests between migrant and indigenous farmers. This has contributed to disputes that are both economic and social in nature, complicating long-standing customary practices and governance arrangements. Furthermore, political tensions have surfaced as Bakiga and Banyoro communities engage in local political contests, with land and representation often becoming intertwined in leadership struggles echoed in events such as the contested LC V elections in 2002, which have at times required external mediation.

Despite these documented phenomena, there is limited empirical evidence that integrates community perceptions, institutional responses, and longitudinal socio-economic outcomes of Bakiga migration in Bunyoro. Theoretical perspectives such as migration theory, political economy theory, social change theory, and dependency theory suggest that migratory processes can reconfigure both economic structures and power relations, yet few studies have applied these frameworks to the case of Bakiga settlement and its impact on indigenous communities in western Uganda. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of how Bakiga migration has influenced land ownership, resource distribution, livelihood strategies, cultural interaction, and social stability among Banyoro in Kagadi, Kibaale, and Kakumiro districts from the 1940s to the present.

This study is guided by migration theory, political economy theory, social change theory, and dependency theory, which provide an analytical lens for interpreting the reviewed studies. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the review moves beyond descriptive accounts to critically assess how power, institutions, and historical processes shape migration outcomes.

3. Findings

3.1. Factors Prompting Bakiga Migration into the Bunyoro Sub-Region

The findings demonstrate that Bakiga migration into Bunyoro was a historically embedded process shaped by interacting demographic, environmental, economic, institutional, and political factors. Earlier scholarship identified population pressure, land scarcity, economic opportunities, and colonial interventions as important influences on population movements in Uganda [3] [8] [10] [13] [15].

The majority of respondents identified population pressure and land scarcity in Kigezi as the primary factors that compelled families to migrate. Participants explained that increasing population growth led to the fragmentation of land holdings, leaving many households with insufficient land for cultivation and settlement. As a result, younger generations found it increasingly difficult to inherit productive farmland.

A key informant from Kibaale District noted:

“By the 1940s and 1950s, land in Kigezi had become extremely scarce. Families were growing, but the land was not expanding. Many young men had no option but to move in search of land elsewhere.” (KI-KB-04, Interviewed 12 August 2025)

The present study extends this literature by showing that these factors cannot be treated as isolated causes. Rather, they interacted over time: pressures in Kigezi encouraged movement, opportunities in Bunyoro attracted migrants, while colonial settlement policies and subsequent kinship networks helped establish and sustain migration. This interpretation is consistent with De Haas’s analysis of migration in colonial East Africa, which demonstrates that African mobility was often responsive to changing economic opportunities and was not simply imposed by colonial authorities.

The findings therefore provide a more nuanced application of Migration Theory. The conventional push-pull framework explains why migrants left Kigezi and selected Bunyoro as a destination, but the evidence suggests that migration became cumulative once settlement networks were established. Early migrants created social and economic connections that reduced the costs and uncertainties faced by subsequent migrants. Thus, migration should be understood as a continuing social process rather than a single movement of population. This interpretation also resonates with contemporary research showing that internal migration in Uganda continues to redistribute population in response to differences in employment, services, livelihoods, and economic opportunities.

3.2. Socio-Economic Changes Experienced by Indigenous Communities in Bunyoro as a Result of Bakiga Settlement in the Bunyoro Sub-Region

The findings revealed that one of the most significant impacts of Bakiga settlement was the transformation of agricultural practices in Bunyoro. Respondents reported that the Bakiga introduced intensive cultivation methods, crop diversification, and more effective land utilization techniques. Prior to large-scale migration, many areas of Bunyoro were characterized by extensive farming practices and relatively low levels of agricultural commercialization.

The positive economic consequences identified in this study are particularly important. Bakiga settlement was associated with increased agricultural production, commercialization, market development, and improved livelihood opportunities. Rather than portraying migrants only as competitors for land and resources, the findings demonstrate that migrants also introduced labour, agricultural knowledge, production strategies, and commercial connections that contributed to rural transformation. This is consistent with the broader literature that regards migration as capable of facilitating economic restructuring and the movement of labour toward more productive opportunities. Recent research on Uganda similarly shows that population redistribution affects both source and destination areas through changes in labour, land use, and rural economic activity.

