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ROZPRAWA DOKTORSKA

Tytuł Rozprawy: „Ubuntu Filozofia: podejście do zarządzania konfliktami w Rwamwanji Osiedle uchodźców w Ugandzie”

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Ubuntu philosophy is understood, practiced and institutionally recognized as an approach to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Uganda. Its general purpose is to assess the relevance, limitations and practical applicability of Ubuntu within a culturally diverse and institutionally complex refugee setting. The study is motivated by an apparent policy-practice gap: although Uganda's refugee regime formally promotes protection, inclusion, self-reliance and peaceful coexistence, conflicts continue to arise around land, livelihoods, cultural difference, household relations, crime, institutional authority and access to scarce resources. Rwamwanja provides a particularly instructive case because it was originally opened in 1964 to accommodate Rwandese refugees, subsequently closed following repatriation and reopened in 2012 to receive refugees fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The study adopts a qualitative single-case study design with ethnographic elements and is situated within an interpretivist orientation. 45 participants were involved in the study and were purposely and conveniently selected. Evidence was generated through key informant interviews, focus group discussions with refugees and host community members, participant observation and document analysis. Data were coded and analyzed Thematically. The research addresses four questions: how refugees and host community members experience and apply Ubuntu in everyday conflict management; how policymakers and institutional actors perceive Ubuntu; how Ubuntu principles could be integrated into settlement-level conflict management strategies; and how Ubuntu-based practices relate to other formal and informal conflict management mechanisms operating in Rwamwanja.

The findings indicate that Ubuntu is widely recognized as a moral language and lived practice associated with shared humanity, mutual assistance, dialogue, forgiveness, hospitality, and coexistence. Its application is nevertheless uneven and only weakly institutionalized. Participants associated Ubuntu with neighbors' assistance, community mediation, elder-led dialogue, family intervention and reconciliation. They also identified significant constraints, including resource scarcity, cultural and linguistic diversity, unequal power relations, bureaucratic procedures, donor-driven operational systems, limited institutional training and the need to refer serious offences and violations to formal legal and protection mechanisms. Ubuntu should therefore not be treated as a substitute for statutory law, refugee protection or humanitarian governance.

The thesis's principal contribution is the development of an Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model. The model connects community-based restorative practices with formal administrative, protection, policing and legal institutions through differentiated referral pathways. It explains both the relational value of Ubuntu and the institutional conditions under which Ubuntu-informed practices may appropriately contribute to conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation and social cohesion. The study recommends strengthening the conflict-management capacities of community leaders, documenting locally legitimate practices, supporting the roles of elders and Refugee Welfare Committees, and establishing clear safeguards and referral arrangements between community mediation and statutory systems.

Keywords: Ubuntu philosophy, Rwamwanja, refugees, conflict management, Uganda.

Abstrakt

Niniejsza rozprawa analizuje, w jaki sposób filozofia Ubuntu jest rozumiana, praktykowana i instytucjonalnie uznawana jako podejście do zarządzania konfliktami w osiedlu dla uchodźców Rwamwanja w Ugandzie. Jej głównym celem jest ocena znaczenia, ograniczeń i praktycznej możliwości zastosowania Ubuntu w zróżnicowanym kulturowo i złożonym instytucjonalnie środowisku uchodźczym. Motywacją do przeprowadzenia badania jest widoczna luka między polityką a praktyką: chociaż ugandyjski system ochrony uchodźców formalnie promuje ochronę, integrację, samowystarczalność i pokojowe współistnienie, nadal dochodzi do konfliktów dotyczących ziemi, źródeł utrzymania, różnic kulturowych, relacji rodzinnych, przestępczości, władzy instytucjonalnej oraz dostępu do ograniczonych zasobów. Rwamwanja stanowi szczególnie pouczający przypadek, ponieważ osiedle to zostało pierwotnie otwarte w 1964 roku w celu przyjęcia uchodźców z Rwandy, następnie zamknięte po ich repatriacji i ponownie otwarte w 2012 roku w celu przyjęcia uchodźców uciekających przed konfliktem w Demokratycznej Republice Konga.

W badaniu zastosowano jakościowe studium pojedynczego przypadku z elementami etnograficznymi, osadzone w orientacji interpretatywistycznej. W badaniu uczestniczyło 45 osób, dobranych metodą celową i dogodnościową. Materiał badawczy zgromadzono za pomocą wywiadów z kluczowymi informatorami, zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych z uchodźcami i członkami społeczności przyjmującej, obserwacji uczestniczącej oraz analizy dokumentów. Dane zakodowano i poddano analizie tematycznej. Badanie dotyczy czterech pytań: w jaki sposób uchodźcy i członkowie społeczności przyjmującej doświadczają Ubuntu i stosują je w codziennym zarządzaniu konfliktami; jak Ubuntu postrzegają decydenci polityczni i przedstawiciele instytucji; w jaki sposób zasady Ubuntu można włączyć do strategii zarządzania konfliktami na poziomie osiedla; oraz jak praktyki oparte na Ubuntu odnoszą się do innych formalnych i nieformalnych mechanizmów zarządzania konfliktami funkcjonujących w Rwamwanja.

Wyniki wskazują, że Ubuntu jest powszechnie uznawane za język moralny oraz praktykę życia codziennego związaną ze wspólnym człowieczeństwem, wzajemną pomocą, dialogiem, przebaczeniem, gościnnością i współistnieniem. Jego stosowanie jest jednak nierównomierne i jedynie w niewielkim stopniu zinstytucjonalizowane. Uczestnicy łączyli Ubuntu z pomocą sąsiedzką, mediacją społeczną, dialogiem prowadzonym przez starszyznę, interwencją rodzinną i pojednaniem. Wskazali także na istotne ograniczenia, w tym niedobór zasobów, różnorodność kulturową i językową,

nierówne relacje władzy, procedury biurokratyczne, systemy operacyjne uzależnione od darczyńców, ograniczone szkolenia instytucjonalne oraz konieczność kierowania poważnych przestępstw i naruszeń praw do formalnych mechanizmów prawnych i ochronnych. Ubuntu nie powinno być zatem traktowane jako substytut prawa stanowionego, ochrony uchodźców ani zarządzania pomocą humanitarną.

Głównym wkładem rozprawy jest opracowanie Hybrydowego Modelu Zarządzania Konfliktami Skoncentrowanego na Ubuntu. Model ten łączy wspólnotowe praktyki sprawiedliwości naprawczej z formalnymi instytucjami administracyjnymi, ochronnymi, policyjnymi i prawnymi za pomocą zróżnicowanych ścieżek kierowania spraw. Wyjaśnia on zarówno relacyjną wartość Ubuntu, jak i warunki instytucjonalne, w których praktyki inspirowane Ubuntu mogą w odpowiedni sposób przyczyniać się do zapobiegania konfliktom, mediacji, pojednania i spójności społecznej. W badaniu zaleca się wzmacnianie zdolności liderów społeczności w zakresie zarządzania konfliktami, dokumentowanie praktyk uznawanych lokalnie za właściwe, wspieranie roli starszyzny i Komitetów ds. Dobrostanu Uchodźców (Refugee Welfare Committees) oraz ustanowienie wyraźnych zabezpieczeń i procedur kierowania spraw pomiędzy mediacją społeczną a systemami prawa stanowionego.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia Ubuntu, Rwamwanja, uchodźcy, zarządzanie konfliktami, Uganda.

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List of Abbreviations

CARA	Control of Alien Refugee Act
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GOU	Government of Uganda
GRF	Global Refugee Forum
GRF	Global Refugee Forums
IDPS	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
JLIRP	Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan
LC	Local Council
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NDP	National Development Plan
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OC	Office Commandant
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
RWC	Refugee Welfare Committee
STA	Settlement Transformative Agenda

UCHCMM	Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model
UNHCR	United Nation Humanitarian Commission for Refugees
VHT	Village Health Team
WESRRP	Water and Environment Sector Refugees Response Plan

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. UBUNTU AND THE PARADOX OF PROTECTION AND CONFLICT IN RWAMWANJA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT

Uganda has one of Africa's most progressive refugee protection frameworks. The Refugees Act of 2006 grants refugees' rights to social inclusion, freedom of movement, education, access to social services, and access to land for cultivation, fostering self-reliance and peaceful coexistence (Ahimbisibwe, 2016). Scholars such as Betts, Omata, and Sterck, (2022) argue that legal recognition does not automatically translate into economic security because refugees often encounter structural barriers. Uganda's refugee policy is largely grounded in the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), later reinforced through the Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. These approaches seek to integrate refugees into host communities and promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and host community.

However, a paradox persists between this formal policy level and the reality on the ground. Despite legislative promises, refugees and host communities continually experience friction and unresolved disputes arising from resource scarcity, contested identities, and livelihood struggles, which strain social relations (Bjørkhaug, 2020, p. 268). This disconnect leads to long-term social exclusion, widespread insecurity, and serious livelihood struggles (Kaiser, 2010). These dynamics extend beyond interpersonal relations to institutional arrangements, showing how dispersing refugees and managing settlements can fragment refugee communities and divert state responsibilities, while institutional failures and poor governance undermine survival and protection mechanisms (Ilcan et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2006). Ultimately, as refugee management and social integration encounter structural barriers at the intersection of local realities and international forces, everyday life among refugees in Uganda remains defined by unaddressed tensions rather than the harmonious integration envisioned by official policy (Khasalamwa-Mwandha, 2021). This contradiction suggests that legal protection alone may be insufficient to foster sustainable peace and harmonious social relations. Consequently, the paradox lies not in the absence of policy but in the gap between policy aspirations and the everyday realities of conflict experienced within refugee settlements.

The journey toward understanding this underlying paradox began with a personal incident I experienced in 2019, which raised important questions about refugee protection and the lived

realities of refugees amid legal and policy commitments. While serving as an academic staff member at Mountains of the Moon University in Uganda, I participated in community outreach activities in Kamwenge District, western Uganda, where Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement is located. During these activities, I encountered a group of refugee women and children (under four years of age) seeking assistance outside the settlement. Through a colleague who interpreted their Kiswahili, they shared experiences of social exclusion, livelihood challenges, cultural differences, and disputes with both fellow refugees and members of the host community. This encounter raised important questions about why refugee protection policies and institutional commitments to peaceful coexistence do not always translate into harmonious relationships and effective conflict management in everyday life.

Motivated by these observations, I obtained permission from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to conduct research in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Together with a colleague, I first investigated “Refugees’ Adaptability on Peaceful Coexistence with the Host Communities: A Case of Rwamwanja Refugee Camp, Uganda” in 2021 (Basemera & Lwanga, 2021). The findings, published in 2021, provided useful insights into refugee-host community relations but also revealed that peaceful coexistence alone could not adequately explain how conflicts arise, develop, are managed, or remain unresolved within refugee settings. The study further showed that conflicts extend beyond refugee-host relations to include disputes among refugees, within families, between community members and local leaders, and between informal community practices and formal institutions. Common sources of conflict included ethnic and cultural differences, land allocation, prolonged effects of displacement, access to livelihoods and resources, and institutional authority. These findings shifted the focus of this research from coexistence to understanding the nature and management of conflicts in refugee settlements.

Uganda’s refugee policy is founded on the assumption that granting refugees legal rights and integrating them into host communities will promote peaceful coexistence and social inclusion. Although these policy interventions have fostered interaction and cooperation between refugees and host communities, coexistence does not imply the absence of conflict (Bjørkhaug et al., 2025, pp.543-545). Communities may live together peacefully while simultaneously experiencing tensions arising from competition over scarce resources, cultural diversity, institutional authority, and differing expectations regarding rights and responsibilities. Such conflicts are an inevitable feature of socially diverse communities and therefore require

appropriate management rather than mere prevention. It is within this context that Ubuntu philosophy becomes relevant, as it shifts attention from coexistence as a policy objective to the restoration and maintenance of relationships through dialogue, mutual respect, reconciliation, and shared humanity. Ubuntu is understood as “humanity toward others,” and it further holds that human beings exist through relationships, commonly expressed in the maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (“a person is a person through other persons”) (Mbiti, 1969). Rather than emphasizing punishment or adversarial approaches to dispute resolution, Ubuntu promotes dialogue, empathy, reconciliation, collective responsibility, and the restoration of damaged relationships (Ramose, 1999).

These principles are particularly relevant within refugee settlements, where individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds rebuild social relations after experiencing displacement, trauma, and loss. Human dignity and mutual recognition are central to the exercise of Ubuntu (Ramose, 1999), and reconciliation, dialogue, and restoration shape how people live amid conflicts (Metz, 2007). Therefore, Ubuntu is not merely a cultural practice but a philosophical worldview that understands human relationships as central to social harmony. It becomes relevant because refugee settlements are not only humanitarian spaces but also social communities where relationships, dignity, identities, and belonging shape human behavior (Tutu, 1999). Ubuntu offers an alternative perspective that complements formal legal and institutional mechanisms for managing conflicts and sustaining peaceful social relations.

Against this background, the general purpose of this study is to examine how Ubuntu philosophy is understood, interpreted, and applied as an approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, and to consider how its principles might strengthen existing formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms. The remainder of Chapter 1 develops the foundation for this investigation. Section 1.2 presents the background to the study, Section 1.3 explains the origin and application of Ubuntu philosophy, Section 1.4 formulates the research problem, and Section 1.5 gives the purpose and objectives of the study, and other sections follow to organization of the thesis. Some of the sections introduced briefly in this chapter are examined more fully later in the thesis: theoretical and empirical literature is developed in Chapter 2, while the research design, methods, reflexivity, and procedures for establishing trustworthiness are discussed in Chapter 3. Research findings, interpretations and

discussions are presented in chapters 4 and 5 respectively, the conclusion, closing remarks, and future research. (Cf. chap. 1 sec 1.6, sec. 1.8 chap. 2, chap. 3.).

1.2. Background of study:

The backgrounds move from broad to specific, explaining the trends. It addressed the global displacement and prolonged settlement of refugees, challenges related to refugee hosting and conflict management in Africa, the Uganda's refugee protection framework, Policy, practice tensions in Uganda, the historical and institutional context of Rwamwanja refugee settlement and why it is an appropriate case of study and ends with the introduction of the Ubuntu philosophy in context.

1.2.1. Global Displacement and Protracted refugee settlement

The twenty-first century is experiencing forced displacement on an unprecedented scale, with significant humanitarian and social consequences. Armed conflict, persecution, political instability, violence, human rights violations, and events that seriously disturb public order continue to force people to leave their homes in search of safety and protection. Climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters also increasingly influence patterns of human mobility and internal displacement (International Organization for Migration IOM, 2024). Consequently, by the end of 2024, approximately 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, representing about one in every 67 people globally (UNHCR report, 2025). This population included refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and other people in need of international protection.

Although displacement is frequently discussed in terms of population figures and humanitarian needs, it also disrupts social relationships, community institutions, livelihoods, identities, and everyday life (Zetter, 2021). As displacement situations become increasingly prolonged, refugee protection must therefore address not only immediate needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and security, but also questions of social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, and conflict management (UNHCR, 2018).

The prolonged presence of refugees also changes relationships among refugees, host communities, government institutions, and humanitarian actors. Although refugee-hosting arrangements can generate economic activity, employment, infrastructure, services, and cultural exchange, their benefits and costs are not always evenly distributed. Competition

emerges around land, water, employment, environmental resources, public services, humanitarian assistance, and political representation. These pressures do not mean that refugees necessarily cause conflict; rather, conflict risks arise from the interaction of displacement with pre-existing poverty, unequal resource distribution, institutional weaknesses, and perceptions of exclusion or unfairness (Whitaker, 2002; World Bank, 2019).

1.2.2. Challenges related to Refugee hosting and conflicts Management in Africa.

African countries have a long history of providing asylum, but refugee hosting can place additional pressure on land, employment, public services, natural resources, and local governance systems. These concerns are particularly significant in Africa, where many states simultaneously experience internal displacement and host refugees from neighboring countries (UNHCR report 2013, Lee, 2017, Seatzu, 2025). Refugee settlements also bring together people with different national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Diversity does not necessarily produce conflict; however, when it interacts with resource scarcity, inequality, displacement-related trauma, institutional weaknesses, and perceptions of unfair treatment, tensions may emerge within refugee populations and between refugees and host communities (World Bank, 2019; Omata, 2022, Ahimbisibwe, 2018).

Refugee hosting can produce both benefits and pressures for local communities because it attracts human resources, markets, employment opportunities, roads, schools, healthcare facilities, and other forms of infrastructure. At the same time, benefits may be distributed unevenly, while some households experience pressure on land, natural resources, wages, prices, and public services. Whitaker's (2002) study of refugee-hosting communities in western Tanzania demonstrates that the effects of refugee presence differ across locations and social groups. Refugee hosting should therefore not be understood exclusively as either a burden or a benefit; its effects depend on resource distribution, institutional capacity, humanitarian intervention, and the relationships established between displaced and local populations.

Even though refugee hosting in Africa has a positive impact on people's lives, it does not go without challenges, these challenges affect the way people relate with each other. Countries receiving refugees must provide protection while negotiating domestic inequalities, regional insecurity and limited institutional capacity. However, Africa is not a single political or humanitarian setting: experiences differ between rural settlements, border regions and urban neighborhoods. Refugees also possess skills, commercial networks and social relationships that

can strengthen receiving societies. The central challenge is therefore not simply the presence of displaced populations, but how governments and international partners manage their reception. Jacobsen (1996) shows that host policy reflects political calculations, security concerns, international assistance and relations with countries of origin.

There's usually unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of hosting refugees. The demands related to basic needs always impact both refugees and host community members. Because of unfair distributions, at times, it favors one category of people and leaves out another hence creating tension that results into conflicts. (Whitaker 2002). Additionally, challenges related to public services provides arena in which these distributional tensions emerge. When schools, hospitals, roads and water systems are already inadequate, additional demand deepens perceptions of abandonment among residents. When it comes to land and livelihood challenges, particularly where settlement policies depend on agricultural self-sufficiency. Allocating land does not guarantee a viable income if plots are infertile, markets are distant or households lack tools and investment. This, therefore, creates unfavorable conditions that affect the hosting community. Kaiser (2006) shows how remote settlements in Uganda constrained livelihoods through unfavorable environmental conditions, exhausted soil and inadequate agricultural inputs.

Security concerns are important, especially when displacement occurs alongside armed mobilization across borders. Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006) identify mechanisms through which refugee movements can accompany the diffusion of civil conflict, including transnational networks and the movement of arms and combatants. In most cases, this leads to political manipulation, turning manageable tensions into organized hostility (Onoma 2013).

Research carried out in Guinea, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo highlights the role of state involvement and local political relationships in explaining anti-refugee violence, challenging explanations that automatically attribute conflict to ethnic differences or population size and demonstrating how refugees became convenient symbols through which leaders redirected frustration about insecurity, unemployment and government failure in refugee hosting (Onoma, 2013).

Therefore, refugee governance in Africa consequently involves more than the provision of humanitarian assistance. It also requires mechanisms through which disputes can be prevented from escalating and conflicting interests can be addressed constructively. Formal mechanisms,

including legislation, courts, police, administrative structures, and humanitarian procedures, play an important role in maintaining order and protecting rights. Nevertheless, formal mechanisms may not always address the interpersonal, cultural, and relational dimensions of everyday conflict. Disputes arising from mistrust, cultural misunderstandings, damaged relationships, perceptions of exclusion, or competing expectations may also require dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, and community participation. This has generated scholarly interest in whether indigenous knowledge and community-based approaches can appropriately complement formal conflict-management arrangements (Murithi, 2008; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

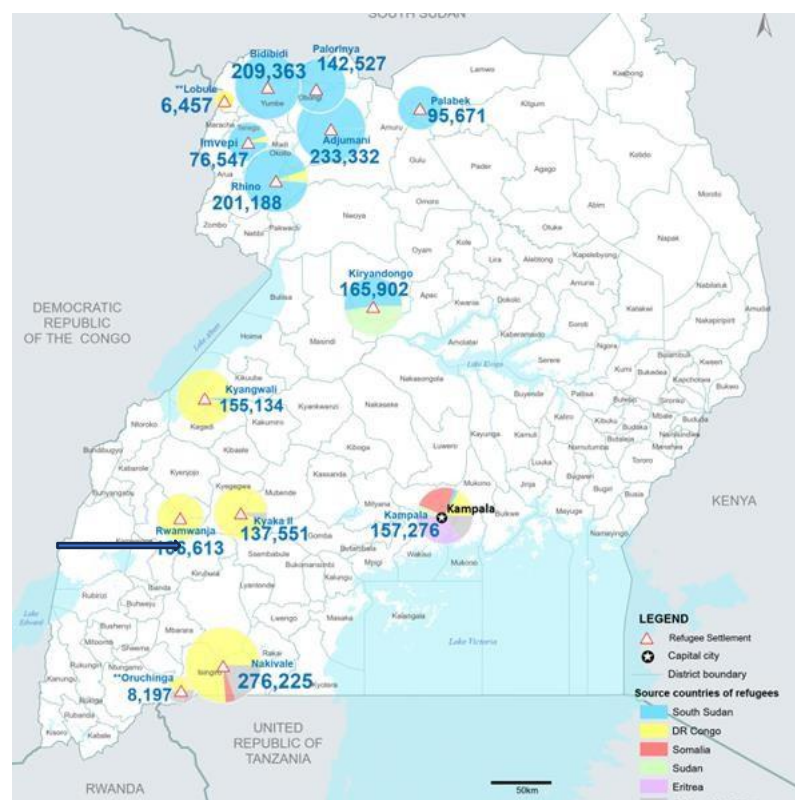
1.2.3. Uganda's refugee-protection framework

Uganda provides an important setting in which to examine these issues. Its refugee-protection framework is widely recognised for granting refugees freedom of movement, access to employment and public services, and land for cultivation within designated settlements (Government of Uganda, 2006; Betts, 2021; Omata, 2022). The Self-Reliance Strategy, Settlement Transformative Agenda, and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) seek to integrate refugee protection into national and local development while encouraging interaction and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; OPM, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). These initiatives aim to reduce long-term dependence on humanitarian assistance, include refugees in local economies and public services, and ensure that refugee-hosting communities also benefit from development interventions (Betts, 2021; World Bank, 2019). The framework therefore differs from conventional encampment systems that substantially restrict refugees' movement and economic participation.

Uganda has consequently continued to receive refugees from countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia. Uganda accommodates refugees through a network of settlements distributed across different regions of the country. These settlements operate under a national framework administered principally by the Office of the Prime Minister in collaboration with UNHCR, local governments, humanitarian organisations, and other partners. Although the settlements are governed under the same national refugee framework, their histories, populations, resource conditions, and relationships with surrounding communities differ. At the time covered by this study, Uganda hosted refugees across 13 designated settlements thus (Adjumani, Bidibidi, Imvepi,

Kiryandongo, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Lobule, Nakivale, Oruchinga, Palabek, Palorinya, Rhino Camp and Rwamwanja) and the urban refugee-hosting area of Kampala (OPM & UNHCR, 2024).

Figure 1 Map of Uganda showing distribution of refugees-hosting settlements.



Source: Adapted from OPM and UNHCR (2024).

1.2.4. Policy practice tensions in Uganda

Despite the Self-Reliance Strategy, Settlement Transformative Agenda, and Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) policy commitments, the implementation of Uganda's refugee model faces significant challenges. Refugees and host communities experience pressure on land, livelihoods, employment opportunities, natural resources, humanitarian assistance, and public services. Reductions or interruptions in humanitarian funding place further pressure on refugees, local communities, and service-delivery institutions. Administrative weaknesses, perceptions of unequal resource allocation, and limited opportunities for meaningful participation also undermine trust in settlement governance (World Bank, 2019; Omata, 2022). Uganda's progressive legal and policy framework has

therefore not eliminated conflict within refugee settlements. This reveals a discrepancy between the formal commitment to inclusion and peaceful coexistence and the everyday realities of tension, disagreement, and unresolved grievances.

The distribution of land and livelihood opportunities is particularly important. Omata (2022) argues that Uganda's self-reliance approach has often been promoted without adequate attention to the availability and distribution of resources among refugees and host communities. Where both groups depend on limited land, informal employment, natural resources, and public services, self-reliance policies may intensify competition rather than produce the expected mutual benefits. Refugees and host populations may consequently interpret resource allocation, humanitarian assistance, or service provision as unequal, potentially weakening trust and social cohesion.

A policy-practice tension therefore exists between Uganda's formal commitment to refugee inclusion and the realities experienced in settlements. The national policy framework provides important rights and opportunities, but its implementation is affected by changing refugee populations, funding shortages, institutional capacity, resource availability, local politics, and historical land relations. Uganda should therefore not be treated as a uniformly successful model without examining the lived experiences of refugees and host populations in specific locations (Betts, 2021; Omata, 2022). This tension is especially relevant to conflict management because coexistence within the same geographical area does not necessarily mean that relationships are harmonious or that conflicts are managed effectively.

1.2.5. Historical and institutional context of Rwamwanja

Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement illustrates this policy-practice discrepancy. Located in Kamwenge District in western Uganda, Rwamwanja was initially established in 1964 to receive Rwandees refugees. It was closed following repatriation in 1995 and later remained largely inactive before being reopened in 2012 to accommodate refugees fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNHCR, 2019). During the period of reduced settlement activity, parts of the gazetted land were occupied or used by Ugandan nationals from neighbouring areas. Its reopening consequently brought refugees, existing land users, host communities, humanitarian organisations, and government institutions into renewed interaction within a historically contested social and geographical space (Ahimbisibwe, 2018).

The settlement's history continues to influence present social relations. Questions concerning land ownership, settlement boundaries, eviction, compensation, cultivation, and access to natural resources coexist with pressures relating to livelihoods, water, education, healthcare, shelter, security, and humanitarian assistance (REACH & UNHCR, 2019). Rwamwanja also contains a socially and culturally diverse population whose members have different languages, identities, displacement experiences, and expectations regarding authority, justice, and reconciliation (Basemera & Lwanga, 2021; Odwe et al., 2018). These conditions do not make conflict inevitable, but they create circumstances in which disagreements may arise and become difficult to manage.

Conflict management involves several actors in the settlement, including the Office of the Prime Minister, local government, police, Refugee Welfare Councils, UNHCR, non-governmental organizations, elders, religious leaders, family members, and other community representatives (de Simone, 2022; Hoff, 2019). The coexistence of these actors suggests that the central problem is not simply the absence of conflict-management mechanisms, but rather concerns how these mechanisms are understood, accessed, coordinated, and experienced, and whether they adequately address the relational and historical dimensions of conflict (Hoff, 2019; Odwe et al., 2018).

1.2.6. Rwamwanja as an appropriate case

Rwamwanja is an appropriate case for this study for several interconnected reasons. First, its history of closure and reopening provides an opportunity to examine how changing land use and population settlement influence contemporary relationships. Second, its population includes refugees and host community members with different nationalities, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and displacement backgrounds even though the current settlement group originates from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Third, conflict management involves several governmental, humanitarian, legal, customary, religious, and community actors. Fourth, the settlement operates within Uganda's progressive national refugee framework while continuing to experience the practical pressures associated with protracted displacement and resource scarcity (UNHCR, 2019; World Bank, 2019).

The case is also analytically important because it enables the study to move beyond a simple refugee–host distinction. Refugees and host communities are not internally uniform groups, and individuals within them may occupy different economic, social, cultural, gender,

generational, and institutional positions. A qualitative single-case study of Rwamwanja can therefore generate a detailed understanding of how conflict is experienced and managed by different stakeholders within one bounded historical and institutional setting. Although the findings cannot be statistically generalised to every refugee settlement in Uganda, they may offer transferable insights for settlements with comparable social, resource, and governance conditions.

The choice of Rwamwanja is further supported by an identified gap in the existing literature. Studies of Uganda's refugee system have examined legal protection, self-reliance, livelihoods, local integration, resource distribution, service delivery, and refugee-host relations (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004; Betts, 2021; Omata, 2022). However, limited context-specific research explains how formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms interact in Rwamwanja, how different stakeholders assess these mechanisms, and whether they address the relational dimensions of conflict. There is also limited evidence concerning the relevance of African relational philosophies to conflict management in this particular refugee-settlement context.

1.2.7. The place of Ubuntu philosophy in Rwamwanja context

It is within this context that Ubuntu philosophy becomes relevant. Ubuntu is a relational African philosophy that emphasizes shared humanity, human dignity, mutual respect, empathy, dialogue, collective responsibility, reconciliation, and the restoration of damaged relationships (Metz, 2018; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2019). Its relevance to Rwamwanja lies in its potential to illuminate aspects of conflict that formal administrative and legal procedures may not fully address, particularly mistrust, damaged social relationships, exclusion, and the need for community participation.

However, Ubuntu should not be assumed to constitute an established or universally understood practice within the settlement. Rwamwanja's cultural diversity means that participants may express Ubuntu-related principles through different languages, traditions, and community practices without necessarily using the term "Ubuntu." Although previous research has examined Uganda's refugee policies, self-reliance programs livelihoods, service provision, environmental pressures, and refugee-host community relations, less attention has been given to the operation of formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms within Rwamwanja (Betts, 2021; Omata, 2022).

Limited context-specific evidence explains how refugees, host community members, community leaders, government officials, and humanitarian actors understand and interpret Ubuntu philosophy; whether Ubuntu-related principles are reflected in everyday conflict management practices; how such principles interact with existing institutional mechanisms; and what factors may constrain their application or institutionalization. This study addresses that gap by examining Ubuntu philosophy as a possible approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

1.3. Origin and Application of the Ubuntu Philosophy

Ubuntu is an African indigenous philosophy whose roots can be traced to the social and cultural traditions of many communities across sub-Saharan Africa. Although the term is most commonly associated with the Nguni languages of Southern Africa, particularly among the Zulu and Xhosa peoples, similar concepts are expressed in other African societies through different terms and cultural practices (Metz, 2018; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). For example, related ideas are expressed as *botho* among Sotho-Tswana communities, *Obuntu-bulamu* among the Baganda and *hunhu* or *unhu* among Shona-speaking communities. Although these concepts developed within different linguistic and cultural contexts, they generally share an emphasis on human interconnectedness, communal belonging, and responsibility toward others. The Ubuntu philosophy is commonly captured in the expression *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, literally translated as “a person is a person through other persons” (Nzimakwe, 2014). This expression reflects the belief that human beings achieve their full humanity through relationships with others and active participation in community life.

While the terminology and cultural expression of Ubuntu vary across African societies, the philosophy is generally associated with compassion, mutual respect, solidarity, hospitality, collective responsibility, and social harmony (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). These values have historically guided social interactions, leadership practices, community relationships, and approaches to resolving disputes. Rather than viewing individuals as entirely independent entities, Ubuntu philosophy recognizes the interconnected nature of human existence and the importance of maintaining constructive relationships within society (Metz, 2014). However, the existence of comparable communal values in different African societies does not mean that all African traditions are identical or that they originated from a single cultural system. Ubuntu

should therefore be understood as a relational philosophy with culturally specific expressions rather than as a uniform philosophy practiced in exactly the same way throughout Africa.

Ubuntu existed primarily within oral traditions and everyday community practices before it was increasingly articulated as an academic, moral, and political philosophy. Samkange and Samkange's formulation of *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism* in 1980 contributed to the development of Ubuntu as a written African political philosophy (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). Subsequent scholars further developed Ubuntu as a framework for understanding morality, human dignity, governance, social responsibility, and relationships within African societies (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2007). Its public and political prominence increased in the late twentieth century, particularly through debates about democracy, reconciliation, restorative justice, and African approaches to peacebuilding (Gade, 2011, pp. 303-304, 314-320). This development did not create Ubuntu as a new philosophy but translated aspects of an existing oral and cultural tradition into academic and political discourse.

In conflict resolution and management, Ubuntu views conflict not simply as a disagreement between isolated individuals but as a disruption of social relationships and community harmony. Conflict management approaches informed by Ubuntu, therefore, seek to restore relationships, rebuild trust, acknowledge harm, and promote reconciliation rather than focusing exclusively on punishment or retribution (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Murithi, 2009). Through dialogue, empathy, accountability, forgiveness, mediation, and community participation, such approaches attempt to address the underlying causes of conflict while strengthening social cohesion. Accountability remains an important element because the restoration of relationships requires the acknowledgment of wrongdoing and acceptance of responsibility. Ubuntu-based conflict management should therefore not be interpreted as the absence of justice or as an unconditional requirement for victims to forgive those who have harmed them.

Ubuntu related principles have been identified in several African peacebuilding, restorative justice, and reconciliation initiatives. These initiatives differ in their cultural and historical foundations and should not all be understood as direct applications of the Nguni concept of Ubuntu. However, their emphasis on communal participation, dialogues, accountability, collective responsibility, restoration, and human dignity, reflects values that are comparable to Ubuntu (Murithi, 2009; Chitonge, 2020). Such initiatives demonstrate how relational and community-based African philosophies can inform practical responses to conflict. They also show that Ubuntu is not merely an abstract philosophical concept but can provide principles

through which communities understand harm, responsibility, reconciliation, and the restoration of social relationships.

One of the most widely cited political applications of Ubuntu emerged during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. Following decades of racial segregation and political violence, the country faced the challenge of addressing past injustices while rebuilding coexistence among previously divided groups. Ubuntu informed aspects of the reconciliation discourse surrounding this transition, particularly through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Tutu, 1999). The Commission emphasized truth-telling, acknowledgment of wrongdoing, accountability, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation as possible pathways toward rebuilding social relationships and national cohesion (Murithi, 2009). Although the Commission did not resolve all the social and economic injustices created by apartheid, its experience illustrated the potential contribution, and limitations of relational and restorative principles in a society emerging from prolonged conflict.

Related principles have also been observed in Rwanda's Gacaca courts and among the Acholi people of Northern Uganda (Mato-Oputi). The Gacaca courts were established after the 1994 genocide to address genocide-related cases through locally based proceedings involving community participation, testimony, confession, accountability, and judgment. Although rooted in Rwandan traditions rather than in Nguni Ubuntu, Gacaca contained communal and restorative elements that can be examined through an Ubuntu-related perspective (Clark, 2010; Murithi, 2009). The process provided opportunities for truth-telling and community involvement, but it also attracted criticism concerning due process, political influence, unequal power relations, and the experiences of victims (Thomson, 2011). Similarly, the Acholi reconciliation mechanism known as *Mato Oput*, commonly translated as "drinking the bitter herb," emphasizes acknowledgment of wrongdoing, acceptance of responsibility, compensation, mediation, forgiveness, and the restoration of relationships between affected families or clans. These examples show that community-based reconciliation may combine restoration, accountability, customary obligations, and social reintegration rather than relying exclusively on punishment.

Elsewhere in Africa, values comparable to Ubuntu can be observed in Botswana's Kgotla system and Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok initiative. The Kgotla is a Setswana communal institution through which members of society participate in consultation, dialogue, collective

decision-making, and the settlement of disputes under traditional leadership. It is more directly associated with the Setswana concept of *botho*, which shares Ubuntu's emphasis on respectful and responsible relationships (Dube, *etl.*, 2016). Fambul Tok, meaning "family talk," emerged in post-conflict Sierra Leone as a community-led reconciliation initiative that encouraged dialogue, truth-telling, acknowledgment, forgiveness, and social healing among communities affected by civil war (Tankink & Richters, 2007). Although these mechanisms developed in different cultural settings, they demonstrate how locally grounded values can support community participation and the restoration of relationships after conflict.

An emphasis on reconciliation and social harmony can sometimes place pressure on victims to forgive, obscure inequalities within communities, or privilege communal expectations over individual rights (Mboti, 2015, pp. 125-127; Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013, pp. 197-203). Traditional institutions may also be affected by differences in gender, age, social status, ethnicity, and political power (Sebba, 2006, pp. 2-3; Thomson, 2011, pp. 373-390). Community based mechanisms should therefore not be taken for granted or treated as automatically inclusive and effective (Clark, 2010; Thomson, 2011, pp. 378-386). Their contribution to conflict management depends on how they are implemented, whose voices are represented, how accountability is addressed, and how they interact with formal legal and institutional systems (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Murithi, 2006, pp. 29-32). These limitations do not necessarily invalidate Ubuntu philosophy; instead, they demonstrate the importance of examining its practical application within each social and institutional context (Mboti, 2015, pp. 140-145; Metz, 2014, pp. 65-72).

The relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to refugee settings lies in its emphasis on coexistence, mutual respect, human dignity, dialogue, and collective responsibility (Ekoh & Warria, 2023, pp. 1-3; Metz, 2011, pp. 537-542). Refugee settlements often bring together people from diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds who share resources, institutions, services, and social spaces over extended periods (Sebba, 2006, pp. 1 -4; Basemera & Lwanga, 2021). Relationships also develop between refugees and members of the host community. Under such circumstances, disagreements may arise over resources, leadership, cultural differences, access to services, and other aspects of community life (Sebba, 2006, pp. 1 -4; Basemera & Lwanga, 2021). Ubuntu philosophy offers a perspective that encourages understanding, dialogue, cooperation, accountability, and the restoration of relationships among community members (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Ekoh & Warria, 2023, pp. 2-5). Nevertheless, its application in

refugee settings cannot be assumed because refugees and host communities may have different cultural understandings of community, justice, reconciliation, and authority. Its relevance must therefore be investigated within the particular context in which conflict occurs (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Basemera, 2025).

The present study does not seek to examine all the African applications of Ubuntu philosophy in detail, since their theoretical foundations, outcomes, and limitations are discussed further in Chapter 2 (Cf; ch.2. Sec 2.2.1.). They are introduced here to demonstrate the broader development and relevance of Ubuntu as a philosophy associated with peacebuilding and conflict management in Africa (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Murithi, 2006, pp. 25-34). Despite the growing literature on Ubuntu and community-based reconciliation, limited empirical attention has been given to how its principles may be understood and applied in the management of conflicts within refugee settlements, particularly in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement (Ekoh & Warri, 2023, pp. 1-8; Basemera, 2025). It remains necessary to establish whether Ubuntu related values are recognized by refugees, host-community members, leaders, and conflict-management actors; how such values are applied; and what opportunities and limitations affect their use. Given its emphasis on reconciliation, social harmony, accountability, and human interconnectedness, Ubuntu therefore provides a useful lens through which conflict management can be examined within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, where peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities remains an important concern.

1.4. The research problem

Despite substantial investments in refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, and settlement governance, internal conflicts continue to occur in refugee settlements across Africa (Jansen & de Bruijne, 2020). Refugees and host communities frequently interact in contexts characterized by resource scarcity, cultural diversity, social inequalities, and prolonged displacement. These conditions often contribute to tensions related to land use, access to livelihoods, service delivery, cultural differences, institutional authority, and community relations (Omata, 2020; Ahimbisibwe, 2018). Uganda, one of the highest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, hosts approximately 1.9 million refugees and asylum seekers (World Bank, 2016; UNHCR, 2024), adopted progressive refugee policies aimed at promoting integration, self-reliance, and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities (Dryden-Peterson & Hovil, 2004). However, conflicts related to competition over land, livelihoods, natural resources, and

public services continue to be reported within refugee settlements, suggesting that existing policy interventions have not entirely addressed the underlying social and relational dimensions of conflict. While these policy mechanisms have contributed to maintaining order and resolving disputes, scholars have questioned their ability to adequately address the social, cultural, and interpersonal factors that often shape everyday conflicts in displaced communities (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Murithi, 2009). Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to refugee protection, humanitarian governance, self-reliance, economic inclusion, and refugee livelihoods in Uganda (Oliver & Boyle, 2020; Omata, 2022), the application of indigenous African philosophies to conflict management in refugee settlements has received comparatively limited attention. Scholars have only recently begun to examine Ubuntu explicitly in relation to refugees, host communities, humanitarian practice, and conflict resolution in Uganda (Basemera, 2025; Buzaare et al., 2025).

In Rwamwanja refugee settlement, poverty, inequality, marginalization, political incitement, and lack of respect between groups affect peaceful coexistence (Basemera & Lwanga, 2021). Rwamwanja was established in 1964 to accommodate Rwandese refugees, the settlement closed following repatriation in 1995 and was reopened in 2012 to accommodate refugees fleeing insecurity in the Democratic Republic of Congo particularly violence in North and South Kivu (REACH & NRC, 2019, p.1). During the period when the settlement was closed, sections of the settlement land were reportedly occupied and used by Ugandan nationals from neighboring communities. Its reopening brought refugees, established land users, surrounding host communities, and government authorities into renewed interaction within a space whose ownership, boundaries, access arrangements, and administrative status had changed. (Ahimbisibwe 2018). Land-related problems continue to affect the settlement: 25% of surveyed refugee households reported housing, land, or property challenges, with eviction, unusable allocated plots, and land grabbing among the most frequently reported problems (REACH & NRC, 2019, p. 3). Earlier research similarly identified scarcity of land water sources and pressure on health, education, housing, and employment as factors affecting relations between refugees and the Rwamwanja host community (Kazahura, 2014). Despite formal mechanism approaches established involving the Office of the Prime Minister, police, local government, Refugee Welfare Councils, and humanitarian organizations operate alongside informal mechanisms involving elders, families, religious leaders, and community mediators internal conflicts still persist in Rwamwanja refugee settlement. Limited research explains how these mechanisms interact, how stakeholders evaluate them, or whether they

address the relational and historical dimensions of conflict. This persistence of conflict, together with limited understanding of how formal and informal mechanisms interact, creates a need to examine relational and culturally grounded approaches such as Ubuntu.

More specifically, little context-based evidence exists on whether Ubuntu-related principles such as dialogue, shared responsibility, recognition of human dignity, reconciliation, and relationship restoration are understood or practiced in Rwamwanja, how they relate to existing mechanisms, and what institutional or cultural factors constrain their wider application. Although Uganda's refugee framework contains principles compatible with Ubuntu, including inclusion, hospitality, shared responsibility, and coexistence, there is insufficient evidence that Ubuntu is explicitly recognized or systematically incorporated into settlement conflict-management structures. This creates a critical analytical puzzle: why does an apparently Ubuntu-compatible refugee-policy environment not automatically produce Ubuntu-based conflict management in practice? The study therefore moves beyond asking whether Ubuntu is "present" or "absent" in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement and instead asks how Ubuntu is interpreted, where it works, where it fails, and what kind of hybrid institutional framework would be required for it to contribute meaningfully to conflict management in a complex refugee settlement.

1.5. Purpose, and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. It investigates how Ubuntu is understood and practiced by refugees and host community members, how institutional actors perceive its relevance, how Ubuntu principles might strengthen existing conflict-management strategies, and how Ubuntu relates to other formal and informal mechanisms operating within the settlement.

The research objectives

1. To explore how refugees and host community members understand, interpret, and apply Ubuntu principles in managing everyday conflict.
2. To examine institutional actors' perceptions of Ubuntu and its relevance to conflict management.

3. To assess how Ubuntu principles might complement or strengthen existing conflict-management strategies.
4. To identify and examine the formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms operating within the settlement besides Ubuntu.

1.6. Research questions

Overall research question

“How has the Ubuntu philosophy been understood, interpreted, and implemented as a conflict management approach in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?”

Specific questions that support the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja settlement in applying the Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community?
2. How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?
3. How can the Ubuntu philosophy approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?
4. What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?

1.7. Research propositions

The study is informed by two analytical propositions. First, Ubuntu philosophy principles particularly relational responsibility, dialogue, empathy, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity may complement existing conflict-management mechanisms and contribute to the restoration of relationships within the settlement of Rwamwanja.

Second, the institutionalization of Ubuntu philosophy within formal conflict-management structures may be constrained by legal, bureaucratic, cultural, resource-related, and practical factors, including the diversity of the settlement population and the limited translation of indigenous values into institutional procedures.

1.8. Theoretical Orientation of the Study

Theories are used not only to make sense of the world and analyse social problems but also to guide practice at the individual, family, community, societal, environmental, and spiritual levels (Mugumbate et al., 2024; Payne, 2020). Understanding a theory is complex, where different scholars extract different meaning depending on their disciplines. Émile Durkheim regarded sociology as the systematic study of social facts-ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside individuals and exercise constraint over them (Durkheim, 1895/1982; Jones, 1986). In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, originally published in 1895, Durkheim established methodological principles for identifying, explaining, and comparing social facts, thereby providing a foundation for the systematic analysis of society. From a behaviorists perspective, B. F. Skinner viewed scientific explanation as the identification of functional relationships between behavior and environmental conditions. For Skinner, the scientific study of behavior was intended to support its prediction and control, although he questioned theories that relied on unobservable explanatory entities (Skinner, 1950, 1953). In his 1953 work “Science and Human Behavior”. Skinner theory on radical behaviorism, prioritized empirical observation of overt behaviors that are shaped by the environment. These behaviors reinforce punishment-rejecting mental concepts that favor practical and testable principles. In his theory, Skinner presents a framework that is rooted in understanding the modified behavior that enables effective interventions among people.

In contrast, Karl Popper (1959) revised scientific theory and proposed falsifiability (the principle that a theory must make specific, testable predictions that can be proven false by observation or experiment to be considered scientific). The argument of Popper (1959) on testing scientific theories is evidence to discover the ‘logic of scientific findings’. His argument led to drastic changes to which theories are perceived and revised in different academic disciplines such as economics and psychology. In the field of economics, Milton Friedman (1953) argued that economic theory is necessary to make accurate predictions. In “The Methodology of Positive Economics”. Friedman argues that the only way to prove the reliability of an economic theory is to test its predictions and hypotheses through empirical observations. In this theory, it serves as a lens for analyzing the effects of different communication mediums on social structures. Ray Kurzweil's (2005) singularity theory in the field of artificial intelligence foresees an unpredictable and irreversible change in the human way of life due to explosive technological advances, bringing a contemporary perspective to the discourse. Some of these theoretical frameworks are speculative and futuristic, as his works

such as “The Singularity Is Near” (2005) show. Kuhn’s study (1962) on the structure of scientific revolutions examines how scientific theories in academic literature change over time. Kuhn (1962) argues that scientific progress does not occur through the cumulative development of theories but rather through paradigm shifts in which old theories are changed by new ones. In his argument, Kuhn looks at changing world and different ways of understanding concepts. Therefore, to understand conflict theory approaches, different paradigms and theories will be discussed to provide highlights under which the study takes lane.

The above understanding of the concept and definition of theory contributes to a deeper understanding of how theories work in scientific research.

This study is guided by an integrated theoretical framework that draws on Ubuntu philosophy (Ramose, 1999 and Eze, 2008), Conflict Transformation Theory (Lederach 1995), Neo-Institutionalism Theory (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983), ABC model on conflicts (Galtung,1969), and Middle-Range Theory (Merton, 1949, 1968). Rather than treating these perspectives as competing explanations, the study adopts them as complementary lenses for understanding conflict management within the complex social, cultural, and institutional environment of the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The combination of these theories enables the study to examine conflict management from interpersonal, community, institutional, and policy perspectives.

Ubuntu philosophy is central to this study. As described in the African proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (which literally means “a person becomes a person through another person”), it implies that the Ubuntu philosophy provides a theoretical lens for interpreting participants’ lived experiences and perspectives on conflict management. Described by Ramose (1999) and Eze (2008), Ubuntu philosophy plays a role in reconciliation, fostering collective responsibility and interconnectedness among people. This has thus been understood by different scholars that conflicts viewed in the Ubuntu lens are not merely disputes to be resolved as a social relation; rather, it requires healing, rebuilding communal norms, and restoration, which is core for conflict resolutions other than punitive or advisory approaches (Desmond, 1999). By adopting Ubuntu as a framework for conflict management, the theory opens an argument for sustainable peace through dialogues, reconciliation, and restoration of relationships among refugees and host community members.

Conflict Transformation Theory, developed by Lederach (1995, 2003), complements the Ubuntu philosophy by offering a process-oriented approach that views conflict not merely as a problem to be resolved but as a catalyst for constructive social change. Lederach argues that sustainable peace is achieved through the transformation of relationships, attitudes, behaviours, and the social structures that perpetuate conflict, rather than through short-term conflict settlement alone. This perspective is relevant in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement, where tensions from social inequalities, cultural differences, and competition over scarce resources create conflicts. Similarly, scholars such as Miall (2001) contend that conflict transformation addresses the underlying causes of conflict while fostering inclusive and participatory processes that build lasting peace. In this regard, Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness, human dignity, reconciliation, and mutual care provides the ethical foundation through which conflict transformation can promote long-term coexistence, social cohesion, and sustainable peace in refugee communities.

Neo-Institutional Theory, associated with the works of Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and Scott (2014), argue that human behaviour and organizational practices are shaped by both formal regulations and informal norms. The theory played a role by examining the socially constructed rules within institutional environments, especially in vulnerable settings such as refugee settlements. Associated with the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations adopt institutional norms and structures to gain legitimacy, while DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures influence organizational behaviour and decision-making. Similarly, Scott (2014) contends that institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars that shape social interactions and collective action. In the Rwamwanja refugee settlement, the governance structure, which includes government authorities, humanitarian organizations, refugee leadership, and host community institutions, plays a role in creating opportunities and constraints that influence decision-making, hence leading to conflict. The theory was key to addressing such inconsistencies, bringing on board the Ubuntu principles to determine the extent through which such principles like reconciliation, communal working, and dialogues are being supported to reduce conflicts.