A key informant from Kagadi District noted that:

“The Bakiga came with a culture of hard work and intensive farming. They cultivated almost every piece of land available and demonstrated new farming methods that increased food production.” (KI-KG-05, Interviewed on 18 September 2025)

Similarly, participants in a focus group discussion in Kibaale noted:

“Before the migrants arrived, farming was mainly for subsistence. The Bakiga encouraged commercial farming, and many Banyoro adopted similar practices.” (FGD-KB-03, Conducted 22 October 2025)

3.3. Impact of Bakiga Migration on Land, Resource Distribution, and Cultural Interaction in the Bunyoro Sub-Region

Findings indicate that the settlement of Bakiga migrants significantly transformed

patterns of land tenure, access to natural resources, socio-political relations, and cultural interactions between migrant and indigenous communities. While migration contributed to economic development and cultural exchange, it also generated competition over land and resources, leading to periodic tensions and disputes.

At the same time, the findings reveal that the developmental benefits of migration were accompanied by significant distributive consequences. Changes in land ownership, increasing competition for land, and disputes over resource access demonstrate that migration can produce winners and losers within receiving communities. This finding is strongly supported by Mwesigye and Matsumoto's empirical study of rural Uganda, which found higher incidences of land conflict in migrant-host and ethnically diverse communities and linked population pressure and internal migration to weakened informal mechanisms of conflict resolution. Their findings reveal that land conflicts can reduce agricultural productivity, a finding that is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that the consequences of migration extend beyond social tensions to affect economic production.

The study found that Bakiga migration significantly altered traditional land ownership patterns in Bunyoro. Respondents reported that before large-scale migration, land was relatively abundant and was largely governed under customary tenure arrangements. However, the arrival of migrants increased demand for land, leading to the expansion of land sales, leases, and private ownership.

A key informant from Kibaale District explained:

"In the past, land was plentiful, and people occupied it according to customary arrangements. When migrants arrived, land became a commodity that could be bought and sold." (KI-KB-03, Interviewed on 18 August 2025)

The findings also need to be interpreted within the longer history of land relations in Kibaale and Bunyoro. Magezi's historical analysis of Kibaale demonstrates that contemporary land struggles have roots extending into the pre-colonial and colonial periods and were intensified by transformations in land tenure and the commodification of land. This historical perspective is important because not every contemporary land dispute can be attributed directly to Bakiga migration. Some conflicts reflect much older transformations in political authority, land administration, ownership, and commercialization. Consequently, the present study interprets migration as one important factor interacting with pre-existing institutional and historical processes rather than as the sole cause of land conflict.

3.4. Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities Arising from the Long-Term Coexistence between Bakiga Migrants and the Indigenous Banyoro in the Bunyoro Sub-Region

Findings indicate that more than eight decades of interaction have produced both positive and negative outcomes. While coexistence has promoted economic growth, social integration, cultural exchange, and community development, it has also gen-

erated challenges related to land ownership, political representation, resource competition, and cultural identity.

The findings revealed that land remains the most significant source of tension between migrant and indigenous communities. Respondents indicated that increasing population growth, rising land values, and competing claims over ownership have intensified disputes in some areas.

A key informant from Kibaale District explained:

“Most conflicts reported today are related to land. As land becomes more valuable, disagreements over ownership and boundaries have increased.” (KI-KB-09, Interviewed on 15 September 2025)

Similarly, participants in a focus group discussion in Kagadi observed:

“People generally live peacefully together, but disputes often emerge when land ownership is questioned or when boundaries are not clearly defined.” (FGD-KG-03, Conducted on 12 October 2025)

Respondents noted that although local councils and traditional leaders often mediate such conflicts, land disputes continue to pose challenges to harmonious coexistence.

The study found that demographic changes resulting from migration have influenced local political dynamics. Respondents reported occasional concerns regarding political representation, leadership positions, and access to government resources.

One local government official from Kakumiro stated:

“As populations have become more diverse, questions sometimes arise regarding who should represent particular communities and how public resources should be distributed.” (KI-KK-05, Interviewed 6 November 2025)

An indigenous Banyoro elder from Kagadi further remarked:

“Some Banyoro fear losing influence in areas where migrant populations have become dominant, especially in matters of leadership and decision-making.” (KI-KG-11, Interviewed on 18 December 2025)

These findings suggest that demographic transformations have created new political realities that require inclusive governance approaches.

Respondents acknowledged that cultural interaction has strengthened social cohesion but also expressed concerns regarding the preservation of indigenous Banyoro cultural identity.

A cultural leader from Kibaale observed:

“Intermarriage and integration have strengthened relationships, but there is also concern about ensuring that Banyoro traditions, language, and cultural values are maintained.” (KI-KB-12, Interviewed on 22 January 2026)

Participants in focus group discussions noted that younger generations increasingly identify with multiple cultural traditions, reflecting the gradual blending of migrant and indigenous cultures.

One participant from Kakumiro commented:

“Many young people speak both Rukiga and Runyoro and participate in tradi-

tions from both communities. This shows integration, but some elders worry about losing cultural uniqueness.” (FGD-KK-04, Conducted on 28 January 2026)

The findings indicate that cultural preservation remains an important concern despite growing social integration.

The study found that differences in access to land, capital, and economic opportunities have contributed to perceptions of socio-economic inequality among some community members. Respondents observed that while many households benefited from migration-induced development, others remained disadvantaged.

A respondent from Kibaale explained:

“Some families accumulated large farms and businesses over time, while others struggled to access land and economic opportunities.” (INT-KB-29, Interviewed on 10 January 2026)

These perceptions occasionally contribute to tensions and feelings of marginalization, particularly among vulnerable households.

Despite the challenges identified, respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the positive economic contributions of migration. The findings revealed that migration has stimulated agricultural production, expanded markets, increased investment, and improved livelihoods throughout the region.

A district official from Kagadi stated:

“The economic transformation of this region cannot be discussed without recognizing the contribution of migrant communities. Agriculture, trade, and infrastructure development have expanded significantly.” (KI-KG-07, Interviewed on 5 December 2025)

Focus group participants similarly from Kibaale noted:

“The region has become more productive because people brought new farming methods, established businesses, and created employment opportunities.” (FGD-KB-04, Conducted on 14 November 2025)

The findings demonstrate that migration has been a major driver of local economic development.

The study established that social integration between Bakiga migrants and indigenous Banyoro has increased substantially over time. Respondents cited intermarriage, shared religious institutions, educational facilities, markets, and community organizations as important factors promoting peaceful coexistence.

One community elder from Kakumiro remarked:

“The relationship between the two communities has improved greatly. Many families are connected through marriage and community activities.” (KI-KK-08, Interviewed on 17 January 2026)

A focus group participant from Kagadi added:

“People now work together in schools, churches, cooperatives, and local development projects. There is a sense of belonging among many residents regardless of origin.” (FGD-KG-05, Conducted on 24 January 2026)

These findings suggest that social integration has contributed significantly to stability and community development.

Respondents highlighted cultural diversity as one of the major benefits of co-existence. Interaction between migrants and indigenous communities has encouraged the exchange of languages, agricultural knowledge, customs, and social practices.

A key informant from Kibaale observed:

“The sharing of ideas and experiences has enriched both communities. People have learned from each other in farming, leadership, and cultural practices.” (KI-KB-13, Interviewed 30 January 2026)

This distinction strengthens the application of Political Economy Theory. The findings show that the consequences of migration depended not simply on the number of people moving into Bunyoro but on who controlled land, how land rights were recognized, which institutions regulated access, and whose claims were politically recognized. Political Economy Theory therefore guided the analysis by directing attention to the relationship between population movement and the distribution of productive resources and political power. Land disputes, concerns about representation, and perceptions of unequal access to resources were interpreted as struggles over the control and distribution of economic and political opportunities. The historical literature on Kibaale supports this interpretation by demonstrating how successive land regimes transformed relationships between owners, occupants, migrants, and local communities.