The **ABC Model**, conceptualized by Johan Galtung (1969), addresses the Attitude, Behavior, and Contradiction that do occur in vulnerable environments. The model was adopted because it addresses the conflict triangle that interrelates with the system through which fears and

cultural prejudices manifest. In Rwamwanja refugee settlement, which has cultural diversity challenges and competition over resources, verbal and physical disputes provide negative behaviors that affect both refugees and host community members. The model was adopted to prevent stakeholders from merely suppressing surface-level hostilities related to verbal and physical disputes (*Behavior*); instead, it prompts peacebuilders within community members and reduces fears, prejudices, mistrust and stereotypes (*Attitude*) while systematically tackling structural disparities like unequal access to land allocation, aid, food distribution, shelter, or security-related challenges (*Contradiction*).

Furthermore, this study adopts Merton's (1957, 1968) Middle-Range Theory (MRT) as its overarching analytical framework. MRT serves as an intermediate bridge between abstract philosophical ideals and observable social realities. The theory was helpful to address the imperical indicators of Ubuntu philosophy such as reconciliation, mutual care and shared responsibility among refugees and host community members that illustrated willingness of members in helping one another, participating in community activities, respect treatment to each other, forgiveness, and sharing available resources, while acknowledging faults and ready to restore broken relationships. The realization was observed where dialogues and accountability through interviews and focus group discussions showed how the above were addressed. The elders played a role in mediation of community conflicts. This is further explained in chapter 4 of the research findings. The Theory transformed communal solidarity, and informal networks from being abstract into understandable ways through which resource sharing, dispute resolution, and inclusion in decision-making were treated with concern. Therefore, the MRT converted the Ubuntu abstract principles and values into observable research indicators for conflict management

All the four theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional framework for examining conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Ubuntu philosophy provides the ethical foundation by introducing broad values such as interconnectedness, dignity, solidarity, reconciliation, and communal responsibility, while Conflict Transformation Theory explains processes of constructive change in relationships and structures, Neo-institutional Theory explains the influence of formal rules and informal norms, while ABC model emphasizes changes and inclusion that identifies attitudes, behaviours, and underlying contradictions, and Middle-Range Theory links philosophical concepts to practical realities. MRT therefore, intrgrates the different theoretical perspectives and connects them to the study's empirical

evidence. A detailed discussion of these theories, their assumptions, strengths, limitations, and relevance to the study is presented in Chapter Two.

1.9. Overview of Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology to examine the application of Ubuntu philosophy to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, interpretations, values, relationships, and conflict-management practices rather than to measure predetermined variables or establish statistical relationships. Qualitative research enabled me to investigate how individuals and groups construct meaning within their social and cultural environments, as mentioned by Creswell & Poth (2018). This orientation was particularly relevant because Ubuntu is understood and practiced through interpersonal relationships, community values, dialogue, shared responsibilities, and culturally situated experiences that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone

Research paradigm approach

The study is guided by an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is not fixed or universally experienced but is constructed through people's interactions, experiences, histories, and interpretations (Schwandt, 1994). Accordingly, individuals occupying the same social setting may understand conflict, reconciliation, justice, coexistence, and Ubuntu in different ways. The interpretivist approach therefore enabled this study to examine the meanings that refugees, host-community members, local leaders, humanitarian actors, and government officials attach to Ubuntu and conflict-management practices.

This approach was appropriate because the study did not assume that Ubuntu has a single meaning that applies uniformly to all participants. Refugees and host community members interpret Ubuntu differently because of differences in culture, displacement histories, access to resources, social position, and experiences of conflict. Similarly, institutional actors also their understanding of Ubuntu differ from community members because their actions are shaped by formal policies, professional responsibilities, and humanitarian procedures. The interpretivist approach allowed these multiple perspectives to be explored within their specific social and institutional contexts. It also enabled the study to examine how participants' interpretations influence their responses to conflict and their relationships with other groups within the settlement (Cf. chap. 2, sec. 2.6.; chap. 3, sec. 3.2.1.).

Case study design

The research employed a qualitative case study design, with Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement serving as the case. A case study facilitates the detailed examination of a contemporary social phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the phenomenon cannot easily be separated from the environment in which it occurs (Yin, 2018). The design was therefore suitable for examining Ubuntu philosophy and conflict management as interconnected social processes operating within a particular refugee settlement context.

Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement was selected because of its historically and culturally diverse background. The settlement accommodates refugees with different ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and displacement experiences while also existing alongside Ugandan host communities with their own cultural identities, historical claims, and livelihood needs. Its establishment for Rwandan refugees, subsequent closure, occupation by Ugandan nationals, and reopening to accommodate refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo created a complex social environment. These historical developments have shaped contemporary relationships, particularly in relation to land, resources, identity, institutional authority, and belonging.

The cultural diversity of Rwamwanja made it an appropriate case for examining whether Ubuntu philosophy provides a shared basis for dialogue and conflict management across different communities. At the same time, this diversity allowed the study to investigate whether differences in cultural background influence how Ubuntu philosophy is understood and practised. The case study design consequently supported an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of the opportunities and limitations associated with applying Ubuntu within a complex refugee setting. As a single case study, the research sought analytical and contextual understanding rather than statistical generalisation to all refugee settlements.

Study population and participant selection

The study population comprised refugees, host-community members, local leaders, government officials, and representatives of humanitarian organisations, Ngo representatives, elders, and RWCs involved in community relations or conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. These categories were included because they occupy different positions within the settlement and may have different experiences and interpretations of conflict, Ubuntu, authority, and reconciliation.

A total of 45 participants took part in the study. Eight participants were engaged through key informant interviews, while the remaining 37 participated in four focus group discussions. Two focus group discussions were conducted with refugees and two with host community members. Separating the refugee and host community discussions enabled members of each group to speak about their experiences in a comparatively familiar setting and reduced the possibility that unequal relationships or fear of disagreement between the groups would inhibit discussion. It also made it possible to identify areas of convergence and divergence between refugee and host community members.

The study used both purposive and convenience sampling. These non-probability sampling techniques were consistent with the qualitative character of the research, which prioritised the relevance and depth of participants' knowledge over statistical representativeness.

Data collection Method

The study used key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Employing several data collection methods enabled me to examine the research problem from different perspectives and to compare individual accounts, group discussions, and observed social practices. This methodological triangulation strengthened the credibility of the study by reducing dependence on a single form or source of evidence.

Key Informant Interviews

Eight key informant interviews were conducted with individuals selected because of their professional responsibilities, leadership positions, or knowledge of conflict-management processes within Rwamwanja. Key informant interviews enabled the researcher to obtain detailed accounts of settlement governance, common sources of conflict, existing dispute resolution mechanisms, institutional relationships, and perceptions concerning the potential application of Ubuntu philosophy.

Focus Group Discussions

Four focus group discussions were conducted, comprising two discussions with refugees and two with host community members. Collectively, the focus groups involved 37 participants. Focus group discussions are useful in qualitative research because interaction among

participants reveal shared experiences, disagreements, community norms, and differences in interpretation that may not emerge through individual interviews (Morgan, 1997).

The discussions enabled participants to describe their experiences of coexistence, common sources of conflict, community responses to disputes, and their understanding of Ubuntu related principles such as dialogue, mutual respect, reconciliation, hospitality, shared responsibility, and collective well-being. Conducting separate discussions with refugees and host community members created space for each group to discuss potentially sensitive experiences without the immediate presence of the other group. The approach also enables to compare the concerns, expectations, and interpretations expressed by the two communities.

Observation

Observation was used to complement information obtained through interviews and focus group discussions. It enabled the researcher to examine aspects of the settlement's social environment, patterns of interaction, community activities, institutional arrangements, and everyday practices relevant to coexistence and conflict management. Observation was important because participants' descriptions of Ubuntu philosophy and conflict management might not always correspond directly with their everyday conduct or the practical conditions within the settlement.

Through observation, I was able to consider how people interacted across social and cultural boundaries and how institutional and community spaces influenced those interactions. Observational evidence therefore assisted in contextualizing participants' accounts and identifying consistencies or differences between what participants reported and what could be observed in practice. Observation was not used to make broad judgements about the communities but to deepen the interpretation of evidence obtained through the other methods.

Therefore, these methodological choices enabled an in-depth examination of how Ubuntu philosophy is understood, experienced, and potentially applied by different stakeholders. They also allowed the study to investigate the social and institutional conditions under which Ubuntu philosophy may support or fail to support conflict management. A detailed discussion of the methodology is presented in chapter 3.

1.10. **Significance of the study**

This study is significant because it fills the knowledge gap regarding the importance of using Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management especially in refugee settlements in Uganda as there was no literature specifically addressing that challenge. Considering the differences and the complexities of understanding refugee conflict management strategies, the findings of this research fill the knowledge gap by critically exploring the Ubuntu philosophy as a conflict management approach through the lived experiences among refugees and host communities. Further insights promote mutual support to minimize conflicts. Furthermore, the study has great importance in its ability to formulate and guide Inclusive-Ubuntu refugee management settlement policies, as it does through the discussion of Ubuntu philosophy. One of the critical issues is the assessment of how policymakers see Ubuntu philosophy because such understanding guide in developing effective policies. Policy-makers responses advocates for policy-reviews and training for inclusive policy implementation.

1.11. **Scope and delimitation of the study**

Geographically, the study was conducted in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Kamwenge District, western Uganda, and in the neighbouring host communities that interact with the settlement. Rwamwanja was selected because its history of closure, reopening, changing land use, population diversity, and interaction between refugees and host communities provides a relevant context for examining conflict and its management. The settlement is treated as a single case because it constitutes a defined social, geographical, and administrative setting governed through interconnected community, humanitarian, local government, and national institutional structures.

The population scope included refugees and members of the neighbouring host communities, as well as actors involved in conflict management and settlement governance. These included community leaders, elders, Refugee Welfare Council representatives, officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, police officers, UNHCR representatives, and personnel from relevant non-governmental organisations. These participant categories were included to capture community-level experiences alongside institutional perspectives on the causes, management, and resolution of conflict within the settlement.

Conceptually, the study focused on Ubuntu philosophy as a possible approach to conflict management. Attention was given to Ubuntu principles such as shared humanity, respect for human dignity, empathy, dialogue, collective responsibility, reconciliation, and the restoration of damaged relationships. The study also examined the formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms operating within Rwamwanja and considered how Ubuntu-related principles interact with, complement, or differ from these mechanisms. Formal mechanisms included the police, courts, Refugee Welfare Councils, the Office of the Prime Minister, local government structures, UNHCR, and humanitarian organizations. Informal mechanisms included family mediation, elders, religious leaders, community leaders, and other community-based processes.

Temporally, the study focused on participants' experiences during the period of fieldwork conducted between March-May 2024 and July-September 2025. Documentary analysis covered relevant policies, reports, laws, and scholarly literature. Where necessary, earlier historical sources were consulted to explain the establishment, closure, reopening, land occupation, population changes, and administrative development of the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

The study was delimited to conflict management within Rwamwanja and its neighboring host communities. It did not attempt to examine all refugee settlements in Uganda or to make statistical generalizations about refugee conflict management nationally. It also did not investigate every dimension of refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, livelihood development, or national refugee policy except where these issues directly influenced conflict and its management. The study did not assume that every community-based practice constituted Ubuntu philosophy or that Ubuntu philosophy was appropriate for every form of conflict. Instead, it examined participants' interpretations and practices while recognizing that serious criminal offences, gender-based violence, child-protection cases, Rape cases and other matters involving significant protection risks may require formal legal and institutional responses.

As a qualitative single-case study, the research prioritized contextual depth over statistical representativeness. Its findings are therefore specific to the historical, cultural, social, and institutional conditions of Rwamwanja. Nevertheless, the detailed analysis may provide theoretically and practically relevant insights into other refugee settlements with comparable

conditions. Any transfer of the findings to other settings should consequently be based on careful consideration of contextual similarities and differences.

1.12. **Definition of key terms and how they are used in the study**

This section explains the operational and technical terms used throughout the study. The terms are defined according to how they are applied within the research context, helping readers understand their specific meanings and ensuring clarity and consistency. Where appropriate, definitions are drawn from relevant literature and adapted to the study.

i) Ubuntu philosophy: Ubuntu is an African relational philosophy based on the understanding that personhood is developed and expressed through relationships with others. It is commonly captured in the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning “a person is a person through other persons”. In this study, Ubuntu refers both to an ethical orientation and to practices through which refugees, host community members, and institutional actors seek to manage conflict and restore social relationships. The study does not assume that participants necessarily use the term “Ubuntu”; it also examines locally expressed practices and values that reflect Ubuntu-related principles.

ii) Conflict: Conflict refers to a situation in which individuals or groups perceive that their interests, needs, values, identities, rights, goals, or access to resources are incompatible. Conflict may be expressed through disagreements, tension, mistrust, avoidance, verbal confrontation, physical violence, or institutional disputes. In this study, conflict includes disputes among refugees, between refugees and host community members, within families, between community groups, and between community members and formal institutions. Conflict is not regarded as inherently negative; its consequences depend on how it is understood, expressed, and managed.

iii) Conflict management: Conflict management refers to the processes used to prevent the escalation of conflict, reduce its harmful consequences, regulate interactions between conflicting parties, and establish conditions under which disagreements can be addressed constructively. Unlike conflict resolution, conflict management does not necessarily seek to eliminate all underlying causes of a conflict. In this study, it includes formal and informal practices such as dialogue, negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, community meetings, administrative intervention, policing, and legal adjudication.

iv) Conflict resolution: Conflict resolution refers to efforts to address and resolve the underlying needs, interests, grievances, or incompatibilities that have produced a conflict. Its objective extends beyond controlling the immediate dispute to reaching an acceptable outcome and, where possible, removing or reducing its principal causes. In this study, conflict resolution includes processes through which conflicting parties reach agreements, repair harm, restore relationships, or settle disputes through community-based, administrative, or legal procedures.

v) Conflict transformation: Conflict transformation refers to a longer-term process of changing the relationships, attitudes, behaviors, institutions, and social conditions that generate or sustain conflict. It treats conflict as a possible opportunity for constructive social change rather than merely a problem to be suppressed or settled. In this study, conflict transformation concerns the extent to which Ubuntu-related and existing conflict-management practices address not only immediate disputes but also mistrust, unequal relationships, institutional weaknesses, exclusion, and structural inequalities within the settlement.

vi) peaceful coexistence: Peaceful coexistence refers to a condition in which refugees, host community members, and other groups live and interact without sustained violence while recognizing one another's dignity, rights, identities, and legitimate interests. It includes tolerance, cooperation, mutual respect, participation, social interaction, and the ability to manage disagreements constructively. Peaceful coexistence does not mean the complete absence of conflict. In this study, it describes the capacity of diverse groups within and around Rwamwanja to maintain workable and respectful relationships despite differences and occasional disputes.

vii) Institutionalization: Institutionalization refers to the process through which ideas, values, norms, or practices become recognized, regularized, and embedded within the rules, procedures, roles, routines, and decision-making structures of an organization or social system. In this study, the institutionalization of Ubuntu means the extent to which Ubuntu-related principles are formally or consistently reflected in conflict-management policies, training, procedures, leadership practices, mediation arrangements, and institutional decisions within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Institutionalization is distinguished from occasional or informal use of Ubuntu-related values by individual actors.

viii) Refugee: A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, conflict, violence, or other circumstances seriously disturbing public order, is outside their country of

nationality or habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return because of the need for protection. This study applies the definition contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and Uganda's Refugees Act of 2006. Operationally, the term refers to persons officially recognized or received as refugees and residing in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement during the period covered by the study.

ix) Host community: A host community refers to the local population living within or around an area in which refugees have been settled and whose social, economic, environmental, and institutional circumstances are affected by refugee settlement and humanitarian activity. In this study, the term principally refers to Ugandan nationals living in communities neighboring Rwamwanja and interacting with refugees through land use, trade, employment, education, healthcare, public services, community activities, and local governance. The term does not imply that the host community is culturally, socially, or economically uniform.

x) Formal conflict-management mechanism: A formal conflict-management mechanism is a legally, administratively, or organizationally recognized process through which conflicts are reported, mediated, investigated, adjudicated, or otherwise managed. Such mechanisms operate through established mandates, procedures, offices, or rules. In this study, formal mechanisms include the police, courts, Office of the Prime Minister, local government structures, Refugee Welfare Councils, UNHCR, and relevant humanitarian organizations. A mechanism's classification as formal depends on its recognized institutional authority rather than on whether its procedures are always written.

xi) Informal conflict-management mechanism: An informal conflict-management mechanism is a community-based or relational process that operates primarily through customary authority, family relationships, religious influence, social norms, or local practices rather than through statutory legal or administrative procedures. In this study, informal mechanisms include mediation by elders, family members, religious leaders, community leaders, neighbors, and other respected community actors. Informal mechanisms may complement formal structures, but they are not treated as appropriate substitutes for formal legal and protection procedures in cases involving serious crime, coercion, gender-based violence, child abuse, or other significant protection risks.

1.13. Conclusion

Chapter One introduces the foundation of the study by introducing the research problem, providing the background to the study, explaining the origin and application of Ubuntu philosophy, presenting the problem statement, outlining the theoretical orientation, introducing the research methodology, and explaining the significance of the study. The chapter has also presented the overall research question and the four specific research questions that guide the study. Some of the issues introduced in this chapter are deliberately developed in greater detail in subsequent chapters rather than repeated for their own sake. The brief theoretical orientation presented in Section 1.5, for example, establishes theoretical lenses adopted by the study, while their assumptions, conceptual foundations, strengths, limitations, and relevance are examined more comprehensively in the theoretical review in Chapter Two. Similarly, the methodological approach introduced in Section 1.6 establishes the overall methodological direction of the study, whereas the research paradigm, research design, study population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations are presented in detail in Chapter Three. The brief discussion of the origin and application of Ubuntu in Section 1.3 establishes the philosophical context of the study, while its conceptual development and applications are examined more extensively in Chapter Two.

1.14. Structure and organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and presents its background, research problems, aim, research questions, research propositions, theoretical overview, significance, scope, and methodological overview. It also situates the study within the context of conflict management and Ubuntu philosophy in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

Chapter Two presents the literature review. It begins with a chapter overview and proceeds through the conceptual review, Ubuntu philosophy, theoretical review, empirical literature, the development of the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model, and the historical context of refugees and conflicts in Uganda. The theories introduced in Chapter One are therefore revisited in Chapter Two for detailed scholarly examination rather than as a repetition of the introductory discussion. The research questions introduced in Chapter One also provide an organizing framework for the empirical literature review.

Chapter Three presents the research design and methodology in detail. It expands the methodological choices introduced in Chapter One by explaining the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, methodological approach, research design, study area and population, sample size, sampling procedures, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations. The chapter also explains the operationalization of the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model.

Chapter Four presents the empirical findings of the study. The findings are organized according to research questions and emerging themes. The chapter therefore returns to the research questions introduced in Chapter One, but its purpose is not to restate them; rather, it uses them as an organizing framework for presenting and synthesizing the evidence generated from the field. The chapter also synthesizes the findings in relation to the emerging Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model.

Chapter Five discusses and interprets the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, the research propositions, and the existing literature. It considers the possibilities and limitations of applying Ubuntu philosophy principles within the settlement's conflict-management arrangements and examines the factors influencing their limited institutionalization.

The conclusions and final remarks of the study, the synthesizes the principal findings, answers the research questions, revisits the research propositions, and explains the study's theoretical, empirical, policy, and practical contributions. The chapter also acknowledges the study's limitations and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

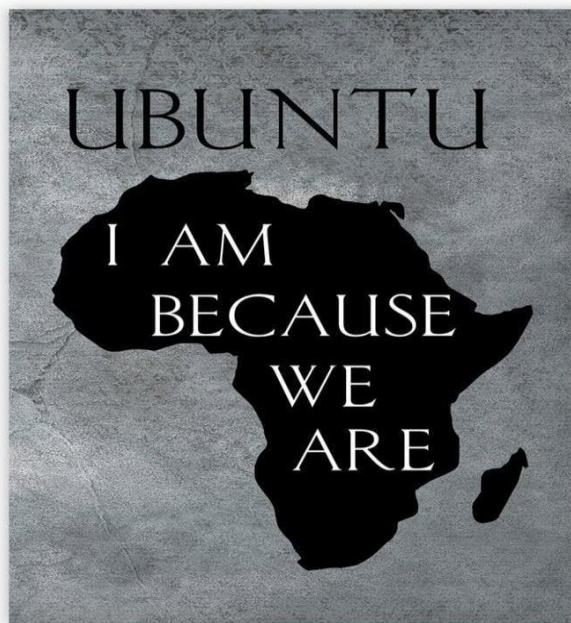
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0. Chapter overview

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study. It examines Ubuntu philosophy, refugee-host community relations, conflict within refugee settlements, formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms, and African indigenous approaches to conflict management. The chapter identifies the knowledge gap addressed by the study and presents the theoretical framework that informs the analysis. The chapter is guided by research questions to address the existing gaps; i) What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja settlement when applying the Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community? ii) How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement? iii) How can the Ubuntu approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement? iv) What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides the Ubuntu-based approaches?

2.1. Ubuntu Philosophy and conflict management

Figure 2 Ubuntu and its indigenous phrase



Source: Map Adapted by the researcher (2026) from *Ubuntu African Art Print*, by Saffa Designs (n.d.). Copyright by Saffa Designs.

Chapter 1 introduced Ubuntu as an African relational philosophy and briefly outlined its relevance to peacebuilding and conflict management. It also presented selected examples to establish the background and context of the study. Building on that introduction, this section provides a more detailed and critical review of the literature concerning the linguistic and cultural foundations of Ubuntu, its development from an oral ethic into written philosophical and political discourse, and its application to conflict management. The section also examines selected African reconciliation mechanisms to distinguish initiatives directly influenced by Ubuntu from those that merely share comparable restorative and communitarian principles. The discussion is important because Ubuntu is sometimes presented as though it were a single and uniformly understood African philosophy. However, the literature demonstrates that Ubuntu has multiple linguistic, historical, philosophical, and political interpretations (Gade, 2011, 2012; Metz, 2007; Ramose, 1999). A critical literature review must therefore acknowledge both its potential contribution to conflict management and the limitations associated with translating culturally specific values into diverse contemporary settings.

On this basis, the section develops analytical dimensions through which the relevance and application of Ubuntu can be investigated in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

2.1.1. Definition of Ubuntu

“A person is a person through another person”, and “I am because we are”; and since we are, therefore I am.” implies that none of us come into the world fully formed, we learn from each other; therefore, “we need other human beings to be human” (Mbiti, 1969; Tutu, 2004).

Ubuntu is generally understood as a relational African philosophy that locates human identity, dignity, and moral responsibility within relationships with other people. The term derives from the Nguni language family and is commonly associated with the expression *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, translated as “a person is a person through other persons” (Metz, 2007; Tutu, 1999). The expression suggests that personhood is not realized entirely through individual existence but is developed through participation in relationships characterized by identification with others, solidarity, compassion, mutual care, and commitment to the well-being of the community.

Ramose (1999) understands Ubuntu as both an African worldview and a philosophy of human existence. From this perspective, human beings exist through interconnected relationships with living persons, past generations, future generations, the community, and the wider natural and spiritual environment. Ubuntu therefore extends beyond being kind or helpful to others. It provides a way of understanding what it means to be human and how people ought to live with one another. Human identity is relational because the individual is formed and sustained through family, community, cultural, and social relationships.

Metz (2007) develops Ubuntu as a moral theory grounded in harmonious relationships. He argues that a morally appropriate action is one that enables people to identify with others and demonstrate solidarity toward them. Identification involves a sense of shared belonging and participation in a common way of life, while solidarity involves acting for the good of others. From this perspective, conduct that promotes cooperation, mutual aid, dignity, and shared well-being expresses Ubuntu, whereas conduct that causes division, humiliation, domination, unnecessary harm undermines it.

Ubuntu should not, however, be interpreted as requiring the complete subordination of the individual to the community. Although some communitarian interpretations give priority to

collective interests, relational accounts recognize that communities are sustained by individuals whose dignity, agency, and well-being must also be respected (Metz, 2007; Molefe, 2019). The individual and the community are therefore interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. This distinction is particularly important in conflict management because the restoration of communal harmony should not be pursued by silencing victims or denying individual rights.

For the purposes of the present study, Ubuntu is understood as a relational and community-oriented philosophy emphasizing human dignity, interconnectedness, mutual respect, dialogue, responsibility, accountability, reconciliation, and the restoration of constructive social relationships. This working definition provides a basis for examining whether these principles are recognized and applied in conflict-management processes within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

2.1.2. linguistic and Cultural Roots of Ubuntu

Although Ubuntu is most closely associated with Nguni-speaking societies in Southern Africa, words constructed from the root *-ntu*, referring broadly to a human being or person, occur in a number of Bantu languages. In isiZulu, the term is commonly expressed as *ubuntu*, while related forms and maxims appear in isiXhosa and other Nguni languages. These linguistic connections reflect a relational conception of humanity in which personhood is understood through social belonging and responsible relationships with others (Gade, 2011; Ramose, 1999).

Related concepts are found outside Nguni-speaking communities. Among Sotho-Tswana-speaking societies, *botho* expresses ideas of humanness, good character, respect, and socially responsible conduct. Among Shona-speaking communities, *hunhu* or *unhu* refers to morally appropriate personhood and responsible participation in family and community life. Samkange and Samkange (1980) used the term *hunhuism* or *Ubuntuism* to articulate a Zimbabwean indigenous political philosophy based on respect for human life, recognition of the humanity of others, and the responsibility of leaders to the people.

In Uganda, *Obuntu-bulamu* represents a related understanding of humanity, belonging, unity, and socially responsible conduct. Bannink-Mbazzi et al. (2020) describe *Obuntu-bulamu* as an indigenous Ugandan concept concerned with shared values that promote well-being, togetherness, belonging, and unity. Their research used the concept to develop a community-

based model for disability inclusion. Although disability inclusion differs from conflict management, the study demonstrates that relational African values can be operationalized through peer support, community participation, mutual recognition, and the inclusion of marginalized people.

The existence of *botho*, *hunhu*, *unhu*, and *Obuntu-bulamu* demonstrates that relational ideas comparable to Ubuntu are present in different African cultural settings. Nevertheless, these concepts should not be treated as interchangeable. Each is embedded within a particular language, historical experience, social organization, and moral tradition. Similarly, institutions such as Mato Oput, gacaca, Kgotla, and Fambul Tok should not automatically be renamed “Ubuntu mechanisms.” Their relationship to Ubuntu is conceptual because they may express comparable principles of relational responsibility, communal participation, acknowledgment, restoration, and reintegration.

This distinction prevents the literature review from presenting African societies as culturally uniform. It also avoids using Ubuntu as a broad label for every African practice involving community participation. In this study, Ubuntu functions as an analytical lens through which comparable relational values may be examined, rather than as evidence that all the selected practices originated from the Nguni philosophical tradition.

2.1.3. The Move from Ethics to Written Philosophy and Political Discourse

Ubuntu developed through oral traditions, customary practices, proverbs, narratives, social expectations, and everyday relationships long before it became a formally written academic philosophy. Its earlier existence was therefore expressed less through philosophical texts than through social practices concerning family obligations, hospitality, leadership, mutual assistance, care for vulnerable members, dispute settlement, and communal responsibility.

Gade’s (2011) historical analysis demonstrates that the word Ubuntu appeared in written sources from at least the nineteenth century. Before the mid-twentieth century, it was frequently defined as a human quality, moral character, or form of humanness. Interpretations of Ubuntu as African humanism, a worldview, an ethic, or a formal philosophy became especially prominent during the second half of the twentieth century (Gade, 2011). This historical evidence is important because it shows that contemporary academic definitions are partly

products of intellectual and political development rather than unchanged descriptions inherited from the distant past.

Samkange and Samkange's (1980) formulation of *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism* represented an important effort to articulate indigenous relational values as a written political philosophy. Their work connected Ubuntu to human dignity, the preservation of life, respectful human relationships, and the accountability of political leadership. Ramose (1999) subsequently developed Ubuntu as a philosophical account of African being, knowledge, and ethics. Metz (2007) further systematized aspects of Ubuntu into a moral theory based on identity and solidarity.

Ubuntu also entered political and legal discourse during democratic transitions in Southern Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa, Ubuntu was invoked in public discourse concerning nation-building, human dignity, reconciliation, constitutionalism, and restorative justice. Tutu (1999) associated Ubuntu with the recognition that human beings belong within a network of relationships and that the degradation of one person diminishes the humanity of others. Ubuntu consequently became influential in the moral language surrounding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The movement from oral ethics to academic and political discourse expanded Ubuntu's influence but also created interpretive difficulties. Political leaders, religious actors, courts, academics, and development practitioners have not always used the term in the same way. In some contexts, it describes a moral quality; in others, it functions as a philosophy, political ideal, management principle, legal value, or peacebuilding framework (Gade, 2011, 2012). The literature, therefore, distinguishes Ubuntu as a lived cultural ethic from its later institutional and political uses.

2.1.4. Ubuntu Principles Relevant to Conflict Management

As discussed in Chapter One, we note that conflict is not only a disagreement over interests or scarce resources; it also damages relationships, dignity, trust, and the sense of belonging that enables people to live together. Discussing the principles of Ubuntu in relation to conflict management provides an African relational framework for understanding how conflict may be prevented, managed, and transformed through recognition, dialogue, participation, restorative justice, and the rebuilding of social relationships (Murithi, 2006; Metz, 2007; Omodan, 2022).

The principles are particularly relevant to relations between refugees and host communities, where competition over land, employment, water, education, health services, and other limited resources may create tension. Ubuntu does not remove these structural causes of conflict. It, however, offers a basis for ensuring that different groups of people recognize their shared humanity and participate in solutions that protect dignity and promote peaceful coexistence. Ubuntu have got many principles, for this reason, the selected Ubuntu principles in this study are treated as a complementary approach to formal law, public policy, equitable resource distribution, and accountable institutions, rather than as a replacement for them.

Caring and compassion

As noted in previous chapter one, Ubuntu philosophy expresses the idea that people are intertwined. Desmond Tutu (1999) explains this as “one is a person only because of other people”; this, therefore, points out to caring and compassion. Care and compassion of course are assumptions in the Ubuntu worldview that may help transform our common politics for the better. It is possible that if more leaders used this idea of interconnectedness, then they could work towards creating societies that are fairer. The idea of Ubuntu also requires that common people nurture communities and be concerned with their ways of life. Mokhutso (2022) opines, that, Ubuntu serves as an ethical foundation for addressing social issues promoting dignity and respect among community members, which makes it vital for harmonious and sustainable living. It is, therefore, important that we all take our responsibility of being citizens of our respective countries seriously. As Tutu summarizes: “A person with Ubuntu is welcoming and hospitable. I am because you are” (Tutu, 1999). Speaking of the caring communities and good societies, the philosophy of Ubuntu appeals to the essence of human being employing the South African perspective as an example. During President Mandela’s era, Ubuntu played an important role in the political alteration of South Africa. It is imperative to note that when Mandela was released from prison after 27 years, many people thought he would be revengeful on those who had mistreated him. However, he chose the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. And in his statement “if you desire to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy” (Mandela, 1994). This statement showed compassionate leadership that enabled the peaceful transformation of South Africa into a democratic country. Arguments for empathy and compassion for others are commonly made using the Ubuntu idea (Mandela, 1994). The underlying belief is that all individuals are interconnected and that taking care of others is essential to our wellbeing. One way of building a more compassionate society where

everyone is valued and cared for is through this political process. It encourages the most vulnerable members of society to be cared for, which ubuntu philosophy views as a political concept (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). As part of this care, every individual has equal opportunity to access necessities, including food, shelter, and assistance for those in need. Considering this, Ubuntu aims to establish a society in which all people collaborate to guarantee that everyone can prosper in an environment free from conflict. This concept can be used to improve workplaces in the corporate and social spheres, foster closer bonds with individuals in our daily lives, and address a wide range of issues. Additionally, Ubuntu can contribute to the political sphere by fostering a society that is more just and equitable, which will lessen the need for conflictual behaviors.

Even though care and compassion mean to support independency and relational responsibility rather than competition and individual rights, it limits institutional frameworks and ignores political structures. Care and compassion emphasis is on interpersonal relationships which contradict governance in politics. Care and compassion encourage dependence rather than empowerment because of the hierarchy re-enforcement between the caregivers and the recipients which has an impact on the people's wellbeing especially the vulnerable groups where choices of inequalities do appear (Sefotho & Letseka, 2024).

While Ubuntu emphasis is on communal identity, social harmony and collective decision-making in ways that show care and compassion in relation to politics, at times the Ubuntu approach underestimate conflicts and disagreements and yet they conform with political goals (Sefotho & Letseka, 2024). Therefore, there should be another way in which Ubuntu philosophy should be incorporated in politics.

In conflict management, Caring and compassion are important because they encourage conflicting parties to see one another as persons whose dignity and suffering matter. This recognition can reduce dehumanization, hostile labelling, revenge, and the rigid division between "us" and "them." In mediation, compassion supports attentive listening and acknowledgement of harm, while care directs the process towards repairing relationships and responding to the needs of vulnerable parties. In relation to refugees, host community conflicts for example, these principles may help both groups understand the insecurity, loss, and pressure experienced by the other, thereby creating conditions for dialogue and negotiated solutions rather than violence.

However, Care and Compassion should not be treated as a substitute for justice. An exclusive emphasis may individualize conflicts that are produced by unequals such as access to land, services, political representation, or decision-making. It may also place unequal caregiving expectations on women or pressure injured parties to forgive before responsibility and reparation have been addressed (Keevy, 2009). Ubuntu-based compassion is therefore most effective when accompanied by accountability, equal participation, and institutional measures that address the material causes of conflict.

Solidarity and sharing principle.

Solidarity and sharing in the political process in Africa mean supporting and promoting togetherness among people and other groups within society regarding the political system. This comprises issues of fairness in the allocation of resources, representation in governance, and the involvement of civil society. While stable political power-sharing arrangements are often considered important instruments for peace and inclusive governance, their use may lead to difficulties such as corruption and inefficiency if handled inadequately (Haass & Ottmann, 2017; LeVan, 2011). Appreciation of such dynamics entails consideration of both national and local levels because regional and local politics can play substantial roles in determining community involvement and political activity (Isaksson, 2014; Simons et al., 2013).

Political participation also depends on whether citizens possess the resources, opportunities, and institutional channels necessary to engage in political processes. Evidence from emerging African democracies indicates that individual socioeconomic resources influence different forms of political participation, although their effects vary according to the type of participation involved (Isaksson, 2014). Consequently, solidarity cannot be reduced to the formal inclusion of political elites in power-sharing arrangements. It should also involve meaningful opportunities for citizens and local communities to participate in decisions that affect their welfare, representation, and access to public resources.

Consequently, political power-sharing does not automatically produce accountable or inclusive governance. Although it can reduce conflict by including competing groups in political institutions, it may also create opportunities for patronage and corruption when public authority and resources are distributed primarily among political elites (Haass & Ottmann, 2017; LeVan, 2011). The effectiveness of power-sharing therefore depends on transparency, institutional accountability, public participation, and the extent to which arrangements made at the national

level respond to local political realities. Research on post-conflict African countries demonstrates that national agreements may have limited pacifying effects when local conflicts and patterns of exclusion remain unaddressed (Simons et al., 2013).

In Ubuntu, solidarity and sharing focus on the understanding that the well-being of the community is important. Ubuntu stresses the connection between one's identity and that of others, expressed in the idea that "I am because we are." In the political process, therefore, an approach based on solidarity and sharing is important for collaborative governance. This is where leaders put the interests of the people first and public institutions serve the common good. Ubuntu promotes compassionate justice, reconstruction, participatory rights, and fairness for citizens. This brings into play a feeling of responsibility not only to individuals but also to society in shaping policies. Ubuntu philosophy may consequently provide a normative foundation for fairer resource distribution and participation in government activities, although the practical achievement of these objectives depends on appropriate institutional safeguards (Metz, 2011; Nzimakwe, 2014).

Ubuntu's political relevance is grounded in its understanding of human beings as relational and interdependent. Metz (2011) explains this relational morality in terms of identifying with others and acting in solidarity with them, while Nzimakwe (2014) connects Ubuntu values with responsible leadership, service delivery, and good governance. From this perspective, political leadership should be assessed not only by the exercise of legal authority but also by its contribution to human dignity, communal welfare, participation, and mutually supportive relationships. Ubuntu can therefore provide an ethical orientation for governance, but it should not be assumed that invoking Ubuntu will automatically eliminate inequality, exclusion, or misuse of public resources.

Stuit (2016), for instance, demonstrates that Ubuntu can function as a discourse through which belonging and community are constructed. However, Ubuntu may be interpreted and used differently within particular political and institutional contexts. Its emphasis on communal harmony must therefore be balanced with the protection of individual rights, political difference, and accountability. An Ubuntu-informed political process should not silence criticism in the name of unity; instead, it should create space for dialogue, recognition, participation, and collective responsibility. In this sense, Ubuntu complements rather than

Based on the interpretation of Ubuntu, one may contend that considering Ubuntu from the perspective of how individuals are compelled to act in unity, practice love, and share among themselves is one way that Ubuntu can be spread. Ubuntu, a philosophy that values unity, communality, and love for one another over sharing, has been seen by many African scholars as an African way of life. This viewpoint is frequently understood as humanity's concern for others, but it may also be understood as the conviction that all people are connected by a common bond of sharing. The aforementioned assumption highlights the interdependence of all individuals, fosters collaboration and selflessness, and advances the notion that "we are all responsible for each other". It also suggests that members of the same community and organizations have a duty to assist those who are less fortunate among themselves. One of Ubuntu's greatest features is that it may be seen as a political statement supporting moral organizational procedures that foster interpersonal sharing and unity

Solidarity and sharing are important because conflict often grows where groups perceive public resources, opportunities, burdens, and political voice to be distributed unfairly. Solidarity creates a basis for joint problem-solving, while sharing translates the recognition of interdependence into practical arrangements concerning resources and responsibilities. In conflict management, these principles may support inclusive dialogue, joint refugee-host committees, community participation, and transparent decisions about scarce services. They can consequently move the parties away from zero-sum thinking, in which one community's gain is understood as another community's loss, towards solutions based on mutual benefit and collective security (Omodan, 2022).

Critically, solidarity should not be confused with compulsory consensus. Appeals to unity may conceal unequal power, corruption, elite capture, or exclusion from decision-making. Sharing that is based only on goodwill may also be inadequate where resources are severely limited. The principle must therefore be supported by transparent allocation criteria, meaningful representation of refugees and host communities, and mechanisms through which marginalized members can disagree without being labelled disloyal to the community.

The inner goodness principle

It is clear from the understanding of Ubuntu that the Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes the human capacity for goodness. Human existence is characterized by both morally constructive and destructive tendencies; however, Ubuntu encourages the cultivation and expression of qualities

such as compassion, solidarity, generosity, respect and concern for others (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Ramose, 1999). Rather than claiming that all people are inherently and consistently good, Ubuntu may be understood as a normative ethical framework that calls upon individuals to develop their humanity through morally appropriate relationships with others. Metz (2011) explains that human beings possess dignity partly because of their capacity to identify with others and act in solidarity with them.

The idea that “others make us who we are” and that “I am what I am because of others” comes to mind when one conceives of Ubuntu. This understanding reflects the widely recognized Ubuntu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, commonly interpreted as “a person is a person through other persons” (Menkiti, 1984; Ramose, 1999). The maxim expresses a relational understanding of personhood in which individual identity and moral development occur through participation in family and community relationships. In this perspective, personhood is not merely a biological condition but is also developed through conduct that demonstrates concern, respect and responsibility towards others (Menkiti, 1984; Metz, 2011).

Ubuntu therefore emphasizes fostering community and connections. It is based on the understanding that human beings are interconnected and that individual actions can affect the well-being of others and the wider community. Metz and Gaie (2010) describe Ubuntu morality as valuing communal relationships involving both shared identity and solidarity. Identity involves recognizing oneself as connected to others, while solidarity entails acting for their good. Ubuntu consequently discourages conduct based exclusively on individual self-interest and encourages cooperation, mutual assistance and sensitivity to other people’s needs.

Ubuntu does not compromise on the moral importance of doing good because it presents humane relationships as central to becoming a morally commendable person. It serves as a reminder to treat others with dignity, respect, compassion and kindness. By acting in this manner, individuals may contribute to a more supportive and caring social environment. Nevertheless, Ubuntu should not be interpreted as guaranteeing harmonious outcomes. Its values must be translated into practice and supported by fair social and institutional arrangements, particularly where relationships are affected by inequality, exclusion or competing interests (Metz, 2011).

Thus, Ubuntu has the potential to strengthen the human capacity for goodness by encouraging moral development through relationships with others. Kindness, solidarity and meaningful

interpersonal connections may support both individual and communal flourishing by promoting belonging, cooperation, reconciliation and social harmony. Ubuntu therefore provides a valuable ethical framework for cultivating compassionate and peaceful communities. However, its positive effects depend on how its principles are understood, interpreted and practiced within particular social and institutional contexts (Metz & Gaie, 2010; Ramose, 1999).

Within conflict management, the principle of inner goodness challenges the assumption that parties are permanently defined by their harmful conduct, past wrongdoing or group identities. Instead, it recognizes the possibility that individuals can acknowledge wrongdoing, accept responsibility, change their behavior and return to constructive relationships. This understanding is compatible with Ubuntu's emphasis on developing personhood through communal relationships and conduct that promotes shared identity, solidarity and social harmony (Metz, 2007; Gade, 2012). It is also consistent with restorative conflict management, which seeks not only to establish blame but also to recognize harm, address the needs and obligations arising from wrongdoing, rebuild trust and, where appropriate, reintegrate the parties into their communities (Zehr, 2002). This orientation is particularly relevant to protracted community conflicts in which refugees and members of host communities must continue sharing social spaces and resources after a particular dispute has been addressed.

On the other hand, the principle of inner goodness should not result in the underestimation of deliberate violence, repeated abuse, unequal power relations or serious violations of rights. Trust cannot simply be presumed, and forgiveness or reconciliation should not be imposed on victims. An Ubuntu-informed approach must therefore leave room for protection, legal accountability, acknowledgement of harm, reparation and the right of victims to refuse reconciliation where their safety, dignity and access to justice have not been secured. Inner goodness is consequently best understood not as an assumption that every person will act benevolently, but as a moral capacity for accountable transformation. Its relevance to conflict management lies in keeping open the possibility of behavioral change and restored relationships while requiring evidence of responsibility, protection from further harm and respect for justice. Properly applied, inner goodness provides a basis for hope without diminishing accountability, and for reconciliation without sacrificing the rights and safety of those who have experienced harm.

Lastly, **communal responsibility** is another foundational principle of Ubuntu. It assumes that community members share responsibility for one another's well-being and that social problems should be addressed collectively rather than individually (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020).

This principle promotes cooperation, mutual support, and collective action. In conflict management contexts, communal responsibility encourages community members to participate actively in mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding processes. Rather than leaving conflict management solely to formal institutions, Ubuntu recognizes the role of families, elders, religious leaders, and community members in maintaining social harmony. Recent studies suggest that communal responsibility can strengthen social cohesion and resilience in communities experiencing displacement, poverty, or social fragmentation (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018). However, critics caution that strong communal obligations may sometimes generate pressure for conformity and discourage criticism of existing power structures (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018).

Communal responsibility broadens responsibility for peace beyond the immediate disputants and formal state institutions. Families, elders, religious leaders, local councils, refugee representatives, women, youth, and civil-society organizations may all contribute to early warning, mediation, reconciliation, and the monitoring of agreements. This wider participation can strengthen local ownership and make conflict-management outcomes more legitimate and sustainable (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Murithi, 2006). In refugee-host settings for instance, communal responsibility recognizes that peaceful coexistence depends on continuing cooperation among communities and institutions, rather than on a single mediation event.

At the same time, the category of “community” should not be treated as if it speaks with one voice. Elders and other customary authorities may reproduce age, gender, ethnic, or status hierarchies, while refugees and other marginalized persons may have limited influence over communal decisions. Communal responsibility must therefore be inclusive, voluntary, and consistent with human rights. It should distribute responsibility without allowing the state to withdraw from its legal obligations or transfer the burden of resolving structural problems to already vulnerable communities.

All in all, the Ubuntu core principles used in this study, caring and compassion, solidarity and sharing, inner goodness, and communal responsibility explain why Ubuntu is relevant as an approach to conflict management. The principles rehumanize the parties, encourage mutual

support, preserve the possibility of moral change, and locate responsibility for peace within the wider community. They also direct attention beyond the settlement of an immediate dispute towards reconciliation, restored relationships, and sustainable coexistence. However, the study does not assume that Ubuntu is automatically peaceful or inclusive. Its usefulness depends on whether it is applied critically, protects individual rights, includes marginalized voices, addresses power and material inequality, and operates alongside accountable legal and public institutions.

2.1.5. Ubuntu and Conflict Management in Africa

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human relationships and may have both constructive and destructive consequences (Miall, 2007). Its management therefore requires recognition that disputes arise within social relationships and cannot always be resolved through formal legal or administrative mechanisms alone. Within African societies as discussed in the previous chapter¹, Ubuntu has been widely discussed as a moral philosophy that emphasizes shared humanity, social solidarity, reciprocity, and the relational character of personhood. It is commonly expressed through the maxim “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”: “a person becomes a person through other persons” (Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2007). In conflict management, Ubuntu encourages dialogue, acknowledgement of wrongdoing, empathy, forgiveness, reparation, and the restoration of relationships (Murithi, 2006). Its primary concern is therefore not simply the termination of a dispute but the rebuilding of a social environment in which former opponents can continue to live together.

Ubuntu should not, however, be treated as a single and uniform tradition practiced identically throughout Africa. Although relational and communitarian values appear in many African societies, their expressions differ according to language, history, authority structures, and local customs (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2007). The concept is most closely associated with Southern African intellectual traditions, while comparable principles may be expressed through different institutions and terminologies elsewhere on the continent. Consequently, practices such as *mato oput* in northern Uganda, *gacaca* in Rwanda, the *kgotla* in Botswana, and community reconciliation programs in Sierra Leone should not automatically be described as Ubuntu practices. They are more accurately understood as context specific institutions that may share Ubuntu related values such as participation, accountability, relational restoration, and communal responsibility.

The relevance of Ubuntu to conflict management is particularly evident in its contrast with approaches that treat conflict exclusively as an offence against the state. Formal justice systems generally determine legal responsibility and impose authorized sanctions. Ubuntu-oriented conflict management places additional emphasis on the effects of wrongdoing on victims, families, and the wider community. Murithi (2006) identifies acknowledgement, remorse, apology, forgiveness, compensation, and reconciliation as interconnected elements of Ubuntu-informed peacemaking. These elements resemble restorative justice, which seeks to involve those affected by wrongdoing in identifying the harm caused, the responsibilities arising from it, and the measures required to repair relationships (Zehr, 2015). Ubuntu and restorative justice are not identical, but both challenge the assumption that punishment alone is sufficient to rebuild communities fractured by violence.

2.1.5.1. Elders and community-based conflict management

Community elders have historically played important political, moral, and spiritual roles in conflict management in several African societies. Their authority commonly derives from age, knowledge of customary norms, social standing, and familiarity with a community's history. In pastoral communities, including the Turkana and related communities in East Africa, elders have participated in dispute settlement, the management of communal resources, and peace negotiations (Osamba, 2001). Their role is not limited to deciding who is at fault. Elders may convene the parties, hear competing narratives, clarify responsibilities, determine compensation, supervise ritual processes, and facilitate reintegration into the community.

These processes reflect an understanding that conflict affects a network of relationships rather than only the immediate disputants. Dialogue and storytelling allow the parties and community members to explain the historical and social circumstances of a dispute. Compensation may then serve a restorative purpose by acknowledging injury and rebuilding damaged relations. Nevertheless, traditional authority should not be idealized. The legitimacy and inclusiveness of elder-led processes may be affected by gender, age, social status, ethnicity, disability, and unequal power relations. Some customary remedies may also conflict with constitutional rights and contemporary human-rights standards. The value of community-based mechanisms therefore depends on their capacity to combine cultural legitimacy with voluntariness, procedural fairness, equality, and protection of vulnerable participants (Huyse, L., & Salter, M. (Eds.) 2008)

The role of elders remains relevant in displacement settings, although refugee movements may weaken or transform traditional authority structures. Displaced populations may contain multiple ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups whose members do not recognize the same leaders or customary rules. At the same time, refugees may rely on elders and community representatives because formal institutions are distant, unfamiliar, expensive, or insufficiently responsive to everyday disputes. This produces an important analytical question: whether community-based authority can support reconciliation across diverse refugees and host communities without reproducing exclusion or subordinating individual rights to communal harmony.

2.1.5.2. Ubuntu, transitional justice, and African experience

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is frequently discussed as a prominent institutional expression of Ubuntu related values. The Commission was established under the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995*, which provided for investigation of gross human rights violations, restoration of victims' dignity, amnesty under specified conditions, and recommendations concerning reparation and rehabilitation. (Republic of South Africa, 1995, ss 3-4, 20 and 23-27) Public testimony created opportunities for victims to narrate their experiences and for perpetrators seeking amnesty to disclose politically motivated violations. Tutu (1999) associated this process with Ubuntu's emphasis on shared humanity and the restoration of relationships. The Commission nevertheless illustrates an important limitation: reconciliation language cannot substitute for adequate reparation, accountability, or structural transformation. Ubuntu based initiatives must therefore be evaluated not only by their symbolic appeal but also by their material consequences for victims and marginalized communities.