The evidence concerning cultural interaction further demonstrates that migration produced processes of Social Change rather than simply demographic replacement. The study found increased intermarriage, economic cooperation, educational interaction, shared institutions, and cultural exchange between Bakiga and Banyoro. These processes gradually created social relationships that could not be explained through a simple migrant-versus-host dichotomy. Research on migration in Uganda has similarly demonstrated that mobility can transform identity and social relationships, particularly when migrants negotiate between different social environments and cultural expectations. The present findings extend this insight to a rural historical setting, showing that prolonged interaction can generate hybrid social practices, mutual dependence, and shared developmental interests.

The application of Social Change Theory therefore focused on identifying changes in institutions, livelihoods, cultural practices, social relationships, and patterns of cooperation over time. The evidence suggests that the consequences of migration were cumulative: initial settlement produced changes in agricultural practices and land use; subsequent interaction affected markets and social institutions; and longer-term coexistence produced intermarriage, cultural exchange, and increasing social integration. Thus, social change was neither entirely positive nor negative. It involved simultaneous processes of adaptation, innovation, competition, conflict, and accommodation.

Dependency Theory provides an additional perspective on the unequal dimensions of this transformation. The findings concerning differences in access to land, resources, political influence, and economic opportunities suggest that the bene-

fits of settlement were not distributed equally among all groups. Dependency Theory helped the analysis move beyond describing inequalities to asking how historical and institutional relationships produced and reproduced those inequalities. It is therefore useful in interpreting perceptions of marginalization and resource competition. However, the findings also indicate that Dependency Theory has limitations when applied alone because the relationship between migrants and indigenous communities was not simply one of dependency. Both groups participated in reciprocal economic activities, intermarriage, labour exchange, markets, and shared institutions. The relationship was therefore characterized by both inequality and interdependence.

Taken together, the four theoretical frameworks provide complementary rather than competing explanations. Migration Theory explains the movement and settlement process; Political Economy Theory explains struggles over land, resources, institutions, and political influence; Social Change Theory explains transformations in social and cultural relations; and Dependency Theory draws attention to unequal access to resources and opportunities. Their combined application allowed the study to move from the simple question of why Bakiga migrated to the more complex question of how migration transformed relations between migrant and host communities over more than eight decades.

The study nevertheless has several limitations. First, reconstructing events beginning in the 1940s depended partly on oral testimony from elderly respondents and community memory. Although oral accounts were compared with documentary and archival evidence, retrospective accounts may be affected by selective memory, subsequent experiences, or community narratives. Second, access to historical records was not necessarily uniform across the three districts, meaning that some aspects of early settlement may be better documented than others. Third, the study focused specifically on Kibaale, Kagadi, and Kakumiro and therefore its findings should not automatically be generalized to all migrant-host relationships in Uganda. Fourth, the qualitative design provides detailed historical and social explanations but does not establish statistically measurable causal effects between migration and particular socio-economic outcomes. Finally, the study examined Bakiga-Banyoro relations primarily from the perspectives available within the selected communities and did not systematically compare them with other migrant-host experiences elsewhere in Uganda.

Despite these limitations, the use of multiple sources, purposive and stratified sampling, oral histories, documentary evidence, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions strengthened the credibility of the interpretation. Triangulation was particularly important in distinguishing long-term historical processes from explanations based solely on contemporary perceptions. The study consequently contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating that Bakiga migration should be understood neither exclusively as a demographic movement nor solely as a source of conflict. It was a prolonged historical process that simultaneously generated agricultural and economic transformation, altered land and re-

source relations, reshaped political and cultural identities, and produced new forms of social integration. This more balanced interpretation provides a stronger basis for understanding migration, land relations, and ethnic coexistence in contemporary western Uganda.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that Bakiga migration has been a major force shaping the socio-economic, cultural, and political development of the Bunyoro sub-region from the 1940s to the present. Driven by population pressure, land scarcity, environmental challenges, colonial resettlement policies, and the search for better economic opportunities, migration transformed the demographic and socio-economic landscape of Kibaale, Kagadi, and Kakumiro districts. The findings show that Bakiga settlement promoted agricultural modernization, increased food production, market expansion, commercial farming, and improved access to education, health services, and other socio-economic opportunities, benefiting both migrant and indigenous Banyoro communities.