Rwanda's post genocide response combined international criminal prosecution, domestic courts, gacaca jurisdictions, and memorialization (Viebach, 2020). The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was created by United Nations Security Council Resolution 955 of 8 November 1994 (United Nations Security Council, 1994). At the national level, Organic Law No. 40/2000 of 26 January 2001 established gacaca jurisdictions and organized prosecutions for genocide and crimes against humanity committed between 1 October 1990 and 31 December 1994. (Organic Law No. 40/2000, 2001, arts. 1-3). This legislation was subsequently replaced by Organic Law No. 16/2004 of 19 June 2004, which regulated the

organization, competence, and functioning of gacaca courts (Organic Law No. 16/2004, 2004, arts. 1, 3, 105).

Gacaca adapted a community-based institution to address an extraordinary volume of genocide cases. Community participation, testimony, confession, and locally elected lay judges distinguished it from conventional criminal trials. Article 54 of Organic Law No. 16/2004 expressly provided access to a procedure involving confession, a guilty plea, repentance, and apology, while the succeeding provisions regulated the content and acceptance of such declarations. These features created possibilities for truth recovery, reduced sentences, community participation, and reintegration. However, gacaca combined restorative and retributive elements and should not be characterized as a purely Ubuntu-based process. Research documents achievements alongside concerns about due process, intimidation, uneven participation, political control, and the quality of reconciliation produced (Clark, 2010; Penal Reform International, 2009). Its significance lies in demonstrating both the possibilities and the risks involved when community practices are transformed into state institutions.

Northern Uganda provides another important example through the Acholi practice of *mato oput*. This reconciliation process is associated particularly with cases of killing and traditionally includes investigation, acknowledgement of responsibility, compensation, ritual acts, and the restoration of relations between clans (Wasonga, 2009). During debates about accountability for violence committed in the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda, cultural and religious leaders proposed adapting local justice practices to facilitate accountability and reintegration. These proposals became particularly significant after the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and other senior LRA commanders in 2005.

The debate was sometimes presented as a choice between international prosecution and local reconciliation. Such a binary is misleading. Local practices contribute to social reconstruction, but their application to mass atrocities raises questions about consent, representation, gender, trauma, and the ability of ritual settlement to address crimes extending beyond relationships between individual clans (Baines, 2007). *Mato oput* is therefore relevant not because it offers a simple replacement for formal justice, but because it illustrates how accountability, compensation, spiritual meaning, and relational repair can be combined. Its application must remain sensitive to changes in the scale and nature of violence and to the preferences and rights of victims.

The Ugandan constitutional framework provides limited but important support for restorative principles. Article 126(2)(c) of the *Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995* requires adequate compensation for victims of wrongs, while Article 126(2)(d) provides that reconciliation between parties shall be promoted (*Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995*, art. 126(2)). Article 126(2)(c). These provisions form part of Chapter Eight, concerning the judiciary and the exercise of judicial power. (*Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995*, ch. 8). They do not establish Ubuntu as a constitutional doctrine or create a complete restorative-justice system. They nevertheless demonstrate that compensation and reconciliation are recognized principles in the administration of justice. (*Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995*, art. 126(2)(c)-(d)). Objective XXIV(a) of the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy further provides that cultural and customary values consistent with fundamental rights, human dignity, democracy, and the Constitution may be developed and incorporated into Ugandan life. (*Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995*, National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, Objective XXIV). Accordingly, the constitutional recognition of culture is conditional: a customary process cannot be justified merely by describing it as traditional or communitarian.

Other African community reconciliation initiatives further demonstrate the importance of context. In Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok developed community-level truth-telling and reconciliation activities following the civil war, including dialogue organized around local ceremonies (Hoffman, 2008 ;Huyse ,L., & Salter, M. (Eds.) 2008)

2008). Such programs may create spaces in which victims and perpetrators acknowledge experiences that formal institutions cannot fully address. Their effectiveness, however, cannot be inferred from individual accounts of forgiveness. Immediate forgiveness may coexist with continuing fear, inequality, trauma, or material deprivation. Evaluation must therefore consider whether participation was voluntary, whether victims received meaningful support, and whether reconciliation endured beyond the public ceremony.

These examples also demonstrate that Ubuntu cannot be separated from law, governance, and institutional power. Its values may inform informal mediation, local rituals, truth commissions, and restorative programs, but institutionalization changes how those values operate. State recognition may provide resources, authority, and enforceability, while also introducing bureaucracy, political control, and rigid procedures. Equally, leaving Ubuntu entirely within

informal community structures may preserve flexibility but expose participants to unequal authority and weak safeguards. A hybrid approach should consequently define how community processes relate to formal law, when cases must be referred to state institutions, how consent is secured, and how the rights of women, children, minorities, and other vulnerable groups are protected.

2.1.6. Ubuntu and the Restorative Model of Conflict Management.

The restorative model understands wrongdoing primarily in terms of harm caused to people, relationships, and communities. This differs from a strictly retributive model, which concentrates on identifying the rule violated, determining individual guilt, and imposing a proportionate penalty. Restorative approaches ask who has been harmed, what their needs are, who is responsible for meeting those needs, and how damaged relationships can be repaired. (Menkel-Meadow, 2007).

Ubuntu supports restorative conflict management because it treats harmonious relationships and shared well-being as moral goods (Murithi, 2006; Metz, 2007). A conflict-management process informed by Ubuntu may therefore involve facilitated dialogue, acknowledgment of harm, apology, compensation, forgiveness, community witnessing, negotiated agreements, and the reintegration of responsible parties. Its objective is not simply to end an immediate disagreement but to address the relational conditions that might reproduce it.

Restoration and punishment should not be treated as completely incompatible. Some community-based mechanisms combine confession, compensation, public accountability, social disapproval, ritual obligations, and formal sanctions. Gacaca, for example, contained both restorative and retributive elements because it encouraged testimony and confession while also determining guilt and imposing sentences (Clark, 2010). Ubuntu-based conflict management is consequently better understood as prioritizing relational repair without necessarily excluding sanctions.

The restorative model is particularly applicable to recurring or community-level conflicts in which parties must continue living together. In such settings, a decision that declares a winner and a loser may resolve a legal question without addressing distrust, fear, hostility, or the practical need for future cooperation (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). By involving affected parties

in the resolution process, restorative approaches may strengthen legitimacy, ownership, and compliance with agreements (Tyler, 2006).

2.1.7. Limitations and Critiques of Ubuntu based Conflict Management

Despite its potential, Ubuntu should not be romanticized. Mboti (2015) argues that Ubuntu is often defined in ways that are conceptually vague and overly harmonious. The expression “a person is a person through other persons” does not automatically explain which relationships are morally desirable or how conflicts between communal expectations and individual rights should be resolved. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) similarly question whether idealized accounts of Ubuntu adequately address the realities of contemporary African political and social life.

A major concern is that the pursuit of social harmony may pressure victims to forgive or reconcile before they are ready. When reconciliation becomes a community obligation, victims may be treated as obstacles to peace if they demand punishment, compensation, or continued separation from those who harmed them. Genuine reconciliation therefore requires voluntary participation, adequate acknowledgment of harm, and respect for the victim’s dignity and agency (Shapland, 2016; Stubbs, 2007).

Community participation may also reproduce existing power inequalities. Elders, political leaders, men, dominant ethnic groups, or economically powerful actors may exercise greater influence over communal processes than women, young people, persons with disabilities, minority groups, or displaced persons. A mechanism can be culturally legitimate while still being unequal or exclusionary. Ubuntu-based processes must consequently be evaluated by examining who participates, who speaks, whose evidence is believed, and who determines the outcome. (Daly & Stubbs, 2006).

Another limitation concerns serious human-rights violations and criminal offences. Community reconciliation may contribute to healing and reintegration, but it may be insufficient where protection, formal investigation, enforceable sanctions, or specialized support are required. Ubuntu should therefore complement rather than automatically replace formal justice, humanitarian protection, and human-rights standards.

Finally, the institutional use of Ubuntu may differ from its ethical ideal. Governments and organizations can use the language of reconciliation to promote political legitimacy while avoiding structural injustices such as poverty, discrimination, unequal land access, or exclusion from decision-making. A critical analysis must therefore examine both interpersonal restoration and the material or institutional causes of conflict (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018).

2.1.8. Selected Application and Comparable African Mechanisms

i) South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission represents the clearest case among the selected examples in which Ubuntu directly influenced public reconciliation discourse (Gade, 2013; Tutu, 1999). The Commission was established to address gross human-rights violations committed during apartheid and to support the country's transition to democratic rule (*Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995*, 1995, sec 2-4). Its public hearings created opportunities for victims to narrate their experiences, while perpetrators who made full disclosures concerning politically motivated offences could apply for amnesty.

Tutu (1999) explicitly connected the Commission's work to Ubuntu, shared humanity, forgiveness, and the restoration of relationships. The process therefore demonstrated a direct philosophical influence rather than a resemblance constructed only by later scholars. Nevertheless, the TRC also revealed the limits of reconciliation. Truth-telling did not automatically produce material reparation, economic justice, or equal social relationships. Its contribution was strongest in public acknowledgment and the creation of a national moral narrative, but weaker in addressing the structural inequalities inherited from apartheid (Stanley, 2001; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 1998).

ii) Rwanda's Gacaca Courts

Rwanda's gacaca courts were established to process the large number of genocide-related cases that could not be handled through ordinary courts alone. They involved public testimony, community participation, confession, judgment, sentencing, and, in some cases, reintegration. Their community orientation and concern with truth, accountability, and social reconstruction resemble principles associated with Ubuntu (Clark, 2010).

However, gacaca was rooted in Rwandan political and cultural history and was not a direct application of the Nguni concept of Ubuntu. Its inclusion in Ubuntu literature should therefore be based on conceptual similarity. Furthermore, gacaca was not entirely restorative because it exercised state authority, determined criminal responsibility, and imposed punishment. Thomson (2011) shows that gacaca could reproduce local power inequalities and political pressures. Its experience demonstrates that community participation does not by itself guarantee voluntariness, fairness, reconciliation, or equal protection.

iii) Mato Oput in Northern Uganda

Mato Oput is an Acholi reconciliation process traditionally associated with serious harm, particularly killing between clans. The wider process may include investigation, acknowledgment of responsibility, negotiation, compensation, ritual performance, and the restoration of relations between affected clans. Mwaka et al. (2023) explain that Mato Oput is one stage within a wider process of reconciliation and the restoration of peaceful coexistence.

Mato Oput is not linguistically or historically derived from Nguni Ubuntu. Its relevance lies in the comparable understanding that serious wrongdoing damages relationships extending beyond the immediate offender and victim. Responsibility and restoration therefore involve families or clans, not only individuals. Unlike reconciliation models that rely principally on verbal apology, Mato Oput emphasizes negotiated obligations and compensation. Its limitations include questions about its adaptation to mass violence, changes in clan authority, gendered participation, victim consent, and its relationship with formal justice.

iv) Botswana's Kgotla System

The Kgotla is a Setswana institution of public consultation, community deliberation, governance, and dispute settlement (Government of Botswana, n.d.; Lekorwe, 2011). It is associated more directly with *botho* than with Nguni Ubuntu (Tlou, 2021). Its contribution to conflict management lies in the opportunity it provides for community members to present views, deliberate publicly, and seek an accepted decision under the guidance of traditional leadership (Ngwenya & Kgathi, 2011). However, the term *Kgotla* may refer to a public assembly, its physical meeting place, or a customary forum exercising legally recognized adjudicative functions. These functions should be distinguished because consultation within an assembly does not necessarily entail voting or equal control over the final decision, which

traditionally remains associated with the *kgosi* or other presiding traditional authority (Griffiths, 1998; Lekorwe, 2011).

Compared with the TRC, gacaca, Mato Oput, and Fambul Tok, the Kgotla is not limited to societies emerging from mass violence. It represents an ongoing institution for governance and community-level decision-making. This makes it particularly relevant to everyday disputes and recurring disagreements. Nevertheless, the apparent openness of a communal forum should be assessed against actual participation, including whether women, young people, minority groups, refugees, and persons of lower social status exercise equal influence. Historical access to Kgotla deliberations was unequal, particularly for women, young people and subordinated ethnic communities, and contemporary participation may still be affected by gender, location, socioeconomic status and individual social standing (Molomo, 2006; Ngwenya & Kgathi, 2011). Consequently, the Kgotla should be understood as a potentially participatory but internally differentiated institution rather than automatically characterized as an egalitarian form of consensus democracy.

v) Sierra Leone's Fambul Tok

Fambul Tok, meaning “family talk” in Krio, developed as a community-based reconciliation initiative after Sierra Leone's civil war. It used community consultations, truth-telling, acknowledgment, apology, forgiveness, and locally meaningful ceremonies to promote reconciliation and reintegration (Caulker, 2012; Hoffman, 2008). Its emphasis on community ownership and relational restoration resembles Ubuntu, although it emerged from Sierra Leonean cultural and post-conflict circumstances rather than from direct adoption of Nguni philosophy.

Evidence concerning Fambul Tok illustrates both the promise and complexity of community reconciliation. Cilliers et al. (2016) found that participation increased social capital and forgiveness but was also associated with poorer psychological well-being among some participants. This finding indicates that public truth-telling and reconciliation may strengthen social relationships while simultaneously creating emotional costs for individuals. Martin (2023) further cautions that claims of local ownership may conceal organizational hierarchies and unequal relationships between institutions and participants (Friedman, 2015; Martin, 2023).

2.1.9. Comparative Analysis of the Selected Cases

The selected cases share an understanding that conflict or wrongdoing damages relationships and that affected communities have a role in addressing the harm. All emphasize participation more strongly than conventional court-centered processes. They also provide space, although to varying degrees, for testimony, acknowledgment, accountability, reconciliation, and reintegration.

They differ, however, in origin, scale, authority, procedure, and relationship with the state. The South African TRC was a national transitional-justice institution directly associated with Ubuntu discourse. Gacaca was a state-supported community court system rooted in Rwandan history and adapted to genocide-related prosecutions. Mato Oput is an Acholi clan-based reconciliation mechanism involving ritual and compensation. Kgotla is an established Setswana institution of governance, consultation, and dispute settlement. Fambul Tok is a community-oriented peace-building initiative developed through civil-society organization after war.

The mechanisms also differ in how they balance restoration and punishment. The TRC combined public truth-telling with conditional amnesty. Gacaca combined community participation with criminal judgment and punishment. Mato Oput relies more strongly on acknowledgment, compensation, ritual reconciliation, and clan responsibility. Kgotla emphasizes deliberation and accepts community decisions. Fambul Tok places greater emphasis on truth-telling, apology, forgiveness, and reintegration.

This comparison demonstrates that Ubuntu should not be reduced to one technique. Its relevance lies in a group of relational principles that may be expressed through different institutional arrangements. The effectiveness of these principles depends on cultural legitimacy, voluntary participation, procedural fairness, accountability, inclusion, victim protection, and attention to structural causes of conflict.

2.1.10. Ubuntu relevance to refugee settlement

Refugee settlements create a distinctive context for applying Ubuntu. Unlike many of the selected case studies, a refugee settlement may contain people from different national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds who do not necessarily share the same customary

institutions. Refugees must also develop relationships with host communities, humanitarian organizations, government authorities, and settlement leaders (Bjørkhaug, 2020).

Within such settings, conflicts may arise from competition over land, water, firewood, employment, markets, social services, leadership, cultural practices, and humanitarian assistance. (Bjørkhaug, 2020). Other conflicts may involve family relations, gender-based violence, youth, discrimination, ethnic mistrust, or misunderstandings between refugees and host-community members. These conflicts are not all suitable for the same intervention. Serious criminal or protection cases require formal reporting and specialized procedures, whereas neighborhood, resource-sharing, leadership, and interpersonal disputes may allow greater use of dialogue and restorative practices (Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2015; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013).

Ubuntu may contribute by encouraging recognition of shared humanity across national and ethnic boundaries. Its principles may support dialogue, community mediation, inclusive participation, acknowledgment of harm, negotiated responsibility, and the rebuilding of trust. Ubuntu may also challenge the tendency to view refugees only as aid recipients by recognizing their agency, knowledge, social networks, and capacity to support one another. Ekoh and Warri (2023) argue that Ubuntu can strengthen refugee resilience, dignity, reciprocal support, and social integration.

All said, the application of Ubuntu in refugee settlements cannot be assumed unless refugees and host communities' interpretation of authority, justice, apology, compensation, and forgiveness is redefined to their understanding. The application of Ubuntu in refugee settlements requires intercultural and protection safeguards. Community leaders may not be viewed as legitimate by all groups, and power imbalances may affect participation. Ubuntu-based processes in refugee settings must therefore be culturally negotiated, inclusive, voluntary, sensitive to displacement-related trauma, and connected to formal protection and justice systems. (IASC, 2015; UNHCR, 2013).

It is also noted that relational dialogue cannot by itself resolve conflicts arising from structural scarcity, discriminatory aid distribution, contested land rights, or institutional corruption. Such disputes may require transparent allocation procedures, administrative accountability, livelihood support, and the meaningful inclusion of both refugees and host communities in decision-making (Bjørkhaug, 2020). Ubuntu should therefore complement, rather than replace,

refugee law, humanitarian protection standards, formal accountability, and material responses to resource inequality.

The comparison of the African cases suggests six broad dimensions for examining Ubuntu in refugee settlements: relational recognition, inclusive dialogue, community participation, accountability and repair, reconciliation and reintegration, and institutional compatibility. Institutional compatibility concerns whether community-based practices can operate alongside settlement leadership, humanitarian protection procedures, local government structures, and Uganda's legal system.

2.1.11. Research Gap in Rwamwanja refugee settlement

Existing scholarly literature has extensively discussed Ubuntu as an African moral philosophy and has examined its relevance to peacebuilding, restorative justice, governance, social work, and reconciliation (Metz, 2007; Murithi, 2006; Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Other studies have examined particular mechanisms such as the TRC, gacaca, Mato Oput, Kgotla, and Fambul Tok. Emerging literature has also begun to consider Ubuntu in relation to refugees, forced migration, resilience, and social inclusion (Ekoh and Warri, 2023; Basemera, 2025).

However, much of the available Ubuntu literature remains philosophical, normative, or based on post-conflict reconciliation at national and community levels. There is limited settlement-specific empirical research on how Ubuntu-related principles are understood and applied in the everyday management of conflict involving refugees and host communities. The existing literature does not sufficiently establish whether community members recognize such practices as Ubuntu, *Obuntu-bulamu*, customary mediation, religious reconciliation, ordinary neighborliness, or another form of conflict management.

Rwamwanja presents an important context for addressing this gap. The settlement was reopened in 2012 to receive people fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is located within communities in Kamwenge District (UNHCR, 2019). Refugees and host-community members interact through shared resources, services, institutions, markets, livelihood activities, and local leadership structures. However, limited empirical evidence explains whether Ubuntu-related principles influence the management of conflicts arising within these relationships.

A further gap concerns implementation. Even where values such as respect, dialogue, forgiveness, hospitality, and collective responsibility are recognized, it is not clear who mobilizes them, which conflicts they are used to address, how agreements are reached, whether women and marginalized groups participate effectively, or how community processes relate to formal settlement and legal institutions. It is also unclear whether participants consider such approaches fair and effective or whether the emphasis on communal harmony creates pressure, exclusion, or inadequate accountability.

2.1.12. The focus of Ubuntu to the present study

The present study addresses this gap by examining Ubuntu as a possible indigenous approach to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. It investigates how refugees, host-community members, community leaders, and conflict-management actors understand Ubuntu-related values and whether these values are reflected in existing conflict-management practices.

The study specifically examines the role of human dignity, interconnectedness, mutual respect, dialogue, community participation, acknowledgment of wrongdoing, accountability, forgiveness, restoration, and social reintegration. It also considers the types of conflict for which these principles may be appropriate and the cultural, institutional, and power-related factors that facilitate or constrain their application.

Rather than assuming that Ubuntu is already practiced or that it is automatically effective, the study treats its relevance as an empirical question. It assesses participants' experiences and perceptions, the inclusiveness of existing processes, their relationship with formal mechanisms, and their potential contribution to peaceful coexistence. In this way, the study extends the literature beyond philosophical and post-conflict discussions by examining the practical possibilities and limitations of Ubuntu within a culturally diverse refugee-settlement context.

2.2. Theoretical Review

Theories are used not only to “make sense of the world” but also to guide practice at the micro (individual and family), meso (community), and macro (societal, environmental, and spiritual) levels (Van Breda, 2019). As introduced in section 1.8 of chapter 1, understanding theory is complex because scholars interpret it differently depending on their disciplines. Émile

Durkheim, in the field of sociology, regarded theory as a system of concepts that provides a basis for understanding social phenomena. In *The Rules of Sociological Method*, originally published in 1895, Durkheim sought to clarify patterns in social life and establish a basis for the systematic analysis of society (Durkheim, 1982). In psychology, B. F. Skinner treated theory as a tool for predicting and controlling behavior. In *Science and Human Behavior*, Skinner's radical behaviorism prioritized the empirical observation of behavior shaped by environmental consequences (Skinner, 1953). His framework therefore contributes to understanding how behavior may be modified to facilitate effective interventions.

Popper (1959) proposed falsifiability: the principle that, to be considered scientific, a theory must make testable predictions that could be proven false through observation or experiment. His argument concerning the testing of scientific theories contributed to a clearer understanding of the logic of scientific discovery and influenced how theories are assessed and revised across academic disciplines. Kuhn (1962), in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, similarly examined how scientific theories change over time. He argued that scientific progress does not occur solely through the cumulative development of knowledge but also through paradigm shifts in which established theoretical frameworks are replaced by new ones. Kuhn's argument highlights the changing nature of knowledge and the different ways through which concepts may be understood.

These perspectives demonstrate that theory can perform explanatory, predictive, practical, and critical functions. They also show that theoretical frameworks are shaped by their disciplinary purposes and may operate at different levels of analysis. Consequently, understanding conflict management requires theories capable of explaining individual behavior, social relationships, structural contradictions, institutional arrangements, and the values that guide communal life. This broader understanding provides the basis for integrating complementary theoretical perspectives within the present study.

This study adopts an integrated theoretical review because conflict management in refugee settlements and host communities is simultaneously ethical, relational, behavioral, structural, and institutional. No single theory adequately captures these dimensions. Ubuntu provides the normative and relational foundation (Van Breda, 2019); Conflict Transformation Theory explains the processes through which destructive relationships and structures may change (Lederach, 2003); Neo-Institutionalism explains how formal and informal rules shape actors and outcomes (North, 1990); the ABC model offers a diagnostic framework for analyzing

attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions (Galtung, 1996); and Middle-Range Theory connects these broad propositions to observable practices and outcomes (Merton, 1968). The five frameworks are therefore complementary rather than competing explanations (see chapter 1, point 1.8).

The review is organized around a central question: How can Ubuntu philosophy inform conflict management in refugee settlements and host communities? In answering this question, each framework is assessed in terms of its central propositions, relevance to the study, contribution to the analysis, and limitations. This organization avoids presenting theory as detached history and instead demonstrates how the selected theoretical frameworks guide the interpretation of empirical evidence.

2.2.1. Ubuntu as a Theoretical Approach

Ubuntu is the ethical and relational anchor of this study. Although the concept has different linguistic expressions across African societies, it commonly conveys that personhood is realized through relationships with others often summarized as “a person is a person through other persons.” Ubuntu therefore understands human well-being, dignity, and responsibility as relational rather than exclusively individual. Ramose (1999) describes Ubuntu as an African philosophical account of being in which persons exist through an ongoing process of interdependence, while Metz (2011, pp. 537-541) reconstructs Ubuntu as a moral theory centered on identifying with others and acting in solidarity with them.

As a theoretical approach to conflict management, Ubuntu shifts attention from defeating an opponent to restoring damaged relationships and re-establishing communal harmony. Its core values such as shared humanity, reciprocity, respect, compassion, participation, reconciliation, and restorative justice provide criteria for judging both the process and outcome of conflict management. A settlement may end overt disagreement yet remain inconsistent with Ubuntu if it humiliates one party, excludes affected groups, or leaves relationships fractured. Conversely, a process reflects Ubuntu when parties are heard, responsibility is acknowledged, harms are repaired, and the solution enables continued coexistence (Murithi, 2006, pp. 28-31; Tutu, 1999, pp. 34-35).

Ubuntu as a theory, fits the present study because refugee settlements bring together different categories of people such as displaced persons, host communities, state agencies, humanitarian

organizations, and customary leaders whose lives are materially interconnected. Conflicts over resources such as land, water, services, livelihoods, identity, and representation cannot be managed sustainably through rules and coercion alone. Ubuntu directs attention to inclusive dialogue, collective responsibility, mediation through community leaders, acknowledgement of harm, and the rebuilding of trust. It also recognizes refugees and hosts as members of a shared moral community rather than as isolated interest groups.

The contribution of Ubuntu is threefold. First, it supplies the normative standard against which conflict-management practices can be evaluated: whether they protect dignity, promote belonging, and restore relationships. Second, it foregrounds locally meaningful practices and institutions that may be overlooked by externally designed interventions. And the third, it provides the conceptual bridge linking interpersonal reconciliation with social cohesion. In this study, Ubuntu may therefore be examined through such observable practices as inclusive decision-making, communal dialogue, apology, forgiveness, and sharing, and the participation of elders, community leaders, women, youth, refugees, and host community representatives.

Nevertheless, Ubuntu should not be considered as a uniform or uncontested African tradition. challenges related to communal harmony can suppress dissent, reinforce patriarchal or gerontocratic authority, and obscure differences among African societies. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013, pp. 197-205) question whether Ubuntu can function as a contemporary public ethic under conditions of individualization and political misuse. Metz (2011, pp. 533-536), however, shows that Ubuntu can be specified in ways that protect freedom and human dignity. The present study therefore uses Ubuntu critically analyzing that harmony is not treated as silence or conformity, and communal decision-making is considered legitimate only when it is inclusive, rights respecting, and attentive to power inequalities.

2.2.2. Conflict Transformation Theory

In most organizations and communities, conflicts are addressed through hierarchical authority or strict policies, often leaving one party dissatisfied. Conflict Transformation Theory offers a different possibility where disputes can be addressed by fostering mutual understanding and collective harmony rather than producing winners and losers. It constitutes the primary process-oriented framework of the study because it moves beyond viewing conflict as a problem to be eliminated and instead regards conflict as a potential catalyst for constructive social change.

The theory emerged principally from peace and conflict studies and is associated with Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach. Galtung's distinction between negative peace, the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, the presence of social justice, demonstrates why ending overt confrontation is insufficient when structural inequalities remain (Galtung, 1969, pp. 183-186). Lederach (1995, pp. 17-23) similarly argues that sustainable peace requires reconciliation that brings truth, justice, mercy, and peace into a productive relationship. Conflict transformation consequently aims to change relationships, structures, attitudes, discourses, and social conditions that generate destructive conflict rather than merely settling the immediate disagreement.

Conflict transformation operates across personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions. Personal transformation concerns change in how individuals understand and respond to conflict. Relational transformation seeks to alter patterns of communication, mistrust, stereotyping, and power between parties. Structural transformation addresses unequal access to resources, representation, rights, and decision-making. Cultural transformation questions narratives and practices that legitimize exclusion or violence. These dimensions are interdependent: dialogue may improve attitudes, but its effects will be fragile if discriminatory rules or material inequalities remain (Lederach, 2003, pp. 23-30).

The theory fits this study because conflict in refugee settlements often arises from long-standing grievances, displacement experiences, resource competition, institutional exclusion, trauma, and identity differences (Ahimbisibwe, 2019). These are not problems that can be resolved by a one-off agreement. The theory enables the study to examine whether Ubuntu-informed processes transform hostile perceptions, rebuild relationships, increase participation, and address institutional or distributive causes of conflict. It also accommodates multiple time scales and actors, ranging from interpersonal disputes and community leaders to humanitarian organizations and government agencies.

Its principal contribution is to explain the mechanism through which Ubuntu values may produce durable change. Ubuntu provides the ethical orientation shared humanity, dignity, solidarity, and restoration, while Conflict Transformation Theory specifies the processes of dialogue, recognition, trust-building, capacity development, institutional reform, and reconciliation. Together, the two perspectives clarify why peaceful coexistence requires both relational repair and changes in the conditions that reproduce conflict.

However, Conflict Transformation Theory may be normatively ambitious, difficult to operationalize, and slow in situations requiring immediate protection or dispute settlement. Its language of transformation can also conceal who defines the desired change and may understate coercive power, material scarcity, or actors who benefit from the status quo. The study therefore distinguishes immediate conflict containment from longer-term transformation and examines whose voices, interests, and definitions of peace shape Ubuntu-based interventions. The theory was chosen because its long-term relational and structural focus is indispensable to explaining sustainable refugee host coexistence.

2.2.3. Neo-Institutionalism Theory

Neo-Institutionalism provides the institutional lens through which conflict management can be understood. While Ubuntu emphasizes values and relationships, Neo-Institutionalism explains how formal and informal institutions shape behavior, opportunities, legitimacy, and conflict outcomes. It emerged from criticism of older institutional analysis that concentrated primarily on formal organizational structures. Meyer and Rowan (1977, pp. 340-345), DiMaggio and Powell (1983, pp. 147-150), Hall and Taylor (1996, pp. 936-942), and Scott (2014) demonstrate that organizations and political actors are also shaped by norms, routines, cognitive scripts, cultural expectations, and pressures for legitimacy.

Neo-institutional analysis is relevant at three connected levels. Historical institutionalism draws attention to path dependence, power asymmetries, and the way earlier policy choices constrain later possibilities. Rational-choice institutionalism explains how rule's structure strategic action by actors pursuing interests. Sociological institutionalism shows how culturally embedded norms and taken-for-granted meanings shape what actors regard as legitimate or appropriate (Hall & Taylor, 1996, pp. 938-947). For this study, these are not separate theories requiring lengthy treatment; they are complementary insights for analyzing a complex institutional field.

Conflict management in refugee settlements involves overlapping institutions: national refugee law and policy, local government, humanitarian procedures, customary leadership, religious authority, community committees, and informal norms of reciprocity. These institutions reinforce one another, compete for authority, or create gaps in accountability. Scott's (2014) argues that regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars are useful here. The regulative pillar concerns laws, sanctions, and formal mandates; the normative pillar concerns obligations

and accepted roles; and the cultural-cognitive pillar concerns shared understandings that make particular practices appear natural or legitimate.

The theory fits the study because it explains why well-intentioned conflict-management mechanisms may differ in practice from their formal design. Organizations may adopt community-dialogue committees or participatory policies to gain legitimacy while daily routines remain exclusionary, a form of decoupling identified by Meyer and Rowan (1977, pp. 356-357). Coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures may also lead humanitarian agencies to adopt similar procedures, whether or not those procedures respond to local conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, pp. 150-154). Neo-Institutionalism thus allows the study to investigate both formal compliance and actual practice.

It contributes to the conditions under which Ubuntu can move from moral aspiration to institutionalized practice. Ubuntu-based conflict management is more likely to endure when participation, restorative procedures, representation, and accountability are embedded in rules, routines, leadership expectations, and resource allocation. The theory also helps identify institutional contradictions for example, when humanitarian policy promotes inclusion, but decision-making authority remains centralized, or when customary mediation builds social legitimacy but excludes women, youth, or minority groups.

On the other hand, Neo-Institutionalism has been criticized for explaining stability and similarity more effectively than agency, contestation, and rapid change. Its emphasis on legitimacy and conformity has underplayed material interests and unequal power. The study addresses this limitation by treating institutions as areas of conflict as well as constraints and by combining Neo-Institutionalism with Conflict Transformation Theory, ABC model and Ubuntu. This integration makes it possible to examine not only how institutions shape actors, but also how actors may reform institutions through dialogue, collective action, and locally legitimate practices.

2.2.4. The ABC Model of Conflict Management

The ABC model provides a diagnostic framework for understanding and addressing conflict. Galtung conceptualizes conflict as a triangle comprising Attitudes (A), Behavior (B), and Contradiction (C). Attitudes include perceptions, emotions, assumptions, stereotypes, fear, and mistrust; behavior includes cooperation, avoidance, threats, discrimination, and direct

violence; and contradiction refers to the underlying incompatibility of goals, interests, needs, or social positions (Galtung, 1996, pp. 70-73). The components are interconnected where an unresolved contradiction may generate hostile attitudes and destructive behavior, while violent behavior can deepen mistrust and make the contradiction harder to address.

The model is significant because it distinguishes visible manifestations of conflict from less visible drivers. In refugee settlements, behavior may be observed in fighting, refusal to cooperate, discriminatory practices, or competition over resources. Attitudes may include resentment towards refugees, suspicion of host-community leaders, trauma-related fear, or stereotypes between ethnic groups. Contradictions may concern unequal access to land, water, livelihoods, services, representation, or legal protection. Effective conflict management must therefore intervene in all three dimensions rather than treating behavior alone.

Ubuntu strengthens the model by providing values and practices through which the three dimensions can be addressed. Intergroup dialogue, storytelling, apology, and psychosocial support may transform negative attitudes and strengthen empathy. Mediation, nonviolent communication, and cooperative community projects may change behavior. (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 2003; Metz, 2011) Inclusive planning, fair distribution, representation, and institutional reform may address contradictions. Trauma-informed support is particularly important because displacement related distress can affect social relations, although trauma should not be used to depoliticize conflicts rooted in material or institutional inequality (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010, pp. 7-16).

The ABC model is appropriate for the study because its categories organize empirical data from interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents. It contributes to an operational bridge between the broader theories and field evidence where Ubuntu-informed practices can be assessed according to whether they change attitudes, behavior, contradictions, or a combination of the three. It also guards against a common analytical error-assuming that the absence of visible violence means the underlying conflict has been resolved (Galtung, 1996).

Even though the model is important in refugee settlement, it does not go without limitation. First, the model is a heuristic rather than a complete causal theory. Its three categories can overlap, causal relationships may run in several directions, and the triangle does not by itself explain institutional power, historical change, or the normative quality of an intervention. It may also oversimplify conflicts involving multiple actors and intersecting identities. For these

reasons, the ABC model is used as a diagnostic and coding framework, not as the sole explanation of conflict. Neo-Institutionalism supplies institutional context, Conflict Transformation Theory supplies process, and Ubuntu supplies ethical direction. (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lederach, 2003; Metz, 2011).

2.2.5. Middle-Range Theory

Middle-Range Theory serves as the overarching analytical strategy that links Ubuntu's broad philosophical principles to observable conflict-management practices. Robert K. Merton developed the approach to bridge the gap between highly abstract grand theories and narrow descriptions or working hypotheses. Middle-range theories involve abstraction but remain sufficiently close to observed data to generate propositions that can be empirically examined (Merton, 1968, pp. 39-53). They address delimited aspects of social life rather than attempting to explain all social behavior, organization, and change.

In this study, the value of the approach lies in converting broad claims about Ubuntu into testable or empirically traceable propositions. For example, the general claim that Ubuntu promotes social harmony can be investigated through more specific mechanisms: inclusive dialogue may reduce hostile attitudes; restorative mediation may rebuild trust; shared projects may increase cooperation; and representative institutions may reduce perceived exclusion. These propositions connect the philosophical level to the experiences and practices of refugees, host-community members, leaders, government officials, and humanitarian actors.

Middle-range analysis also helps bridge macro- and micro-level explanations. At the macro level, refugee policy, legal frameworks, aid systems, and resource allocation structure conflict. At the micro level, individuals experience mistrust, trauma, exclusion, and everyday cooperation. Between these levels are community leaders, settlement committees, civil-society organizations, religious institutions, women's and youth groups, and informal networks. These meso-level actors translate policy into practice and local experience into claims on institutions. Evidence from Ugandan refugee settings, for example, shows that refugee leaders can act as brokers between different legal and customary systems, although brokerage may also reproduce unequal representation (Vancluysen & Ingelaere, 2020).

This approach was appropriate for the study because Ubuntu is a broad philosophy and the research concerns a delimited question: how Ubuntu can be an approach and be utilized in

managing conflict in refugee settlements and host communities. Its contribution is methodological and explanatory. It disciplines the analysis by requiring clear links among concepts, mechanisms, indicators, context, and outcomes. It also allows findings to be general enough to inform comparable settings without claiming universal validity.

Critique and limitation for the Middle-Range Theory is not, by itself, a substantive theory of conflict or Ubuntu. It risks fragmenting analysis into modest propositions that neglect wider structures, colonial histories, or political economy. The present study therefore treats it as a theory building strategy that organizes and tests the relationships supplied by the aforementioned theories. It is important because it makes the integrated framework empirically usable and prevents Ubuntu from remaining an abstract moral ideal.

2.2.6. Integrated Theoretical Framework and Propositions

The five frameworks form a layered explanation of conflict management. Ubuntu provides the ethical and relational foundation. Conflict Transformation Theory explains how destructive conflict can become constructive change. Neo-Institutionalism identifies the formal and informal rules that constrain or enable that change. The ABC model diagnoses the attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions through which conflict is experienced. Middle-Range Theory translates these relationships into focused propositions that can be examined empirically. The integration is therefore coherent because each framework answers a different analytical question. Such as, how do rules, norms shape actions (Neo-institutionalism), where is conflict located and manifested (ABC Model) How does conflict change over time (Conflict transformation) what should human seek in conflict management (Ubuntu) and how can broad ideas be linked to evidence (Middle Range Theory). This integrated framework provided a basis for this study.

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located and manifested (ABC Model) How does conflict change over time (Conflict transformation) what should human seek in conflict management(Ubuntu) and how can broad ideas be linked to evidence (Middle Range Theory). This integrated framework provided a basis for this study. The Consensus stage involves the following: Determination of the strategies to implement, and then the concretization of the strategies assuring their efficiency with the participation of the group of people involved. The ABC model approach can be described as a clear and organized systematic approach to managerial and organizational conflicts, which is cooperative, win-win and integrative. And finally middle range theory (MRT), offers a pragmatic framework for conflict management in marginalized environments. Its suitability lies in its ability to bridge structural critique and practical intervention, enabling marginalized communities not only to resist domination but also to manage conflict in ways that sustain social cohesion and open pathways for durable change. All these approaches give us a clear picture of how to deal with conflicts from different perspectives, especially in vulnerable environments.

2.3. Empirical Literature Review

This empirical literature review examines how Ubuntu philosophy has been understood and applied in conflict management involving refugees and host communities. The review is organized around the following recurring topics: the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in applying Ubuntu to conflict management; policymakers' perceptions of Ubuntu as an approach to conflicts within refugee settlements; ways of integrating Ubuntu into conflict-management strategies within refugee settlements; and other formal and informal conflict-resolution mechanisms that operate alongside Ubuntu-based approaches. These themes recur throughout the study because lived experience, policy interpretation, practical implementation, and institutional pluralism are interdependent dimensions of conflict management in refugee settlements.

The review proceeds from experience to policy, from policy to implementation, and then to the relationship between Ubuntu and existing mechanisms. It does not treat Ubuntu as an automatic or culturally uniform solution. Rather, it examines the extent to which the values commonly associated with Ubuntu human dignity, relational personhood, reciprocity, solidarity, restoration, and shared responsibility, are reflected in practice and under what social, political, and institutional conditions they can contribute to conflict management. This approach is important because the empirical literature frequently invokes Ubuntu normatively but provides

less evidence about how refugees, host communities, policymakers, and conflict-management actors interpret and operationalize it in a specific settlement.

2.3.1. Lived experiences of refugees and host communities on applying the Ubuntu approach to conflict management

The global refugee crisis has become a threat to humanity, with millions of people being displaced. Settling with host community members becomes a challenge because of different cultural backgrounds, ethnic identities, economic pressures, and personal traumas (World Bank, 2022). Uganda's self-reliance approach provides refugees with relative freedom of movement and access to land and services (as mentioned in the previous chapter1), but communities in refugee-hosting areas still face the challenge of coping with population pressure and the unequal availability of resources. Research on social cohesion in East Africa indicates that refugee-host interaction can build trust when contact is sustained and cooperative, but negative contact can deepen distrust; therefore, interaction alone does not necessarily produce cohesion (Betts et al., 2022, pp. 4-6, 28-30).

When refugees settle in new places, they often face challenges with local communities, including cultural differences, economic competition, social inequalities, and memories of violence and displacement. Ubuntu philosophy, which highlights shared humanity and interconnectedness, offers an approach for examining the real-life experiences of both refugees and host communities and for promoting understanding, healing, and peaceful coexistence. Mbiti's account of relational personhood and Ramose's discussion of Ubuntu place the person within a network of mutual obligations rather than treating the individual as isolated (Mbiti, 1969; Ramose, 2002). In conflict management, this relational understanding supports dialogue, responsibility, restoration, and the rebuilding of damaged relationships.

Ubuntu's relevance to lived experience is therefore practical as well as philosophical. Where there is genuine concern for the welfare of others, individual interests are balanced against the well-being of the wider community. Ubuntu-based conflict management promotes dignity, empathy, generosity, justice, reciprocity, harmony, and mutual responsibility. Murithi (2006, pp. 28-32) links these values to restorative processes in which truth-telling, acknowledgement of harm, apology, compensation, forgiveness, and reconciliation are pursued through inclusive community dialogue. Such processes are especially relevant to refugee settlements because the

disputing parties usually continue to live alongside one another after a particular conflict has been addressed.

However, the lived experience of refugee-host relations also exposes a gap between Ubuntu as an ideal and Ubuntu as social practice. Studies of xenophobia in South Africa show that appeals to shared African humanity coexist with exclusion, fear, and violence against African migrants. This contradiction is important to the present study because it demonstrates that a society's identification with Ubuntu does not by itself prevent conflict. Resource scarcity, unemployment, political mobilization, legal insecurity, and unequal access to services can weaken solidarity. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013, pp. 197-205) consequently warn against treating Ubuntu as a romantic return to a harmonious African past, while Metz (2014, pp. 65-72) argues that the failure to realize Ubuntu does not invalidate it as a contemporary ethical ideal. The empirical question is therefore not whether a community claims Ubuntu, but whether institutions and everyday practices translate its values into fair and inclusive relationships.

The experience of refugees also shows the importance of social networks in recovery and resilience. Displacement weakens family, livelihood, and community support systems. An Ubuntu approach can respond through collective care, community gatherings, inclusive education, mutual assistance, and opportunities for refugees and host-community members to solve shared problems. Ekoh & Warri (2023, pp. 92-96) argue that Ubuntu can strengthen work with refugees by recognizing dignity, reciprocal care, resilience, and community participation. They also caution that Ubuntu should not be imposed as a culturally fixed formula: its meaning must be developed with refugees and host communities in the setting where it is applied.

Educational and livelihood spaces are particularly important points of encounter. Inclusive schools, savings groups, markets, agricultural associations, youth activities, and women's groups can create repeated cooperative contact rather than one-off peace events. Such settings may allow refugees and nationals to recognize both common interests and legitimate differences. The World Bank's East African evidence suggests that the quality and conditions of inter-group contact matter more than mere proximity (Betts et al., 2022, pp. 28-30). Ubuntu therefore needs to be linked to material fairness calls for harmony are unlikely to succeed where one group perceives systematic exclusion from land, employment, water, education, or humanitarian assistance.

This literature does not go without limitation. First, much of it is conceptual or based on Southern African contexts and cannot simply be transferred to western Uganda. Second, refugee experiences are often discussed collectively, with insufficient attention to gender, age, disability, nationality, length of displacement, and power differences within refugee and host communities. Third, few studies examine how people themselves define Ubuntu or identify particular conflict-management practices as Ubuntu-based. These limitations justify a context-specific study in Rwamwanja that begins with lived experience and investigates whether Ubuntu is named explicitly, expressed indirectly through local practices, or constrained by resource and institutional conditions.

2.3.2. The perception of policymakers on the Ubuntu approach as a method of addressing conflicts within refugee settlements

African societies have long traditions of hospitality, asylum, and community incorporation, but contemporary refugee governance is also shaped by international law, national security, administrative capacity, and the distribution of scarce resources. The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention states that granting asylum is a peaceful and humanitarian act and should not be regarded as unfriendly by any member state (OAU, 1969, Art. II (2)). This regional framework is compatible with Ubuntu's emphasis on human dignity and shared responsibility, although the Convention does not itself use Ubuntu as its organizing concept.

Policymakers may perceive Ubuntu positively because it offers a moral language for inclusion, local integration, social solidarity, and the peaceful management of refugee-host relations. It can encourage policies that treat refugees as participants in community life rather than merely as beneficiaries or security risks. It may also support community dialogue, shared services, corporate and local social responsibility, and conflict-sensitive development. Basemera (2025, pp. 81-88) argues that Ubuntu can provide a framework for refugee identity, integration, restorative justice, and conflict resolution in Uganda, while recognizing that implementation must be connected to law, institutions, and the voices of affected communities.

At the same time, policymakers operate within real tensions. Encampment and restrictions are often justified by security, administrative control, or concern about competition between refugees and citizens. An Ubuntu-based policy cannot disregard these responsibilities, but it changes how they are approached: security should be pursued through participation, trust, early warning, fair procedures, and shared accountability rather than through collective suspicion.

The relevant policy question is therefore not a simple choice between Ubuntu and state security. It is how Ubuntu's relational and restorative values can inform lawful security and conflict-management systems without weakening refugee rights or the protection of host communities.

Uganda's settlement approach offers an important setting in which to examine this relationship. The policy framework provides opportunities for self-reliance and interaction, but implementation is affected by funding gaps, local service pressure, land constraints, and uneven participation. Policy commitments to inclusion may therefore differ from the experiences of refugees and host communities. This difference between policy intention and local implementation should be treated as an empirical issue rather than assuming that a progressive policy automatically produces social cohesion.

Policy literature also requires conceptual caution. Some writing attributes successful coexistence directly to Ubuntu without demonstrating that policymakers, officials, or residents use the philosophy in decision-making. Other studies infer Ubuntu from any act of hospitality or communal support. Such reasoning risks make Ubuntu so broad that it becomes difficult to test or distinguish from human rights, social cohesion, restorative justice, or ordinary community development. Bilotta (2022, pp. 125-127) notes that Ubuntu's application in work with refugees remains underdeveloped and may be idealized or appropriated if local meanings and power relations are not examined. Policymakers' perceptions should therefore be studied directly through their language, decisions, priorities, and reported constraints.

Further critique concerns whose understanding of Ubuntu informs policy. Policymaking can reproduce elite, male, or culturally dominant interpretations while marginalizing women, young people, minority ethnic groups, and refugees themselves. Critics also warn that appeals to community can conceal hierarchy or pressure individuals to reconcile without adequate protection or justice (Eliastam, 2015; Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013, pp. 197-205). Ubuntu-informed policy should consequently be integrated with constitutional rights, gender equality, child protection, due process, and survivor-centered safeguards. It should supplement rights-based governance, not replace it.

Literature leaves an important gap regarding Rwamwanja. It does not adequately show how national policymakers, district officials, settlement authorities, humanitarian organizations, refugee leaders, and host-community leaders understand Ubuntu; whether they consider it relevant to current conflicts; or what institutional barriers they identify. The present study

addresses this gap by examining policymakers' perceptions alongside experience, thereby comparing official intentions with community realities.

2.3.3. How to integrate the Ubuntu approach into conflict management strategies within refugee settlements

Integrating Ubuntu into conflict management requires more than adding the term to policy documents. The philosophy must be translated into procedures, roles, safeguards, and measurable practices. The literature suggests that integration can occur through inclusive dialogue, trusted mediation, acknowledgement of harm, apology, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the restoration of relationships. Murithi (2006, pp. 28 -32) presents these as interconnected elements of African restorative peacemaking rather than as a rigid sequence applicable in every context.

The first entry point is an inclusive community forum. Refugees and host-community members need safe and regular opportunities to identify tensions, hear different accounts, and agree on locally legitimate responses. Representation should include women, young people, people with disabilities, minority groups, religious leaders, elders, refugee welfare representatives, local government, settlement officials, police, and humanitarian organizations. Participation must be substantive; Ubuntu cannot be reduced to consultation after decisions have already been made.

The second entry point is culturally competent mediation. Elders and community leaders may possess legitimacy, language skills, historical knowledge, and the ability to repair relationships. However, their authority should not be idealized. Some customary forums may exclude women and young people, reproduce ethnic hierarchy, or handle cases beyond their lawful competence. Ubuntu-based mediation should therefore operate within a clear referral system. Minor interpersonal and communal disputes may be mediated locally, while sexual and gender-based violence, child abuse, serious assault, and other criminal matters must be referred promptly to the competent state and protection authorities. Reconciliation must never be used to silence survivors or avoid legal accountability.

The third entry point is restorative practice. A contextually adapted process may involve voluntary acknowledgement of responsibility, an account of the harm, apology, agreed restitution or compensation where appropriate, and actions to rebuild trust. The objective is not merely to close a case but to restore safe relationships and reduce recurrence. This is

particularly important in settlements, where parties remain interdependent and may continue sharing schools, water points, markets, land boundaries, or community institutions. Nevertheless, participation must be voluntary, power imbalances must be assessed, and agreements must be monitored.

The fourth entry point is shared social and economic activity. Because many refugee-host conflicts arise around resources, Ubuntu-based dialogue should be linked to equitable access and cooperative initiatives. Joint livelihood groups, shared infrastructure committees, youth peace projects, women's savings associations, and transparent beneficiary-selection processes can translate solidarity into visible practice. Evidence on refugee-host interaction indicates that cooperative contact around shared goals is more likely to strengthen cohesion than unmanaged proximity (Betts et al., 2022, pp. 4-6, 28-30).

The fifth entry point is institutionalization. Settlement conflict-management committees should define how community mediation connects to local councils, police, courts, protection actors, and humanitarian agencies. Records should protect confidentiality while allowing patterns of recurring conflict to be identified. Community mediators require training in Ugandan law, human rights, gender and child protection, trauma awareness, impartiality, and referral procedures. Policymakers should also establish feedback mechanisms through which refugees and host-community members assess whether processes are accessible, respectful, fair, and effective.

Ubuntu can also inform research and monitoring. Bilotta (2022, pp. 132-140) proposes that work with people experiencing refugee status should combine procedural ethics with relational ethics, including reciprocity, reflexivity, respect, and shared knowledge production. Applied to conflict management, this means that communities should participate in defining problems, indicators, and acceptable outcomes. Success should not be measured only by the number of cases closed; it should include perceptions of dignity, fairness, trust, restored relationships, inclusion, and reduced recurrence.

Several critiques must guide implementation. Ubuntu is not culturally uniform across Africa and should not be assumed to have the same meaning for Congolese refugees, Ugandan host communities, and institutional actors. It can be invoked symbolically while material inequality remains unchanged. Its emphasis on harmony may also obscure conflict, discourage dissent, or privilege communal pressure over individual rights. Furthermore, many claims about Ubuntu's

effectiveness are based on normative or theoretical studies rather than evaluated interventions. The appropriate response is not to abandon Ubuntu but to treat it as a locally interpreted ethical framework that must be combined with legal safeguards, material equity, and empirical evaluation.

Accordingly, the Rwamwanja study should examine integration at three levels: values, practices, and institutions. At the values level, it should identify how participants understand dignity, solidarity, reciprocity, and shared humanity. At the practice level, it should examine dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, resource sharing, and community support. At the institutional level, it should investigate authority, referral pathways, legal recognition, inclusion, monitoring, and coordination. This framework converts Ubuntu from a broad philosophical claim into observable dimensions of conflict management.

2.3.4. Other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches

Refugee settlements are legally and socially plural environments. Conflicts may be addressed by families, elders, religious leaders, refugee representatives, local councils, settlement authorities, humanitarian protection actors, police, and courts. These mechanisms do not necessarily operate in a simple hierarchy. People choose among them according to accessibility, trust, cost, cultural legitimacy, the seriousness of the dispute, and the remedy sought.

Informal mechanisms are often used first for minor families, neighborhood, livelihood, and interpersonal disputes because community actors are accessible and understand the parties' language and social context. Refugee leaders can also act as cultural brokers between refugees' customary norms and Ugandan institutions. Vancluysen and Ingelaere (2020) show that refugee leaders in Uganda mediate between different legal and cultural orders; this brokerage can make dispute resolution more accessible but also places leaders in difficult positions when norms conflict or their authority is unclear.

Formal mechanisms remain essential. Police, courts, local government, and protection agencies provide legal authority, procedural safeguards, investigation, and remedies that informal actors cannot supply. They are especially necessary for serious crime, sexual and gender-based violence, child protection, and disputes involving significant power imbalances. However,

formal systems may be distant, slow, unfamiliar, costly, or mistrusted. Conflict management in refugee settlements therefore depends on coordination between formal and informal mechanisms rather than the complete replacement of one by the other.

Ubuntu based approaches can contribute to this plural system by providing relational values and restorative practices. They may strengthen the way community dialogue and mediation are conducted, encourage responsibility and repair, and improve the relationship between community actors and formal institutions. Yet not every informal practice is Ubuntu based, and not every customary outcome is just. The analysis should distinguish between the actor involved, the legal or cultural basis of authority, the procedure used, the values expressed, the type of case, and the outcome.

The literature identifies recurring risks in informal dispute resolution: leaders may exceed their mandate; serious cases may be concealed; women, young people, minority groups, and survivors may be underrepresented; decisions may lack documentation or enforceability; and cultural brokerage may reproduce unequal power. Formal systems also have weaknesses, including limited capacity, poor accessibility, weak follow-up, and insufficient recognition of community knowledge. A hybrid model is therefore appropriate only if mandates, referral thresholds, accountability, and rights protections are explicit.

For Rwamwanja, the empirical review suggests that a useful mapping should ask which conflicts are taken to which actor; why people select that mechanism; how decisions are reached; whether parties perceive the process as fair; how cases move between informal and formal systems; and where Ubuntu values are visible. This mapping will clarify whether Ubuntu functions as a distinct mechanism, an ethical orientation within existing mechanisms, or a retrospective label applied to practices of dialogue and reconciliation.

2.3.5. Synthesis of empirical literature and study gap

Across the four themes of the research questions, the literature supports Ubuntu's potential contribution to dignity, solidarity, dialogue, restorative justice, and peaceful coexistence. It also demonstrates that Ubuntu cannot be separated from material conditions, law, institutional authority, and power. Lived experience may contradict policy claims; policy may invoke inclusion without providing resources; community mechanisms may be accessible but insufficiently accountable; and formal institutions may be lawful but socially distant.

The principal research gap is the limited settlement-specific evidence connecting these dimensions in Rwamwanja. Existing literature rarely investigates, within one analytical framework, how refugees and host communities experience Ubuntu, how policymakers understand it, how it can be operationalized, and how it interacts with formal and informal mechanisms. The present study addresses this gap by treating Ubuntu neither as an assumed solution nor as a purely abstract philosophy, but as a proposition to be examined through participants' meanings, practices, institutional arrangements, outcomes, and critiques. A critical of a hybrid Ubuntu centric approach is therefore important in addressing the gaps in this study.

2.4. Towards an Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model

The literature suggests that Ubuntu has often been discussed as a moral philosophy, a restorative justice principle, or a cultural resource for reconciliation (Metz, 2011; Tutu, 1999). However, less attention has been given to how Ubuntu can be operationalized within humanitarian governance settings where multiple actors such as refugees, host communities, elders, police, local councils, RWCs, OPM, UNHCR, and NGOs interact within overlapping formal and informal systems. Research on Ugandan refugee governance confirms that Refugee Welfare Councils operate within institutionally created spaces but may also be adapted by refugees as mechanisms for participation, representation, and claiming access to rights and services (de Simone, 2022). This thesis therefore develops an Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model. The model treats Ubuntu as an ethical foundation for dialogue, mutual recognition, and reconciliation, while recognizing that formal institutions remain necessary for rights protection, serious crime, gender-based violence, child safeguarding, and administrative accountability (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015; Metz, 2011). The model is “hybrid” because it links community-based mediation with formal referral systems, and it is “Ubuntu-centric” because it places relational personhood, shared humanity, and restorative dialogue at the centre of settlement-level conflict management.

Operationally, the model should distinguish between three interconnected functions: community-level prevention, restorative resolution, and formal protection. Prevention includes intercultural dialogue, joint refugee-host activities, inclusive planning, early identification of tensions, and community education concerning rights and responsibilities. Restorative resolution includes voluntary mediation, acknowledgment of harm, negotiated responsibility, reparation where appropriate, and follow-up of agreements. Formal protection requires

documented referral pathways to the police, OPM, UNHCR, local government, Ngos, and law enforcement such as police when dispute involves criminal conduct, immediate danger, coercion, safeguarding concerns, or serious rights violations (IASC, 2015; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013).

The model, therefore, must specify safeguards against the dangers associated with hybrid governance. Where community authority may reproduce inequalities based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, nationality, language, socioeconomic status, or proximity to settlement leadership. Accordingly, participation must be voluntary and informed; mediators must be impartial; interpretation and reasonable accommodation should be available; confidentiality must be protected; and parties must retain access to formal complaint and appeal mechanisms. Community reconciliation must never be used to prevent the reporting of serious offences or to pressure victims into forgiveness. These safeguards are particularly important because formal recognition of refugee participation does not necessarily remove marginalization, unequal institutional power, or implementation gaps within the wider refugee-protection system (de Simone, 2022).

Conclusively, the model should identify measurable outcomes. These may include changes in trust, attitudes between refugees and host communities, recurrence of disputes, representation of marginalized groups, compliance with mediated agreements, timeliness and completion of referrals, participant perceptions of procedural fairness, and protection outcomes. This would make the model empirically testable and distinguish it from a purely normative statement about Ubuntu. Further discussion of the Model is elaborated in chapter 4 (cf chap 4; sec 4.10.1-4.10.3.)

2.5. Historical context of refugees and conflicts in Uganda

As introduced in chapter 1, Uganda has a long history of hosting refugees, beginning in the 1940s, when Polish refugees were settled in the country, followed by refugees from Rwanda and Sudan in the 1950s (Mulumba & Olema, 2009, p. 1). Various legislation regarding refugee hosting began during the colonial period. The legal regime that later became the Control of Alien Refugees Act (CARA) was intended primarily to control, register and confine refugees rather than to facilitate durable integration. This historical context is important because the literature reviewed in this section on refugee governance, inter-border conflict, resource

pressures and indigenous conflict resolution will recur throughout the subsequent analysis, where the same themes are examined in relation to the study findings.

The CARA framework permitted the state to establish settlements, regulate movement and relocate refugees, including away from border areas. Although settlement arrangements made it possible to organize shelter, food and health services, the governing logic was one of control and security. Sharpe and Namusobya (2012, pp. 562-564) describe the legislation replaced by the Refugees Act 2006 as antiquated and inconsistent with a rights-based protection regime. The colonial legacy therefore helps to explain the tension that persists in Uganda's refugee governance, refugees may be offered protection and assistance while simultaneously being treated as populations to be spatially managed.

After independence, Uganda experienced political, economic and social upheaval, including both refugee inflows and the displacement of Ugandans. During the 1980s and early 1990s, conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) increased the number and diversity of refugees in Uganda. The limitations of CARA became increasingly apparent as Uganda's protection responsibilities expanded. The Refugees Act 2006 consequently repealed CARA and aligned domestic law more closely with the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. In particular, the Act broadened the refugee definition, provided for group recognition during mass influxes, and codified rights relating to employment, property, courts and movement (Refugees Act, 2006, ss. 4, 25, 29-30; Sharpe & Namusobya, 2012, pp. 565-573).

Since that time, Uganda has hosted a significant number of refugees, mainly from South Sudan, the DRC, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and other neighboring countries. UNHCR recorded more than 1.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers in Uganda by the close of December 2025 (UNHCR, 2025).

Uganda is frequently celebrated for policies that permit recognized refugees to move, work, establish businesses and access public services. Yet the description of Uganda as uniformly "open" or "progressive" must be qualified. Legal rights do not necessarily translate into effective access to land, decent work, finance or public services, especially in remote and under resourced refugee hosting districts (ILO, 2023, pp. 21-38; Omata, 2022, pp. 649-673).

Uganda's self-reliance approach is likewise contested. It is intended to reduce long-term dependence by integrating refugees into local economies and national development planning. However, Kaiser (2005, pp. 351-366) shows that a development-oriented settlement policy may meet material needs while leaving legal protection and political belonging unresolved. More recent study indicates that self-reliance can become a transfer of responsibility from humanitarian agencies to refugees and local governments when land, markets and public services are inadequate (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, pp. 1458-1467; Omata, 2022, pp. 665-670). Thus, the central analytical issue is not whether self-reliance is desirable in principle, but whose resources sustain it and how its costs and benefits are distributed.

This tension has intensified as humanitarian funding has declined. Titeca and Derrix (2024, pp. 2-4) describe a proposed "transition" from humanitarian provision to development financing in which local government is expected to assume greater responsibility for services such as water. They report that refugees may be required to contribute to the operation and maintenance of water pumps at reduced rates (p. 4). The transition may promote local ownership, but it also risks shifting costs to people with few reliable income sources and to districts with limited fiscal capacity. Unaffordable user fees may encourage harmful coping strategies and heighten household and communal tension. The funding crisis does not invalidate the international refugee definition. Refugee status is determined by the statutory and convention criteria concerning persecution, external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order, not by the host state's ability to finance services (Refugees Act, 2006, sec. 4). What the crisis places in question is the implementation and sustainability of protection. The historical literature therefore reveals a recurring gap between progressive legal commitments and the institutional, fiscal and local-resource conditions required to realize them.

2.5.1. Inter border conflicts and refugee crisis in Uganda

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa with a history of cross-border conflict and major refugee movements. These dynamics arise from political instability, armed conflict, ethnic and kinship networks that cross state boundaries, and competition over land, water and other resources. The borders established during colonial rule frequently divided communities and connected local disputes to regional political struggles. However, colonial boundary making should not be treated as a complete explanation, post-independence state-building, elite competition, militarization and regional interventions have also shaped contemporary conflict

(Leonardi, 2020). The 1978-1979 Uganda-Tanzania War illustrates the relationship between interstate conflict and displacement. Idi Amin's rule was characterized by political repression and widespread human-rights violations, while the war that removed his government produced further population movements (Roberts, 2014). Regional instability continued when the Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, after which civil war and the 1994 genocide generated refugee flows and regional insecurity (Des Forges, 1999; United Nations, n.d.).

More recent refugee inflows are closely connected to the civil war that began in South Sudan in December 2013 and to protracted armed conflict in eastern DRC. The South Sudanese conflict developed from a political struggle within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement into widespread armed and intercommunal violence (de Waal, 2014). Conflict in eastern DRC has been sustained by numerous armed groups, regional military interventions, political exclusion, weak state institutions, and competition over land, authority, and natural resources (Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2014). These conflicts have caused large numbers of people to seek protection in Uganda, placing additional demands on already constrained reception systems and public services (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2026; World Bank, 2019). However, refugees should not themselves be represented as the cause of insecurity. Rapid population growth, refugee influx, chronic underinvestment and unequal resource allocation have intensified existing institutional weaknesses and local grievances. Resource competition is particularly visible in refugee hosting areas. Mulumba and Olema's (2009, pp. 1-6) study in south-western Uganda demonstrates that land conflicts arose from contested boundaries, changing land values, host-community expectations and the gendered insecurity of refugee women. Similarly, Bjørkhaug's (2020) findings from the Nakivale Refugee Settlement suggest that refugee-host relationships cannot be reduced to either harmony or conflict. Although access to livelihoods and services can benefit both refugees and host communities, it may also generate tensions between them. These findings improve upon generalized "scarcity causes conflict" arguments by demonstrating that the effects of scarcity are mediated by institutions, resource-allocation rules, social relationships, and perceptions of fairness. Land and water pressures are also affected by environmental change. Research in refugee-hosting districts documents high dependence on land, woodland and water for cultivation, construction and cooking (World Bank, 2019, pp. 17 -31). Yet it is analytically unsafe to infer violence directly from environmental degradation. Resource scarcity may increase the risk of conflict, but outcomes depend on governance, access arrangements,

dispute-resolution capacity and the distribution of humanitarian and development assistance. Where water points or agricultural land are allocated without meaningful participation by both refugees and hosts, perceptions of exclusion may become as important as absolute scarcity.

The implications for Uganda's national security include the movement of armed groups and illicit arms, pressure on border administration and difficult diplomatic relations with neighboring states. At the same time, securitized responses can undermine refugee protection. Militarization, restrictions on movement and collective suspicion may expose refugees and border communities to arbitrary detention or abuse. A balanced analysis must therefore examine both state security and human security, including the rights to life, physical safety, livelihood, education and health. Inclusive refugee hosting combined with aid can improve local development and public-service delivery. These benefits may nevertheless be unevenly distributed by location, gender, age, class and political connection. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether refugees create pressure or benefits, but which groups receive resources, which bear costs, and through which institutions those outcomes are negotiated.

Overall, inter-border conflict should be treated as an upstream driver of displacement, while refugee host conflict is a possible downstream outcome shaped by local governance. Conflating the two obscures the mechanisms that this study needs to examine. International cooperation remains essential, but financial assistance alone is insufficient without accountable allocation, participation by refugees and hosts, and credible local mechanisms for resolving disputes.

2.5.2. Uganda's refugee policy/legal framework

As mentioned earlier in chapter1, Uganda has continued to offer a conducive environment to millions of refugees from all corners of the world due to its open-door policy for refugees, embedded in Uganda's refugee policy and subsequent statutes on the coexistence of refugees with host communities and a harmonious environment within refugee settlements. Despite the challenges faced by host communities that welcome refugees, particularly the struggle over scarce resources, the Government has continued to ensure equitable delivery of services to both communities through various policy frameworks that foster refugee inclusion and sustain peaceful coexistence. According to the UNHCR fact sheet, Uganda's refugee and asylum seeker population stood at 1,973,716 as of 31 December 2025 (Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR, 2026, *Uganda Refugee Statistics December 2025*). Without discrimination, refugees are provided with freedom of movement and allocated land for shelter and cultivation

by the Government, and they have the right to access social services alongside host communities to improve their well-being and transform them into independent and productive communities, hence Uganda's progressive refugee and asylum policies (International labor organization (ILO), 2023, *Review of National Policy, Legislative and Regulatory Frameworks and Practice in Uganda*).

Uganda's refugee policy framework emanates from the grand norm, the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, which provides for the protection and promotion of fundamental and other human rights and freedoms under Chapter Four (*Constitution of the Republic of Uganda*, 1995, chap. 4). These rights and freedoms have been incorporated and expounded in subsequent legislation and policy frameworks addressing the peaceful coexistence of refugees in Uganda, thus granting refugees many of the same fundamental rights enjoyed by Ugandans. In addition, the country has ratified international and regional conventions on refugees, including the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 1976, and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa in 1987, thereby grounding refugee rights and freedoms in the domestic refugee policy framework (*Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951; *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, 1969; *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1967). The Refugees Act 2006 and the Refugees Regulations 2010, in addition to the provisions of the Constitution that provide a firm foundation for a conducive refugee environment, were enacted by the Government through Parliament. The Refugees Act 2006 is considered one of the most progressive pieces of refugee-focused legislation in the world due to the rights and freedoms it provides to refugees under what is referred to as the "refugees' bill of rights" in section 29 (*Refugees Act*, 2006, s. 29; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2023). The Refugees Regulations 2010 operationalize the Refugees Act (*Refugees Regulations*, 2010).

This legal framework is supplemented by policy and planning instruments that support the self-reliance model, which focuses on self-reliance and local settlement for refugees through the provision of land for subsistence agriculture and shelter. These instruments include the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF); the Third National Development Plan 2020/21–2024/25; the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities 2020/21–2024/25; the Health Sector Integrated Refugee Response Plan 2019–2024; and the Water and Environment Sector Response Plan for Refugees and Host

Communities (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017, *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework*; National Planning Authority, 2020, *Third National Development Plan 2020/21-2024/25*; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2021, *Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda 2020/21 -2024/25*; Ministry of Health, 2019, *Health Sector Integrated Refugee Response Plan 2019-2024*; Ministry of Water and Environment, 2018, *Water and Environment Sector Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities*).

According to the UNHCR Refugee Policy Review, these legal, policy, and planning instruments are explicitly and implicitly intended to identify, mitigate, and prevent potential social tensions and risks that could result in conflict between refugees and host communities. For instance, the Act and Regulations set out refugee rights as well as refugee obligations for those bound by the rule of law and public order (UNHCR and World Bank, 2022, *Uganda: Refugee Policy Review as at 30 June 2020*).

Additionally, Uganda has adopted and incorporated regional instruments to protect the rights and freedoms of refugees. It supported the development and affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018, signed the Djibouti Declaration on Quality Education for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in 2017, and adopted the Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region in March 2019 (United Nations, 2018, A/73/12 (Part II), *Global Compact on Refugees*; IGAD, 2017, *Djibouti Declaration on Quality Education for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities*; IGAD, 2019, *Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region*). Uganda also actively participated in the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019, *Global Refugee Forum 2019*).

The 2017 IGAD Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education and the 2019 Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance have continued to strengthen the normative basis for inclusion, burden-sharing and regional cooperation. Their effectiveness, however, depends on implementation. The ILO's field-based review finds that refugees' legal right to work is constrained by documentation difficulties, limited awareness among employers and officials, scarce formal employment, weak access to finance, and the remoteness of settlements (ILO, 2023, pp.27-46). This evidence demonstrates the difference between de jure rights and de facto access.

The allocation of land likewise requires qualification. Land is generally provided for use rather than transferred as property, plot sizes and availability vary, and urban refugees do not ordinarily receive settlement land. Omata (2022, pp. 659-670) argues that self-reliance policies often overlook the distribution and declining availability of local resources. Consequently, the policy may generate empowerment for some refugees while leaving others dependent on shrinking assistance and precarious informal work. While upholding the Uganda refugee policy, tensions surrounding the rights recognized nationally may be unevenly implemented locally. the expectation of self-reliance may exceed available land, employment and public services, and international burden-sharing remains voluntary and underfunded even though Uganda's protection obligations continue. These tensions provide an important basis for assessing whether existing conflict-resolution mechanisms can manage disputes arising from policy implementation

2.5.3. Indigenous way of conflict resolutions in Uganda

Conflict resolution is part of social life, and different communities in Uganda have developed distinct ways of addressing disputes. Indigenous systems were prevalent before colonial rule and continue to operate, although they have changed through interaction with state law, religion, war, displacement and development institutions. Their common objectives frequently include acknowledgement of wrongdoing, compensation, reconciliation and restoration of relationships, but Uganda's cultural diversity makes it inappropriate to present one mechanism as nationally representative.

As mentioned in chapter 1 sec 1.3., as part of Ubuntu in northern Uganda especially among Acholi communities, elders and clan authorities have historically played a central role in mediating disputes and enforcing communal norms. *Mato oput* literally associated with "drinking the bitter root" is the best-known Acholi reconciliation process. It involves investigation, acknowledgement, compensation and a ritual restoration of relations between clans. It is not a general-purpose procedure used identically for every offence, nor is it simply an informal criminal court. Contemporary representations of *Mato Oput* was idealized and reconstructed as practice in response to the Lord's Resistance Army conflict and international transitional-justice debates (Allen, T., 2006 pp. 128-166). Since then, it has been one of the reconciling indigenous practices especially in the Northern part of Uganda. During and after the conflict involving the Lord's Resistance Army, traditional leaders participated in reconciliation discussions and assistance to displaced communities. *Mato Oput* became

prominent in debates about whether local restorative justice could complement formal prosecution and be extended to other regions in Northern Uganda Langi, Teso, Madi, Karamojong and other communities, which have often been overshadowed by the literature on Acholi practices (Allen & Macdonald, 2013, pp. 9 -17). This imbalance limits the generalizability of claims drawn from northern Uganda.

In central Uganda, dispute resolution under the Buganda Kingdom was more centralized under the Kabaka and delegated chiefs, although mediation also occurred at household, clan and local levels (Haydon, 1960; Ramadhan, 2018). The Kabaka represented the highest political and judicial authority in important disputes. The contrast with Acholi clan-based practices demonstrates why indigenous conflict resolution must be analyzed in its specific institutional and cultural setting rather than treated as a homogeneous Ugandan tradition. Colonial indirect rule altered indigenous authority by recognizing selected chiefs and customary institutions while subordinating them to colonial administration (Mamdani, 1996; Ramadhan, 2018). Traditional leaders sometimes continued to resolve rural disputes alongside colonial courts, but what counted as “custom” was also reshaped by administrative power (Mamdani, 1996; Morris, 1965; Sseremba, 2023). Indigenous institutions therefore did not merely survive unchanged; their authority, jurisdiction and procedures were selectively transformed

Today, customary processes remain important in disputes concerning land, marriage, inheritance and community relations. Their potential strengths include accessibility, lower cost, cultural intelligibility, participation and the restoration of damaged relationships. These qualities may be relevant to refugee host disputes, especially where continued coexistence is necessary. However, the applicability of a community-specific ritual to refugees from different countries, ethnicities or religions cannot be presumed. A mechanism derives legitimacy from shared meanings and recognized authority; those conditions may be absent in culturally mixed settlements. There are also important human-rights critiques. Customary forums may reproduce unequal power relations, restrict women’s voice, privilege elders or clans, and prioritize collective reconciliation over individual accountability. Anderson (2009, pp. 59-95) shows that Mato oput has been criticized as gender-insensitive, while also documenting local women’s and men’s support for forms of ownership and restorative justice. The implication is not that indigenous justice is either inherently legitimate or inherently discriminatory. Rather, legitimacy must be assessed empirically by asking who participates, who can refuse, whose

account is believed, how remedies are enforced, and whether outcomes comply with constitutional and international rights.

Indigenous and formal mechanisms should therefore be understood as potentially complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Community mediation may address relationships and compensation, while formal institutions remain necessary where serious crimes, coercion, discrimination or enforceable legal rights are involved. During Uganda's continuing social transformation, cultural practices can be upheld without compromising constitutional protections, but this requires safeguards, inclusive representation, voluntary participation and referral pathways to formal justice.

2.5.4. Critical synthesis of the section.

The reviewed literature establishes four connected findings. First, Uganda's refugee regime has moved from colonial control toward a comparatively rights-based statutory framework, but elements of settlement-based management remain. Second, regional conflicts drive displacement, while conflict within refugee-hosting areas is mediated by local institutions, resource allocation and perceptions of fairness. Third, the self-reliance model offers legal and economic opportunities but can also shift responsibility to refugees and under-resourced local governments. Fourth, indigenous mechanisms offer relational and culturally grounded approaches to dispute resolution, although their inclusiveness and cross-cultural legitimacy cannot be assumed.

A major weakness in the existing literature is that these fields are commonly studied separately. Refugee-policy scholarship concentrates on law, livelihoods and humanitarian governance; border-conflict literature concentrates on security and regional politics; and indigenous-justice scholars often concentrates on transitional justice in northern Uganda. Less attention is given to how refugees, host communities, customary leaders and local-government officials combine-or fail to combine formal law and indigenous practices when resolving everyday disputes over land, water, services and coexistence.

2.6. summary of the main arguments in the literature review.

This literature review has explored the role of Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management. Ubuntu has been studied as a guiding concept for promoting social cohesiveness, peacemaking, and conflict resolution. The review illustrates how Ubuntu promotes inclusivity, shared

humanity, and moral leadership using interpretivism and positivism perspectives. Furthermore, the broader political, social, and economic processes that impact the understanding and the implementation, creation and application of policies in refugee settlements have been connected to Ubuntu's emphasis on unity, compassion, and inner goodness. The empirical review emphasized the real-life experiences of both host communities and refugees, demonstrating Ubuntu's capacity to foster harmonious co-existence and cross-cultural differences. But issues like xenophobia, financial hardships, and legislative restrictions continue to exist which affects the application of the Ubuntu values, while others include them into their migration policy. Different policymakers have differing opinions regarding Ubuntu's efficacy; some believe it is a crucial instrument for promoting social justice and inclusivity, while others are dubious about its real-word implementation.

The review also covered different conflict resolution techniques and how Ubuntu might be included in both official and informal dispute resolution processes in refugee camps. A variety of viewpoints on how Ubuntu ideals might be successfully used to conflict resolution are offered by the theoretical framework, which includes the ABC Model, Conflict Transformation Theory, Neo-Institutionalism, and the middle range theory (MRT). In the end, Ubuntu is still a potent but little-applied philosophy for handling conflict in refugee situations.

Finally, having established the theoretical foundations and identified the gaps in the existing literature, the next chapter 3 will outline the research methodology employed in this study. The chapter will discuss the research design, the methodological approach, data collection methods, and data analysis framework used to address the research questions posed in this dissertation, ethical considerations and reflexivity.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Chapter overview

This chapter examines the research methodologies the study employed to investigate the application of the Ubuntu Philosophy in conflict management within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement. The study aimed to comprehend the lived experiences of both host communities and refugees, the application of Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management, policymakers' perspectives on Ubuntu in conflict management, and the integration of this philosophy into current management frameworks.

This chapter is guided by research questions as:

- i) What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja settlement in applying the Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community?
- ii) How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?
- iii) How can the Ubuntu approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?
- iv) What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?

The study utilized a qualitative technique as the questions addressed what, why, and how, which are interrogative in nature. The qualitative research approach explains human experiences perspectives, policy implications and community dynamics. The technique was considered suitable since it facilitates a comprehensive examination of participants' perspectives and interpretations related to the Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management.

Further, the research strategy and detail step-by-step approach used to gather and analyze data is explained too. Key research design related to the formulation of research questions, the type of research design chosen, the reasons for this choice, the selection of interview participants, how interviews were conducted, the transcription and analysis of data was all captured in this chapter. The chapter examines ethical considerations and the strategies employed to overcome challenges in data collection and analysis. It further discusses the technique, emphasizing the design, carrying out, and analysis of research in a comprehensive and systematic manner, while examining both ontological and epistemological concerns. The chapter is structured as follows:

methodology, justification for the research design, study population, data sources, data collecting methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and chapter summary. As was introduced in chapter 1. (cf chap1 sec 1.9.).

3.2. Methodology

Methodology refers to the “strategy, plan of action, process or design” that informs the selection and application of the research paradigm, research methods and connects them to the intended research outcomes (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It provides a systematic framework for explaining how a study is designed, how data are collected and analyzed, and why particular methods are appropriate for answering the research questions.

3.2.1. The research Paradigm.

To understand research paradigms in social sciences, as an extensive belief system that govern the knowledge creation, interpretation, and validation of information within academic research, there is a need to elaborate the three categories of paradigms used in social sciences: thus positivism, interpretivism and critical theory.

Positivism is a famous worldview that believes reality as objective, quantifiable, and independent of the researcher. Grounded in the natural sciences, positivist research prioritizes empirical observation, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis to reveal universal rules (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Positivist researchers predominantly utilize quantitative methods and endeavor to maintain neutrality, hence reducing researcher bias. Critics assert that this paradigm too simplifies complex social processes by neglecting context and human subjectivity although its being considered by many (Bryman, 2016). To differ from positivist, interpretivism (or constructivism) Paradigm challenges the assumption of an objective reality. Interpretivists assert that reality is socially constructed through human experiences and interactions. Therefore, Interpretivist researchers seek to understand the meanings, perspectives, and experiences of people other than abstract beliefs. Interpretivists researchers often use a qualitative approach through interviews, observations, and case studies. The interpretivism paradigm acknowledges the researcher’s position as an active participant in knowledge production, hence highlighting reflexivity and context. While positivists focus on generality, interpretivist studies emphasize depth, richness, and comprehension of particular social contexts. While Interpretivism is significant in qualitative research, its opponents

highlight possible limits regarding replicability and generalizability; yet advocates contend that its value is in its capacity to encapsulate the intricacies of human behavior (Schwandt, 2014).

The critical theory paradigm is a significant framework that not only comprehends reality but also interrogates and transforms it. Critical theory, stemming from the Frankfurt School and other intellectual movements, examines issues of social justice, inequality, and power dynamics (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Critical theory utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods, however, is driven by a dedication to critique and reform rather than impartiality to tackle real-world challenges (Morgan, 2014). Collectively, All the three paradigms demonstrate that research is not devoid of values but is influenced by philosophical assumptions regarding reality, knowledge, and the objectives of inquiry.

Having understood the interconnection of the research paradigms, this study is guided by the interpretivist(constructivism) paradigm. As explained above, interpretivism, which is originally rooted in the idea that knowledge can be understood through a relativist ontology approach which sees reality as socially constructed, and can have multiple interpretations, rather than a singular truth that can be determined through measurement (Goldkuhl 2012; Ryan 2018; Pham 2018). According to Turyahikayo (2021), a phenomenon can have multiple interpretations instead of a definitive truth that can be determined through measurement. Creswell and Poth, (2018) asserts that interpretivism holds reality which is not fixed but is shaped by social and cultural context, and people's actions can only be understood within these settings which focuses on understanding the world through the eyes of the others (their meanings and experiences) who live in it. Adopting an interpretivist perspective, therefore, provided latitude and flexibility in observing and interpreting the data from different perspectives This makes the paradigm highly suitable for the current study, which set out to explore how refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja settlement draw on Ubuntu philosophy a cultural and relational way of life to resolve the conflicts they face in their daily interactions.

Interpretivism primarily focuses on revealing individuals' genuine experiences rather than evaluating concepts or quantifying them. This study focused on the perspectives of refugees, host community members, and policymakers to understand their distinct perceptions of how Ubuntu influences conflict management decisions in Rwamwanja. The Ubuntu principles of empathy, reciprocity, and community interdependence may possess diverse interpretations across various cultures, groups, and individuals hence the interpretivist approach facilitated an

understanding of these differences within their social, historical, and cultural contexts (Schwandt, 2014). Because the interpretivist research design utilizes thick descriptions and rich narratives, just like the qualitative ethnographic approach used in this study, the researcher explored deep into the community, conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) and carry out interviews to understand how conflicts are experienced, narrated and resolved using the Ubuntu philosophy. The methods used aligned with the interpretivist paradigm and were core to the achievement of the study's objectives of understanding conflict resolution while applying the Ubuntu philosophy.

The adoption of interpretive-constructivist paradigm was essential as it enabled the researcher to explore subjects beyond mere superficiality. This facilitated research in uncovering the values, perspectives, and social interactions that fostered the acceptance of Ubuntu principles. The paradigm offered an ideal framework for achieving the study's objectives of understanding lived experiences, assessing policymakers' perceptions, and proposing context-specific strategies for the integration of Ubuntu into conflict management in the refugee settlement and beyond.

3.2.2. The methodological approach

In social science, researchers commonly distinguish between inductive and deductive approaches to theoretical reasoning (Blaikie, 2010). Deductive research begins with theory and tests propositions or hypotheses against empirical observations, whereas inductive research begins with observations and develops concepts, patterns, or theoretical insights from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Neuman, 2014; Trochim et al., 2016). This study employed an inductive approach within a qualitative framework. Its purpose was not to construct a universally generalizable theory but to develop a rich, contextualized understanding of participants' experiences, meanings, and social processes and to represent those insights through an interpretive model.

Two propositions guided the inquiry. The first was that the adoption of the Ubuntu philosophy may contribute to effective conflict management by promoting mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among the diverse communities in Rwamwanja refugee settlement. The second was that the Ubuntu philosophy may be inconsistently employed in Rwamwanja because the settlement's specific social, cultural, and institutional conditions and the meaning of Ubuntu itself have not been sufficiently accepted or shared by all stakeholders. In qualitative research,

propositions serve as sensitizing and organizing devices rather than hypotheses to be statistically tested. Here, they guided the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) while allowing unanticipated experiences and interpretations to emerge from participants' accounts (Yin, 2014, pp. 29-36).

The inductive approach enabled flexibility during data collection and analysis. Interview, FGD, and observational data were openly coded to identify recurring themes, contradictions, and narrative patterns. Inductive analysis is particularly valuable in qualitative inquiry because it allows categories to arise from the data and supports a contextual understanding of complex human experiences (Patton, 2015). This flexibility was appropriate in Rwamwanja, where tensions within and between refugee and host communities are shaped by resource competition, cultural diversity, institutional arrangements, and everyday social relations.

Induction also enabled the study to engage critically with its theoretical perspectives: Ubuntu philosophy, conflict transformation theory, and middle-range theory. Conflict transformation emphasizes the relationships, structures, and cultural patterns that sustain conflict rather than concentrating only on the resolution of immediate disputes (Lederach, 1997, pp. 81 -83). In refugee host relations, this perspective draws attention to resource inequalities, identity-based tensions, historical grievances, and the need to rebuild trust and social cohesion. The inductive analysis therefore examined both grassroots peacebuilding practices and the structural or political constraints that may limit transformation despite dialogue efforts.

Middle-range theory enabled the researcher to connect concepts of social justice with the lived experiences of refugees and host-community members. It also provided a way to examine how informal, community-led conflict management practices interact with formal legal procedures, humanitarian policies, and administrative structures. Ubuntu, conflict transformation, and middle-range theory were consequently used as interpretive lenses rather than rigid frameworks imposed on the data. This position allowed participants' voices to affirm, qualify, or challenge the assumptions embedded in those perspectives.

The interpretivist orientation of the study recognized that participants' accounts are situated, and that knowledge of conflict is shaped by experience, social position, and context. Interviews were guided by broad but theoretically informed questions, allowing the researcher to examine how lived experiences aligned with or departed from the study's initial propositions. This methodological choice provided analytical direction while retaining the narrative depth and

openness required to study complex social settings. It was especially valuable in a refugee settlement because it enabled the study to explore how conflict could be transformed constructively and how indigenous approaches might interact with institutional policy.

This approach proved particularly valuable in studying complex social phenomena like those in refugee settlements, as it allowed us to assess how conflicts can be transformed into positivity (conflict transformative) not withholding the middle range which balances both policy and the indigenous approaches to conflict management. While the data analysis and writing demanded considerable time and attention, the inductive framework provided clear direction and analytical focus throughout the research process. This choice of inductive reasoning within a qualitative paradigm ultimately served the research aim well, offering a structured yet flexible approach to understanding complex social dynamics.

3.3. Empirical research design

A research design provides the framework that connects a study's questions, evidence, methods, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018, pp. 27-29). The design of a study and the research methods are essential for addressing the research problem. The design acts as a plan that outlines the entire research process, giving a researcher a clear structure to organize the ideas while considering practical constraints and own position in the knowledge-production process (Sileyew, 2019). This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how Ubuntu philosophy is understood, interpreted and used in conflict management in Rwamwanja refugee settlement.

The design was informed by the proposition that Ubuntu may offer a culturally meaningful approach to conflict management but may not be uniformly understood or applied across Rwamwanja's culturally diverse population. Stakeholders include refugees, host-community members, government officials, local leaders, humanitarian organizations, and UNHCR. Their different roles and understandings required a design capable of examining both lived experience and institutional practice. A review of the literature indicated that research on Ubuntu-informed conflict management in Sub-Saharan African refugee settlements remains limited and that evidence specific to Rwamwanja is particularly scarce. Interviews, FGDs, participant observation, and policy-document review were therefore combined to address this gap through methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015).

The study integrated case-study and ethnographic designs. The case study supported an in-depth examination of Ubuntu and conflict management within the bounded setting of Rwamwanja, while ethnographic engagement enabled the researcher to observe everyday interactions and interpret practices in their social and cultural contexts. Together, these designs supported research questions by connecting participants' accounts, observed practices, and institutional perspectives.

3.3.1. Case study

The study examined Rwamwanja refugee settlement as a case, because of its uniqueness in diverse cultural background. As explained in the previous chapters, Rwamwanja is the only settlement in Uganda that was closed and later reopened. Rwamwanja was selected to represent other settlements because of its uniqueness in operations and diverse cultures. Since its initial establishment as a settlement in 1964 to provide refuge for Rwandan refugees until 1994 genocide era, it was closed in 1995 when the refugees repatriated back. Even though it is believed that majority stayed, and the nationals pre-occupied the settlement until the settlement was re-opened in 2012 to accommodate Congolese refugees fleeing violence in North and South of Kivu in the DRC. The internal conflicts found in Rwamwanja are based on Ethnicity, tribes, resource allocation (land) because of trends in operations made Rwamwanja a case for studying the changing dynamics.

The case approach was appropriate for generating in-depth insights regarding the perception of Ubuntu philosophy in a multi-cultured environment like Rwamwanja. Yin (2018) explains the case study methodological as answering the “why” and “how” in the qualitative study. The case study approach was Descriptive whereby it focused on real-life experience and contexts situations that identifies the research questions and focuses on specific detailed insights. The case study was chosen to give a holistic view of the study of Ubuntu philosophy and how it has been applied in diverse cultural-ethnic background of Rwamwanja refugees' settlement. The case study was ideal for drawing patterns and strategies for conflict management in refugee settlements. As it is the first study in southwestern Uganda, while acknowledging the wide range of the case, the findings related to conflict management in refugee settlement may not fully replicate other settlements. Conflicts differ from one settlement to another.

To provide a diverse view of answering the research questions. Three qualitative primary data collection methods were employed, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and semi-

structured interviews. The interviews provided an opportunity to engage with individuals such as community leaders, policymakers, Ngo representatives and other stakeholders to gain deeper insights into policy-level perspectives. The Focus group discussions allowed for the collective reflection of the everyday conflicts experienced in the settlement and how Ubuntu principles are applied in their resolution. Further, FGDs enabled collective reflection of the conflict encounters of the participants and the Ubuntu-inspired principles they applied such as dialogue, empathy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The interview guide was shared, and the guidelines were provided to the respondents.

Ethnographic engagement complemented these verbal accounts. The researcher lived within the community, participated in daily activities, attended events, held informal conversations, and observed interactions in shared spaces. Such immersion enables social practices to be interpreted within the contexts in which they occur and can reveal dimensions that are not fully captured through interviews alone (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The researcher spent two months in the settlement, from July to September 2025, and maintained a field diary. Observations were compared with interview and FGD accounts to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of both grassroots and institutional dimensions of Ubuntu in conflict management. This methodological framework aligns with the research goals of uncovering lived experiences, exploring perceptions, and identifying practical strategies for integrating Ubuntu into conflict management within a culturally diverse and complex setting like Rwamwanja refugee settlement.

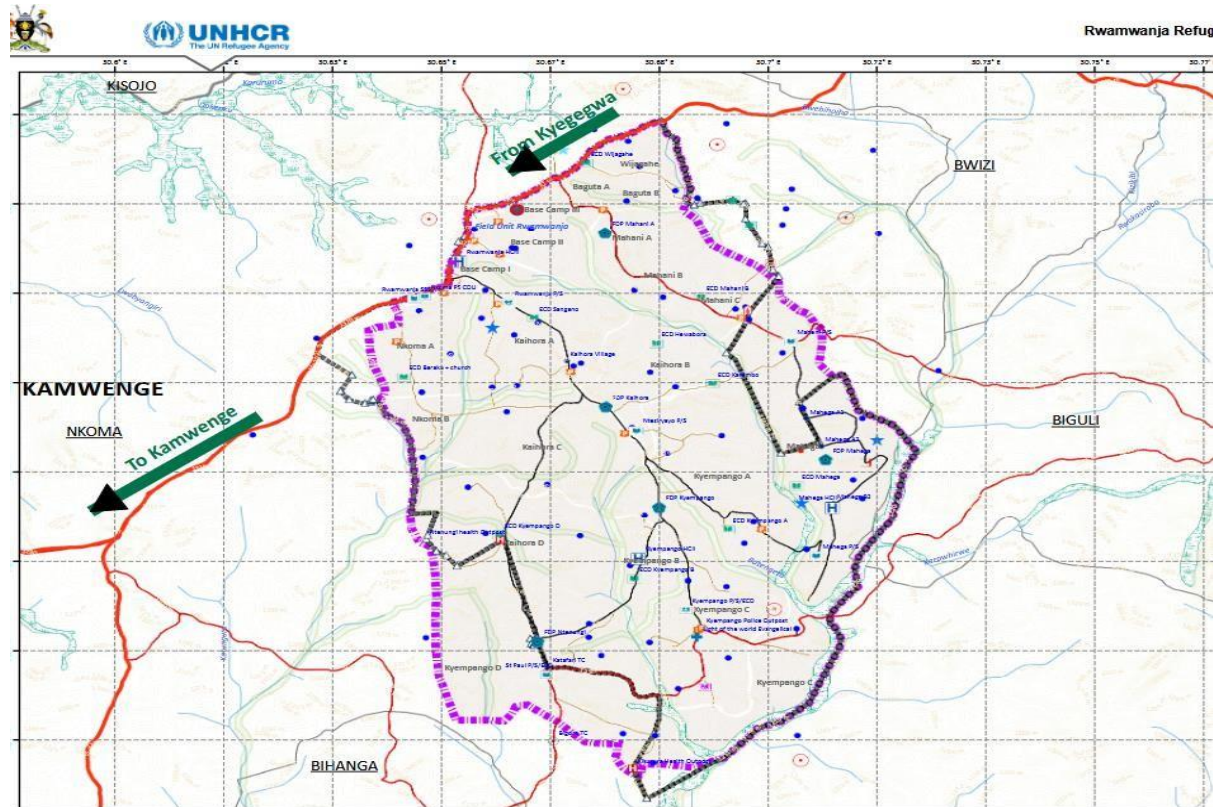
Secondary data were drawn from academic literature, policy documents, and existing datasets. These sources supplemented the primary data and provided historical, policy, and demographic context. The combination of interviews, FGDs, observation, and document review strengthened the credibility of the analysis by allowing evidence from different sources to be compared (Patton, 2015).

The study also recorded participants' ethnic backgrounds where voluntarily disclosed because refugees registered in Uganda are commonly identified by country of origin rather than ethnicity, although ethnic identity may influence social relations and conflict. Uganda's own ethnic diversity further shapes the cultural context in which refugee host interactions occur. Age information was optional but helped the researcher consider the experiences of youth, women, men, and older persons. These characteristics were used to interpret differences in

conflict exposure and conflict-management practices, not to rank ethnic groups or claim statistical representation.

3.3.2. Study area.

Figure 3 Map of Rwamwanja refugee settlement



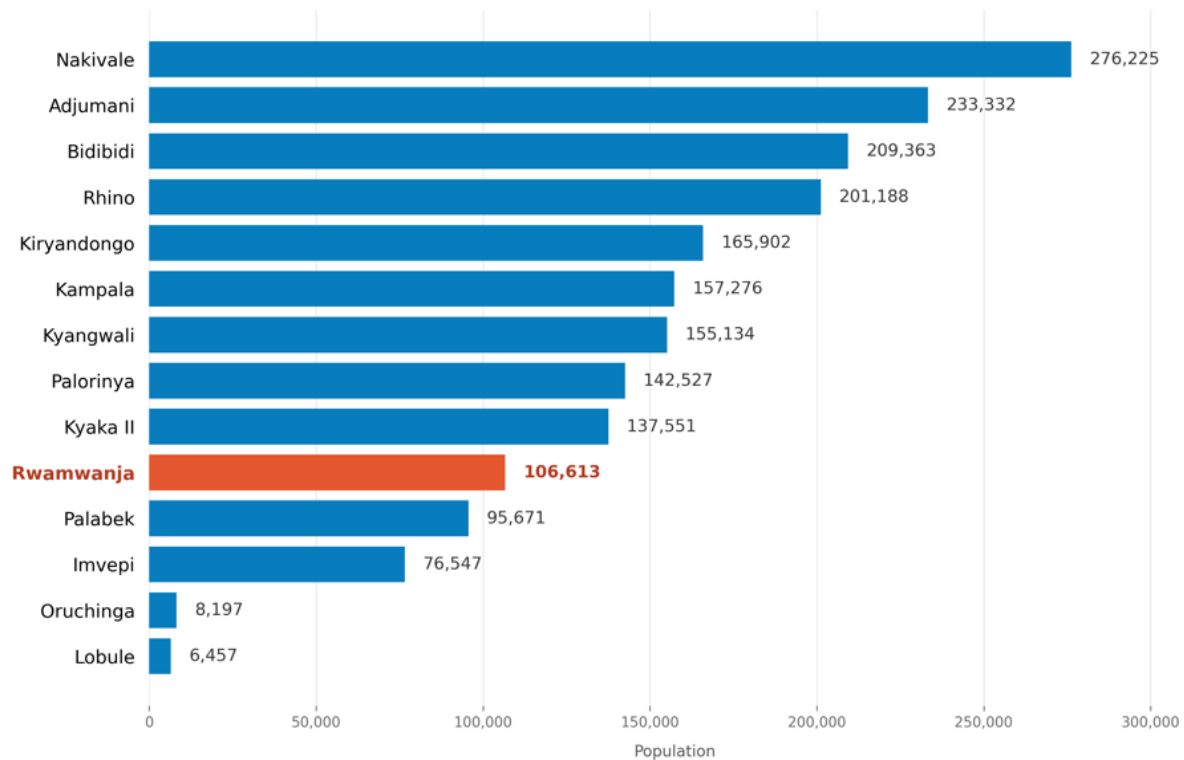
Source: UNHCR, *Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement Map - Kamwenge* (August 2018).

Rwamwanja refugee settlement is situated in Kamwenge District bordering Kabarole, Ibanda and kyenjojo Districts in south-western Uganda. The settlement is among the 13-refugee settlement in Uganda. As earlier mentioned in the previous chapters (1 and 2), Rwamwanja is one of the oldest settlements and yet newly reopened. This uniqueness in its operation is important in understanding how conflicts are being managed in a diverse cultural environment such as Rwamwanja. Uganda is still leading in hosting the highest number of refugees in Africa approximately 1.9 million (UNHCR, 2025), the refugees are settled in 13 refugee settlements grouped into 4 regions. The West-Nile region has 7 refugee settlements thus (Bidi-bidi, Adjumani, Palorinya, Rhino, Imvepi, Loble, and Palabe) mainly hosts refugees from South Sudan. The South-Western Region include (Nakivale, Oruchinga, Kyakall, Rwamwanja, and Kyangwali) mainly hosts refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mid-Western and Urban region (Kiryandongo and Kampala) with mixed refugees. By the time of

the study, Rwamwanja had approximately more than 100,000 refugees mainly from DRC and few from other countries. These refugees are settled in 10 zones, thus Kyempango, Kaihora, Mahani, Nkoma-Katalyeba, Ntenungi, Basecamp, Mahega, Kikiuru, Waijagahe and Buguta zones which are surrounded and occupied by host community members. Rwamwanja operates in a density populated environment which creates tension over resources hence causing conflicts between hosts and refugees (Jacobsen, 2002). Rwamwanja was selected because of its uniqueness in cultural and ethnic groups, also focused on refugee-host interactions. Rwamwanja was one of the oldest Refugee settlements established in 1964 to accommodate Rwandese refugees from Rwanda. In 1995 after refugees' repatriation back to their country, the settlement alleged to have been "dormant" and closed all humanitarian activities even though majority of the refugees had stayed behind. This prompted the nationals from neighboring districts to occupy the place. The preoccupation of different groups made it difficult to control movements and population. It focused on the integration process within this settlement given the fact that it was reopened in 2012 hosting Refugees from Democratic republic of Congo after being left vacant for some time and where nationals had re-settled. This unique background of having different ethnic groups of both the hosts and refugees made the Rwamwanja refugee settlement imperative for research. Rwamwanja is managed by the UNHCR and the Uganda Office of the Prime Minister's Department of Refugees (OPM). Therefore, this host community is believed to have a lot of experience from hosting the refugees. Since they have hosted refugees from different countries, they are believed to have rich information and perceptions on the refugees in relations to conflict management.