At the same time, migration altered traditional land tenure systems, intensified competition for land and natural resources, and generated tensions related to political representation, resource allocation, and cultural identity. Despite these challenges, long-term coexistence has largely been characterized by adaptation, intermarriage, economic cooperation, and social integration, demonstrating the resilience and interdependence of both communities. The findings also affirm the relevance of Migration Theory, Political Economy Theory, Social Change Theory, and Dependency Theory in explaining the causes and long-term consequences of migration. Overall, the study demonstrates that migration is both a catalyst for development and a source of social transformation. It underscores the need for inclusive development policies, effective land governance, sustainable resource management, and intercultural dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence and equitable development in multi-ethnic societies experiencing similar migration dynamics.

Author Contributions

Samuel Asiiimwe: Conceptualization, development of the research objectives, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the original manuscript. Peter Sekiswa: Supervision of the research, methodological guidance, review and interpretation of findings, critical revision of the manuscript, and provision of scholarly and academic guidance throughout the research and manuscript preparation. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2018) Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research. 3rd Edition, SAGE Publications.
- [2] Bowen, G.A. (2009) Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, **9**, 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/qj0902027>
- [3] Kigula, J. (1993) Inter-Ethnic Relations and Social Change in Western Uganda. Fountain Publishers.
- [4] Kobusingye, A. (2014) Land Conflicts and Rural Livelihoods in Western Uganda. Makerere Institute of Social Research.
- [5] Krejcie, R.V. and Morgan, D.W. (1970) Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, **30**, 607-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308>
- [6] Patton, M.Q. (2015) Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods. SAGE Publication.
- [7] Lune, H. and Berg, B.L. (2012) Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Pearson Education.
- [8] Doornbos Martin, R. (1978) Not All the King's Men: Inequality as a Political Instrument in Ankole, Uganda. De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110879254>
- [9] Richards, A.I. (1982) Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia. Oxford University Press.
- [10] Green, E.D. (2008) Decentralisation and Conflict in Uganda. *Conflict, Security & Development*, **8**, 427-450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800802539317>
- [11] West, H.W. (1972) The Transformation of Land Tenure in Buganda since 1896. Oxford University Press.
- [12] Kasfir, N. (1976) The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520315617>
- [13] Richards, P. (1983) Ecological Change and the Politics of African Land Use. *African Studies Review*, **26**, 1-72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/524173>
- [14] Christou, A. and Kofman, E. (2022) Gender and Migration: An Introduction. In: *Gender and Migration*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91971-9_1
- [15] West, H. (1972) Colonial Resettlement Policies and Population Movements in Uganda. Oxford University Press.

Oral History and Indigenous Knowledge Sources

1. KI-KB-04, Interviewed 12 August 2025
2. KI-KG-05, Interviewed on 18 September 2025
3. FGD-KB-03, Conducted 22 October 2025
4. KI-KB-03, Interviewed on 18 August 2025
5. KI-KB-09, Interviewed on 15 September 2025
6. FGD-KG-03, Conducted on 12 October 2025
7. KI-KK-05, Interviewed on 6 November 2025
8. KI-KG-11, Interviewed on 18 December 2025
9. KI-KB-12, Interviewed on 22 January 2026
10. FGD-KK-04, Conducted on 28 January 2026
11. INT-KB-29, Interviewed on 10 January 2026
12. KI-KG-07, Interviewed on 5 December 2025
13. FGD-KB-04, Conducted on 14 November 2025
14. KI-KK-08, Interviewed on 17 January 2026
15. FGD-KG-05, Conducted on 24 January 2026
16. KI-KB-13, Interviewed on 30 January 2026