3.3.3. The study population

Figure 4 Study population by settlement, Rwamwanja highlighted



Source: UNHCR & Government of Uganda. Uganda Refugees and Asylum-Seekers: Overview (31 December 2025).

Source: UNHCR & Government of Uganda Refugee and Asylum Seekers: Overview (31 December 2025)

Babbie, (2021) defines a study population as the larger group of individuals or units from which the research sample is drawn and to which the researcher intends to generalize or transfer the findings. Unlike quantitative research, which commonly emphasizes statistical representativeness, qualitative research uses the study purpose to guide participant selection. Participants are selected because they can provide rich and relevant accounts of the phenomenon under investigation rather than achieve numerical representation of a wider population (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Patton (2015) note that study population in qualitative research is conceptualized defining the experiences and relevant context focusing on individuals or groups to respond to the research questions, it takes into account the experience of the respondents, location and the involvement in the study which is key in selecting the population rather than random selection methods which is used in quantitative research. In agreement with this statement, the study population in this research was selected in the view of understring Ubuntu as a key element in conflicting

community of Rwamwanja refugee settlement. Conflicts in refugee settlements involve a number of parties host community and refugees, the law enforcers and other stakeholders involved in peace making and conflict resolution; like community leaders, NGO workers, local government officials, and cultural or religious leaders operating in or around the settlement. As all these individuals and groups are directly or indirectly involved in or affected by conflict, it was thus important to include them in the population.

The population for this study comprised of refugees, host community members, elders, representatives of different NGOs, Representatives of the OPM, Representatives of international body (UNHCR) local representatives (LCs), and Police, Refugee Welfare Councils and Desk receiving personnel within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement. These groups were central to the research because they are directly involved in or affected by conflict dynamics, making them key actors in the investigation of how Ubuntu philosophy is understood and applied in conflict management. Refugees constitute the primary category of the study population because they experience day-to-day conflicts related to displacement, resource competition, and cultural differences. Their voices were critical in answering the first research question, which focused on lived experiences of Ubuntu as a conflict management approach. The host community interacts with refugees in shared spaces such as schools, health facilities, Agricultural land, water sources, social gatherings and marketplaces. These interactions often give rise to tensions, especially in a densely populated environment, but also present opportunities for Ubuntu principles such as solidarity, empathy, and reciprocity to be applied in resolving disputes. Including them in the population helped capture the relational and intercultural dynamics of conflict management.

Elders' play key role in reconciling the conflicting parties using the Ubuntu principle, it was imperative to include them in the study, their involvement shows how the study is relevant in upholding traditional values and peace keeping. Lastly, policymakers such the representatives from the OPM, the UNHCR representatives, community leaders, local government officials, law enforcement practitioners, and humanitarian actors formed another critical part of the study population. Their inclusion was important for addressing the second, third, and fourth research questions, which examined the perceptions of Ubuntu at policy and leadership levels, as well as the strategies for integrating it into formal conflict management frameworks and addressing other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms rather than Ubuntu. By considering these categories, the study population represented both grassroots community members and

institutional actors. This allowed the research to explore Ubuntu not only as a lived philosophy among ordinary people but also as a principle that could inform decision-making and institutional practices in refugee settlement management.

3.3.4. Sample size:

The sample size is mainly the number of participants that are included in the study that enables the researcher to gather in-depth insights into the phenomenon. The aim of the study is to explore the Ubuntu philosophy and how it has been applied in conflict management mainly in Rwamwanja refugee settlement.

As stated in the previous section (3.3), qualitative studies focus on depth rather than breadth. These studies aim to obtain rich, in-depth detailed data. Thus, in selecting the sample, respondents rich in data and knowledge of the subject were sought to provide the information. The number of these respondents is usually small due to a phenomenon known as saturation which is a point reached when additional interviews or any other qualitative data collection methods will not yield any newer information. According to Saunders et al., (2018), at this point data collection can cease as nothing new is being added to the data already collected. Saturation is a guiding principle for qualitative research as it helps to determine when enough qualitative data has been gathered, particularly in interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic research. According to Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, (2006), and Baker, & Edwards, (2012), some studies reach their saturation point as early as after 12 interviews. In this study, 08 key informant interviews were conducted with Local council 1 (LC1), Elder, NGO Representative staff, Representative from UNHCR, Representative from OPM, the law enforcement like policemen (OC). Representative of Refugee Welfare Council (RWCs) and Reception office in charge of receiving the refugees. These Key informants were selected because of their direct participation in matters concerning refugee management in Rwamwanja.

Four FGDs were conducted, 2 from refugees and two from host - community members. The selection of the FGs made sure of the inclusion of different categories being represented to avoid biases thus, youth, Elderly, women and men each comprising of between 8-10 for Refugees, and 9-10 for host community members were sufficient to generate enough information. The sample selection included the areas of operation thus (Base camp 1&2) which was only for refugees, Nkoma -Katalyeba which is community near the base camp (that works

as integration community of both refugee and host) and Mahani which was the furthest community which is mainly for host community.

Base camp, being large, the groups were selected from base camp one and two. Base-camp one which is closer to the main headquarters, and base camp two, which was the furthest, from the headquarters. The selection was based on getting diverse views of respondents and avoiding biases. Nkoma-Kataryeba zone, which is integrated with refugees and host community members, was important in addressing the concerns that lead to conflicts and how they manage the conflicts. Lastly, Mahani, mainly had host- community members alone. They were important in that; they provided information that was vital for the communities that surround the main settlement. The study also used an ethnographic approach, a 2-month ethnographic study and observation was done where the researcher spent time taking part in activities within the settlement and observing all the stakeholders in conflict and conflict resolution. A diary was kept of all the observations.

The study focused on understanding the use of Ubuntu in a complex behaviors of refugees and host community members, the experiences and the perceptions of different stakeholders in conflict management within the settlement. The sample size was smaller in number, whereby the researcher emphasis was more on quality, the depth and the richness of the data to reach the saturation point. The researcher also considered the time frame, and the resources availability which drew the number of respondents.

3.3.5. Sampling procedure

Following the qualitative study approach, the sampling procedure depends on the nature of the study. The study involved a non-probability sampling procedure which involved purposive sampling and convenience sampling technics. The study took two approaches: the case study and ethnographic approach. The study was conducted in Rwamwanja refugee settlement. The number of respondents, especially the key respondents, were purposively selected due to their expertise, experience, knowledge and responsibilities they held in the settlement.

Rwamwanja refugee settlement has 10 zones which have both refugees and host members. The researcher followed the convenient sampling approach to select three zones that gave information on the study. The zones selected were those that would give maximum variation to the population selected. The zones included, Base camp zone, which has only refugees, this

helped the research to interview refugees through focus group, the Mahani zone was selected as it mainly accommodates host members and its furthest from Base camp, and the Nkoma-Kataryeba Zone, which is integrated with both refugees and host community members and it is closet to Basecamp the refugee settlement. The selection of the 3 zones gives a representative of other zones. This was done to avoid bias to the study and provide a representative sample of the Rwamanja Refugee settlement.

3.4. Data collection Methods and instruments

The type of data often determines the methods of data collection. The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was used to collect first-hand information and experience for specific reasons in responding to research questions. Primary data included semi-structured interviews which were administered to key informants, focus group discussions (FGDs) were mainly conducted for refugees and host community members, and observations where the researcher participated. The secondary data was used to obtain literature from different sources, including but not limited to academic journals, policy documents, which were used to supplement the findings from the primary source.

Table 1 Showing different participants

Method	Participants	Zone	Age	Country/ethnicity	Duration
Interviews	UNHCR representative	Head quaters (Rwamwanja)	-At the respondent request age was not provided	Uganda	45 mins
Interviews	OPM representative	Head quaters(Rwamwanja)	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	Uganda	40 minutes

Interviews	OC police station Rwamwanja	NkomaKatalyeba	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	Uganda	45 mins
Interviews	NGO representative (alite)	Headquarters	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	Uganda	50 mins
Interviews	LC1 interviews	Nkoma-Katalyeba	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	Uganda	50min
Interviews	Elder	Nkoma-Katalyeba	85 years	Ugandan	45 min
Interviews	RWC (presida)	Base-camp	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	DRC	45 min
Interviews	Receiving desk head	Mahani	At the respondent request, age was not provided.	Uganda	40 mins
FGD1	Male	Base camp1	30	DRC/Mfulewu	45 mins
	Male		35	DRC/Mtusi	
	Female		27	DRC/muhema	
	Female		62	DRC/Mrega	
	Male		36	DRC/Mrega	
	Female		26	DRC/Wahema	
	Male		40	DRC/Mtusi	
	Male		27	DRC/ Mtsusi	
08 respo ndent s					

FGD2	Male	Base camp2	40	DRC/Mtusi	45 mins
	Male		52	DRC/ Mfuliru	
	Male		24	DRC / Muhem a	
	Male		26	DRC/Mfulewu	
	Female		42	DRC/ Muhem a	
	Female		50	DRC/ Mtusi	
	Female		38	DRC/Mtsusi	
	Male		24	DRC/Muhema	
	Female		23	DRC/Muhema	
	Male		55	DRC/ Mtsusi	
10 respo ndent s					
FGD3 Host com munit y	Female	Mahani ,	40	Uganda/Muto oro	50 minutes
	Male		50	Uganda/Muki ga	
	Female		50	Uganda/Muho roro	
	Male		61	Uganda/Muto oro	
	Male		25	Uganda/Muki ga	
	Female		27	Uganda/Muto oro	
	Male		74	Uganda/Muto oro	
	Female		45	Uganda/ Mufum bira	
	Female		40	Uganda/muny ankole	
	Female		22	Uganda/Muki ga	

10 respo ndent s					50 minutes
FGD4	Male	Nkoma-Katalyeba ”	78	Uganda/mutoo ro	
	Female		40	Uganda/muga nda	
	Female		35	Uganda/Muki ga	
	Female		22	Uganda/Muto oro	
	Female		30	Uganda/mufu mbira	
	Female		45	Uganda/mutoo ro	
	Male		50	Uganda/Mufu mbira	
	Female		28	Uganda/Muki ga	
	Male		45	Uganda/mufu mbira	
09 respo ndent s					

Source: Author's compilation based on data from the field 2025

The four FGDs were selected from Base camp 1(FGD1) Base camp 2 (FGD2) Mahani (FGD3) and Nkoma- Katalyeba (GD4)

In the Table 1, especially from Nkoma-Katalyeba (FGD4), the host community members who are Ugandan/Bafumbira, are mainly the refugees who stayed behind after the genocide, and they became Ugandans. The Ugandan refuge act of 2006 allows naturalization of refugees who have stayed for a long period of time. This group was considered as “integrated” community because of the nature of its composition. These refugees were able to give their experiences and how they manage conflicts now as they are part of the bigger community.

3.4.1. Data Collection Instruments

The study employed three main data collection instruments, namely a semi-structured interview guide (see: Appendix 1), a focus group discussion (FGD) guide, and an observation checklist. These instruments were briefly identified in Section 1.6. *Overview of Methodology*, where the general methodological approach and proposed methods of data collection were presented. The present section provides a detailed explanation of the instruments, including their purpose, structure, areas of inquiry, target participants, and procedures for their administration. The instruments were developed in line with the purpose of the study and the four research questions to ensure that the data collected captured participants' understandings, experiences, perceptions, practices, and observations concerning Ubuntu philosophy and conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The use of multiple qualitative data collection methods also enabled the researcher to obtain complementary perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation and to enhance the comprehensiveness and credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Busetto et al., 2020; Guha et al., 2021).

3.4.1.1. The semi structured interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 1) was used to obtain in-depth information from selected participants who possessed relevant knowledge, experience, or responsibilities concerning conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. These included the Local Council 1 chairpersons (LC1), Refugee Welfare Council (RWC's), Police Commandant (OC), representative from Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Representative from UNHCR, and a representative from an NGO dealing with Refugees. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection approach in which the researcher uses predetermined thematic questions while retaining flexibility to vary the sequence of questions, seek clarification, and probe issues emerging during the interaction. This flexibility is particularly useful in qualitative research where the researcher seeks to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, meanings, and interpretations in their own words. (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, pp. 1-3)

The development of a semi-structured interview guide should therefore be closely connected to the research purpose, existing knowledge, study objectives, and the issues that the researcher intends to explore (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide and focus group guide were first piloted to few respondents to credibility assessment.

The interview guide was developed specifically around the four research questions of the study. The questions were predominantly open-ended to enable participants to provide detailed

accounts rather than responses restricted to predetermined alternatives. The guide was organized into identified areas corresponding to participants' understanding of Ubuntu, experiences of conflict management, perceptions of institutional actors, the potential contribution of Ubuntu to existing mechanisms, and the formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms operating within the settlement.

The first identified area of the interview guide addressed the first research question, which sought to explore how refugees and host community members understood interpreted, and applied Ubuntu principles in managing everyday conflict. Participants were asked to explain what Ubuntu meant to them, the values they associated with the philosophy, and how they understood principles such as humanity, mutual respect, compassion, solidarity, forgiveness, reconciliation, dialogue, and communal responsibility. The questions further explored how such principles were manifested in everyday relationships between individuals, families, refugees, and host community members. Participants were encouraged to provide examples of situations in which Ubuntu principles had been applied to prevent, manage, or resolve disagreements and conflicts. The questions under this theme also explored whether participants perceived Ubuntu as an explicit philosophy, an inherited cultural value, a way of relating to other people, or a practical approach to resolving disputes. This distinction was important because the study was concerned not only with whether participants had heard of the term "Ubuntu" but also with how they interpreted and practiced its underlying principles. The semi-structured nature of the guide allowed the researcher to follow participants' explanations and explore meanings that emerged during the interviews rather than imposing a single predetermined interpretation of Ubuntu.

The second identified area focused on the perceptions of institutional actors regarding Ubuntu and its relevance to conflict management, thereby addressing the second research question. Institutional participants were asked to describe their understanding of Ubuntu and their perceptions of its relevance to conflict management within the settlement. The questions explored whether institutional actors had encountered Ubuntu-related practices among refugees and host community members and whether they considered Ubuntu principles compatible with existing institutional approaches to conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. The interview questions also explored the extent to which Ubuntu was recognized or incorporated, explicitly or implicitly, within the work of institutions and community structures involved in conflict management. Participants were encouraged to discuss the possible strengths and limitations of Ubuntu as an approach to conflict management

and to explain circumstances in which Ubuntu-based practices might be useful or less appropriate. This enabled the study to capture institutional perspectives rather than relying exclusively on community members' understandings of Ubuntu.

The third identified area addressed the third research question, which sought to assess how Ubuntu principles might complement or strengthen existing conflict-management strategies. Participants were asked to identify the conflict-management approaches currently used within the settlement and to assess their effectiveness in addressing different types of conflict. The questions then explored whether principles such as dialogue, empathy, mutual respect, forgiveness, reconciliation, collective responsibility, and restoration of relationships could strengthen these approaches. Particular attention was given to the possibility that Ubuntu could function as a complementary rather than necessarily an alternative approach to formal conflict-management structures. Participants were therefore asked to explain how Ubuntu principles could be integrated into existing practices and whether such integration could improve relationships between refugees and host community members. They were also encouraged to identify possible challenges associated with applying Ubuntu within formal institutional settings.

The fourth identified area addressed the fourth research question by identifying and examining the formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms operating within the settlement apart from Ubuntu. Participants were asked to identify the structures and processes through which conflicts were reported, mediated, negotiated, resolved, or prevented. These included, where applicable, community leadership structures, refugee leadership structures, local government authorities, religious institutions, family and kinship networks, traditional or community leaders, mediation, negotiation, community dialogue, and other locally established practices. Participants were asked to explain the circumstances under which particular mechanisms were preferred, the actors involved in their operation, their perceived strengths and limitations, and the outcomes associated with their use. The questions also explored relationships between these mechanisms and Ubuntu principles. This enabled the researcher to examine Ubuntu within the broader conflict-management environment of Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement rather than treating it as a mechanism operating independently from existing structures.

The interview guide incorporated probing questions to obtain clarification and deeper explanations where participants raised issues requiring further exploration. Probing is an

important feature of semi-structured qualitative interviewing because it allows the researcher to pursue significant issues that arise during an interview while maintaining the overall direction of the study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). In this study, probes included requests for participants to provide examples, explain particular experiences, clarify meanings, describe processes, or elaborate on statements they had made. This was particularly important when participants used concepts such as Ubuntu, reconciliation, forgiveness, caring, eating together, justice, mediation, or community responsibility, since these concepts could have different meanings across individuals and social groups.

The interview guide was administered flexibly while maintaining consistency in the major identified areas covered across participants. The researcher established rapport with participants and explained the purpose of the study before commencing each interview. Questions were presented in a manner that enabled participants to express their views freely, while probing questions were used where additional information was necessary. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes capturing relevant contextual information. The interview data were subsequently organized according to the research questions and emerging themes for analysis (see: Appendix 6).

The interview guide was therefore not treated as a rigid questionnaire but as a flexible framework for guiding the researcher-participant interaction. This approach was consistent with the exploratory nature of the study because it allowed participants to introduce experiences and perspectives that might not have been anticipated during the initial development of the instrument. The guide was also reviewed and refined to ensure that its questions were relevant to the study objectives and capable of generating the depth of information required for qualitative analysis. Rigorous development and refinement of a semi-structured interview guide are important for improving the coherence and trustworthiness of qualitative data collection (Kallio et al., 2016).

3.4.1.2. Focus Group Interview Guide

A focus group discussion guide (see Appendix 2) was used to generate collective perspectives, shared experiences, and differing views concerning Ubuntu philosophy and conflict management among refugees and host community members. A focus group is a qualitative method that uses interaction among participants as a source of data, allowing the researcher to explore not only individual views but also how participants respond to, agree with, challenge, or elaborate on one another's perspectives (Tritter & Landstad, 2020). This characteristic made

FGDs appropriate for the present study because Ubuntu concerns relationships, communal responsibility, social harmony, mutual recognition, and the ways in which people live and resolve problems together.

The FGD guide was structured around the study objectives while allowing sufficient flexibility for participants to raise issues that emerged during group interaction. The initial section explored participants' general understanding and interpretation of Ubuntu and the values they associated with philosophy. Participants were invited to discuss what Ubuntu meant within their communities, the behaviors they considered consistent with Ubuntu, and the ways in which Ubuntu principles were expressed in everyday relationships. The discussion also explored whether participants perceived differences in the understanding or practice of Ubuntu among different groups within the settlement.

The second area of discussion focused on everyday conflicts experienced within the settlement and how such conflicts were commonly managed. Participants were encouraged to identify common sources or forms of conflict and to discuss the processes normally used to address them. The discussion explored the involvement of families, community members, refugee leaders, host community leaders, religious leaders, elders, local authorities, and other relevant actors. Participants were also asked to discuss the role of dialogue, mediation, negotiation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and other community-based practices in managing conflict.

The group discussions provided an opportunity to examine whether particular understandings of Ubuntu were shared collectively or differed among participants. Because interaction is a defining characteristic of focus groups, participants were able to respond to and reflect upon one another's experiences, thereby generating data that might not emerge through individual interviews alone (Tritter & Landstad, 2020). This was particularly relevant to the first research question because the study sought to understand not only individual interpretations of Ubuntu but also how refugees and host community members collectively understood and applied its principles.

The third area of the FGD guide examined the potential contribution of Ubuntu principles to existing conflict-management strategies. Participants were asked to discuss the strengths and limitations of the mechanisms currently used to manage conflict and to consider whether Ubuntu values could complement these approaches. Specific attention was given to principles such as respect for human dignity, empathy, dialogue, forgiveness, reconciliation, mutual assistance, collective responsibility, and restoration of relationships. Participants were also

asked to consider circumstances in which Ubuntu-based approaches might be effective and situations in which formal institutional mechanisms might be necessary. This allowed the researcher to avoid assuming that Ubuntu was universally applicable and instead examine participants' perceptions of its practical relevance within the specific social and institutional context of Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

The fourth area of the FGD guide focused on formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms operating within the settlement apart from Ubuntu. Participants were encouraged to identify mechanisms they knew or had experienced and to discuss how these mechanisms operated, who was involved, the types of conflicts they addressed, and their perceived effectiveness. The discussion also examined how community-based mechanisms interacted with formal institutional structures and whether Ubuntu principles were already reflected in any of these mechanisms. The researcher facilitated the discussions by introducing the areas, encouraging participation, maintaining focus on the research questions, and using probing questions to clarify or deepen emerging issues. The facilitator also ensured that participants had opportunities to express different or opposing views. Attention to divergent views was important because disagreement within a focus group could reveal differences in how Ubuntu, conflict, justice, reconciliation, and appropriate conflict-management practices were understood.

Before each discussion, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the expectations concerning respectful participation and confidentiality. With participant's consent, the discussions were audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes. The researcher also paid attention to the context of the interaction, including areas of agreement, disagreement, hesitation, and elaboration among participants. The resulting information was considered alongside the individual interview and observation data during analysis (see: Appendix 4).

The FGD guide therefore complemented the interview guide by generating collective rather than exclusively individual accounts. Whereas individual interviews provided opportunities for participants to explain their experiences in depth, FGDs enabled the researcher to explore how views were expressed, negotiated, affirmed, or contested through social interaction. Using these methods together was consistent with qualitative methodological triangulation, in which different methods can provide complementary perspectives on the same phenomenon and contribute to a richer account of the research problem (Busetto et al., 2020; Guha et al., 2021).

3.4.1.3. Participatory Observations

An observation checklist (see Appendix 3) was used to obtain contextual information concerning interactions, behaviours, practices, and conflict-management processes relevant to Ubuntu philosophy within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Observation is particularly useful in qualitative research because it enables researchers to examine phenomena in their social and contextual settings rather than relying exclusively on participants' verbal accounts (Busetto et al., 2020). In the present study, observation was used as a complementary method to help the researcher understand how values and practices associated with Ubuntu were expressed in everyday interactions and how conflict-management processes operated within the settlement.

The observation checklist was developed around areas directly related to the study objectives. These included interpersonal interactions, communication and dialogue, cooperation, mutual assistance, respect for others, participation in community activities, approaches to disagreements, reconciliation practices, involvement of community leaders, and interactions between refugees and host community members. The checklist also provided space for recording observations relating to formal and informal conflict-management structures and the manner in which community members interacted with these structures.

The first area of observation concerned behaviours and interactions that could provide contextual information relevant to the understanding and application of Ubuntu principles. The researcher paid attention to observable forms of respect, cooperation, assistance, inclusion, dialogue, collective participation, and interpersonal engagement. These observations were not used to assume the presence or absence of Ubuntu merely from particular behaviours; rather, they provided contextual evidence that could be considered alongside participants' explanations of what Ubuntu meant and how it was practised.

The second area concerned observable conflict-management practices. Where appropriate and ethically permissible, the researcher observed how disagreements were discussed, who participated in resolving them, how communication occurred, and whether practices associated with dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, cooperation, or collective responsibility were evident. The researcher also observed the involvement of relevant community or institutional actors in activities connected with conflict management.

The third area concerned the formal and informal structures through which conflict-management activities occurred. The checklist therefore captured relevant information about the presence and functioning of community structures, leadership arrangements, institutional

settings, meeting spaces, and other contexts in which conflict-management activities could be observed. These observations complemented participants' descriptions of formal and informal mechanisms under the fourth research objective.

The observation checklist also enabled the researcher to compare reported practices with observable contextual evidence. This was not intended to judge the truthfulness of participants accounts but to provide additional information through which the phenomenon could be understood from multiple perspectives. In qualitative research, the use of different data collection methods can strengthen the richness and credibility of an inquiry because different methods may illuminate different dimensions of the same phenomenon (Guha et al., 2021).

The researcher conducted observations in relevant settings within the settlement without unnecessarily interfering with normal activities. The checklist provided a systematic framework for recording observations while allowing space for descriptive field notes concerning the context in which particular behaviors or interactions occurred. The researcher distinguished between what was directly observed and what was reported by participants to avoid presenting interpretations or assumptions as direct observations.

Field notes were used alongside the checklist to capture contextual details that could not be adequately represented through predetermined observation categories. Such notes included descriptions of the setting, interactions, relevant activities, and issues requiring further clarification during interviews or FGDs. The observations were subsequently considered together with interview and FGD findings during data analysis.

Overall, the observation checklist complemented the interview and FGD guides by providing a non-verbal and contextual dimension to the study. Interviews enabled participants to explain their understandings and experiences, FGDs provided collective perspectives and social interaction, while observation enabled the researcher to document relevant practices and contexts directly. The combination of these instruments constituted methodological triangulation, which involves using different methods or sources of evidence to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon and strengthen the credibility of qualitative findings (Guha et al., 2021).

The three instruments were therefore deliberately designed to complement one another rather than operate as isolated sources of information. Their alignment with the four research objectives ensured that the study could examine Ubuntu from individual, community, institutional, and contextual perspectives. The interview guide generated detailed individual

and institutional accounts; the FGD guide captured shared understandings, experiences, agreements, and divergent perspectives; and the observation checklist provided contextual evidence concerning interactions and practices. The convergence and divergence of evidence generated through these instruments provided a basis for a more nuanced interpretation of Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

3.5. Data Analysis

In this study, Narrative and Thematic analysis were employed for data analysis. Data were collected and transcribed. The number of 8 key individuals were interviewed, and 37 participants completed the open-ended surveys. (See table 2 and 3 in appendices 4 and 5). The recorded interviews and FGD data were translated into English and transcribed to text. The field notes data recorded aided in the transcription to convert the data into text. This was so that the data is organized to help in analysis (Creswell & Poth 2018). Checking for accuracy of the transcribed data was done. This involved comparing the transcripts with the original audio recordings and field notes to identify omissions, mistranslations, or inaccuracies. Where translation was required, attention was paid to preserving the participants' intended meanings and culturally specific expressions. The researcher then studied and examined the transcribed text seeking to understand the context and recurring patterns and themes.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), the first phase of thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data through immersion, including repeated reading of the transcripts and active engagement with the data to identify meanings and patterns. In this study, the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed interviews and focus group discussions and listened to the original audio recordings to ensure familiarity with the data and accuracy of the transcripts before proceeding to coding. During the re-listening and re-reading, labels were assigned to the different parts of data that carry the same ideas. Any emergent themes (inductive) were also identified. Saldaña (2016) distinguishes between First Cycle and Second Cycle coding, with First Cycle methods used to initially code and categorize segments of qualitative data and Second Cycle methods used to develop broader patterns, categories, concepts and themes from the initial codes (pp. 67 -80, 211-235). After coding, similar ideas were grouped together to develop the themes and sub-themes. A working codebook was maintained to record the names and meanings of the codes and the data extracts associated with them. Codes were reviewed and compared across the key-informant interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended survey responses. Related codes were grouped into provisional

categories, which were subsequently reviewed, combined, separated, or renamed according to their relevance to the research questions and the supporting data. The researcher also examined divergent or contradictory accounts so that the themes did not represent only the most frequently expressed views. These themes represented broader patterns that were significant to the research questions such as how Ubuntu values influence conflict management, or how refugees and hosts view community coexistence. The initial management and analysis of the textual data were conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. Word was used to read, annotate, highlight, and compare the transcripts, while Excel was used to arrange data extracts, labels, participant identifiers, categories, and provisional themes in a systematic matrix. The manually organized material was later transferred to NVivo13 to support the organization, retrieval, comparison, and visualization of the developing categories and themes. NVivo enabled the researcher to bring together related extracts, compare patterns across participant groups and data sources, and examine the relationships among categories through queries, charts, models, and hierarchical thematic structures. NVivo did not independently analyse the data or generate the final themes; the interpretation, grouping of categories, and formation and naming of themes remained the responsibility of the researcher. In this study, NVivo mainly assisted with organizing and comparing the manually developed codes and categories during theme formation rather than automatically coding or “decoding” the participants’ responses.

The researcher used thematic analysis, interpretive and narrative for this study. Thematic inductive analysis was used to make group codes from interviews and focus groups on similarities to achieve themes. While interpretive analysis was used to understand the personal experiences of the people and how stories told were being interpreted to fit the research questions. And the Narrative analysis helped to extract meaning from the story told and any other information that was relevant to the study. The three approaches served related but distinct purposes. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across the complete dataset, while narrative analysis retained attention to the sequence, context, and meaning of individual participants’ stories. Interpretive analysis was applied as a lens through which the researcher examined how participants understood their experiences and attached meaning to conflict, coexistence, and Ubuntu values. Narrative accounts were therefore first considered within their individual contexts before being compared with accounts from other participants during the development of broader themes. The themes were then interpreted in the context of Ubuntu philosophy and conflict resolution.

According to Miles et al. (2014), interpretation involves going beyond surface meanings to construct a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Here the researcher sought to connect her findings with existing literature and theories discussing whether the findings support or contrast existing research. The final themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to determine whether they were internally coherent, adequately supported by the participants' accounts, distinct from one another, and relevant to the research questions. An audit trail consisting of transcripts, field notes, coding records, Excel matrices, NVivo outputs, category revisions, and analytic notes was maintained to document how the analysis progressed from the raw data to the final interpretations. Bazeley and Jackson (2013) argue that while software can aid in organizing and retrieving data, the human researcher must still perform the interpretive analysis.

Artificial intelligence was used only to support the preparation or refinement of selected drawings and visual illustrations presented in the study. The researcher reviewed the AI-assisted drawings for accuracy and relevance before including them in the document. AI was not used to interview participants, transcribe confidential recordings, generate codes, determine categories or themes, interpret participants' responses, or produce the study findings. No identifiable or confidential participant information was entered into the AI application. The final drawings and all accompanying interpretations remained under the researcher's control and responsibility. For transparency, the final study should identify the AI application, version or model, date of use, purpose, prompts or procedures where relevant, and the figures for which it was used.

3.5.1. Data Translation

To ensure accurate representation of participants' meanings, experiences, and cultural contexts, data collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were translated through the following steps.

Step 1. Audio Recording and Data Preparation

The focus group discussions and interviews were audio-recorded, with participants' consent, to ensure complete and accurate data capture. The recordings were labelled systematically using details such as the date, location, participant group, and language used. Background noise, overlapping speech, and group dynamics were also noted, particularly during focus group discussions, because these factors could influence interpretation.

Step 2. Verbatim Transcription in the Original Language

Most recordings, particularly those from focus group discussions, were transcribed verbatim in the original local language. This included participants' exact words, emotional expressions such as laughter or hesitation, and significant non-verbal cues where relevant. Transcribing in the original language helped to preserve participants' meanings and reduce the risk of premature interpretation or distortion.

Step 3. Familiarization with the Data

The researcher read and reread the transcripts in both the local languages and English to become familiar with the content. This process supported an understanding of cultural expressions and contextual meanings before translation. In the case of focus group discussions, attention was given to group interactions and to how meanings were collectively constructed.

Step 4. Translation into English

The transcripts were translated into English by bilingual interpreters who were fluent in English and the relevant local languages: Kinyabwisi, Kiswahili, and Runyakitara/Rutooro. Translation emphasized meaning rather than word-for-word equivalence to ensure that participants' intended meanings were accurately conveyed. Culturally specific terms or expressions without direct English equivalents were explained through brief descriptive phrases or translator notes.

Step 5. Review and Cross-Checking of Translations

The translated transcripts were reviewed by a second bilingual translator to assess their accuracy, consistency, and completeness. This review helped to identify and correct possible errors, omissions, or misinterpretations. Where necessary, back-translation, involving translation of the English version back into the relevant local language, was used to provide further validation.

Step 6. Annotation and Documentation of Translation Decisions

Challenges encountered during translation, including ambiguous phrases and culturally embedded concepts, were documented. The researcher's notes explained how particular meanings were interpreted. This transparency strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Step 7. Final Verification and Data Readiness for Analysis

Following final verification, the English-language transcripts were prepared for coding and analysis. The original-language transcripts were retained so that the researcher could revisit the source data whenever further clarification was required during analysis.

In conclusion, this rigorous translation process helped to preserve the meanings expressed in the original data and enhanced the credibility, dependability, and transparency of findings derived from the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness as explained by Lincon and Guba (1985) helps to ensure that findings are believable, applicable, consistent, and unbiased. To ensure that the quality of this study was not compromised, the following were checked, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. For this study, which employed interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnography, several measures were undertaken to ensure that the data and interpretations were both credible and dependable.

As a Ugandan researcher, my geographic, cultural, and professional proximity to the study context offered important advantages for building rapport with participants and accessing key informants. At the same time, I remained critically aware of how my insider status, professional training, and underlying assumptions could influence data generation and interpretation. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practices, including the maintenance of a field journal, regular debriefings with local collaborators, and the use of member checking to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Attention was given to power dynamics during interviews and focus group discussions, with deliberate efforts to ensure that women, youth, and other marginalized participants had equitable opportunities to contribute. This reflexive approach aligned with the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm underpinning the study and supported the ethical principles of mutual respect, empathy, and shared humanity reflected in Ubuntu-informed research practice.

3.6.1. Credibility

The study addressed credibility through methodological triangulation, through using individual interviews, group discussions, and participant observation in ethnographic contexts. The use of these different methods assisted in finding accuracy in participants' perceptions. "Credibility

addresses the ‘fit’ between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 391). This further was used to find cross-verification that enabled the researcher to confirm emerging patterns and minimize bias. The prolonged engagement in the field through ethnography also deepened understanding and enhanced authenticity by situating insights within participants’ natural contexts fulfilling. “Credibility is established when the research findings accurately represent participants’ lived experiences”.

3.6.2. Dependability

Was reinforced by creating a transparent audit documenting methodological choices, raw data, coding procedures, and analytic decisions. This process ensures that the study is consistent and can be replicated under similar conditions. Korsjens and Moser note that dependability enables the auditor to study the transparency of the research path (Korstjens & Moser, 2018 p. 122.). Accordingly, the researcher maintained detailed records of the research process, including the development of data-collection instruments, participant recruitment, interview procedures, transcription, coding, theme development, and revisions made during analysis. Maintaining these records provided a clear account of how the findings were generated from the participants’ responses and allowed methodological decisions to be traced and evaluated.

3.6.3. Confirmability

Was safeguarded through reflexivity and triangulation. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal (notebook where events observed were noted down) to eliminate assumptions and monitor potential biases throughout data collection and analysis. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the data and interpretations are not figments of the researcher’s imagination but are clearly derived from the data. Using diverse data sources, such as interviews, FGDs, and observations, further strengthens the neutrality of findings (Shenton 2004).

3.6.4. Transferability

Was ensured by providing thick description of the study context, participants background, and observed practices, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the results to other settings. “Thick description enables audiences to enter the research context and draw their own conclusions about transferability” (Tracy 2010). Transparency was emphasized throughout the research process. All analysis procedures were documented, and findings were reported

according to the study design. Limitations were openly acknowledged, particularly where challenges such as recall bias or social desirability bias that could influence results.

3.6.5. ethical and procedural quality

Controls were maintained throughout. Interview and FGD guides were pilot tested for clarity and flow, while research assistants were trained to encourage open discussion and reduce interviewer bias. All sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy, while ethnographic observations were systematically documented in field notes. These layered strategies: triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, audit trails, and thick description collectively ensure that the findings are trustworthy, well-grounded, and credible contributions to understanding Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Research involved vulnerable participants (refugees). To ensure participants' safety and data Integrity, the researcher had a duty to provide participants with comprehensive information about the research, including its objectives, procedures, and any potential benefits and risks. Participants were asked to give their voluntary and informed consent to participate in the study. To achieve this, a detailed summary of the study's objectives/questions and content was presented at the beginning of each interview and focus group. (See appendices 1 and 2)

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants is paramount which is why the Researcher used procedures that ensure anonymity to prevent any potential harm to individuals. In this study, all identifiable information, such as names, and phone numbers, were anonymized.

Appropriate study designs and methodologies were employed to demonstrate sensitivity to cultural, linguistic, vulnerable groups, and social factors while minimizing potential harm to participants. This study utilized qualitative research, inductive theorizing, and an interpretivist approach to actively engage interviewees and better understand their diverse cultural perspectives.

Participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time and retain control over their data if they needed so. Before interviews commenced, participants were informed, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that the interviews would

be recorded, the study was mainly academics, and their consent was obtained. Participants were also asked about their comfort level with the chosen communication method and informed of their right to decline or discontinue the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

And lastly, Conflicts of interest in research can arise when personal or financial affiliations compromise the study's neutrality. Researchers are required to disclose any potential conflicts that might affect the study's integrity. In this study, there were no known conflicts of interest related to financial matters, personal relationships, undisclosed collaborations, or biases that could jeopardize professional responsibilities, academic progress, or intellectual property considerations.

3.8. Limitations and delimitations of the study

Like all qualitative inquiries, this study faced certain limitations that influenced the depth, scope, and generalizability of its findings. First, the issue of subjectivity was inherent in the qualitative research process. Because data were generated through interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observation, the interpretations may have been influenced by the researcher's position, assumptions, or interactions with participants. The researcher employed reflexivity and audit trails to minimize this, but as Tracy (2010) states, it remained a limitation, as "qualitative findings are inevitably shaped by the researcher's lens and presence in the field."

The second envisioned limitation was transferability of the study's findings to other settings. The research was situated in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement, which has a unique socio-cultural and political context that inevitably shapes how Ubuntu philosophy is interpreted and applied. Although Korstjens and Moser (2018) posit that qualitative research prioritizes thick description to enable readers to assess transferability, the findings cannot claim broad generalizability in the statistical sense. Therefore, although the study provides rich insights, its application to other refugee settlements or cultural contexts must be approached with caution.

Another limitation was related to participant bias and power dynamics during data collection. In FGDs, for instance, it was observed that certain voices dominated while others remain silent, particularly among participants who felt less empowered due to gender, age, or social standing. This affects the diversity of perspectives captured. Similarly, during interviews, participants would withhold sensitive information due to fear of judgment or repercussions, especially when discussing conflict issues. To address this, the researcher used several qualitative research

strategies like triangulation and member checking, probing more so that some level of bias or withholding of information was controlled.

Limited time available for prolonged engagement and researcher immersion in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Although ethnographic research requires extended engagement to build trust and gain an in-depth understanding of participants' authentic practices and experiences, the restricted fieldwork period limited the depth of immersion achieved. Furthermore, the researcher's presence may have influenced participants' behaviors, a phenomenon known as the "observer effect" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). To address this limitation, the researcher spent as much time as possible interacting with participants, established rapport before collecting data, conducted observations on different occasions, and triangulated observational findings with interviews and other sources of evidence. These measures helped minimize participants' awareness of being observed and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

The last limitation was language and translation barrier which involved participants such as refugees who spoke a different language from the researcher (Kinyabwisi and Kiswahili). When researchers used interpreters, meaning was sometimes lost, altered, or selectively filtered during translation. Interpreters occasionally summarized responses omitted culturally sensitive details, or reframed participants' words based on their own assumptions, values, or positions. This practice distorted participants lived experiences and weakened the credibility and authenticity of the data. Temple and Young (2004) argued that language is not a neutral conduit for meaning; instead, it was deeply tied to culture and identity, indicating that interpretation inevitably involved transformation rather than simple translation. As a result, the researcher sometimes analyzed the interpreter's version of reality rather than the participant's original voice, which threatened the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

The researcher hence adopted strategies that enhanced transparency and rigor in cross-language qualitative research. The approach treated interpreters as active research partners rather than neutral tools and involved them in reflexive discussions about meaning, context, and translation choices. In addition, the researcher used translator team members, some refugees understood English and were able to help in translation where the translator would miss out certain information. and verbatim transcription in both the original language and the translated versions to preserve meaning and enable accuracy checks all though not all

information was recovered. Together, these strategies improved credibility, dependability, and confirmability by making the role of language and interpretation explicit rather than hidden.

3.9. Ubuntu-centric hybrid model and its operationalization.

As mentioned in chapter 2, (cf ch 2, sec 2.4), Ubuntu-centric hybrid conflict model was important in this study where diverse actors such as refugees, host community members, UNHCR, Refugee Welfare Committee, police and other interacting groups overlap with both formal and informal systems. This gap was filled by positioning Ubuntu as an ethical foundation that promotes mutual reconciliation while acknowledging the importance of formal structures which address serious crimes, such as murder, defilement rape, and others human rights violations. The model is hybrid because it integrates both community-based mediation with formal structures. Through these engagements, the study captured diverse perspectives on conflict management practices, highlighting how informal Ubuntu-based approaches and formal institutional mechanisms interact in practice. The model as it is mentioned it was well fit in the qualitative study because it involves actors like the policymakers who were the key informants where semi-structured interviews were used to understand Ubuntu philosophy and its strategic operational system, and also the refugees and host community members through focus group discussions which brought the understanding of Ubuntu in practice. Through these engagements, the study captured diverse perspectives on conflict management practices, highlighting how informal Ubuntu-based approaches and formal institutional mechanisms interact in practice as it is more elaborated in chapter 4. (cf 4, sec 4.10.1, 4.10.2., 4.10.3.)

3.10. Summary of the chapter

This qualitative study used an interpretive and constructive research paradigm which seeks reality as subjective and shaped by participants' experiences and meanings. The research followed an inductive approach, so themes came directly from the data. The design included several methods such as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) interviews and observations. These were carried out in the Rwamwanja Refugee settlement, a place affected by displacement and complex cultural community dynamics.

Data collection involved using FGD guides, to encourage groups interactions, among participants, semi-structured interviews guide to gain detailed individuals perspectives on Ubuntu and conflict management and observation checklist to record natural behavior and the environment. The study sample included refugees, host community members and key

stakeholders selected purposively and conveniently, with 45 participants in 4 focus group discussions and 8 interviews, & continuous observation until data saturation was reached.

For data analysis, narrative analysis was used to capture personal stories, thematic analysis to identify common patterns and interpretive analysis to understand meanings within a constructive framework. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility through members checking and triangulation, transferability by providing rich description of the context, dependability via audit trails documenting decisions and confirmability through reflexivity journals aimed at reducing bias. Limitation of the study included possible language barriers, generalizability due to specific geographical location and difficulty in observing sensitive behaviour related to trauma in the settlement.

Having acquired the data, the following chapter explains how this data was presented in terms of narration through themes and subthemes.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Chapter overview

This chapter presents the findings on Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Uganda. The study examined the understanding and application of Ubuntu philosophy in conflict management among refugees, host communities, and policymakers. It was guided by four research questions:

- i) What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in applying Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community?
- ii) How has Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement?
- iii) How can the Ubuntu approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement?
- iv) What other formal and informal conflict-resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?

The findings are based on qualitative data collected through eight(8) key informant interviews and four focus group discussions (FGDs). The key informants represented UNHCR, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the police, a local council, local elders, the Reception Centre representative, Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs), and a non-governmental organizations (NGO) representative. The eight key informants therefore represented institutional, security, humanitarian, traditional-leadership, and community-governance perspectives relevant to conflict management and refugee–host-community coexistence. Two FGDs involved host-community members, with 8-10 participants in each group, and two involved refugees, with 9 - 10 participants in each group. Host FGD3 (10), Host FGD 4(9), Refugee FGD 1 (8), and Refugee FGD 2 (10). (See table 1, cf 3, sec 3.4) Separating refugee and host-community participants allowed members of each population to discuss their experiences among people with whom they shared broadly similar community positions and reduced the possibility that unequal relationships between the two populations would inhibit discussion. Men, women, older people, and young people participated. Participant characteristics, including gender, age

category, refugee or host-community status, and relevant leadership or community roles, are summarized in (Table 1). The composition of each FGD was considered to ensure that different social and demographic perspectives were represented. However, participation by community leaders and other prominent individuals was managed carefully to minimize the possibility that differences in age, gender, authority, or social position would restrict other participants from expressing their views. Participants were selected purposively and by convenience based on their community involvement, leadership roles, experience of conflict, availability, and willingness to participate. Purposive selection ensured the inclusion of participants who possessed experience and knowledge relevant to the research questions, whereas convenience considerations facilitated access to eligible participants who were available during the data-collection period.

The data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, code categorization, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and compilation of the findings. The themes were aligned with the research questions and are presented with direct quotations to retain participants' voices.

Participant codes are provided in Table 4.1 to protect respondents' anonymity. These identifiers are used throughout the presentation and interpretation of the findings.

Table 2 Participants unique codes

Participants or group	Abbreviations	Code
UNHCR representative	UNHCR	P1
Commandant Office of the prime minister	OPM	P2
Police Representative	OC	P3
NGOs Representatives	Ngo	P4
Local council1 representative	LC1	P5
Refugee Welfare leader/presida	RWCs	P6
Reception Centre head	RC	P7
Local elder	LoE	P8
FGD 1 base camp	FGD 1	Rf 1

FGD2 base camp	FGD2	Rf 2
FGD3 host community	FGD3	Hc1
FGD4 host Community	FGD4	Hc2

Source: Aurthor's field research 2025

4.2. Overview of Emerging Themes

Analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts generated seven broad themes aligned with the four research questions. Each theme was divided into subthemes that capture participants' understandings, lived experiences, and perceptions of conflict management and the application of Ubuntu in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement. Table 2 summarizes the relationship among the research questions, major themes, and subthemes. Seven major themes emerged from the interview and FGD data.

Table 3 Summary of the Major Themes

Research Question	Major Themes	Subthemes
RQ1: Lived experiences of refugees and host communities in applying Ubuntu	Everyday realities of conflicts among refugees and host members	- understanding of Ubuntu -Resource and livelihood conflicts -Household & Gender conflicts -Insecurities and crimes -Co-existence tensions (culture misunderstanding)
RQ1: Lived experiences of refugees and host communities in applying Ubuntu	Ubuntu as lived practice	-traditional reconciliation mechanism & relational values -Community mediation -Social inclusion.
RQ3: How can the Ubuntu philosophy approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the	Community engagement & trust building	- Forgiveness and reconciliation - Community policing and mediation -Awareness and dialogues

Rwamwanja refugee settlement? RQ1: What Lived experiences of refugees and host communities in applying Ubuntu in conflict management?		Trust building through leaders and elders
RQ3 How can the Ubuntu philosophy approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?	Pathway for integrating Ubuntu	-embedding Ubuntu in practice -Inclusive operational systems -Partnerships between traditional leaders and agencies(legal & cultural adoption)
RQ2 How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement? RQ1 What Lived experiences of refugees and host communities in applying Ubuntu in conflict management?	Challenges & constraints for application of Ubuntu.	- Resource scarcity and competition(poverty) Influence of external actors (operational complexities) - Cultural diversity and erosion of traditional values(local interference)

RQ4: What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches? RQ3 How can the Ubuntu philosophy approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?	Hybrid conflict management system	- Embedding Ubuntu in legal and informal mechanisms for operations (OPM and UNHCR frameworks) -Negotiation outcome (using bylaws) - Training local leaders and humanitarian staff on Ubuntu
RQ2, How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement? RQ4 What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?	Institutional and policy framing of conflict management	- Police and Legal Systems - Policing enforcement - Humanitarian conditions. - Bureaucratic and donor -driven limitations - Lack of training and documentation
Merging theme	Synergy between Ubuntu and formal mechanisms	- Ubuntu-compatible community policing - Use of mediation committees and peace dialogues

Source: Author's analysis based on field data (2025).

The seven themes form an explanatory sequence. Everyday conflicts create the practical conditions under which Ubuntu is tested. Ubuntu is expressed most clearly through mutual aid, neighbors' support, apology, forgiveness, and elder-led mediation. Its application is likely to be constrained when disputes concern land scarcity, serious crime, gender-based violence,

institutional authority, or unequal access to resources. Community engagement and trust-building therefore function as enabling conditions for Ubuntu, while formal institutions influence whether Ubuntu remains an informal moral practice or becomes part of a hybrid conflict management system. Overall, the findings indicate that Ubuntu is neither absent nor fully institutionalized in Rwamwanja. Rather, it operates as a lived moral resource whose translation into formal conflict management remains partial, uneven, and dependent on institutional recognition.

The themes are presented below according to the research question to which they principally relate. Where a theme occurred under more than one research question, the relevant findings are reported in each section without repeating the same evidence.

4.3. Findings for Research Question One: Lived Experiences of Refugees and Host Communities in Applying Ubuntu

This section presents participants' views of how Ubuntu was understood and practiced in everyday life. Four themes emerged: everyday realities of conflict; Ubuntu as a lived practice; community engagement and trust-building; and challenges and constraints in practicing Ubuntu. Refugees and host-community members provided most of the evidence, supplemented by key-informant submissions.

4.3.1. Theme 1: Everyday Realities of Conflict Among Refugees and Host-Community Members

Participants reported conflicts associated with limited resources, cultural and linguistic differences, household and gender relations, insecurity, crime, and livelihood pressures. Their accounts also described how Ubuntu was understood and used during everyday interactions between refugees and host-community members.

4.3.1.1. Understanding of Ubuntu Among Refugees and Hosts

Ubuntu was understood as sharing, mutual giving and coexisting, caring, and a mutual guide among the respondents as narrated.

i) Ubuntu as Sharing

Through most interviews and focus group discussions, participants expressed that Ubuntu reflects a sense of shared humanity, emphasizing interdependence and empathy. The respondents believed that Ubuntu starts at the family level and spreads through.

Participant 1 (P1) said, *“Ubuntu is the way of life; we live with it. It all starts at family level. We value each other.”*

A male refugee participant stated:

“Ubuntu means knowing that we are all people. Even if I am from Congo and you are from Uganda, we are the same. We must live together and help each other when problems come.” (Rf1)

Similarly, a host community member emphasized that Ubuntu manifests in how people share resources and respond to others’ suffering:

“When someone’s house burns, we do not wait for the government. We collect food and clothes for them. That is Ubuntu to us.” (Hc2)

ii) Ubuntu as Mutual Giving and Coexistence

Participants also associated Ubuntu with the practical expression of mutual aid or giving, particularly in daily interactions. A leader explained that Ubuntu encourages refugees to rely on one another and build networks of support:

“When someone is new in the camp, we welcome them and share what we have, even if it is little. Without Ubuntu, life here would be impossible.” (P6)

Host community respondents similarly spoke of Ubuntu in terms of tolerance and peaceful coexistence:

“Even when we disagree with the refugees, we remember that peace is better than fighting. Our elders always remind us that a person is a person, and we all need each other.” (Hc1)

Host community respondents similarly spoke of Ubuntu in terms of tolerance and peaceful coexistence:

“Even when we disagree with the refugees, we remember that peace is better than fighting. Our elders always remind us that a person is a person, and we all need each other.”(Hc2)

iii) Ubuntu as caring

Participants associated with caring as part of Ubuntu as follows;

Refugee participant explained that Ubuntu is shown as caring when new members are brought into the settlement

“When new members come, we check in and see if they are okay or need anything, because we all came in like that”. (Rf2)

Similarly, a respondent from the community identified caring through illness.

“When we are at health-center for treatment, we always see if a refugee has got proper attention and at times offer a bottle of water”. (Hc1)

A response from key informant indicated constant visits as part of caring

“We have a planned schedule, where we pay visits to refugees and community members to see if they are doing well”. (P4)

iv) Ubuntu as Moral Guidance

Several participants identified Ubuntu as a moral foundation for acceptable behavior.

P3 noted that; *“When I talk to people about resolving disputes, I tell them to think of what it means to be human. To forgive, to talk, and to be patient that is Ubuntu.” (P3)*

The respondent despite not understanding the Ubuntu philosophy, noted that

“Ubuntu largely unknown but practiced implicitly through systems” (P2).

Even though Ubuntu is understood in different ways, conflicts related to resources and livelihoods such as land, water sources, and firewood collection do occur and compromise Ubuntu as narrated.

4.3.1.2. Resource and Livelihood Conflicts

Resource and livelihood conflicts were identified as common challenges affecting relations between refugees and host community. Respondents from both groups reported disputes arising from competition over limited resources, particularly agricultural land, water sources, and firewood. Refugees described difficulties accessing sufficient land for cultivation and collecting water and firewood, while host-community members reported concerns about refugees entering their gardens or using resources they considered part of their community. Participants indicated that these competing needs frequently resulted in misunderstandings, accusations, quarrels, and, in some cases, demands for compensation as narrated.

A host community participant observed: *“Sometimes the refugees cross into our gardens to fetch firewood or collect crops. We quarrel, but we know they also need to survive”* (Hc1).

Similarly, a refugee woman shared:

“We have small land for cultivation so in most times we rent from the host members. When we look for water or firewood, the locals say we are stealing. It brings fights, but we usually settle through talking although at times they need compensation” (Rf2)

i) Social tension and coexistence

Social tension and coexistence emerged as important aspects of conflict between refugees and host-community members in the settlement. Participants reported that cultural and linguistic differences sometimes created misunderstandings during everyday interactions. Differences in customs, communication styles, attitudes towards elders, marriage practices, and gender roles were identified as sources of disagreement. Participants also described interpersonal disputes arising from jokes being misunderstood, perceived disrespect, relationships, and differing social expectations. These accounts showed that challenges associated with cultural misunderstanding and interpersonal relations affected peaceful coexistence between refugees and members of the host community. Some participants noted that refugees from Francophone backgrounds (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo) and host communities from western-part mainly Tooro and Ankole cultures sometimes misinterpret gestures or communication styles, leading to mistrust.

A respondent noted. *“Sometimes a simple joke becomes a big issue because of language. People think they are insulted when they are not”*. (P6).

A respondent from the host community explained,

“Our cultures are different; we were brought up differently. The refugees do not understand how to respect elders, and this in most times creates a huge misunderstanding leading to fights (Hc1)

Similarly, a refugee respondent noted.

“The community sends their girls for marriage who are below 18 years, when we engage with them, they report us for defilement and yet in our culture a girl is ready for marriage at 16 years”. (Rf2)

A female respondent from the focus group narrated,

“We at times fight in our homes over money and our men marrying other women, but our elders sit us to reconcile together to reconcile” (Rf1)

The male respondent from the host community narrates

“When I sale my goat as a man I need to use my money as desired, but my wife wants all the money. So, we fight”. (Hc1)

These conflicts spill into youth related conflicts too, where the young get involved in disputes related to cheap labor offering, and bullying in schools as narrated by respondents

Youth participants mentioned conflicts related to competition for casual labor, relationships, and sports rivalries. A young refugee noted.

“The youth sometimes fight over girls or jobs in town, but later we come together to play football. That is how we rebuild friendship.” (Rf2)

Another youth noted.

“We go for casual labor work, at times the host does not pay us all our dues, but we don’t report, we sit together and find a solution, at times they give us food instead of money”. (Rf1)

A refugee noted, *“Our children are bullied in schools being called names (empungi) and this affects their study performance”* (Rf2)

One participant from the group noted.

“I married a refugee, in my culture a woman is to obey and keep home, but this woman keeps going back to her family which annoys me and lead to fights... (Hc2)

4.3.2 Theme 2: Ubuntu as a Lived Practice

In this theme, respondents agreed that Ubuntu is part of life and has been applied in different ways such as traditional reconciliation, community mediation, social inclusion, forgiveness and many more others as narrated by participants.

i) Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness emerged as a central Ubuntu value applied in conflict management. Respondents across groups described instances where reconciliation was prioritized over punishment.

A key respondent explained

“We make sure that conflicts do not last forever, we encourage conflicting groups to reconcile” (P8)

A refugee elder explained:

“If someone wrongs me, I first go to them and talk. We share a meal and forgive each other. That is what our elders taught us. (Rf1)

Similarly, a key respondent emphasized community-level forgiveness:

“We prefer that people reconcile. When they bring a case, we ask both sides to talk, and when one says sorry, the matter ends. That is our way.” (P5)

It was also noted by two key respondents who had similar views, *“as leaders, we encourage reconciliation and forgiveness first before we take any further actions, when the two groups agree to forgive each other, then the matter is solved”*. (P2, P6)

ii) Community Dialogue and Mediation

Most participants highlighted the use of dialogue as a preferred approach to resolving disputes. One of the key informants explained:

“In this settlement, we encourage dialogue. Whether it is between refugees and hosts or between households, we believe in sitting together to talk until a solution comes.” (P2)

Other participants from focus groups described community meetings (*barazas*) as important spaces for collective dialogue:

“We gather under the tree to talk about our problems. Everyone can speak, even women and youth. After we talk, we agree on peace.” (Hc1, Rf2)

While participants associated Ubuntu with forgiveness, mutual aid, and reconciliation, not all conflicts can or should be resolved through informal community mediation as noted by participants

Key informant response *“Crimes like aggressive assaults, rape, murder, cannot be handled lightly, they move to a higher authority” (P3)*

4.3.3. Theme 3: Community Engagement and Trust-Building

The theme emphasized the inclusive approach for addressing conflicts where top-down approaches cannot be stand-alone. The findings highlight that community engagement approach allows inclusiveness which is important in the culturally diverse environment of Rwamwanja. We further noted that the resource-based conflicts, intercultural differences and competition for jobs that were mentioned by participants during focus group discussions all need inclusive participation. To build trust in the leadership of the settlement, was seen through participatory approach because it strengthens relationships of host and refugees as explained.

“We need to be safe and trust our leaders; this will help us communicate freely” (Rf1)

Another participant noted *“.....when members feel heard are likely to cooperate” (Hc2)*

It was noted that some trust issues came up, where participants felt, they could not trust their leaders.

...the police need money to address your issue, so how do you trust them?. (Hc1)

i) Forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness and reconciliation have appeared many times to show the importance of Ubuntu in conflict management. It is a mechanism through which members felt trust can be restored. The findings indicate that despite having disputes in the settlement and communities, the community-led approach was conferred to be key for expressing grievances and creating understanding rather than formal law engagement. Participants reported that forgiveness helped restore relations in the community.

Participants narrative explains this further

“When we forgive, the heart becomes lighter. You can greet your neighbor again without fear.” (Rf1)

We try to encourage them to forgive one another and after, we see peace in the community, others even share tonto (local brew) (P6)

ii) Community policing and mediation

While dealing with different participants, it was noted that community policing and mediation structures act as a bridging gap for formal and informal conflict management way in the community, because it encourages collaboration and trust during dispute management which involves local leaders, community members and refugee representatives who work together to maintain order. Participants described community policing and mediation as involving dialogue, collaboration, and respect. Participant narrative further elaborates on this,

“Community policing builds on the same idea solving issues through dialogue, respecting people, and preventing harm before it happens.” (P3).

iii) Awareness and dialogues

Misinformation and lack of sensitization were identified as backlashes for dialogues and yet community dialogues play a crucial role in conflict resolutions. In Rwamwanja where stereotypes, and closed communication were identified, dialogues continued to be the source of engagement among different groups especially refugees and host community members. This

engagement created communication channels with leaders and reduced unnecessary disputes, as narrated by one participant.

“We have seen that dialogue works better. When people reconcile, there is peace not only in their homes but in the whole village.” (P5)

Similarly, peace committees and mediation forums organized jointly by leaders at both levels were seen as hybrid spaces where Ubuntu principles are practiced informally.

“When we hold community dialogues, both hosts and refugees share stories, apologize, and agree on how to live better. That is Ubuntu in action, even if we don’t name it that way.” (P2)

iv) Trust building through leaders and elders

Elders, RCWs and local leaders play a critical role in mediating disputes. As participant narrates, new arrivals are oriented towards community rules grounded in mutual respect and Ubuntu. Elders and leaders play a role in encouraging and maintaining trust in communities through encouraging mediation and reconciliation. The findings highlight that elders were involved in reconciliation processes as seen in the narrative below.

“When refugees come in, we tell them: here, we live as one family. If you fight, elders will help you talk and reconcile.” (P7)

Another key respondent noted.

“We work closely with the leaders and elders, and where they’re disputes, we send them first to handle the situation, by the time we go, we find everything has been resolved, the leaders play a big role in this. (P4)

4.3.4. Theme 4: Challenges and Constraints in Practicing Ubuntu.

Despite the strong recognition of Ubuntu, participants acknowledged several challenges that limit its full practice.

i) Resource Scarcity, Competition and poverty

Both host, refugee groups and key informants emphasized that poverty and scarcity undermine Ubuntu values. A host participant remarked:

“It is easy to talk about Ubuntu when there is enough food. But when hunger comes, people forget humanity.” (Hc2)

Similarly, a key informant added:

“We want to help each other, but everyone here struggles. Sometimes you cannot give; because you have nothing.” (P6)

Similarly, a respondent from a focus group noted

“Ubuntu is good when you are in your country, we are strangers here (Empungi-refugees), we are all looking for survival, how can I think of Ubuntu? It is all about survival. (Rf1)

It was also noted through a host community member as;

“In our community we want to help, but poverty is the issue, if you can’t afford a piece of soap yourself, how can you share with the Empungi(refugee)? We are equally the same, or they are even better than us because they get some money”. (Hc2)

And lastly a key respondent note;

....”the community together with the refugees are all living in a devastated state. All are poor, poverty in most times course conflicts because people aren’t happy. Imagine fighting for tomatoes” (P4)

ii) Influence of External Actors (operational complexities)

Participants noted that the presence of international humanitarian agencies has altered local social dynamics. Some aid programs unintentionally create dependency and competition, eroding Ubuntu’s ethic of mutual support.

A key respondent explains

“When NGOs come, people fight to be on the list. Others accuse leaders of favoritism. This kills the spirit of sharing.” (P6)

Another key respondent noted that guidelines given at times create more confusion than it should not have.

“We follow the guidelines given by the office of the commandants, but at times we find the same people are the ones benefiting and others are not, we have no mandate to change anything, we go with that, we are service providers” (P4)

While focus group member explained;

“We register with our leaders to be included on the list, but in most cases, we are left out. Those who have connections are the ones chosen to benefit all the time; we wonder whether we are all beneficiaries of these projects”. (Rf2)

iii) Local interference (Cultural diversity and erosion of traditional values)

Participants from both groups and key informants expressed concern that Ubuntu is being weakened by generational shifts and exposure to different cultural influences.

A key responded noted that;

“The young people prefer reporting to police instead of community mediation. They say the elders are slow.” (P3)

While another key respondent noted cultural differences, leading to erosion of core values

“There is cultural erosion among people, greeting, caring has all been faded away. It all begins at home, the culture has died, how can you leave without greeting your people in the house, and even neighbors”? (P1)

And a community member noted that;

“The traditional way slows us down, we have things to do, at times we are interrupted by elders, talking about things we don’t understand, culture revolves, we shouldn’t stick to the past, when you wrong me, I take you to police”. (Hc1)

4.3.5. Summary of Findings for Research Question One

Refugee and host-community participants described Ubuntu through forgiveness, sharing and caring, dialogue, mutual aid, and collective responsibility. They reported using discussion, apology, elders, local leaders, RWCs, and community meetings to address minor disputes. Participants also identified resource scarcity, poverty, bureaucracy, cultural and linguistic differences, household and gender conflicts, external pressure and programs coordination, and generational change as constraints on these practices.

4.4. Findings for Research Question Two: Policymakers' Perceptions of Ubuntu

This section presents the findings on how policymakers including the Commandant (representing the Office of the Prime Minister), UNHCR representative, the Police Officer-in-Charge, Reception Centre Manager and the RWC perceive and engage with the Ubuntu philosophy in their administrative and conflict management roles. The findings were grouped into two themes; thus, theme 7: institutional and policy frameworks, and theme 5: challenges and constraints. The themes and subthemes emerged to further explain the research question.

4.4.1. Theme 1: Institutional and Policy Framework

The institutional and policy framework emerged as one of the themes in the findings concerning policymakers' views of Ubuntu and its place in conflict management within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Participants described how formal policies, administrative guidelines, and institutional practices addressed values associated with peaceful coexistence, dialogue, respect, and community participation. Two subthemes emerged from their accounts: *Recognition of Ubuntu in Policy Frameworks* **and** *Policymakers' Perceptions of Ubuntu's Relevance*. The first subtheme presents participants' accounts of whether Ubuntu was explicitly or indirectly reflected in existing policies and operational guidelines. The second presents policymakers' views regarding the relevance of Ubuntu to conflict management among refugees and host-community members as explained;

i) Recognition of Ubuntu in Policy Frameworks

The findings revealed that, although Ubuntu is not explicitly mentioned in formal refugee management policies or administrative guidelines, its principles are indirectly reflected in community-based peacebuilding and participatory approaches.

Key respondent explains;

“I believe the refuge policy of Uganda is based on the Ubuntu philosophy even though it is not mentioned, when you take a look, you find issues of integrity, integration, respect and others... I believe those are Ubuntu values; however, I feel they should come out strongly.” (P1)

Another key respondent noted;

“Our operational manuals from the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR do not use the word Ubuntu, but the idea is there living together peacefully, respecting each other, solving issues through dialogue.” (P2)

Similarly, another respondent stated that the settlement’s orientation programs emphasize coexistence, tolerance, and mutual assistance values consistent with Ubuntu ethics.

“When refugees arrive, we teach them about peaceful living and respecting hosts. We do not call it Ubuntu, but that is what it is in practice.” (P7)

And finally another key responded noted that;

..... *“I am not so sure of the existence of Ubuntu in our policy, but when you get the guidelines that support our operation, we find phrases like respect for one another, and peaceful leaving, I think those are indicators of Ubuntu”. (P3)*

ii) Policymakers’ Perceptions of Ubuntu’s Relevance

Most key respondents who are policymakers recognized Ubuntu as a culturally resonant and contextually appropriate approach for managing conflict in Rwamwanja. They argued that Ubuntu offers an indigenous moral foundation that complements formal humanitarian and legal structures.

“Ubuntu fits well in this settlement because people from different countries must live together. It reminds them that humanity is bigger than tribe or nationality.” (P3)

Another respondent described Ubuntu as an “invisible framework” that guides relationships between authorities and communities. He noted that fostering trust requires compassion, patience, and mutual understanding of the core tenets of Ubuntu.

“As administrators, we must act with empathy. When people come to us with disputes, they expect fairness and humanity, not only law.” (P2)

Furthermore, a respondent describes Ubuntu as a “cobweb endeavor to bring people together”. It helps people to identify with themselves and learn to live with others.

..... *“Yes, the rules, and policies are there to govern the way of living, including human right policies, but when people do not learn how to live together, they all do not work” (P1).*

4.4.2. Theme 2: Challenges and Constraints

Even though challenges and constraints have been addressed in theme for research question one, the findings reveal that challenge occurs in policy Institutional structures too. During interviews, it was noted that policy constraints hinder the application of Ubuntu in the organization structure of the Rwamwanja refugee settlement as explained.

Despite positive attitudes, respondents identified several barriers to the institutionalization of Ubuntu within formal governance structures. These included bureaucratic rigidity, donor-driven programming, and lack of training on indigenous approaches.

A respondent narrates ;

“Most of our procedures are designed by international agencies. They follow global standards, not local philosophies. It is hard to include Ubuntu formally.” (P2)

Similarly, another respondent observed that humanitarian interventions often prioritize efficiency over community engagement, which weakens the relational aspects of Ubuntu:

“When aid programs rush to meet deadlines, they forget to listen. Ubuntu is about listening first, acting later”. (P7)

And another respondent noted

“We have international guidelines that we are to follow, the country has to abide with each and every thing that the UN asks”, (P1)

4.4.3. Summary of Findings for Research Question Two

The findings reveal that policymakers in Rwamwanja perceive Ubuntu as a relevant and powerful philosophy that aligns with community-oriented peacebuilding, even though it lacks formal recognition in policy frameworks. Its values dialogue, empathy, forgiveness, and coexistence are already reflected in local administrative practices such as community policing and mediation forums. However, bureaucratic rigidity, donor conditionalities, and inadequate training constrain the full integration of Ubuntu into formal conflict management systems.

4.5. Findings for Research Question Three: Strategies for Integrating Ubuntu

This section presents findings on possible strategies for embedding Ubuntu into existing conflict management systems at community, institutional, and policy levels. Three main themes emerged: Theme 3 Community engagement and trust- building (community-level strategies) theme 4: Pathway for integrating Ubuntu, Theme 6: Hybrid conflict resolution system.

These themes were supported by sub-themes and the narratives by participants

4.5.1. Theme 1: Community Engagement and Trust-Building

Participants proposed strengthening community-based peace structures and cultural education to promote Ubuntu values among both refugees and host populations.

i) Strengthening Local Peace Committees

Leaders emphasized the need to empower local peace committees composed of elders, youth, and women to mediate minor disputes before they escalate.

“Our peace committees work well, but they need training and recognition. If they understand Ubuntu deeply, they can handle issues faster.”(P5)

FGD participants suggested creating regular *baraza* dialogues where host and refugee communities discuss shared challenges.

“When we sit together often, we remember we are one people. That spirit should be encouraged.”(Hc1&Hc2)

ii) **Cultural Education and Storytelling**

Refugee participants proposed cultural sessions led by elders to teach young people about Ubuntu through songs, proverbs, and stories.

“Our children should learn from us that being human means caring for others. Ubuntu should be taught in schools and churches.” (Rf2)

4.5.2. Theme 2: Pathways for Integrating Ubuntu

Pathways for integrating Ubuntu emerged as a theme from participants’ narratives on how Ubuntu could be incorporated into existing conflict-management practices in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

i) **Embedding Ubuntu in Policy Language**

Different key respondents recommended that policy documents explicitly include Ubuntu-inspired principles of coexistence, community dialogue, and restorative justice.

“If the national refugee policy could speak the language of Ubuntu, we would not only manage people we would build communities.” (P2)

“Ubuntu is there but silent, if it could come out strongly in the National policy that would be a great idea. Both communities will be happy”. (P1)

4.5.3. Theme 3: Hybrid Conflict-Resolution System

Both formal and informal approaches were found key in conflict management. They supplement each other, even though the formal approach takes an upper hand, disputes within communities cannot all be solved by formal/legal agencies. There’s need for incorporating both.

i) **Partnerships Between Traditional Leaders and Humanitarian Agencies**

Participants called for structured partnerships between traditional authorities, local councils, and humanitarian agencies to co-design peacebuilding interventions.

“Peace cannot come from offices alone. It must start with the people who live together daily.”(P6)

4.5.4. Theme 4: Institutional and Policy Framework

Polymakers and leaders proposed embedding Ubuntu principles into formal frameworks guiding refugee management.

Leadership and Institutional Recommendations

Participants recognized the importance of leadership modeling Ubuntu values.

i) Training Local Leaders and Humanitarian Staff

Key respondents emphasized the need for capacity-building programs to train both local leaders and humanitarian workers in Ubuntu-oriented conflict transformation.

“Leaders must embody Ubuntu if they are to promote it. We need workshops that teach empathy, dialogue, and moral leadership.” (P2)

To uphold Ubuntu, more training and sensitization should be done to all of us, empathy is key, but some of us lack it. (P7)

ii) Vision for Sustainable Peace through Ubuntu

Participants collectively envisioned a community where Ubuntu values form the foundation of long-term peace and social harmony.

“If we live by Ubuntu, we will not see each other as refugees or hosts. We will be one family.”(Hc2)

A key respondent linked Ubuntu to preventive peacebuilding:

“When people feel valued, they avoid conflict. Ubuntu makes people responsible for one another.” (P3)

4.5.5. Summary of Findings for Research Question Three

The study found that integrating Ubuntu into conflict management requires a multi-layered approach: strengthening community peace structures, training leaders and humanitarian workers, embedding Ubuntu values in refugee policy frameworks, and fostering partnerships that bridge formal and traditional systems. Participants envisioned Ubuntu not only as a philosophy but as a sustainable foundation for inclusive governance and peacebuilding in multicultural settings.

4.6 Findings for Research Question Four: Formal and Informal Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms Beyond Ubuntu

To understand the formal and informal approaches used apart from Ubuntu in conflict resolutions in Rwamwanja settlement, the findings reveal that institutions and policies can be shaped through the combined efforts. Themes 7, of institutional and policy frameworks and theme 6, Hybrid conflict resolution mechanisms addressed the question well. The findings indicate that it is appropriate to use other alternative ways where Ubuntu cannot fully be applied, like the cases of rape, defilement and murder, which requires law enforcement (formal)

As narrated by a participant:

“we do not handle cases of murder, defilement and rape at village/community level, those are criminal cases, that are beyond Ubuntu...” (P5)

Alternative forms of conflict management are important in addressing sensitive-conflict situations where members feel free to talk about their issues with different groups such as religious groups, counselling groups, NGOs, to handle conflicts.

“One participant narrated, I feel safer to talk to my pastor over my situation”. (Hc2)

4.6.1. Theme 1: Institutional and Policy Framework

The institutional and policy framework, which emerged earlier in the findings, resurfaced in participants' accounts of strategies for integrating Ubuntu into conflict management. In this section, participants described the role of formal and legal systems to support the integration of Ubuntu philosophy.

i) **Formal and Legal Systems**

The organization structures play a vital role in conflict management. Cases related to serious offenses cannot be handled at the community level, they are forwarded to formal courts. Even though Participants described formal legal systems as being authoritative and slow, the findings show that they provide services that both refugees and host communities embrace for safety. The structure for conflict management was clear, using leaders at different levels and the legal.

“Some cases like assault or rape need police. Ubuntu cannot handle everything.” (P3)

.... *“You cannot sleep with my wife, and think I will just forgive you and end there, we have to go to police” (Rf2)*

The organ of police is used to maintain law and order in the place, during the study, community members had mixed feelings about the police operational, which at times seem biased in its operation, as narrated by a participant.

You call police to come and help you, they ask you for fuel or money, so it's better not to take the case there. (Hc2)

The police is for refugees not host community, in most cases they rush to help refugees and not host. (Hc1)

“Our leaders especially police asked us to be careful with refugees, that if one refugee gets a problem, the whole village will be punished. So, do the police play their roles equally? (Hc2)

Even though police organ is seen to be active in its operation as mentioned by participants, it is still the central department for keeping law and order in the community.

4.6.2 Theme 2: Hybrid Conflict-Resolution System

Even though it was difficult to differentiate Ubuntu and other forms of operation among the participants, it was noted that different religious organs such as churches, mosques, and NGOs, play vital role in conflict reconciliation to reduce community tensions.

The narrative below elaborates the cooperation and involvement of different groups.

i) NGO-Facilitated Mediation and Dialogue

“We gather under the tree and be guided by the leader to talk about our problems. Everyone can speak, even women and youth. After we talk, we agree on peace.” (Hc1)

A key respondent noted

“Sometimes elders organize peace meals or communal prayers after a conflict. If institutions support such activities, they can reach more people.” (P6)

ii) Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Mediation

A respondent preferred a religious based conflict mechanism as narrated

“I am a Christian and born again, when I conflict with my neighbor I go and talk with my pastor, and forgive because the bible asks us to forgive”. (Hc2)

Another respondent mentioned the involvement of community-based organization

The church members of Churchill organization give us seminars about living in harmony (Rf1)

4.6.3. Summary of Findings for Research Question Four

Conflict management beyond Ubuntu-based approaches operates through both formal and informal mechanisms. Formally, conflicts are addressed through the police and legal systems, where serious cases are reported and handled according to national law; through OPM and UNHCR administrative structures, which manage disputes related to services, land, and protection; and through formal courts and legal aid services, especially for criminal or complex cases. Informally, conflicts are managed by Refugee Welfare Committees, which mediate everyday disputes at the community level; by religious leaders, who use faith-based teachings and moral authority to resolve conflicts; and by NGO-facilitated mediation, where humanitarian organizations support dialogue, counseling, and peaceful dispute resolution within the settlement.

4.7. Consolidated summary of findings

This section presents a consolidated summary of the findings. The table below provides a full summary of research questions and, highlights the principal findings.

Table 4 Consolidated summary of findings under research Questions

Research question	Principal findings
RQ1 What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja settlement in applying the Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community?	Participants described Ubuntu as sharing, mutual giving, caring, moral guidance, forgiveness, dialogue, community mediation, and coexistence. They also reported land, water, firewood, household, gender, cultural, linguistic, youth, and livelihood-related conflicts.
RQ2 How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?	Policymakers regarded Ubuntu as relevant to community-based conflict management, although it was not explicitly named in the formal policy and operational documents described by participants. Bureaucratic procedures, donor requirements, and limited training were reported as constraints.
RQ3 How can the Ubuntu philosophy approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?	Participants proposed strengthening peace committees, regular community dialogues, cultural education, training for leaders and humanitarian staff, explicit recognition of Ubuntu-related values in policy language, and partnerships between community leaders and formal agencies.
RQ4 What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?	Participants identified police, courts, OPM and UNHCR structures, RWCs, religious leaders, NGOs, counselling, and community mediation as mechanisms used alongside or beyond Ubuntu-based approaches. Serious criminal and protection cases were reported to formal institutions.

Source: Authors own research 2025.

4.8. Cross-Cutting Insights

The findings across all four research questions reveal several intersecting insights. First, Ubuntu serves as both a cultural identity and a moral practice that unites diverse communities through shared values of compassion, reciprocity, and dialogue. Second, while Ubuntu is widely embraced at the grassroots level, its institutional recognition remains limited, suggesting a gap between lived culture and formal policy. Third, external humanitarian systems often overlook local philosophies, yet participants demonstrated that indigenous ethics like Ubuntu can enhance legitimacy and sustainability of peace interventions. And lastly the

informal mechanisms are understood as Ubuntu for reconciliation. These cross-cutting insights affirm that conflict management in refugee settings cannot rely solely on external frameworks but must draw from community-based philosophies that prioritize relational harmony and restorative justice. The leaders confirmed that their leadership structure draws on both traditional African models and modern refugee governance systems, integrating Ubuntu values in decision-making processes.

4.9. Thematic mapping of Ubuntu-centered conflict management in Rwamwanja refugee settlement

The thematic mapping shows the interconnection of various themes. Ubuntu, being at the center of the study, indicates its value for conflict management. The interconnection of different themes explains the interaction of Ubuntu and other forms of conflict management. For example, the hybrid conflict resolution system includes both legal and informal mechanisms which are key for conflict management especially in the diverse cultural backgrounds. These dimensions show that sustainable conflict management requires both culturally grounded relationships and effective institutional support.

Figure 5 Thematic framework of the study findings



Source: Author's own development based on field data (2025), created with the assistance of ChatGPT.

Thematic Mapping explanation.

This thematic mapping summarizes how Ubuntu philosophy emphasizing shared humanity, mutual responsibility, dignity, and social interconnectedness and can inform conflict management between refugees and host communities in Rwamwanja. It connects everyday experiences of conflict with community practices, formal institutions, hybrid resolution mechanisms, and practical integration strategies as shown for sustainable conflict management approach.

4.9.1. A brief explanation on the interconnection of the themes

Everyday Realities of Conflict

Resource and livelihood disputes, household and gender-related tensions, serious crime, insecurity, and broader social friction provide the context in which Ubuntu-based conflict

management is needed. Ubuntu can help address these issues by encouraging empathy, collective responsibility, peaceful coexistence, and recognition of the humanity of all community members.

Ubuntu as Lived Practice

Ubuntu becomes meaningful through relational values, informal reconciliation, community mediation, and efforts to strengthen social cohesion. These practices translate the philosophy from an abstract cultural ideal into everyday methods for repairing relationships and resolving disputes.

Community Engagement and Trust-Building

Community policing, sensitization, awareness programs, and dialogue create opportunities for refugees, host-community members, authorities, and humanitarian actors to interact constructively. This engagement builds the trust necessary for Ubuntu principles such as reciprocity, inclusion, and mutual care to influence conflict management.

Institutional and Policy Framing

Formal legal systems, policing and enforcement structures, and humanitarian coordination shape how conflicts are officially understood and managed. Their connection to Ubuntu lies in the possibility of making institutional responses more inclusive, restorative, humane, and responsive to local social relationships.

Hybrid Conflict-Resolution Systems

Hybrid systems combine formal legal procedures with informal and community-based mechanisms. This connection allows Ubuntu-informed mediation and reconciliation to complement state law, producing negotiated outcomes that may be more accessible, legitimate, and culturally appropriate. However, unequal access and procedural barriers must still be addressed.

Challenges and Constraints

Resource shortages, operational complexities, and local interference can limit the application of Ubuntu in practice. These constraints reveal that shared values alone cannot resolve conflict;

Ubuntu-based initiatives also require adequate resources, clear procedures, institutional commitment, and safeguards against bias or manipulation.

Pathways for Integrating Ubuntu

The framework ultimately points toward embedding Ubuntu in routine conflict-management practices, operationalizing inclusive approaches, and adapting legal processes to local cultural realities. This connects all the other dimensions by turning their insights into practical strategies that unite community values, informal mechanisms, and formal institutions.

4.10. Synthesis of findings (Ubuntu-centric hybrid conflict management model (UCHCMM))

The earlier thematic presentation (in section 4.2) demonstrates a complex relationship between indigenous values and formal humanitarian governance. This study proposes a conceptual framework to address the third research question concerning the integration of Ubuntu into conflict management strategies: the Ubuntu-centric hybrid conflict management model (UCHCMM). As shown above, the model advances beyond the binary of “formal versus informal” justice, promoting a synergistic "interlocked" system that emphasizes both legal procedure and relational restoration. This understanding corresponds with the broader concept of hybrid peace, in which formal, international, state, and locally grounded practices interact to produce context-specific forms of conflict management (Mac Ginty, 2010, 2011).

4.10.1. Definition and theoretical contribution of the UHCMM

In this study, the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model (UCHCMM) is defined as a conceptual framework that places Ubuntu’s relational principles in particular, forgiveness, shared humanity, caring, mutual responsibility, dialogue, and social cohesion at the centre of conflict management. The model connects these principles with formal legal and humanitarian institutions, informal community-based practices, community engagement, and hybrid conflict-resolution mechanisms. Therefore, it moves beyond a binary understanding of formal versus informal justice by presenting conflict management as an interconnected process involving legal accountability, relational restoration, and institutional collaboration.

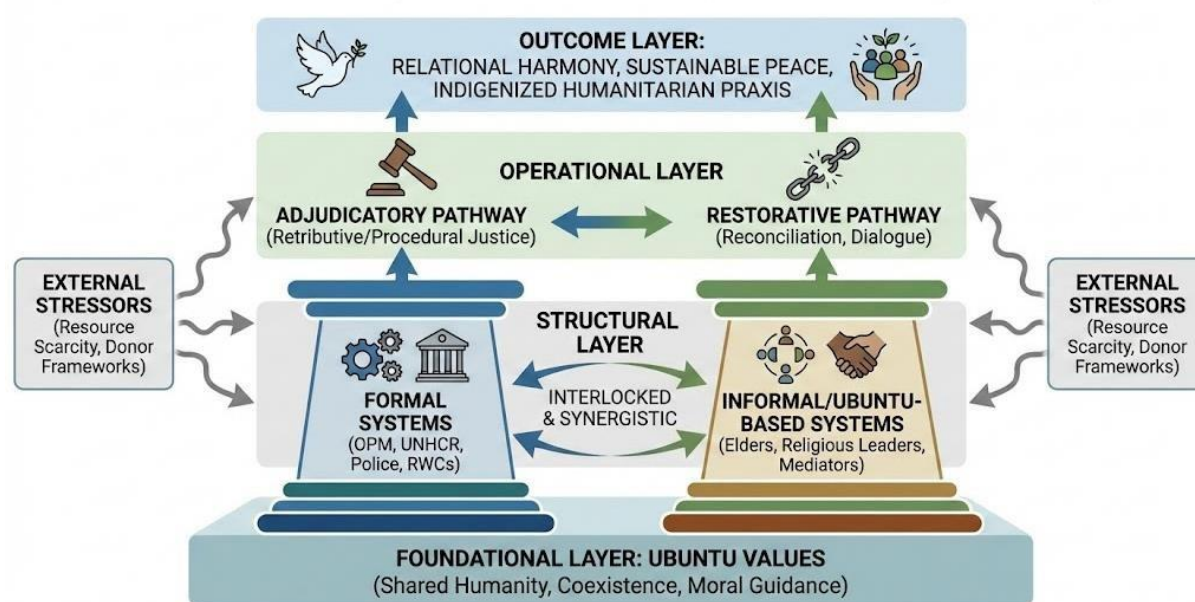
Although the UHCMM was initially introduced in Chapter Two as part of the study’s conceptual and theoretical framing, it is redefined in this chapter for the purpose of interpreting

the empirical findings. This findings-based redefinition does not replace the earlier conceptualization; rather, it refines and contextualizes it in response to the realities identified by participants in Rwamwanja. These include resource and livelihood conflicts, household and gender-related disputes, insecurity, community mediation, trust-building, institutional involvement, operational constraints, and the continued importance of relational reconciliation. The redefined UHCMM therefore represents an empirically grounded development of the framework introduced in Chapter Two.

The model's theoretical contribution lies in extending hybrid peace theory by positioning Ubuntu not merely as an informal conflict-resolution mechanism but as the central ethical and relational foundation connecting community practices with formal institutional processes. Whereas hybrid peace theory explains how local and formal systems interact (Mac Ginty, 2010, 2011), the UHCMM specifies the cultural principles that can guide this interaction in a refugee-hosting context. It demonstrates that effective hybridity involves more than the coexistence of formal and informal mechanisms; it requires culturally legitimate relationships, appropriate referral processes, community participation, institutional accountability, and sensitivity to material constraints.

The UHCMM also contributes by avoiding an idealized interpretation of Ubuntu. It acknowledges that poverty, resource competition, operational limitations, unequal access, local interference, and institutional power differences may weaken Ubuntu-based practices. Consequently, Ubuntu provides an ethical and relational orientation for conflict management but cannot substitute for legal protection, institutional capacity, or adequate material resources. The model thus offers a context-sensitive explanation of how relational restoration and procedural justice may operate as complementary dimensions of sustainable conflict management in Rwamwanja.

Figure 6 Structural components of the Ubuntu-centric hybrid conflict management model (UCHCMM)



Source: Author's own conceptualization based on the study findings, developed with the assistance of OpenAI's ChatGPT for graphic generation, 2026.

4.10.2. Structural components and internal logic

The UCHCMM is structured as a vertical progression from ontological foundations to tangible peace outcomes mediated by horizontal cooperation between diverse stakeholders.

1. The foundational layer (i.e. Ubuntu Ontology):

The core element of the framework is based on the participants' understanding of Ubuntu as “caring” and “shared humanity” (detailed in Section 4.2.1). The concept posits that Ubuntu is not only a set of values but *an ontological foundation* that shapes the community’s ethical framework. This interpretation is consistent with Ubuntu scholarship that conceptualizes personhood through relationships, shared humanity, social responsibility, and communal belonging (Tutu, 1999; Murithi, 2006; Akinola & Uzodike, 2018). The findings suggest that this layer serves as the primary driver for social cohesion in Rwamwanja, providing a shared ethical framework between the refugee and host communities.

2. The structural layer (i.e., institutional hybridity):

The Structural Layer represents the "interlocked and synergistic" relationship between formal state/humanitarian actors and indigenous leaders. As discussed in Section 4.3.2, the role of elders and traditional leaders remains central to the community's trust. The model suggests that

the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UNHCR, and the Uganda Police (Formal Systems) achieve greater legitimacy when they collaborate with these informal actors. This hybridity ensures that conflict management is not only legally sound but also culturally resonant. This approach reflects scholarship on hybrid peacebuilding, which emphasizes the interaction between formal institutions and locally legitimate practices rather than treating them as separate or competing systems (Mac Ginty, 2010, 2011).

3. The operational layer (i.e., dual referral pathways):

The core mechanism of the UCHCMM is the Operational Layer, which utilizes a dual-pathway approach.

The dual referral mechanism is derived from participants' narratives of how different categories of conflict are managed in Rwamwanja, particularly the distinction between criminal matters requiring formal intervention and relational disputes considered suitable for mediation by elders or community leaders (see Section 4.3.3; Interview/FGD codes: Rf1, Hc2, P4, P8). It is also consistent with Ubuntu-oriented approaches that emphasize dialogue, acknowledgment of harm, forgiveness, reparation, reconciliation, and the restoration of social relationships (Murithi, 2006).

- The Adjudicatory Pathway handles criminal matters through retributive or procedural justice (e.g., formal police intervention).
- The Restorative Pathway addresses interpersonal, domestic, and resource-based disputes through the Ubuntu-based practices of dialogue and forgiveness (Section 4.3.1). The bidirectional arrow between these pathways signifies a “referral logic”: formal authorities may refer social disputes back to elders to ensure long-term reconciliation, while elders refer criminal matters to the police to uphold the rule of law.

4. The outcome layer (i.e., indigenized peace):

The apex of the model is the Outcome Layer, where the goal shifts from the mere cessation of violence to the achievement of “Relational Harmony.” This aligns with the findings in Section 4.5.4(ii), suggesting that sustainable peace in refugee-hosting contexts is dependent on an “indigenized humanitarian praxis” that treats refugees as active agents of their own reconciliation processes.

This outcome also reflects the Ubuntu principle that peace involves rebuilding relationships, social trust, and communal solidarity rather than merely ending overt violence (Murithi, 2006).

4.10.3. Contextual constraints of the model

A significant contribution of this model and a departure from idealized versions of Ubuntu is the explicit inclusion of External Stressors. As evidenced by the data on resource competition (Section 4.3.2), extreme poverty and donor-driven frameworks often strain the capacity of Ubuntu to manage conflict. The UCHCMM acknowledges that while Ubuntu provides the *method* for peace, it cannot be a substitute for the *material resources* required for survival.

This qualification prevents the idealization of indigenous conflict-management practices and recognizes that local peace mechanisms operate within wider political, institutional, and socioeconomic conditions (Mac Ginty, 2011).

All in all, the four layers of the UCHCMM demonstrate that Ubuntu can be integrated into conflict management without displacing formal law or idealizing indigenous mechanisms. Its principal contribution lies in establishing a context-sensitive referral system through which legal accountability and relational restoration operate as complementary processes. The model therefore provides a framework for conflict management that is legally grounded, culturally legitimate, materially informed, and responsive to the lived realities of refugee and host communities in Rwamwanja. It suggests that for hybrid management to succeed, external humanitarian agencies must align their resource distribution strategies with the communal, sharing-based ethics of Ubuntu, rather than relying on individualistic or purely bureaucratic metrics.

4.11. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the findings on Ubuntu philosophy and conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Under Research Question One, refugees and host-community participants described Ubuntu through shared humanity, mutual giving, caring, forgiveness, mutual support dialogue, reconciliation, and collective responsibility. Their views also identified recurring conflicts related to land, water, firewood, livelihoods, household relations, gender roles, cultural and linguistic differences, youth relationships, employment, and crime. Participants reported that minor interpersonal and community disputes were frequently addressed through elders, local leaders, RWCs, community dialogue, apology, and reconciliation.

Under Research Question Two, policymakers and institutional representatives reported that the term Ubuntu was not explicitly used in the policy and operational frameworks known to them. However, they identified coexistence, dignity, dialogue, empathy, respect, and peaceful living as values present in administrative and community-based practices. They also reported constraints associated with bureaucratic procedures, donor-driven programs, international guidelines, and limited training in indigenous approaches.

Under Research Question Three, participants proposed several strategies for integrating Ubuntu into conflict-management practice. These included strengthening and recognizing local peace committees, holding regular host-refugee dialogues, using cultural education and storytelling, training local leaders and humanitarian personnel, including Ubuntu-related language in policy documents, and building structured partnerships between community leaders, government actors, humanitarian agencies, and the police.

Under Research Question Four, participants identified formal mechanisms such as the police, courts, OPM, UNHCR, and legal-aid structures, as well as informal mechanisms involving RWCs, elders, religious leaders, NGOs, counselling, and community mediation. Their contributions distinguished minor interpersonal and resource disputes, which could be mediated locally, from serious criminal and protection matters, which were referred to formal authorities.

Chapter five gives a clear interpretation and discussion in relation to the findings and the themes. This guides the study how the findings were connected to the literature and researchers' opinion.

CHAPTER 5. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Overview of the chapter.

Building on the rich narrative presented in Chapter 4, this chapter restates, interprets, and discusses the study findings on Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Uganda in relation to the research questions and themes. The findings themselves were already presented in Chapter 4; they are reiterated here only where necessary to support interpretation, engagement with the literature, and explanation of the study's contribution. Rwamwanja is a culturally diverse refugee settlement that faces internal conflicts arising from different cultural backgrounds, competition over limited resources, and contested access to land and services. The overall goal of the study was to explore how Ubuntu philosophy has been used to manage internal conflicts in this diverse setting. The findings indicate that Ubuntu can contribute to conflict management when it complements, rather than replaces, the formal conflict management strategies used in the settlement.

Seven themes were developed in relation to the research questions: everyday realities of conflict among refugees and host-community members; Ubuntu as lived practice; community engagement and trust-building; pathways for integrating Ubuntu; challenges and constraints in applying Ubuntu; a hybrid conflict management system; and the institutional and policy framing of conflict management. All in all, the themes show that Ubuntu should not be treated as a standalone approach; it should complement other forms of conflict management. The themes were aligned with the following research questions:

What are the lived experiences of refugees and host communities in the Rwamwanja settlement in applying the Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in their community?

How has the Ubuntu philosophy been perceived by policymakers in addressing conflicts in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?

How can the Ubuntu approach be integrated into conflict management strategies in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement?

What other formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms exist within the Rwamwanja refugee settlement besides Ubuntu-based approaches?

As a Ugandan researcher, I approached this study with both an academic interest in indigenous governance frameworks and a personal commitment to understanding community-based conflict resolution in refugee contexts. My proximity to the Ugandan context geographically, culturally, and professionally provided me with a degree of insider knowledge that facilitated rapport-building with participants and access to key informants. However, I remained conscious of the potential for my own assumptions, professional lens, and positional authority to shape the research process. To mitigate these influences, I employed reflexive practices throughout the study, including maintaining a field journal, engaging in regular debriefings with local collaborators, and conducting member checks to validate interpretations. I also remained attentive to power dynamics during interviews and focus group discussions, ensuring that participants especially the women, youth, and marginalized voices had equitable opportunities to share their perspectives. This reflexive stance was essential in honoring the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm of the study and in upholding the Ubuntu values of mutual respect, empathy, and shared humanity that underpin both the research topic and methodology.

The discussion integrates relevant scholars' work, addresses the implications of the findings, and identifies directions for future study in the fields of Ubuntu, refugee governance, and conflict management. Attention is given to the study's novel contribution: the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model.

5.2. Interpretation and discussion of the findings

The findings are interpreted through the themes developed in Chapter 4 and aligned with the research questions. Because some themes cut across more than one research question, Table 5.1 explains their relevance and guides the discussion.

Table 5 Themes and their connection to research questions.

Themes	Interpretation	Connection to literature	Connection to research question.
Everyday realities of conflicts among	Challenges related to cultural misunderstandings; resources competitions and	Literature on resource distribution and structural inequalities show	RQ1 is directly involved in this theme for its connection with

refugees and host members	other form of disputes often result into conflicts as different groups interact with each other frequently	host-refugees' grievances that escalates internal conflicts	host-refugee involvement on lived experiences
Ubuntu as lived practice	Ubuntu philosophy is understood as a life journey among the community members, it is being used in daily lifestyle as long as people exist, its values such as communal work, caring, sharing and empathy all are employed in day-to-day life.	The Ubuntu philosophy is supported by African literature and guided by the African ethics as a way of life in relation to peaceful co-existence.	This cuts across to research questions RQ3 & RQ4 but the main one is RQ1 which explains lived experience
Theme 3: Community engagement & trust building	The theme emphasises inclusive approach which strengthens relations for conflict management.	To build trust, literature explaining participatory approaches are inevitable for conflict resolution, dialogues the need for bottom-up approaches.	RQ1 and RQ3 were key for this theme, integrating Ubuntu supports community engagement which later reduces on tension leading to conflicts
Theme 4: Pathway for integrating Ubuntu	To integrate Ubuntu into the structural framework, there's a need to bridge both formal and informal systems of operation	literature on indigenous knowledge, peacebuilding using hybrid lens, and ubuntu in conflict management are important for integration in formal structure.	This addressed RQ3 on integration of Ubuntu into policy systems.
Theme 5: Challenges & constraints for application of Ubuntu	Constraints on involving ubuntu are not limited to bureaucratic institutional policies, the power imbalances, awareness gap and cultural diversities. All contribute to challenges of incorporating Ubuntu.	Literature related to complex implementation of Ubuntu in the cultural diversity environment and the leadership management policy apply to this theme.	This addresses research Qns 1, 2 and 3 for clarity and understanding, livelihoods, policy, and strategies
Theme 6: Hybrid conflict management system	Both formal and informal conflict management system are required for effective management	The need to advocate for traditional and formal governance structures for support of sustainable peace	It addressed research question RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4

		building a co-existence	
Theme 7: Institutional and policy framing of conflict management	To assess if Ubuntu philosophy is recognised in the policy framework for conflict management strategy	Literature on policy and governance and how they influence peacebuilding	Directly addresses RQ2& RQ4 regarding policymakers' perceptions of Ubuntu and other forms.

Source: Author's synthesis of the findings presented in Chapter 4 and the literature discussed in this chapter

5.3. Everyday realities of conflicts among refugees and host-community members

The theme answered related questions on lived experiences, which were addressed in research question 1. The first research question focuses on the lived experiences of both refugees and host community members. The themes helped the researcher to understand how host members and refugees live together.

The theme looks at how conflicts are being managed through daily interactions, following the cultural, economic, and social challenges that come up with coexistence. Using conflict transformation theory, which describes structural dimensions on solving conflicts, Lederach's view on conflict shows that disputes related to cultural, resources, and economic aspects can be transformed to positivity when two groups agree (Lederach, 1997). Similarly, Galtung's ABC model conceptualizes conflict through three interrelated components: attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions (Galtung, 1996). From Galtung's view on the ABC model of conflicts, the tensions that are brought by attitudes of both refugees and host community members, their behavior and contradictions brought by limited resources explain the relation between refugees and hosts as seen in the narratives (Galtung, 1996). The participants interpreted the question by first giving their understanding of Ubuntu and then narrating stories on how they lived with their fellows.

a) Ubuntu as caring and shared humanity

Ubuntu was understood as a shared, interconnected existence, which was described by most respondents. Ubuntu was known for caring and sharing, and it fostered harmony with both refugees and host community members. As presented in the direct interviews, Ubuntu is key in one's life.

Participants said it was a way of life and that they lived with it. The participants also stated that Ubuntu begins at family level, as evidenced by the way they value one another (P1). This means that Ubuntu shapes our behaviors and we live with it in our daily lives. Based on the narrative, Ubuntu is considered a framework rooted in human relationships, and it emphasizes true personhood through interconnection with others, starting within the family unit and extending to the broader community.

John S. Mbiti's famous statement, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am," was depicted when a respondent (Rf1) *said that Ubuntu meant knowing that we (refugees and hosts) we are all the same people, irrespective of where one hailed from-Congo or Uganda*. To him, we had to live together and help each other when we were in problems. This relational perspective highlights Ubuntu's belief that individual identity and well-being are deeply connected to community ties. Therefore, to "live Ubuntu" means to consistently practice these values in daily life. This perspective was further noted when respondent Hc2 *said that the community came together to help anyone in need by collecting food and clothes without waiting for authorities to come to the aid of this person*. This further elaborates on Mbiti's (1969) writing as mentioned before, which *conceptualizes* human dignity as inherently communal rather than individualistic. Refugees and host community members alike viewed Ubuntu as a unifying philosophy that guides moral conduct and social coexistence.

Further, the respondents perceived Ubuntu as a mutual giving for coexistence, fostering harmonious living between refugees and host members. It involves participation in daily activities and sharing the available resources. The narratives from different respondents like P6, where they welcomed any new person in the camp and shared their possessions with the new member, indicated how coexistence was an important aspect in Ubuntu, especially in refugee settlements. *"When someone is new in the camp, we welcome them and share what we have, even if it is little. Without Ubuntu, life here would be impossible."* (P6; see Section 4.3.1.1) This narrative depicts Ubuntu as more practical for survival and not an abstract philosophy. By emphasizing "sharing even if it is a little," it means that they value Ubuntu more even though they live under conditions of material deprivation. This, therefore, indicates that cooperation compensates for scarcity. Ubuntu is described as "the root of African philosophy," grounded in lived experience rather than theoretical abstraction, and argues that it emphasizes reciprocity and solidarity as conditions for life itself (Ramose, 2002).

Ubuntu provides displaced communities with a moral understanding to curb fears and competition for scarce resources. Respondent (P5)'s statement that even in disagreement with refugees they choose peace over fighting and that elders always remind them about Ubuntu and need for coexistence depicts this. Desmond Tutu reinforces this by stating that Ubuntu "*speaks of the very essence of being human,*" particularly in situations of vulnerability (Tutu, 1999). In this context, communal ethics are crucial where formal institutions fail. Thus, Ubuntu functions as a moral infrastructure within the settlement, enabling people to reconstruct meaning, dignity, and hope through shared humanity despite ongoing challenges and conflicts.

It was also noted that Ubuntu serves as moral guidance with elders involved in solving disputes among the people, especially when disputes involved refugees and hosts or were between refugees. Issues like marital conflicts, gender-based violence, and marriages between refugees and hosts were mostly resolved with the involvement of the elders or even sometimes the community. Even when the police received reports of such cases, they recommended dialogue and consensus building as the best approach. The parties were advised to settle such matters outside the legal system. This resonates with the proverb that "*it takes a village to raise a child,*" which explains how community involvement helps in dispute management. This can be done through consensus, instilling values of respect, forgiveness, and having a clear view of communal living. The interviews ascertained that Ubuntu is a tool that guides people on how to behave in society, as the narrative suggests.

Murithi's (2006) interpretation of Ubuntu as a framework for moral reasoning that encourages restorative rather than retributive justice is depicted by P3's statement, where he *posits that while solving disputes between people, he always encourages the parties to be human, to forgive, to dialogue, and to exercise patience, literally referring to Ubuntu.* The philosophy thus underpins the local moral order that guides peaceful interactions and conflict resolution. These narratives confirm that Ubuntu remains a living social ethic within the community, shaping both interpersonal and intergroup relations.

The findings suggest that, despite linguistic and cultural diversity, Ubuntu functions as a moral compass, fostering solidarity, sharing, and compassion between groups. This reflects Tutu's (1999) idea that one's well-being is linked to others. The *implication for RQ1 is that lived experiences of conflict are shaped by both material conditions and social perceptions.*

To further get to the gist of RQ1, which addressed lived experiences, it is imperative to note that conflicts are shaped by both conditions and the social phenomenon, supporting the argument by Betts (2021), who argues that everyday conflicts need to be transformed through power structures to address concerns between refugees and host community members.

b) Resource and livelihood conflicts

Limited resource constraints, such as land, water sources, and firewood collection, were the most frequently mentioned sources of conflicts in Rwamwanja refugee settlement. The findings reveal both refugees and the host community depend on those resources. Because of competition, conflicts occurred between refugees and host members. Participants highlighted that there is always tension due to limited resources, as described by various respondents. Respondent Hc1 said that refugees crossed into their lands and collected firewood and harvested their crops without the permission of the host, and this led to conflicts. Another respondent, a refugee female (Rf 2), said that the scarcity of land for cultivation, firewood, and water sources had led to misunderstandings, as some hosts said that they (refugees) were stealing. Despite all these conflicts, hosts sometimes understood that the refugees needed these items to survive, while for others, through dialogue and compensation, the issues were resolved either at the police or with local leaders' involvement.

During data collection in both interviews and focus group discussions, it was noted that land and resource-based conflicts were the most pressing issues related to the Rwamwanja refugee settlement. This challenge is not only in refugee settlements, but it's also a global issue, where different groups of people compete for control, use, or ownership of natural resources such as land, water sources, minerals, and space. In Dixon's scarcity theory elaborated by Masara, there are three different forms of scarcity that lead to conflict, including supply-induced scarcity, where depletion or degradation of resources takes place; demand-induced scarcity, which highlights population growth outweighing the resources available; and structural scarcity, where unequal distribution of resources is exercised among the elite and the marginalized (Masara, 2021). This is not far from the situation at Rwamwanja, where resource competition is high compared to the population of refugees and host members. The population influx increased the demand for land for cultivation, in most cases conflicting with host members as seen in the narrative of Hc1 about refugees crossing into the gardens of the host community and Rf 2's statement that land for cultivation was "small," with both situations leading to conflicts. These conflicts, though common, can at times lead to violence even though

some are non-violent and are often resolved through local mediation led by community elders and leaders, reflecting Ubuntu's emphasis on dialogue and restoration. This thus shifts conflict management from retributive justice, which seeks to punish individuals to restorative justice, which advocates healing and reconciliation, which is the Ubuntu approach.

c) Cultural misunderstandings and interpersonal disputes

Through interviews, the findings showed that cultural misunderstandings and language barriers also surfaced as obstacles to harmonious living among refugees and host community members. Cultural misunderstandings within refugee settlements frequently arise from the intersection of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds that come together under conditions of displacement and uncertainty. Refugee populations generally comprise numerous distinct groups, each possessing unique cultural norms, belief systems, and communication styles, which frequently lead to misinterpretations and tensions. Participants noted that refugees from Francophone backgrounds (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo) and host communities from western parts, mainly Tooro and Ankole cultures, sometimes misinterpret gestures or communication styles, leading to mistrust.

Both refugees and host-community members provide narratives that demonstrate this. Participant P6 said that what is considered a joke in one culture may be misunderstood by another culture as an insult, while Hc1 stated that differences in culture and upbringing, especially concerning respect for elders, led to fights and misunderstandings.

This shows how cultural difference shapes everyday social interactions in the refugee-host relationships at the settlement. From Geert Hofstede's definition of culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another, the findings of this study lead us to the understanding that upbringing strongly influences norms of conduct (Hofstede, 2011). In many societies, respect for elders is demonstrated through silence, indirect communication, or physical gestures, while in others it may be shown through open dialogue or questioning. When refugees and host communities operate from different cultural backgrounds, ordinary interactions may be misinterpreted as disrespectful, even when no offense is intended.

Similarly, Gudykunst and Kim (2003, p. 48) argue that misunderstandings emerge due to fundamental differences in the cultural frameworks that govern behaviour and event

interpretation, rather than solely from language barriers. According to respondent Rf 2, their culture (Congolese) permits a girl of 16 to get married, and their community does not frown upon this. However, Ugandan cultures view this as defilement, and the hosts consistently report such cases to the police (Lubaale, 2013, pp. 138 -141). Under Article 257(1)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, a child is defined as “a person under the age of eighteen years.” Furthermore, Article 31(1) provides that a person is entitled to marry only upon attaining the age of 18. (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, art. 257(1), 31 (1) (c)) These cultural differences are a source of conflicts in the community. Within refugee environments dominated by pervasive trauma and uncertainty, these cultural gaps emerge with heightened prominence, which necessitates the application of the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes communal welfare instead of individualistic pursuits, thereby promoting cross-cultural mutual respect and understanding (Metz, 2011, pp. 537-540), and using Julius Nyerere’s phrase of “Ujamaa” (familyhood) (Nyerere, 1968, pp. 11-12). The Ujamaa was meant to promote equality, communal living, and the sharing of resources (Nyerere, 1968, pp. 1-12). This was aimed at preventing the “ruthless competition” and individualistic, capitalistic mentalities caused by tribal and cultural differences (Nyerere, 1968, pp. 4-5). Ubuntu as an approach, on the other hand, reduces cultural misunderstandings through the promotion of solidarity within diverse populations (Metz, 2011, pp. 537-540).

Domestic conflicts, especially between spouses, were also reported as frequent but often resolved through community mediation, reinforcing Ubuntu’s value of restoring relationships rather than punishment. The narrative from participants elaborates on how domestic and gender conflicts are resolved. Participant in focus group Rf2 said that conflicts at home over money and polygamy are always resolved through dialogue, with elders mediating and overseeing the reconciliation process.

The respondent in the focus group Hc1 submission regarding domestic disputes arising from the use of proceeds from property sales highlights the existing gender disparities and inequalities between women and men. In refugee settlements, especially where poverty is at its peak, financial constraints are seen to be major causes of domestic violence. Another domestic dispute cause is culture differences. During the focus group discussion, a participant from Hc2 explains, his marriage to a refugee as problematic because of different cultural norms and backgrounds. “ *she frequently returns to her parents’ home, which is their cultural norm*”, this leads to fights between us and hence put the whole family at risk. Because this kind of

arrangement involves different families, it does not end, but it leads to intergroup conflicts. Intercultural challenges cause conflicts because of different cultural norms.

Lastly, as shown in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.4, under Theme 4 -Challenges and Constraints, cultural diversity and cultural erosion contributed to intergenerational and value-based conflict between elders and young people. The elders felt increasingly isolated, disregarded, and disrespected because many young people no longer adhered to customary norms or recognized traditional authority. On the other hand, the youth viewed themselves as entitled to exercise their individual rights and make choices according to their own preferences. They also tended to favor the contemporary legal system, perceiving traditional cultural processes as slow and less responsive to their needs. This tension represents an intracommunity conflict arising from competing understandings of authority, rights, responsibility, and appropriate dispute-resolution processes. It weakens relationships between generations and contributes to the gradual abandonment of Ubuntu principles, particularly respect for elders, relational responsibility, communal belonging, and intergenerational solidarity. Narrative from a participant state, “*we cannot promote Ubuntu to the next generation when the young ones do not want to listen to us. They feel we are outdated*” (Hc1)

d) Youth-related conflicts

Young people face social pressures that lead to negative psychological and social outcomes (Abur and Mugumbate, 2022). While developing inclusive environments that advance mutual understanding, young people face the challenge of identity development under unstable conditions. The disruption of social norms has caused self-denial among refugee youth, which has led to conflicts. As Abur and Mugumbate (2022) argue, the resistance to change adds complexity to intercultural interactions among the young people, and where absence or deliberate initiatives to build mutual understanding and respect for identity fail, then conflicts occur. Rf2 and Rf1 in focus groups state that conflicts among youth arise over issues related to girls, job opportunities in town, and occasionally the failure to receive their wages. Ubuntu promotes reconciliation by fostering shared human bonds and communal support networks through football matches, dialogue, and compensation of wages with food.

The decision not to report non-payment but instead “sit together and seek a solution” (Rf 1) affirms the role of collective coping mechanisms and social solidarity among marginalized groups like refugees. In the absence of institutional support, workers often rely on informal

negotiation and communal problem-solving, which are embedded in Ubuntu. The narrative shows that even though the youth face challenges, they always come together and reconcile, showing the Ubuntu philosophy's spirit. And accepting food instead of money highlights how basic survival needs influence labor relationships in poverty. Although such arrangements might offer temporary help, they also make exploitation seem normal and reduce the value of work. Poverty is not just about having a low income but about lacking essential capabilities (Sen, 1999). Receiving food instead of wages restricts workers' economic freedom and choices, increasing their reliance on employers. As Harvey (2005) points out, "When labor is undervalued, it is often justified through moral or paternalistic reasons rather than fair pay." The narrative thus uncovers deeper structural inequalities in informal labor markets, where immediate survival often comes at the cost of respect and fair payment.

5.4. Ubuntu as lived practice

In this theme, respondents agreed that Ubuntu is an integral part of life and has been applied in various ways, including traditional reconciliation, community mediation, social inclusion, forgiveness, and many other practices as described by the participants. Ubuntu, understood as "I am because we are," doesn't come as an abstract idea but a lived experience among the people. This experience shaped interpersonal relations and improved peaceful coexistence among the refugees and hosts. The philosophy emphasizes interconnectedness and mutual care, which Mbiti (1969) and Tutu (1999) show as important parts of humanity.

Ubuntu philosophy advocates for the assimilation of refugees into host communities by emphasizing communal bonds rather than division into legal and ethnic statuses. Using the example of South Africa's truth and reconciliation led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the commission demonstrated the Ubuntu principle through initiatives of forgiveness and community recovery, leading to relationship restoration (Tutu 1999).

Ubuntu-based mediation pursues harmonious approaches, such as forgiveness, communal punishment, and communal healing, in contrast to the Western evaluative mediation framework that emphasizes legal structures and power relations (Brigg, 2003). This process is ideal for sustainable conflict resolution, as it works to mend deep-seated emotional and social divisions rather than merely addressing superficial conflicts. The finding shows that sharing, caring, forgiveness, and reconciliation were part of human interactions. The narratives below further elaborated this.

a) Forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness emerged as a central Ubuntu value applied in conflict management. Respondents across groups described instances where reconciliation was prioritized over punishment. In view of conflict transformation theory, which emphasizes involvement of local actors (Miall, 2007), and in view of the refugee settlement situation, it was noted that engaging local leaders and elders in conflict resolution processes guaranteed addressing deep social and cultural problems as elaborated in the narratives. Respondent in focus group (Rf1) talks about dialogue, meal sharing, and forgiveness as the path he prefers to solve a misunderstanding and involvement of leaders (*“It’s what the elders taught us”*), which is in line with conflict transformation theory, which emphasizes involvement of local actors (Miall, 2007). In view of the refugee settlement situation, it was noted that engaging local leaders and elders in conflict resolution processes guaranteed addressing deep social and cultural problems as elaborated in the narratives of P5 in section 4.3.3 who said that they prefer that people reconcile through dialogue. *“We have seen that dialogues work better”*. This reflects the belief that mutual agreement to forgive effectively resolves the conflict at its core, even if practical consequences may still follow. This aligns with peacebuilding, that views reconciliation as a relational process rather than a purely legal outcome. John Paul Lederach (1997) in conflict transformation theory explains that “reconciliation is not simply a static goal, but a dynamic process through which a fractured society moves toward a shared future”. Forgiveness, in this sense, creates the moral and emotional conditions necessary for that shared future to emerge.

Statements such as those from the P5, P2 and P6 emphasized community-level forgiveness:

“We prefer that people reconcile. When they bring a case, we ask both sides to talk, and when one says sorry, the matter ends. That is our way.” (p5)

As already reported in Chapter 4, P2 and P6 emphasized reconciliation and forgiveness before further action (see Section 4.3.1). In my opinion, Ubuntu as a lived practice should align with the ABC model by Galtung, because attitude, and behavior of refugees and hosts show how best they relate with each other in either the good or bad way. The narrative from a participant indicates that the attitude is still negative towards adoption of Ubuntu. *“We are strangers... practicing Ubuntu in a foreign country is not possible...” (Rf2)*. The narrative shows that Contradictions and attitude towards the Ubuntu is still not acceptable even though the principle

is known. Therefore, to align with Galtung on ABC model, the Attitude of people need to be changed.

More so, the theme advocates policymakers' intervention to include these informal practices in rebuilding relationships. This is supported by Lederach's (1997, pp. 26-35, 82-84) conflict-transformation approach, in which rebuilding relationships and addressing personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions are core elements of sustainable peace. It is also consistent with neo-institutional theory, which recognizes that institutions are sustained not only by formal rules but also by normative expectations, shared cultural understandings, and socially accepted practices (Scott, 2014, pp. 56-71). It may also be noted that Ubuntu as a lived practice may be more readily understood in culturally homogeneous settings than in heterogeneous settings. However, Murithi (2009, pp. 221-233) does not explicitly compare homogeneous and heterogeneous groups; rather, he argues that Ubuntu promotes reconciliation through empathy, sharing, cooperation, and recognition of humanity's essential unity. In culturally heterogeneous settings, differences in values and interpretations may weaken shared norms unless they are addressed through inclusive and mutually transformative dialogue (Eze, 2010, p. 154). Cultural differences may therefore lead to the neglect or erosion of cultural norms.

5.5. Community engagement and trust-building

Community engagement is essential for sustainable peace. In Rwamwanja refugee settlement where conflicts related to resource allocation and language barrier were mentioned as a challenge to both refugees and host community members, engaging the community through leaders and elders, and having dialogues was important for conflict management. Even though Uganda has the best refugee progressive policy, co-existence of refugees and host members is still a challenge. Social constructions, dialogues and interactions should play a role in co-existence, which calls for community engagement (Ahimbisibwe 2018).

Community engagement is essential for sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997, pp. 26-35). In Rwamwanja refugee settlement where conflicts related to resource allocation and language barrier were mentioned as a challenge to both refugees and host community members, engaging the community through leaders and elders, and having dialogues was important for conflict management (Lederach, 1997, pp. 41-61; Murithi, 2009, pp. 228-231). Even though Uganda has the best refugee progressive policy (Ahimbisibwe, 2019, pp. 62 -63), coexistence of refugees and host members is still a challenge (Ahimbisibwe, 2019). The Refugees Act

supports this progressive framework by recognizing refugees' rights to employment, education, property, access to courts and freedom of movement (Government of Uganda, 2006, ss. 29-30). However, Social constructions, dialogues and interactions have not been considered to play a role in co-existence, which calls for community engagement (Ahimbisibwe 2018).

Moreso, using the conflict transformative theory, and Neo-institutionalism, conflict transformative fosters long-term changes in conflict resolutions rather than short term engagement (Lederach, 2003), and by employing this theory, community engagement provides a long-term integration process which is key for refugee management especially in Uganda with an influx in number (Betts, et.al, 2022). Through the Ubuntu philosophy Lense of "I am because we are", community engagement and trust promote a moral foundation of restorative justice, as mentioned by Mbiti (1969) and Tutu (1999). This is further explained in the narration, *"When we hold community dialogues, both host and refugees share stories, apologize and agree on how to live best; that is Ubuntu in action even if we don't name it that way"*. p2

a) Community policing and mediation

The sub-theme indicates that local systems are important in cultivating trust among different stakeholders. Building trust is key while dealing with vulnerable groups because it builds relationships. Aligning this with Neo-institutionalism approach, Scott (2014) opines that institutions are meant to support social norms and not only formal rules. Therefore, through mediation and dialogues, the findings reveal that elders and leaders are respected and play a vital role in conflict management through enforcement of justice in communities. This was evident when participant P3 narrated that community policing builds respect and prevents harm before the actual conflicts happen. Study by Ahimbisibwe shows that the engagement of community members reduces tension among conflicting groups within the settlement (Ahimbisibwe, 2018). Therefore, in relation to Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes human interaction through mediation and relationships, community policing allows members to share their grievances and create solution without any fear.

During interviews a participant mentioned *"We feel seen and respected, when elders sit with us and listen to both sides (Hc2)*. This indicates trust among the elders and respect for each other. The ubuntu principle of "I am because we are" serves as a foundation for empathy along with mutual respect and collective responsibility which are important for conflict resolution

and harmonious living. This has thus been used to transform mediation strategies through dialogues that emphasize communal well-being rather than individual interests. Ubuntu philosophy advocates for the assimilation of refugees into host communities by emphasizing communal bonds rather than division into legal and ethnic statuses. Using an example of South African's truth and reconciliation led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the commission demonstrated the Ubuntu principle through initiatives of forgiveness and community recovery leading to relationship restoration (Tutu, 1999).

b) Awareness and dialogue

Awareness emerged as an important component of the community engagement and trust-building theme within conflict management. It enabled community members to understand the causes and effects of conflict, recognize shared concerns, and participate more constructively in addressing disagreements. By creating opportunities for communication and mutual understanding, awareness-building helped reduce unnecessary tensions among community members. Dialogue was therefore understood not merely as an exchange of information but as a relational encounter through which perceptions, identities, and relationships could be reshaped. Conflict transformation theory similarly emphasizes dialogue as a means of addressing immediate disagreements, rebuilding relationships, and supporting constructive social change within communities (Lederach, 2003). Evidence from East Africa also indicates that interaction between refugees and host communities can strengthen social cohesion, although its effects vary according to context (Betts et al., 2022).

In Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, participants reported that dialogue helped different groups coexist peacefully. Participant 5 explained, *"We have seen that dialogue works better. When people reconcile, there is peace not only in their homes but in the whole village"* (P5). This account shows how dialogue can build trust by allowing conflicting parties to acknowledge grievances, identify shared interests, and seek mutually acceptable outcomes.

This finding is consistent with Uganda's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which adopts a multi-stakeholder approach involving government institutions, refugees, host communities, civil society, faith leaders, and development actors (Office of the Prime Minister, 2021). Although the framework does not prescribe dialogue as a distinct conflict-management method, its emphasis on coordinated participation creates institutional space for dialogue, community engagement, and collective problem-solving. This policy orientation also supports

Ahimbisibwe's (2018) observation that Uganda's refugee response seeks to integrate refugees and host communities into shared development and protection arrangements.

Participants 2 and 6 expressed similar views concerning reconciliation and forgiveness. Participant 2 stated, *"As leaders, we encourage reconciliation and forgiveness first before we take any further actions. When the two groups agree to forgive each other, then the matter is solved"* (P2). In a separate interview, Participant 6 similarly explained that community leaders initially encouraged conflicting parties to forgive one another and reconcile before considering further action (P6). These individual views demonstrate a restorative approach to conflict that prioritizes reconciliation and forgiveness over punitive measures and reflects the relational principles of Ubuntu. From this perspective, forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a deliberate moral and social strategy for repairing damaged relationships and restoring communal harmony. Tutu (1999) reinforces this connection between Ubuntu and reconciliation by observing that *"harmony, friendliness, community are great goods"* (p. 35). Unresolved resentment may therefore obstruct trust-building and trap individuals and communities in recurring cycles of hostility.

Participant P2 continued to state, that they encourage more dialogue than punishment : *"In this settlement, we encourage dialogue. Whether it is between refugees and hosts or between households, we believe in sitting together to talk until a solution comes."* (P2). Borrowing Nelson Mandela quotation, who argued that *"courageous people do not fear forgiving, for the sake of peace"* (Mandela, as cited in Beresford, 1994). This statement shows transitional justice which affirms that moral courage is seen in reconciliation and allows societies to replace revenge with responsibility and coexistence (Teitel, 2000, pp. 69 -94). As philosopher Ricoeur notes, *"forgiveness does not erase the past, but it reinterprets it"*. (Ricoeur, 2024, pp.457-506.

In this way, forgiveness becomes the decisive act that transforms conflict into the possibility of lasting peace (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 457–506). This understanding is reflected in the experience of HC1, who stated: *"We gather under the tree to talk about our problems. Everyone can speak, even women and youth. After we talk, we agree on peace."* (Hc1). The quotation demonstrates the importance of inclusive community dialogue by showing how elders and leaders provide spaces in which community members, including women and youth, can participate in conflict management. Elders and leaders are trusted in communities because they play a role as peacemakers and reconcile conflicting groups. This was further explained by P7: *"When refugees come in, we tell them: here, we live as one family. If you fight, elders will help you*

talk and reconcile.” (p7). From a neo-institutional perspective, leaders bridge the gap between formal policies and informal norms because institutions derive legitimacy from the interaction of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements (Scott, 2014, pp. 56-71). In line with Uganda’s refugee policy framework, particularly the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugees Regulations of 2010, leaders play a role in mediation and dialogue. Examples include Refugee Welfare Committee leaders (RWCs) and Local Council leaders (LCs), who manage minor conflicts within refugee settlements and surrounding host communities. Research conducted in Uganda confirms that refugee leaders function as cultural and institutional intermediaries, connecting Ugandan law, refugee governance structures, and customary approaches to dispute resolution (Vancluyesen & Ingelaere, 2020, pp. 300-315). Elders and leaders therefore work together to enhance the credibility and legitimacy of conflict-management processes in the settlement.

As mentioned by a participant *“When elders speak, people tend to listen because they uphold morals, when they call for peace, it feels like a responsibility and not a command”* (Rf2 and Hc1). This therefore means that elders and leaders are trusted to resolve conflicts. Trust is built through continuous engagement with the members and not policy. This is important in organization that help to unite refugees and host communities Nongovernment organizations play this role as quoted from participant *“ we work closely with the leaders and elders, and where they’re disputes, we send them first to handle the situation, by the time we go, we find everything has been resolved, the leaders play”*(P6) This respondents statement supports Ramose’s argument that Ubuntu promotes reintegrative justice restoring the social harmony that has been disturbed by wrongdoing(Ramose, 1999). The leaders confirmed that their leadership structure draws on both traditional African models and modern refugee governance systems, integrating Ubuntu values in decision-making processes. The African model emphasizes consensus, shared responsibility, and community well-being. This perspective is consistent with Olaopa and Ogundare’s (2023) recognition of the continuing relevance of traditional institutions, Indigenous knowledge, and sociocultural values to governance and sustainable development. Ubuntu-based mediation draws on relational values such as empathy, mutual responsibility, care, and respect, which can support social cohesion and the restoration of relationships. However, traditional mechanisms should complement rather than automatically replace formal justice systems, particularly where serious offences, human-rights violations, or unequal power relations are involved .

5.6. Pathways for integrating Ubuntu into the policy framework

The theme answered research Questions, and Research Question 3. During the study, different approaches were suggested by key stakeholders such as inclusive operations, using embedding ubuntu in the policy framework, and partnerships.

a) Embedding Ubuntu in policy language and framework

Most respondents suggested that Ubuntu should be embedded in the Policy framework even though the policies have tresses of Ubuntu, it should come out clearly to help in operations of refugee settlement. This should start from amending the policy framework from international level, National level to grassroots

“If the national refugee policy could speak the language of Ubuntu, we would not only manage people we would build communities.” (P2)

“Ubuntu is there but silent, if it could come out strongly in the National policy that would be a great idea. Both communities will be happy”. (P1)

Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical justification for integrating local leadership training into humanitarian policy frameworks. Ubuntu’s collectivist worldview emphasizes shared humanity, mutual care, and interdependence, aligning closely with scholars who argue for values-based policy reform in humanitarian systems (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2011). When policies prioritize the training and empowerment of local leaders, they move beyond technical capacity building and instead institutionalize respect for local knowledge, relationships, and social networks.

b) Partnerships between traditional leaders and agencies

Participants called for structured partnerships between traditional authorities, local councils, and humanitarian agencies to co-design peacebuilding interventions. This finding emphasizes that sustainable peacebuilding should be locally grounded and informed by the experiences, knowledge, and priorities of the communities affected by conflict. As one participant

explained: *“Peace cannot come from offices alone. It must start with the people who live together daily”* (P6).

Partnering with traditional leaders, including chiefs, elders, and community heads, creates opportunities for conflict management and reconciliation. These leaders often possess knowledge, community legitimacy, and an understanding of local relationships that external organizations may lack. Their involvement can therefore help humanitarian agencies identify emerging tensions, communicate appropriately with communities, and design interventions that reflect local cultural realities. This corresponds with Mac Ginty’s (2010) concept of hybrid peacebuilding, in which formal and international interventions interact with locally grounded institutions and practices.

Localization is also important in ensuring that refugees and host-community members participate as active decision-makers rather than merely as recipients of humanitarian assistance. Localization entails strengthening the capacity, authority, and resources of local actors so that they can prepare for and respond to shocks affecting their communities (Frennesson et al., 2022). Meaningful partnership consequently requires more than consultation. It involves shared decision-making, clearly defined responsibilities, effective communication, and mechanisms through which local actors can influence programme priorities (Fast, 2019). Local leaders assist humanitarian organizations in making appropriate decisions and ensuring that interventions are accepted by the communities they are intended to support.

Participants nevertheless indicated that power imbalances between international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local civil-society organizations could contribute to mistrust and tension. Some participants associated unequal control over funding and decision-making with perceived or alleged financial mismanagement.” *At times we do not get what we expect to get, the money budgeted do not reach us (Rf1)”*. Because this study did not independently audit organizational finances, this finding should be understood as a participants perception rather than conclusive evidence of the misuse of funds. Nevertheless, it identifies an important partnership challenge: when local actors are expected to implement interventions but have limited authority over resources and programme design, partnerships may reproduce rather than transform existing inequalities. Effective partnerships therefore require transparent budgeting, shared accountability, accessible complaint mechanisms, and clarity about how decisions and resources are distributed.

The collaboration between Village Health Teams (VHTs) and formal health facilities provides a practical example of locally embedded partnership in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Participants observed that the health department relies on local community members when conducting visits, particularly in distant parts of the settlement. VHT members assist health centres and hospitals by mobilizing residents, identifying patients, sharing health information, and connecting communities with formal services. Uganda's Ministry of Health identifies community ownership, social mobilization, networking, partnerships, equity, and access as guiding elements of the VHT system (Ministry of Health, 2010). The VHT example therefore demonstrates how locally mobilized structures can bridge the institutional and cultural distance between communities and formal service providers. The findings can also be understood through conflict theory. Marx (1867/1976) foregrounds how unequal control of material resources and institutional power can produce structural inequality. Coser (1956), however, demonstrates that conflict is not exclusively destructive; when appropriately managed, it can expose underlying grievances, clarify group interests, and encourage institutional adjustment. In the context of Rwamwanja, disagreements between local and international actors may therefore reveal inequalities that require changes in funding arrangements, representation, and decision-making structures.

Ubuntu complements this structural analysis by providing a normative framework that prioritizes human dignity, social cohesion, mutual recognition, and collective responsibility. It encourages institutions and community leaders to regard peacebuilding as a shared social responsibility rather than an activity controlled exclusively by humanitarian professionals. Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) similarly explain Ubuntu in terms of interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and the recognition that individual wellbeing is inseparable from the wellbeing of others. Nevertheless, Ubuntu-based partnerships should not romanticize traditional authority. Traditional institutions may also reproduce gender, generational, ethnic, or social inequalities. Partnerships should therefore ensure meaningful representation of women, young people, persons with disabilities, minority groups, refugees, and host-community members.

Ubuntu also aligns with Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace, which extends beyond the absence of direct violence to include social justice and the transformation of unequal relationships. Lederach (1997) similarly advocates sustained dialogue, reconciliation, and the development of peacebuilding relationships involving actors at multiple levels of society. From

this perspective, partnerships between traditional authorities, local councils, humanitarian agencies, and community structures can help connect grassroots knowledge with institutional resources. However, their effectiveness depends on whether local actors are given genuine decision-making authority rather than being used only to mobilize communities or implement externally designed programmes.

Participants further maintained that Ubuntu principles should be explicitly incorporated into partnership and peacebuilding strategies. This perspective was expressed by a respondent in the focus-group discussion, who emphasized Ubuntu's capacity to transcend distinctions between refugees and host-community members:

"If we live by Ubuntu, we will not see each other as refugees or hosts. We will be one family" (HC2).

Similarly, P3 highlighted the importance of human dignity and collective responsibility in preventing conflict:

"When people feel valued, they avoid conflict. Ubuntu makes people responsible for one another" (P3).

These narratives suggest that participants understood Ubuntu not merely as an abstract cultural philosophy but as a practical foundation for inclusive partnerships. Feeling valued may strengthen trust, belonging, and willingness to resolve disagreements collectively. Accordingly, Ubuntu-informed partnerships in Rwamwanja should establish clearly defined roles, inclusive decision-making structures, transparent funding arrangements, conflict-referral procedures, and mechanisms for monitoring accountability. Such measures would translate the relational values expressed by participants into institutional practices capable of supporting sustainable conflict transformation.

c) Building social harmony beyond the refugee-host environment

In the context of refugee management, Ubuntu provides a moral and practical framework for host-refugee relations that counters exclusionary and securitized approaches. Traditional refugee management often reflects conflict-theory dynamics, where refugees are framed as competitors for limited resources, reinforcing social tensions and marginalization (Castles, 2003). Ubuntu reframes refugees as members of an extended human community, encouraging

solidarity, shared responsibility, and social integration. This perspective aligns with UNHCR's (2018) emphasis on community-based protection and social cohesion as key to durable solutions. By embedding refugee management within Ubuntu's ethic of mutual care, states and communities can mitigate conflict, foster coexistence, and contribute to sustainable peace that addresses both displacement-related vulnerabilities and the structural roots of conflict.

5.7. Challenges and constraints in applying Ubuntu

On the theme of challenges for applying Ubuntu in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, issues related to poverty, and policy were of great concern.

(a) Resource scarcity (poverty)

As previously discussed, the growing emphasis on personal freedom, economic competition, and individual achievement in contemporary society presents a significant challenge to initiatives intended to restore and maintain communal values within social policy. Market-oriented economic systems may encourage individuals to prioritize personal advancement and material survival over collective wellbeing. McDonald (2010), for example, critically examines the tension between Ubuntu's relational values and the market-oriented appropriation of African communal principles. Nevertheless, this relationship should not be treated as automatic or universal: economic competition does not necessarily eliminate communal values, but it may make them more difficult to practise where people face severe material deprivation. Ubuntu emphasizes interdependence, shared responsibility, care, and the understanding that an individual's wellbeing is connected to that of the wider community (Mugumbate et al., 2013). These principles may stand in tension with forms of globalization and marketization that privilege competition, consumerism, and individual accumulation. Tendengu (2025) similarly observes that limited resources and socioeconomic inequalities can constrain the practical realization of Ubuntu's ideals. Therefore, although communities may continue to recognize the moral importance of Ubuntu, structural conditions can restrict their capacity to translate these values into everyday practices.

This tension was evident in the present study, where participants described how poverty and the struggle for survival affected relationships between refugees and members of the host community. Their accounts suggested that awareness of Ubuntu did not necessarily lead to its consistent practice. Participants generally valued sharing and caring, but they explained that

these responsibilities became difficult to fulfil when households lacked food and other basic necessities. One focus-group participant stated:

“It is easy to talk about Ubuntu when there is enough food. But when hunger comes, people forget humanity” (HC2, focus-group discussion).

Another participant similarly observed:

“We want to help each other, but everyone here struggles. Sometimes you cannot give because you have nothing” (P6).

These narratives demonstrate a willingness to assist others while simultaneously exposing the material constraints imposed by poverty. Importantly, the accounts do not necessarily show that poor people have abandoned Ubuntu. Rather, they indicate a distinction between valuing Ubuntu and possessing the resources or opportunities required to practise it. Poverty may narrow the range of choices available to individuals, forcing them to prioritize immediate household survival even when they remain morally committed to communal care. This interpretation aligns with Sen’s capability approach, according to which poverty restricts people’s substantive freedom to achieve valued ways of being and acting (Sen, 1999). Capabilities refer to the substantive freedoms and opportunities people possess to live and act in ways they have reason to value. From this perspective, participants may desire to share resources and support other community members but lack the material capability to act on those values. Poverty therefore constrains not only consumption but also social agency, the practical freedom to participate in reciprocal care, hospitality, and collective responsibility.

This tension between moral commitment and material capability was particularly evident in the account of a refugee participant:

“Ubuntu is good when you are in your country, we are strangers here (Empungi-refugees), we are all looking for survival, how can I think of Ubuntu? It is all about survival” (RF1).

This narrative introduces an additional dimension beyond material poverty: displacement and perceived social belonging. The participant associated the practice of Ubuntu with being in one’s country and belonging to a stable community. Refugee status may therefore affect both access to resources and a person’s sense of obligation, reciprocity, and membership within the wider community. The statement suggests that Ubuntu may become more difficult to practise

when people perceive themselves as strangers, face uncertain livelihoods, or lack confidence that assistance given to others will be reciprocated.

Ubuntu was consequently experienced by some participants as an additional responsibility that was difficult to meet under conditions of deprivation. However, describing Ubuntu simply as a burden would overlook the participants' continued willingness to help one another. Their accounts instead reveal a conditional form of solidarity in which communal intentions persist but are constrained by poverty, food insecurity, displacement, and unequal access to assistance. This interpretation avoids blaming individuals for the weakening of communal practices and redirects attention towards the socioeconomic structures that limit their agency.

Poverty may also weaken community engagement by reducing the time, confidence, and resources available for participation in collective activities. When individuals must devote substantial energy to securing food, income, shelter, or basic household supplies, their ability to attend community meetings, participate in peacebuilding initiatives, or contribute materially to neighbours may be diminished. Persistent deprivation can consequently weaken trust in institutions and create perceptions of marginalization, particularly when refugees and host-community members believe that assistance is distributed unequally. Nevertheless, the study's interview evidence demonstrates participants' perceptions and experiences; it does not, by itself, establish a direct causal relationship between poverty, fractured state–society relations, and reduced democratic participation.

The relationship between deprivation, assistance, and social comparison was illustrated by a host-community participant:

“In our community we want to help, but poverty is the issue, if you can't afford a piece of soap yourself, how can you share with the Empungi (refugee)? We are equally the same, or they are even better than us because they get some money” (HC2).

This account illustrates how perceptions of unequal humanitarian assistance can complicate relations between refugees and host communities. Although the participant acknowledged that both groups experienced hardship, the perception that refugees received financial support appeared to influence judgments about who was more disadvantaged. Such perceptions may create resentment and weaken social cohesion even when the actual differences in assistance or wellbeing have not been independently established. Conflict-management interventions

should therefore address not only interpersonal attitudes but also perceptions concerning resource allocation, eligibility, and procedural fairness.

“..... the community together with the refugees are all living in a devastated state. All are poor, poverty in most times causes conflicts because people aren't happy. Imagine fighting for tomatoes” (p4)

The findings indicate that promoting Ubuntu through awareness campaigns alone may be insufficient. If communities are expected to practise solidarity, peacebuilding policies must also address the material conditions that restrict their capacity to do so. Ubuntu-informed interventions could combine dialogue and community education with livelihood assistance, equitable access to basic services, transparent communication about humanitarian support, and inclusive community projects benefiting both refugees and host-community members. In this way, Ubuntu would not be presented merely as an individual moral obligation but would be supported by socioeconomic arrangements that enable people to exercise care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility.

b) Bureaucratic and donor-driven challenges

Institutional and policy constraints often trap societies in cycles of conflict by limiting leaders' ability to build trust, enforce commitments, or deliver public goods effectively. In Rwamwanja it was noted that bureaucratic ways slow down development hence leading to conflict in some areas. During the study as per observation, many boreholes and other water collecting sources had broken down, and only a few were functional, which made refugees and hosts always have long queues, and at times caused fights among themselves. Also, many of the boreholes were constructed inside the refugee camps to serve the refugees. This kind of distribution of resources created negative sentiments in the hosts who felt that the refugees were being “favored” instead of them. Other administrative services like aid and relief money were seen as favoritism for the refugees. The refugees would also feel entitled to these resources like boreholes, and these were sources of fights, quarrels and other conflicts. To get even the hosts would also ‘wait for the refugees to come to them for land, jobs and other things and would use these to ‘get even’. Institutional constraints, escalate conflicts by fostering feedback loops leading to violence which destroys infrastructure and deters institutional investment, and perpetuating fragility. This does not go with the Ubuntu principle of shared resources and communal living. As we may note from the interview’s narratives

“Most of our procedures are designed by international agencies. They follow global standards, not local philosophies. It is hard to include Ubuntu formally.” (P2)

Ubuntu philosophy stands out by prioritizing human connection and community ties. Its ideas of shared accountability, group responsibility, and fairness to all that build mutual bond not top-down global rules. By enforcing external policies without room for local relations, sparks chaos which can lead to conflicts. The tension between bureaucratic logic and Ubuntu community spirit creates institutional friction, sidelining cultural governance, hence weakening ways of managing conflicts and collaborations (Ndlovu, 2016). *“We have international guidelines that we are to follow, the country has to abide with each and every thing that the UN asks,” (P1)* This narrative reflects a bureaucratic worldview rooted in rational-legal authority and formal compliance. Bureaucracies, especially international ones like the UN are structured around standardized rules, procedures, and norms designed to ensure predictability and uniformity across diverse national contexts.

Following Max Weber’s view on bureaucracy, the theory emphasizes on impersonal rules and hierarchical administration as core to modern governance systems, suggesting that rational legal authority binds actors to universal procedures and limits discretionary, culturally grounded decision-making (Brown, 2018). This rationalization, while it is efficient in enforcing international norms, it constrains contextual, relational forms of social interaction and governance that are embedded in ubuntu philosophy, which values communal responsibility, shared humanity, and mutual care over formalized procedural.

“When aid programs rush to meet deadlines, they forget to listen. Ubuntu is about listening first, acting later. (P7)

This narrative shows that there is a gap between policymakers and policy implementors. By following international procedures, it means that, even in a crisis nothing should be done until the decision is made, yet these decisions at times take long, hence creating a room for chaos which results in conflicts. The finding reflects Chasi and Rodney-Gumede’s (2017) argument that global humanitarian frameworks often undervalue indigenous ethics that emphasize community, empathy, and moral responsibility. The challenge, therefore, lies not in the irrelevance of Ubuntu but in the dominance of technocratic management cultures.

c) Absence of explicit Ubuntu language in formal policy

Even though the Ubuntu philosophy was believed to be a framework that guides policy, it was noted that, it is quite silent in its implementation. Lack of integration into policy frameworks arguably diminishes the potential for governmental measures to completely reflect Ubuntu's relational ethical principles.

"I believe the refuge policy of Uganda is based on the Ubuntu philosophy even though it is not mentioned, when you take a look, you find issues of integrity, integration, respect and others... I believe those are Ubuntu values; however, I feel they should come out strongly." (p1)

Uganda's refugee policy is considered important because it emphasizes inclusion, dignity, and socio-economic participation, which reflect Ubuntu's principles of interconnectedness and communal welfare. Uganda's legislative framework, including the Refugees Act and Refugees Regulations, provides for freedom of movement, employment, and access to services, thereby supporting integration rather than isolation (Government of Uganda, 2006, 2010). Uganda's refugee system may therefore reflect some Ubuntu principles in practice through inclusion and community living. Explicitly identifying these philosophical values could nevertheless enhance the ethical clarity and local legitimacy of policy implementation. Respondent P2 states that; *"Our operational manuals from the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR do not use the word Ubuntu, but the idea is there, living together peacefully, respecting each other, solving issues through dialogue."* (P2) and Respondent P3 states *"I am not so sure of the existence of Ubuntu in our policy, but when you get the guidelines that support our operation, we find phrases like respect for one another, and peaceful leaving, I think those are indicators of Ubuntu"*. (p3) . The respondents' narratives indicate that Ubuntu is embedded implicitly rather than explicitly within Uganda's refugee-management framework. Neither P2 nor P3 identifies a policy or operational guideline that expressly adopts Ubuntu as a guiding philosophy. Instead, they associate Ubuntu with policy language and institutional practices emphasizing peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and dialogue. This suggests that frontline actors understand Ubuntu through its practical characteristics rather than through its formal designation. P2's statement that "the idea is there" demonstrates how officials may interpret existing humanitarian principles through an Ubuntu-oriented lens. Similarly, P3 identifies respect and peaceful living as "indicators of Ubuntu," revealing an experiential understanding of the philosophy based on its perceived values and outcomes.

These interpretations are consistent with Murithi's (2009) argument that Ubuntu provides an ethical foundation for African peacebuilding by emphasizing shared humanity,

interconnectedness, dialogue and the restoration of relationships. From this perspective, the absence of the word *Ubuntu* from operational manuals does not necessarily mean that Ubuntu-related values are absent from refugee-management practice. Principles such as respectful dialogue, communal responsibility and peaceful coexistence may constitute functional expressions of Ubuntu, even where policymakers employ the more universal language of protection, participation and social cohesion. However, the conceptual similarity should not be treated as proof that Uganda's refugee policies were intentionally derived from Ubuntu. The findings demonstrate perceived compatibility or normative convergence between Ubuntu and refugee policy rather than direct policy adoption of Ubuntu. The respondents' interpretations are supported particularly by Uganda's *Refugees Regulations, 2010*. Regulation 60(1) requires the Commissioner for Refugees to ensure that refugees are integrated into the communities in which they are settled. Regulation 60(2) further requires the sensitization of host communities concerning the presence of refugees and matters relating to their coexistence. Regulation 61 requires refugee concerns to be integrated into sustainable development and environmental planning, while Regulation 62 provides for affirmative action for women, children and persons with disabilities during the integration of refugees into host communities (*Refugees Regulations, 2010*, regs. 60-62).

5.8. Hybrid conflict management system

Through the findings, we noted that for Ubuntu to be used for conflict management in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, it should be inclusive in policy framework. Embedding Ubuntu in policy language and framework helps the community and beyond to understand how it operates and comply to the principles. Most respondents suggested that Ubuntu should be embedded in the policy framework. Even though the policies have traces of Ubuntu, it should come out clearly to help in operations of refugee settlement. This should start from amending the policy framework from international level, National level to grassroots, following participants P2 and P1 explanations, it is noted that Ubuntu though understood, it would mean more if its being full included in the framework. *"If the national refugee policy could speak the language of Ubuntu, we would not only manage people we would build communities."* (P2) and *"Ubuntu is there but silent, if it could come out strongly in the National policy that would be a great idea. Both communities will be happy"*. (P1). Their narratives show how policy is interpreted and translated by actors operating within refugee settlements. This is important because the practical influence of Ubuntu may depend less on whether the term appears in official

documents and more on whether institutional arrangements encourage inclusive participation, reciprocal responsibility and nonviolent resolution of disputes. At the same time, such an interpretation must remain critical: policies described as promoting harmony should be evaluated according to whether refugees and host communities participate meaningfully, whether resources are distributed fairly, and whether dialogue mechanisms protect vulnerable participants rather than merely suppressing disagreement.

Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical foundation for integrating local leadership training into humanitarian policy frameworks. Ubuntu's collectivist worldview emphasizes shared humanity, mutual care, and interdependence, aligning closely with scholars who argue for values-based policy reform in humanitarian systems (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2011). When policies prioritize the training and empowerment of local leaders, they move beyond technical capacity building and instead institutionalize respect for local knowledge, relationships, and social networks. Ubuntu functions as a normative framework that contests western individualism by declaring that a person's humanity cannot exist independently from the community of which they are apart. As a framework Ubuntu represents a moral obligation for individuals to acknowledge others as essential part of existence. The following sub-themes emerged; absence of explicit Ubuntu language in formal policy and the Indirect alignment through community-based approaches.

a) Indirect alignment through community-based approaches

Whereas direct approach alignment in community involves structured mechanism for community priorities, indirect approach emphasizes relational processes where alignment arises through trust -building activities like forums, story-tellings sessions, and local networks, which allow flexibility of the outcome.

Throughout the study, and with interaction with key stakeholders, it was noted that, in policy guide mechanism, more indirect approach is used which also have the ubuntu perspectives.

“When refugees arrive, we teach them about peaceful living and respecting hosts. We do not call it Ubuntu, but that is what it is in practice.”

This explains the social integration theory which stresses the integration of people through a relational reciprocal dynamic rather than unidirectional process imposed by institutions. This

process therefore engages participants, thus the newcomers and receiving communities to interact and have a social bond. These further stress the holistic approach of human interconnectedness which is expressed in Ubuntu values of shared responsibility and integration. Therefore, the narrative stresses the intergroup theory that suggests meaningful structured interactions between groups under conditions of equality, reduced prejudice and enhances peaceful co-existence.

5.9. Institutional and policy framing of conflict management

This perception mirrors the notion of restorative justice, where reconciliation and forgiveness are seen as essential to rebuilding human relationships after conflict. Policymakers' appreciation of Ubuntu thus underscores its potential as a culturally grounded governance philosophy

a) Community-led strategy

Ubuntu offers an insight into conflict management strategy through transformative ways of conflict resolution such as promoting dialogues, empathy and restorative justice rather than confrontational ways.

Community-led strategies which are rooted in Ubuntu strategies enable conflicting parties to engage in inclusive processes that address underlying grievances and rebuild social cohesion. This was helpful during the Rwanda-genocide reconciliation process, where community-led strategy through community local leaders' committees presided over disputes that led to harmonious reconciliation at grassroots. (Longman & Rutagengwa, 2004). This view indicates that community-led strategies when applied in conflicting environment like Rwamwanja refugee settlement with diverse cultural background, it can lead to harmonious living as we can here from the stories.

“Our peace committees work well, but they need training and recognition. If they understand Ubuntu deeply, they can handle issues faster.” (p5)

This quote encourages us to examine how cultural awareness and the effectiveness of institutions combine in promoting peace within communities. The idea that peace committees can resolve matters more quickly by embracing Ubuntu implies that common values are as important as official regulations or frameworks. Ubuntu highlights respect, interconnectedness,

and a sense of responsibility toward others. When members of peace committees genuinely adopt these principles, they are likely to build trust and collaboration within the community more effectively. This trust helps to stop conflicts from intensifying, as individuals become more open to dialogue, attentive listening, and finding compromises when they feel acknowledged and valued.

b) Strengthening local peace committees

“Our children should learn from us that being human means caring for others. Ubuntu should be taught in schools and churches.” (Rf2)

“When we sit together often, we remember we are one people. That spirit should be encouraged.” (Hc1&Hc2)

This emphasizes the significance of official recognition for peace committees. When these groups receive acknowledgment from authorities or institutions, their efforts gain greater credibility, and community members are more inclined to trust their judgments. Such recognition also empowers peace committees with confidence and legitimacy, enabling them to respond promptly to emerging conflicts.

Therefore, by combining cultural understanding, comprehensive training, and formal acknowledgment creates a solid basis for local peacebuilding. Peace initiatives grounded in these factors are more likely to earn community trust, address issues before they escalate, and maintain effectiveness over time. This makes them valuable not only as practical conflict resolution tools but also as long-term commitments to lasting peace.

c) Training local leaders and humanitarian staff

Training local leaders and humanitarian staff fits within the wider idea of localization. This approach argues that people affected by crises should not only receive aid, but should also take part in planning, decision-making, and leading humanitarian responses. Localization aims to shift power away from international actors and toward local communities so that responses are more relevant to local needs and realities. However, in practice, this goal is often difficult to achieve because leadership and decision-making power are still largely controlled by international organizations from the Global North, leaving limited space for national and

community-based actors to lead as narrated by respondents p4 and p7. Leadership training is important for addressing conflicts and embedding Ubuntu.

“Leaders must embody Ubuntu if they are to promote it. We need workshops that teach empathy, dialogue, and moral leadership.” (p4)

To uphold Ubuntu, more training and sensitization should be done to all of us, empathy is key, but some of us lack it. (P7)

The philosophy of Ubuntu strongly supports investing in the training of local leaders. Ubuntu emphasizes togetherness, shared responsibility, and the idea that a community’s strength comes from its people working collectively. When humanitarian systems equip local actors with the right skills, knowledge, and confidence, they do more than build capacity they recognize the value of local communities and turn that value into real action. In this way, training becomes a practical way of honouring Ubuntu by strengthening local leadership and reinforcing the interdependence that holds communities together.

d) Incorporating Ubuntu into settlement-level bylaws

Participants also recommended that OPM and UNHCR formally acknowledge traditional reconciliation ceremonies as part of the peacebuilding process. Institutional recognition of traditional practices refers to the formal acknowledgment and integration of local knowledge systems, leadership structures, and cultural values into organizational and governance frameworks. In humanitarian and development contexts, this recognition is increasingly seen as essential for creating responses that are ethical, effective, and locally grounded. Rather than treating traditional practices as informal or secondary, institutions are encouraged to view them as legitimate sources of authority, knowledge, and social cohesion. Recognizing traditional practices aligns closely with localization debates, which argue that communities affected by crises should play a central role in shaping humanitarian responses (Barakat & Milton, 2020). Training local leaders and staff becomes more meaningful when institutions respect and build upon existing community leadership structures, such as councils of elders, faith leaders, or customary decision-making systems. These traditional actors often hold deep trust within their communities and possess context-specific knowledge that external organizations may lack.

“Sometimes elders organize peace meals or communal prayers after a conflict. If institutions support such activities, they can reach more people.” (P6)

Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical foundation for this approach. Its emphasis on collective identity, mutual care, and shared responsibility supports the idea that leadership and knowledge are rooted in community relationships rather than individual authority. When institutions train and empower local leaders while respecting traditional practices, they transform training into a collaborative process rather than a top-down intervention. This approach not only strengthens humanitarian effectiveness but also affirms the dignity, agency, and interdependence of local communities. In doing so, institutional recognition of traditional practices becomes both a practical strategy and an ethical commitment to Ubuntu-based, people-centered governance

Policy-level integration refers to embedding key principles such as local participation, and ethical frameworks into formal humanitarian policies, strategies, and institutional practices rather than treating them as optional or informal.

Barakat & Milton, (2020) note that localisation has been formally endorsed at the policy level through global commitments such as the Grand Bargain, which aims to shift power, resources, and leadership to local actors. However, research consistently shows that these policy commitments are often undermined by structural barriers, including donor control, rigid funding mechanisms, and the continued dominance of Global North institutions in leadership roles (Pincock et al., 2020,). As a result, national and community-based actors frequently remain excluded from meaningful governance despite policy rhetoric supporting localisation.

e) Formal and informal ways of conflict management

Looking at formal and informal mechanisms for conflict management, this study provides a guide through which institutional policy framework can include both formal and informal ways which are not ubuntu based to address and manage conflicts in Rwamwanja refugee settlements.

Conflict management in refugee settlements consists of formal mechanisms, rooted in state law and institutional authority, and informal mechanisms, grounded in community practice and social networks. In protracted displacement contexts like Rwamwanja (Uganda), formal and informal systems coexist and interact to address disputes ranging from land access and

domestic tensions to administrative grievances. Scholars of conflict resolution emphasize that these multiple layers reflect hybrid governance models where state and non-state actors share conflict management responsibilities (Okoro et. al.,2025). This perspective recognizes that neither formal institutions nor informal structures alone are sufficient for comprehensive dispute resolution in complex humanitarian settings.

f) Police and legal systems

Formal policing and judiciary processes provide authoritative adjudication on criminal matters and breaches of national law. These systems reflect the rule-based adjudication models described in broader conflict literature, where formal adjudication seeks to deter violence and uphold public order. The finding narratives indicated that some cases could not be handled by Ubuntu and other traditional methods like physical assault cases, murder, rape and defilement whence the legal takes cause.

“Some cases like assault or rape need police. Ubuntu cannot handle everything.” (P3)

Respondent Rf2 states;

.... “You cannot sleep with my wife, and think I will just forgive you and end there, we have to go to police” (Rf2)

Institutional conflict resolution mechanisms operate through state authority and recognized legal frameworks, emphasizing procedural justice, rule-of-law, and codified dispute resolution the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and UNHCR Structures in Uganda operates as formal administrative authorities in refugee settlements. They enforce national refugee policy and manage disputes over services, land allocation, and protection concerns. These structured administrative dispute bodies exemplify formalized bureaucratic justice mechanisms that align with international legal norms. Formal justice aligns with Western legal tradition models where dispute resolution occurs through adjudication, penalties, and procedural safeguards, offering consistency and enforceability key aspects in protecting rights in multifaceted refugee environments.

g) Grassroots application

In Rwamwanja refugee settlement it was hard to distinguish between informal mechanisms and Ubuntu philosophy as separate entity. For participants to understand the concepts different examples were sighted. For example, the role of Refugee welfare committees and religious organisations and Ngo organisations. These roles have legal guidelines even though rooted in the informal setting. Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs) RWCs are elected within refugee communities to address everyday disputes quickly and accessibly. Research on refugee justice systems in Uganda shows that these structures resolve many disputes faster and in ways that are perceived as more culturally legible compared to formal adjudication. While the Ubuntu example could be the traditional elders or indigenous group of people selected from the majority to mediate. The selection can be done at grassroot level involving community members. The selected members in most cases volunteer to work, unlike the NGOs and other committees who expect pay for the work done. Sub-themes like Religious Leaders and Faith-Based, and NGOs facilitation popped out. For NGO-facilitated mediation and dialogue, quotes like this show that they are very much welcome in handling refugees host conflicts; *“We gather under the tree to talk about our problems. Everyone can speak, even women and youth. After we talk, we agree on peace.”* (Hc1)

“Sometimes elders organize peace meals or communal prayers after a conflict. If institutions support such activities, they can reach more people.” (P6)

As for religious leaders and faith-based mediation respondents said the following which led to the conclusion that such methods can work in solving conflicts among refugees; *“I am a Christian and saved, when I conflict with my neighbour I go and talk with my pastor, and forgive because the bible asks us to forgive.”* (Hc2)

*“The church members of Churchill organization give us seminars about living in harmony.” ** (Rf1) The findings indicate that religious groups and NGOs place a role in conflict management in refugee settlement. Humanitarian and civil society organizations sometimes provide trained mediators and structured dialogue sessions that are not embedded in state law but nonetheless formalized through programmatic frameworks. These approaches borrow from alternative dispute resolution (ADR) theory, which emphasizes negotiation and facilitation outside formal courts (Zerihun., 2021).

h) Synergy between Ubuntu and formal mechanisms

The synergy between Ubuntu and formal mechanisms emerged where participants noted that the two could complement each other. The Ubuntu philosophy complements formal institutions by blending relational ethics with structured governance. The philosophy stresses community interdependence, reconciliation and restoring social harmony through prioritizing mediation, dialogues, collective responsibility over punishment for dispute management. The formal systems on the other hand like court, mediation bodies, or governmental peace efforts can earn greater acceptance in society when they include the ubuntu philosophy values to enhance moral standards (Metz. 2011, Tutu 1999). The finding supports this argument.

“When we hold community dialogues, both hosts and refugees share stories, apologize, and agree on how to live better. That is Ubuntu in action, even if we don’t name it that way.”

“Community policing builds on the same idea solving issues through dialogue, respecting people, and preventing harm before it happens.” (p3)

Ubuntu serves as a normative bridge that softens the rigidity of formal legal frameworks in conflict resolution. Formal systems often rely on adversarial tactics, fixed rules, and top-down authority, which can alienate communities in diverse societies. Integrating Ubuntu values such as consensus-building, inclusive participation, and restorative justice renders these systems more adaptable and contextually relevant. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission exemplifies this blend of legal procedures with Ubuntu-inspired restoration to heal violence and foster unity (Boraine, 1998; Mbiti, 1969). Community policing builds on the same principle by addressing issues through dialogue, respecting individuals, and preventing harm before it occurs. These findings demonstrate that policy and practice can coexist with Ubuntu when both emphasize humanity and social restoration over punitive approaches.

In the Rwamwanja refugee settlement, formal conflict resolution mechanisms (police/legal systems, OPM/UNHCR structures, formal courts) work alongside informal community-based processes (RWCs, religious mediation, NGO facilitation). Drawing on conflict resolution theory, especially hybrid governance perspectives, scholars argue that effective peacebuilding in refugee contexts requires both formal authority and community legitimacy. Each mechanism contributes differently: formal systems ensure legal compliance and human rights protections, while informal mechanisms emphasize accessibility, cultural relevance, and rapid resolution.

5.10. Summary of chapter five

The chapter expanded on the thematic, narrative and interpretive analysis in chapter 4. The identified key themes and sub-themes explain how participants experienced and understood Ubuntu philosophy as an approach for conflict management in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement, further discussed and interpreted according to the research questions. The themes are connected to one another and together show participants' experiences. Rather than viewing their experiences as isolated events, participants made sense of them through their everyday lives, personal backgrounds, social environments and policy interventions. The first main theme on research Question one focuses on participants' central experiences on Understanding of the Ubuntu concept as a lived experience in conflict related environment. The sub-themes such as caring & shared humanity, mutual aid & coexistence, and moral guide show important key areas in how participants understood Ubuntu and acted through lived experiences. Participants envisioned Ubuntu not only as a philosophy but as a sustainable foundation for inclusive governance and peacebuilding in multicultural settings. This shows how Ubuntu strongly influences thought, beliefs and behaviors among people.

In relation to Policy-perception in involving Ubuntu as a framework for conflict management, Sub-themes such as absence of Ubuntu language, Bureaucratic challenges and institutional policy frameworks, suggest that although participants shared similar experiences on policy formulation and implementation, the situation is beyond their control as they are only recipients of the policies. Most policies are internationally formulated and shared.

The theme related to strategy mechanism highlights the difficulties participants faced. The related sub-themes, including training local-leaders and humanitarian staff, incorporating Ubuntu into settlement-level bylaws, point to personal, social, or structural barriers that affected participants' choices and actions. These findings show that participants' experiences were not based only on individual decisions but a broader policy challenge.

Another important theme relates to how participants coped with these challenges. The sub-themes such as partnering with traditional authorities & agencies and building social harmony beyond refugees-host environment show that participants used different emotional, mental, and practical strategies to deal with their situations. This suggests that even when participants are faced with uncertainties, they still tried to adapt and take control where possible.

5.11. Discussion of findings

The findings advance three central claims. First, Ubuntu in Rwamwanja operates primarily as a lived moral practice rather than as a formal conflict management framework. Refugees and host community members recognize Ubuntu in practices of mutual aid, hospitality, forgiveness, dialogue, and community mediation, but these practices remain uneven and largely undocumented. Second, the application of Ubuntu is shaped by material and institutional conditions. Resource scarcity, land pressure, livelihood insecurity, cultural diversity, bureaucratic procedures, and humanitarian operating rules limit the extent to which Ubuntu can be practiced in everyday life. Third, the most viable pathway is not a return to purely traditional conflict resolution, but the construction of a hybrid system in which Ubuntu-informed community mediation is linked to formal refugee governance, policing, protection, and administrative structures. Therefore, to redefine the literature on Ubuntu and conflict management the findings show that Ubuntu is neither merely an abstract African ethic nor a ready-made solution to refugee settlement conflict. It is a relational resource whose effectiveness depends on institutional recognition, social legitimacy, and clear boundaries between community mediation and formal justice. The thesis therefore contributes to peace and conflict studies by demonstrating how indigenous philosophies can inform humanitarian governance without replacing legal safeguards or rights-based protection.

The overlap between some sub-themes also shows that participants' experiences cannot be neatly placed into single categories. This highlights the value of using a holistic and interpretive approach in qualitative research. By focusing on participants' voices, this study adds depth to existing research and highlights perspectives that are often missed in qualitative studies such as low social statuses language barrier, hesitations and contradictions.

These claims collectively demonstrate that Ubuntu must be understood through the relationships, institutions, and material realities that influence everyday life in Rwamwanja. Ubuntu philosophy is commonly associated with the idea that a person becomes fully human through relationships with other people. Its emphasis on shared humanity, interdependence, dignity, compassion, reciprocity, and collective responsibility provides an important ethical basis for understanding how refugees and members of the host community respond to conflict. Within the settlement context, however, Ubuntu does not necessarily appear as an explicitly named or formally organized philosophy. Participants may practice its principles without identifying their actions as Ubuntu. Sharing food, assisting a vulnerable neighbor, welcoming

a newly arrived family, forgiving an offender, consulting elders, or encouraging disputing parties to talk are practical expressions of the relational values associated with Ubuntu.

The findings therefore extend understandings of Ubuntu beyond philosophical description by showing how it is enacted through ordinary social relationships. This is significant because much of the literature tends to discuss Ubuntu either as a general African worldview or as a traditional mechanism capable of restoring harmony. The experiences of participants demonstrate a more complicated reality. Ubuntu is present in Rwamwanja, but its presence does not mean that relationships are always harmonious or that conflicts can easily be resolved. People may recognize their moral responsibility towards others while simultaneously experiencing poverty, insecurity, mistrust, cultural difference, and competition for scarce resources. Ubuntu consequently functions as a moral orientation that encourages constructive relationships, but it remains vulnerable to the conditions under which those relationships develop.

The first central claim is closely connected to the distinction between lived social practice and formal institutional arrangements. Mutual assistance, hospitality, forgiveness, dialogue, and mediation are often initiated through families, neighborhoods, religious communities, ethnic networks, women's groups, youth groups, and informal leadership structures. These practices may prevent minor disagreements from escalating and can create opportunities for people to explain their grievances in a familiar environment. They can also restore relationships in situations where formal procedures might establish responsibility without adequately addressing emotional harm, social distrust, or the need for continued coexistence. In a refugee settlement, where disputing parties may remain neighbors and depend on the same services and resources, restoring a workable relationship is particularly important.

At the same time, the informal nature of these practices creates limitations. Their availability may depend on the personalities, commitment, legitimacy, and experience of particular community members. A respected elder or community leader may successfully mediate one dispute, while another mediator may be viewed as biased because of ethnic, gender, political, or social affiliations. Informal outcomes may not be documented, monitored, or communicated to relevant administrative and protection institutions. However, similar disputes receive different responses, and agreements tend to be difficult to enforce. People with low social status struggle to express themselves within community processes dominated by influential

individuals. Thus, the findings do not idealize informality. They reveal both its relational value and its potential weaknesses.

Neo-institutionalism helps explain why Ubuntu-informed practices remain uneven despite their cultural and moral legitimacy. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, institutions are not limited to formal organizations or written regulations. They also include norms, routines, expectations, symbols, and socially accepted ways of behaving. Ubuntu can therefore be understood as an informal institution because it provides moral expectations about how individuals should treat one another and how communities should respond to wrongdoing. Formal refugee governance, in contrast, operates through laws, administrative mandates, humanitarian policies, reporting procedures, policing arrangements, and protection standards. Conflict management in Rwamwanja occurs through interaction between these formal and informal institutions.

The findings suggest that the relationship between the two institutional spheres is not yet fully coordinated. Humanitarian and governmental actors may recognize community participation while continuing to organize interventions according to standardized procedures, professional mandates, funding requirements, and legal responsibilities. Community mediators may possess local legitimacy and contextual knowledge but lack formal authority, resources, training, and recognized referral pathways. Neo-institutionalism shows that the effectiveness of Ubuntu does not depend only on whether individuals believe in communal values. It also depends on whether organizational arrangements provide those values with recognized channels of operation. Where formal systems fail to acknowledge informal mediation, community knowledge can be excluded. Where informal processes operate without connection to protection and justice institutions, serious cases may be mishandled.

Institutional pressures help explain why organizations consider publicly support participation, dialogue, and localization while maintaining bureaucratic practices that restrict genuine community influence. Humanitarian organizations should comply with donor expectations, safeguarding standards, reporting systems, and national policies. These requirements encourage consistency and accountability, but they can also create distance between institutional decision-makers and the communities affected by their decisions. Participants' experiences indicate that the institutionalization of Ubuntu should not mean converting it into another rigid bureaucratic procedure. It should instead involve creating legitimate points of connection through which community mediators can contribute to conflict prevention,

dialogue, reconciliation, and referral while remaining accountable to legal and protection standards.

The second central claim establishes that the practice of Ubuntu is inseparable from material conditions. Appeals to shared humanity become harder to sustain when households face persistent shortages of food, land, employment, shelter, water, education, and health services. Resource scarcity can change the meaning of everyday interactions. A disagreement over land boundaries, access to water, employment opportunities, or humanitarian assistance may appear interpersonal, although its deeper causes lie in structural inequality and economic insecurity. Refugees and host community members may both feel neglected, disadvantaged, or unfairly treated, producing resentment that cannot be resolved through moral persuasion alone.

This finding prevents Ubuntu from being treated as a substitute for material support or equitable governance. Encouraging people to forgive and cooperate without addressing the conditions producing repeated disputes could place an unfair burden on affected communities. It might also transform Ubuntu into a language through which vulnerable individuals are expected to tolerate injustice for the sake of harmony. Genuine Ubuntu requires attention to dignity and mutual responsibility, which includes institutional responsibility for fair procedures, accessible services, livelihood opportunities, and the protection of rights. The philosophy is therefore not opposed to structural reform. Its relational principles can instead provide an ethical justification for creating conditions under which equitable coexistence becomes possible.

Conflict transformation theory deepens this interpretation by shifting attention from the settlement of individual disputes to the transformation of the relationships, structures, discourses, and patterns that generate conflict. From this perspective, conflict is not merely an isolated event that ends when parties reach an agreement. It is embedded in broader systems of power, identity, inequality, historical experience, and institutional practice. A dispute between a refugee and a host community member may involve immediate behavior, but it may also express accumulated frustrations concerning land, assistance, employment, cultural recognition, or political inclusion. Resolving the immediate disagreement without addressing these deeper dimensions may produce only temporary peace.

Ubuntu aligns with conflict transformation because both approaches value relationships, dialogue, recognition, and the restoration of social bonds. Nevertheless, conflict transformation

expands the discussion by requiring attention to unequal structures and recurring patterns. Community mediation can help parties communicate and recognize their interdependence, but sustainable transformation also demands changes in the conditions shaping their relationship. This may include more transparent resource allocation, inclusive decision-making, accessible complaint mechanisms, livelihood support, responsible policing, and stronger communication among refugees, host communities, government institutions, and humanitarian organizations. Ubuntu contributes the relational ethic, while conflict transformation provides a framework for connecting relational change to structural and institutional reform.

The transformative potential of Ubuntu is particularly visible in its emphasis on restoring dignity rather than merely identifying winners and losers. Formal justice processes are essential where rights have been violated or serious offences have occurred. However, some forms of adjudication can leave underlying hostility untouched. Ubuntu-informed dialogue enable parties to discuss harm, responsibility, apology, restitution, and the future of their relationship. Such processes can transform negative perceptions and allow community members to see one another as persons with legitimate needs and fears. Yet transformation requires voluntary participation and safeguards against coercion. Forgiveness cannot be imposed, and reconciliation should not be used to silence victims or excuse repeated abuse.

The ABC model provides another useful way of interpreting the findings. The model distinguishes among attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions as interconnected dimensions of conflict. Attitudes include fear, prejudice, suspicion, resentment, and perceptions of injustice. Behaviors include verbal confrontation, avoidance, discrimination, threats, violence, or, alternatively, dialogue, cooperation, hospitality, and mutual assistance. Contradictions refer to the underlying incompatibilities and structural conditions that place individuals or groups in opposition, such as competition over land, unequal access to resources, insecure livelihoods, or conflicting institutional expectations.

The participants' accounts show that Ubuntu can positively influence attitudes and behaviours. Dialogue, hospitality, forgiveness, and mutual aid can reduce suspicion and encourage empathy. Community mediation discourages harmful behaviour and offer alternatives to retaliation. However, Ubuntu practices cannot by themselves eliminate the contradictions underlying conflict. If land remains scarce, assistance is perceived as unequal, and livelihood opportunities are inadequate, positive attitudes may deteriorate and constructive behaviour may

become difficult to maintain. The ABC model therefore clarifies why conflict management must combine relational interventions with material and institutional measures.

The model also reveals that change in one dimension can influence the others. A transparent administrative explanation concerning resource allocation may reduce perceptions of unfairness and thereby change hostile attitudes. Dialogue between refugees and host community members may correct misinformation and reduce discriminatory behavior. Joint livelihood activities may address economic contradictions while encouraging cooperation and building trust. Conversely, a poorly handled police intervention may reinforce negative attitudes even if it temporarily ends violent behavior. The findings therefore support integrated conflict management in which Ubuntu-informed practices address attitudes and relationships, formal institutions regulate behaviors and protect rights, and governance and development interventions respond to underlying contradictions.

The third claim concerning a hybrid system follows directly from these theoretical insights. Hybrid conflict management recognizes that neither community traditions nor formal institutions are sufficient on their own. Community-based processes offer accessibility, cultural familiarity, local knowledge, and relational legitimacy. Formal systems offer legal authority, specialized expertise, enforceable decisions, documentation, and protection safeguards. Linking these strengths can create a more responsive system, provided that the division of responsibilities is clear. Minor interpersonal and communal disputes may be suitable for voluntary dialogue and mediation, whereas criminal offences, sexual and gender-based violence, child protection cases, and serious human rights violations require immediate referral to competent authorities.

Such boundaries are necessary because the language of culture and reconciliation can sometimes conceal unequal power relations. Women, youth, persons with disabilities, minority groups, and individuals with low social status may be pressured to accept settlements developed by powerful community actors. Language barriers may prevent some participants from understanding procedures or expressing their experiences fully. Fear of authority or social exclusion can produce hesitation, silence, or apparent agreement. The contradictions noted in participants' accounts should therefore not be dismissed as weaknesses. They reveal the pressures under which people interpret and communicate their experiences.

A hybrid framework should consequently include training, oversight, documentation, translation, inclusive representation, confidentiality, and clear referral procedures. Community mediators require knowledge of legal rights, protection principles, and the limits of their mandate. Police officers, humanitarian workers, and administrative officials also require understanding of local conflict dynamics and Ubuntu-informed approaches to communication and relationship-building. Regular coordination allows community mediators to identify emerging tensions while enabling formal institutions to intervene appropriately where risks exceed the capacity of informal mechanisms. This thus, calls for Institutional recognition to support community agency without absorbing it into bureaucratic structures that undermine its legitimacy.

In line with the middle range theory, middle range theory is especially appropriate for interpreting these findings because it occupies the space between highly abstract theory and descriptions of isolated events. Rather than claiming that Ubuntu explains every form of conflict or produces universal outcomes, a middle range approach identifies the particular conditions under which Ubuntu-informed practices are likely to contribute to peace. In Rwamwanja, such practices appear most effective when disputing parties share an interest in continued coexistence, mediators possess social legitimacy, participation is voluntary, power differences are manageable, and formal referral mechanisms are available. They are less likely to succeed where violence is severe, rights violations are involved, material inequalities remain unaddressed, or community authorities lack impartiality.

This conditional explanation makes the contribution of the study both realistic and transferable. The study does not propose a universal formula for all refugee settlements. It develops theoretical propositions grounded in participants' experiences that may be examined in comparable settings. For example, Ubuntu-informed mediation may strengthen conflict prevention when it is supported by inclusive local institutions and linked to formal protection systems. Its effectiveness may decline where scarcity becomes extreme or where identity-based exclusion undermines shared moral belonging. These propositions connect local evidence to broader debates in peacebuilding, humanitarian governance, and indigenous conflict resolution.

Middle range theory also helps bring Ubuntu, neo-institutionalism, conflict transformation, and the ABC model into a coherent analytical relationship. Ubuntu explains the ethical and relational resources available within the community. Neo-institutionalism explains how formal

rules, informal norms, organizational practices, and legitimacy shape the use of those resources. Conflict transformation identifies the need to change relationships and the structures that reproduce conflict. The ABC model distinguishes the attitudinal, behavioral, and contradictory dimensions through which conflict is expressed. A middle range approach integrates these perspectives without assuming that any single theory completely explains the complexity of life in Rwamwanja.

The overlap among sub-themes reinforces this integrated understanding. Mutual aid may simultaneously be a livelihood strategy, an expression of Ubuntu, a form of social protection, and a method of preventing conflict. Dialogue may be cultural practice, a mediation technique, and a means of correcting institutional misinformation. Land disputes may involve economic scarcity, historical grievances, identity, administrative procedures, and interpersonal mistrust. Attempting to place such experiences within only one category would obscure the ways in which personal, relational, cultural, material, and institutional factors interact.

The holistic and interpretive approach adopted in the study is therefore important because participants do not experience conflict through separate theoretical categories. Their narratives may contain uncertainty, hesitation, contradiction, or changes in emphasis because social reality itself is complex. A participant may praise community solidarity while describing exclusion, or support forgiveness while demanding formal justice. These positions are not necessarily inconsistent. They can reflect the attempt to balance communal belonging, personal dignity, security, and practical survival. Paying attention to such tensions produces a more credible account than selecting only statements that fit a predetermined interpretation.

Language barriers and differences in social status are also analytically significant. Language affects more than the translation of words; it shapes which cultural concepts can be expressed, how emotions are communicated, and whether participants feel confident challenging dominant accounts. Individuals with limited access to recognized languages may be underrepresented in institutional processes and research findings. Similarly, participants with low social status may moderate their criticism because they fear consequences or believe their views carry little authority. Their pauses, indirect expressions, and contradictions may therefore communicate important dimensions of power.

Ultimately, the findings present Ubuntu as a practical but conditional resource for conflict management. Its strength lies in its ability to affirm shared humanity, encourage dialogue,

restore relationships, and mobilize collective responsibility. Its limitation is that moral commitment cannot independently overcome scarcity, inequality, bureaucratic fragmentation, or serious violations of rights. A sustainable approach must embed Ubuntu-informed practices within an accountable hybrid system that connects community legitimacy to formal protection, justice, administration, and development.

This interpretation avoids both idealizing indigenous philosophy and dismissing it as irrelevant to contemporary humanitarian governance. Ubuntu does not need to replace formal law in order to make a substantial contribution. It can influence how institutions engage communities, how mediators understand reconciliation, how authorities communicate decisions, and how refugees and host community members negotiate coexistence. When supported by material investment, inclusive participation, institutional coordination, and legal safeguards, Ubuntu can contribute to transforming conflict rather than merely suppressing its visible expression. The study consequently demonstrates that indigenous philosophies remain relevant not as fixed traditions from the past, but as adaptable relational resources through which communities and institutions can construct more humane, legitimate, and context-sensitive forms of peace.

5.12. Implications for the findings

The findings suggest important implications for practice, policy, and future research. Gaining a clear understanding of participants' perspectives on Ubuntu as an approach for conflict management, the following inform more supportive and context-specific interventions about the study in practice. Ubuntu can be used to rebuild trust among people from different backgrounds through shared activities such as communal work, games, and cultural gathering by re-enforcing the idea that no one can survive alone. This will hence reduce on rapidly conflicts and creates a sense of belong making the settlement not just a place of safety but a community where people cared for each other. Policy formulation and implementation can still reflect Ubuntu even when bureaucracy and international rules dominate decision-making. At the international level, institutions such as UNHCR should amend policy guidelines to require community-centered impact assessments alongside legal and security reviews. International rules should allow flexible interpretation at country level, so officers can adapt procedures to local realities rather than apply rigid bylaws. At the national level, Government offices responsible for refugee management in Uganda like the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) should revise refugee and social protection frameworks to formally recognize Ubuntu in community participation, mediation, and collective problem-solving as part of service delivery.

Clear policy amendments should give frontline officers discretion to priorities humane outcomes, not just compliance, while still respecting international obligations. At the grassroots level, implementation should bring *ubuntu* to life through everyday administrative practice.

These implications follow from the finding that Ubuntu in Rwamwanja operates mainly as a lived moral practice rather than as a fully established conflict management system. The continued existence of mutual assistance, hospitality, forgiveness, dialogue, and community mediation shows that practitioners do not need to introduce Ubuntu as if it were an entirely new concept. Instead, interventions should identify, strengthen, and connect the practices that refugees and members of the host community already use. This requires recognizing community members as active contributors to peace rather than treating them only as beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. Community leaders, women, youth, elders, religious representatives, persons with disabilities, and members of minority groups should participate in designing activities intended to improve relationships and prevent conflict.

Shared activities can create regular opportunities for positive interaction between groups that might otherwise meet mainly during moments of competition or disagreement. Communal work such as cleaning public spaces, maintaining water points, planting trees, improving roads, or supporting vulnerable households. Games and sporting events encourage cooperation among young people from refugee and host communities, while cultural gatherings can allow different groups to share music, food, stories, dance, and traditions. These activities should be organized in ways that encourage collaboration rather than competition between fixed identity groups.

However, such activities should not be treated as superficial solutions to structurally generated conflicts. Their practical value depends on whether they are linked to broader measures addressing land pressure, livelihood insecurity, unequal access to services, and perceived unfairness in the distribution of humanitarian assistance. The findings showed that the practice of Ubuntu is constrained by material conditions. It may be difficult for individuals to share resources or maintain hospitable relationships when they cannot meet their own basic needs. Practical interventions should therefore combine dialogue and relationship-building with livelihood programs, transparent resource allocation, skills development, environmental protection, and improved access to essential services.

This approach reflects conflict transformation theory because it addresses both damaged relationships and the structures that repeatedly produce conflict. Community dialogue may

change negative perceptions, but sustainable peace also requires attention to the economic and administrative conditions underlying those perceptions. For example, dialogue surrounding land disputes should be supported by clear information about boundaries, land-use arrangements, complaint procedures, and the responsibilities of relevant authorities. Similarly, tensions concerning assistance should be addressed through transparent communication about eligibility, available resources, and decision-making processes. Ubuntu-informed practice should therefore connect interpersonal reconciliation to structural fairness.

At the community level, trained mediators could help manage minor disputes through voluntary dialogue, active listening, acknowledgement of harm, apology, restitution, and agreement on future conduct. These mediators should be selected through inclusive processes and should represent the social and cultural diversity of the settlement. Selection based only on age, gender, ethnicity, or existing authority could reproduce unequal power relations. All people are encouraged to participate. Translation and interpretation support should also be available so that language barriers do not prevent individuals from explaining their experiences or understanding mediation outcomes.

Community mediation must have clear boundaries. Serious criminal offences, such as sexual and gender-based violence, child abuses, and significant violations of rights should not be handled solely through informal reconciliation. Such cases require referral to the police, or law enforcement, protection agencies, health services, or other legally authorized institutions. Forgiveness should be voluntary and should never be used to pressure victims into silence. The practical application of Ubuntu must preserve dignity, safety, accountability, and access to justice. This is consistent with the hybrid system proposed in the discussion, in which community mediation complements rather than replaces formal protection and justice mechanisms.

The ABC model further clarifies how interventions could be organized. Ubuntu-informed dialogue and shared activities can address attitudes by reducing prejudice, fear, suspicion, and resentment. Mediation, communal work, and cooperation can influence behavior by providing alternatives to discrimination, retaliation, avoidance, or violence. Nevertheless, interventions must also address contradictions, including scarcity, unequal opportunities, land pressure, and conflicting expectations between refugees and host communities. Situations that focus only on attitudes may fail if the material sources of conflict remain unchanged. Similarly, institutional reforms may have limited effects if mistrust and hostile social relationships are ignored.

At the policy level, the formal recognition of Ubuntu should involve more than inserting the term into official documents. Policy frameworks should explain how Ubuntu-informed participation, mediation, and collective problem-solving will operate, who will be responsible, which cases community structures may handle, and how decisions will be monitored. Formal recognition should create practical referral pathways linking community mediators with settlement commandants, local government officials, the police, protection officers, humanitarian organizations, and service providers. It should also establish safeguards to prevent discrimination, coercion, corruption, and the misuse of informal authority.

Neo-institutionalism demonstrates why this formal recognition is necessary. Ubuntu currently operates mainly as an informal institution made up of norms, expectations, relationships, and routine practices. Formal refugee governance, in contrast, is organized through laws, mandates, reporting procedures, funding requirements, and bureaucratic rules. Without recognized links between these two institutional spheres, community mediation can remain marginal, inconsistent, and undocumented. Policy reform should allow the relational legitimacy of Ubuntu to interact with the accountability and protection capacities of formal institutions.

International institutions should consequently support locally grounded approaches through funding arrangements that allow adequate time for trust-building, community consultation, and relationship repair. Short-term projects based mainly on numerical indicators may fail to capture changes in trust, dignity, social belonging, and willingness to cooperate. Monitoring frameworks should include qualitative indicators developed with affected communities. These could examine whether people feel heard, whether vulnerable individuals can access mediation, whether agreements are respected, and whether relationships improve after interventions.

Flexibility in international rules should not mean removing legal standards or weakening accountability. It should mean allowing policy-decision making at both national and at grassroots to adapt methods of participation and conflict management to the social realities of particular settlements. International protection obligations, human rights standards, safeguarding requirements, and the principle of non-discrimination must remain binding. Within these boundaries, frontline personnel should have sufficient discretion to use dialogue, consultation, restorative approaches, and locally legitimate mediation where appropriate.

At the national level, the OPM could develop operational guidance for integrating Ubuntu-informed practices into refugee management. Such guidance could establish community

mediation committees, minimum standards for mediator training, referral procedures, documentation requirements, and mechanisms for reviewing outcomes. National policy should also promote cooperation between refugee governance structures and surrounding local governments because conflicts frequently involve both refugees and members of the host community. Including Ubuntu in social protection and local development planning would help prevent it from being treated as a refugee-only intervention.

Frontline officers should receive training in culturally responsive communication, conflict sensitivity, mediation, and the ethical principles associated with Ubuntu. Administrative decisions should be explained in accessible language, with opportunities for affected people to ask questions and raise concerns. Humane outcomes require officers to consider how procedures affect dignity, family relationships, social belonging, and community trust. Nevertheless, discretion should be accompanied by supervision and complaint mechanisms to ensure that decisions remain lawful, consistent, and free from favoritism.

Grassroots implementation should be visible in everyday encounters between residents and institutions. Ubuntu can be expressed when officials listen respectfully, provide clear explanations, recognize community knowledge, and avoid treating people as case numbers. Regular community forums could enable residents to identify tensions before they escalate. Feedback mechanisms should be accessible to people with limited literacy, low social status, disabilities, or language difficulties. Anonymous reporting options may be necessary where individuals fear retaliation or social exclusion.

The findings also have implications for future research. Further studies should examine how Ubuntu-informed conflict management operates across different refugee settlements and whether similar practices produce different outcomes under different institutional and material conditions. Comparative research could explore differences between settlements, urban refugee contexts, and host communities affected by varying levels of resource pressure.

Middle range theory offers a useful direction for this future research because it encourages researchers to identify the conditions under which Ubuntu is effective instead of presenting it as a universal solution. Studies could test whether Ubuntu-informed mediation works best when mediators are socially legitimate, participation is voluntary, material inequalities are being addressed, and formal referral systems are available. Research could also examine

circumstances in which informal processes become exclusionary or unsafe. **Further clarification on future research is discussed in the next sections of conclusion, summary**

Overall, the implications call for a coordinated approach in which Ubuntu provides a relational and ethical foundation while formal institutions provide legal safeguards, resources, oversight, and accountability. Strengthening Ubuntu means strengthening the conditions that allow people to recognise one another's dignity and act upon their interdependence. When supported by inclusive participation, material investment, institutional recognition, and clear protection boundaries, Ubuntu can help transform Rwamwanja refugee settlement to handle internal conflicts with shared responsibility, Justice and belonging.

5.13. Novel contribution of the study (the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management model)

As noted in Chapter 4, the empirical themes already demonstrated that conflict management in Rwamwanja is neither wholly formal nor wholly customary. This section reinstates that finding and makes its original analytical significance explicit. The study's central contribution is not simply the observation that Ubuntu exists in the settlement, but the development of an empirically grounded model explaining how Ubuntu-informed relational practices can be connected to formal refugee-governance and protection structures while preserving legal safeguards.

This study makes several important contributions to knowledge, theory, methodology, policy, and practice in the fields of conflict management, refugee studies, peacebuilding, and indigenous knowledge systems. Although Ubuntu philosophy has been widely discussed in relation to leadership, governance, social work, restorative justice, and post-conflict reconciliation, relatively little empirical research has examined its relevance within refugee settlements. Consequently, this study contributes to addressing an important gap in both academic literature and practical peacebuilding interventions.

The first and perhaps the most significant and original contribution of the study is the development of the **Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model (UCHCMM)**. Based on empirical findings and theoretical insights, the study proposes a model that integrates Ubuntu values with existing formal conflict management structures operating within refugee settlements. The model recognizes that neither indigenous approaches nor formal institutions

alone are sufficient to address the complex conflicts experienced in refugee contexts. Instead, sustainable conflict management emerges through collaboration between legal frameworks, administrative systems, humanitarian structures, community leadership, and Ubuntu-based practices emphasizing dialogue, reconciliation, empathy, and collective responsibility. To the knowledge of the researcher, no previous study has developed a comprehensive Ubuntu-centred conflict management model specifically designed for refugee settlements in Uganda.

The **Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model** operates through four interconnected layers. The **foundational layer (ontology)** provides the relational values of shared humanity, dignity, empathy, reciprocity, and collective responsibility that guide the model. These values are institutionalised through the **structural layer (institutional hybridity)**, which links elders, Refugee Welfare Committees, Local Councils, humanitarian agencies, the Office of the Prime Minister, police, and courts. The **operational layer (dual referral pathways)** translates these values and institutional relationships into practice through dialogue, mediation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and trust-building, while safeguards and referral boundaries determine which disputes may be addressed through community processes and which must be referred to formal authorities. Putting all together, the three layers generate the **outcome layer (indigenized peace)**, understood as a culturally grounded, socially legitimate, and legally accountable form of peace that restores relationships while protecting individual rights. The layers work together because relational values alone cannot manage conflict without institutional support, while formal institutions may lack community legitimacy unless connected to culturally meaningful practices. Its novelty therefore lies in specifying both the points of connection and the limits of Ubuntu-based mediation in a culturally diverse refugee settlement. This moves the contribution beyond a general call for “integration” and provides a testable framework for policy design, implementation, and future comparative research.

The principal original contribution is thus UCHCMM’s explanation of how community legitimacy and relational repair can operate together with legal authority, protection standards, and institutional accountability.

The other significant contribution of the study lies in its contextualization of Ubuntu philosophy within refugee conflict management. Existing literature has largely examined Ubuntu within stable communities, post-conflict societies, governance systems, educational institutions, and social welfare settings. Very few studies have explored how Ubuntu operates

within displacement environments characterized by cultural diversity, humanitarian governance, resource constraints, and complex social interactions. By examining Ubuntu within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, the study extends the application of Ubuntu beyond its traditional areas of scholarship and demonstrates its relevance within contemporary refugee governance contexts. In doing so, the study broadens the scope of both Ubuntu scholarship and refugee studies.

A third contribution concerns the generation of empirical evidence regarding the lived experiences of refugees, host communities, policymakers, and community leaders. Much of the existing literature on Ubuntu is philosophical or normative in nature, often discussing what Ubuntu ought to achieve rather than how it is actually experienced and practiced. This study moves beyond theoretical discussions by documenting how Ubuntu is understood, interpreted, and applied in everyday interactions among diverse populations living within a refugee settlement. The findings reveal that Ubuntu is not merely an abstract philosophy, but a living social practice manifested through sharing, mutual support, dialogue, reconciliation, hospitality, collective responsibility, and community solidarity. These insights provide a richer understanding of how indigenous philosophies function within contemporary humanitarian settings.

The study further contributes to the growing body of scholars' advocating for the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems in peacebuilding and conflict management. Much of the dominant conflict management literature continues to emphasize formal legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and externally driven peacebuilding approaches. While these approaches remain important, the findings of this study demonstrate that indigenous philosophies continue to shape community responses to conflict and can complement formal systems in meaningful ways. The study therefore contributes to ongoing debates regarding localization, decolonization of knowledge, and the integration of indigenous perspectives into policy and practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes by developing an integrated analytical framework that combines Ubuntu Philosophy, Conflict Transformation Theory, Neo-Institutionalism Theory, the ABC model, and Middle-Range Theory. Existing studies often employ these theories independently. The present research demonstrates how these perspectives can be combined to explain conflict management within complex humanitarian environments. Ubuntu provided the normative and ethical foundation, Conflict Transformation

Theory explained processes of social change and relationship rebuilding, Neo-Institutionalism illuminated the influence of formal and informal institutions, the ABC model, looks at how attitudes and behaviors shape the lives of the people, and Middle-Range Theory linked abstract concepts to observable realities. This theoretical integration provides a multidimensional framework that may be useful for future studies examining conflict management in similarly complex settings.

Methodologically, the study contributes by demonstrating the usefulness of qualitative, interpretivist, and ethnographically informed approaches in examining indigenous philosophies within humanitarian settings. While many refugee studies rely heavily on quantitative indicators and policy evaluations, this research prioritized lived experiences, meanings, perceptions, and social relationships. The study therefore illustrates how qualitative inquiry can generate insights that might remain invisible through purely quantitative approaches. This methodological contribution is particularly important for future researchers interested in examining culturally embedded forms of knowledge and practice.

The study also makes a practical contribution to refugee governance and peacebuilding policy. By identifying specific pathways through which Ubuntu can be integrated into existing conflict management systems, the research provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, humanitarian agencies, community leaders, and development practitioners. The findings suggest that indigenous philosophies should not be viewed as alternatives to formal governance structures but rather as complementary resources capable of strengthening social cohesion, trust, participation, and peaceful coexistence. This contribution has implications not only for Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement but also for other refugee-hosting contexts in Uganda and across Africa.

Finally, the study contributes to broader discussions concerning African-centered approaches to peacebuilding. For many years, peacebuilding interventions in Africa have largely relied on externally developed models and frameworks. This study demonstrates that African philosophical traditions continue to offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges. By foregrounding Ubuntu as both a theoretical lens and a practical conflict management approach, the study contributes to efforts aimed at strengthening African intellectual traditions within global scholarship. In this regard, the research represents a modest but important step toward the development of contextually grounded, culturally relevant, and locally owned approaches to conflict management and peacebuilding.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

Forced displacement and the refugee hosting crisis in Africa have continued to create tension and conflicts in hosting countries, particularly in Uganda, where competition for resources has been a source of conflicts in refugee settlements, hindering peaceful coexistence. The persistent conflicts, especially in settlements like Rwamwanja with diverse cultural backgrounds, demonstrate that formal legal and humanitarian strategies alone are not enough to address the deeper social relational dimensions of conflict.

With the Ubuntu philosophy context that offers a framework for shared humanity, reconciliation, empathy, and collective responsibility, the focus shifts from dispute resolution to restoring relationships that build a practical relevance for fostering dialogue, healing, and participatory community engagement. Uganda remains one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, accommodating refugees primarily from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Eritrea, and other neighboring countries. The country's refugee governance framework, particularly the Refugees Act of 2006 and the Refugee Regulations of 2010, has been widely praised for promoting freedom of movement, access to land, employment opportunities, and integration with host communities. Despite these progressive policies, refugee settlements continue to experience various forms of conflict arising from resource competition, cultural diversity, social identity differences, governance challenges, and everyday interactions among populations originating from diverse social, political, and historical backgrounds. While these groups differ in language, nationality, ethnicity, and lived experiences, they share a broader African identity. It is within this context that the present study sought to explore whether Ubuntu philosophy, grounded in the notion of shared humanity and interconnectedness, could provide an additional pathway for strengthening conflict management and peaceful coexistence within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

This study set out to explore Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Uganda. The starting point was the observation that despite the existence of formal conflict management mechanisms, humanitarian governance structures, refugee policies, and institutional interventions, conflicts continue to persist within refugee settlements. As discussed in Chapter One, these conflicts emerge from complex interactions

involving resource competition, cultural diversity, social integration challenges, household disputes, crime, identity differences, and everyday encounters between refugees and host communities. In this study, therefore, Ubuntu is positioned not as a replacement for formal conflict management structure but rather as an indigenous approach that is locally grounded to complement the existing institutional framework. By examining how Ubuntu is understood, interpreted, and applied in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, the study contributes to broader debates on sustainable peacebuilding and points out the potential of African philosophical traditions to promote peaceful coexistence and long-term conflict management in refugee contexts.

The study was motivated by the observation that most conflict management interventions in refugee settlements continue to be dominated by formal legal frameworks, humanitarian governance structures, administrative procedures, and externally influenced peacebuilding models. Although these mechanisms perform important functions, indigenous African approaches to conflict management have received comparatively limited attention within refugee studies and humanitarian practice. This omission is particularly noteworthy, given that a number of African societies have successfully utilized indigenous approaches in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Examples include the Gacaca Courts in Rwanda, Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone, Mato Oput among the Acholi of Northern Uganda, the Kgotla system in Botswana, and elements of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all of which incorporated restorative principles emphasizing dialogue, accountability, reconciliation, and community healing. These experiences suggest that indigenous approaches can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding. Consequently, exploring Ubuntu as a conflict management approach within refugee settlements represented not a rejection of formal systems but an effort to examine whether a restorative and relationship-centered African philosophy could complement existing mechanisms.

The review of literature undertaken in this study revealed several important trends. Existing scholars consistently identifies refugee settlements as complex social spaces characterized by interactions between displaced populations, host communities, governments, and humanitarian agencies. Studies from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Sudan highlight recurring challenges associated with resource competition, social cohesion, identity formation, governance, and conflict management. At the same time, the literature demonstrated a growing recognition of indigenous knowledge systems within peacebuilding scholars. However,

relatively little empirical work has examined Ubuntu specifically within refugee settings. Most existing studies focus on Ubuntu in governance, social work, leadership, restorative justice, post-apartheid reconciliation, or community development. The literature therefore revealed a significant knowledge gap concerning how Ubuntu is understood, experienced, and applied within refugee settlements, thereby justifying the present research.

Summary of the study's purpose, propositions, and research questions

The purpose of this study was to explore Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Uganda. More specifically, the study examined how Ubuntu is understood, interpreted, and practiced by refugees, host community members, community leaders, humanitarian actors, and policymakers; assessed its contribution to conflict management and peaceful coexistence; identified the factors that facilitate or constrain its application; and considered how Ubuntu-informed practices could complement existing formal and informal conflict management mechanisms.

The study was guided by propositions rather than hypotheses. Two propositions guided the inquiry. The first was that the adoption of Ubuntu philosophy may contribute to effective conflict management by promoting mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among the diverse communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The second was that Ubuntu philosophy may be inconsistently employed in Rwamwanja because the settlement's specific social, cultural, and institutional conditions, as well as the meaning of Ubuntu itself, have not been sufficiently accepted or shared by all stakeholders.

In line with this purpose and these propositions, the study addressed four research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of refugees and host community members in applying Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement? (2) How do policymakers perceive Ubuntu philosophy in addressing conflicts within the settlement? (3) How can Ubuntu philosophy be integrated into conflict management strategies in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement? (4) What other formal and informal conflict management mechanisms operate within the settlement, and how do they relate to Ubuntu-based approaches?

The findings answered these questions and supported both propositions, although with important qualifications. Ubuntu philosophy was evident in everyday practices of care, sharing,

dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, mutual respect, and collective responsibility, and these practices contributed to relationship restoration and peaceful coexistence. Policymakers and institutional actors generally valued principles consistent with Ubuntu, even when they did not explicitly identify them as such. At the same time, Ubuntu was not uniformly understood, accepted, or practiced. Its application was constrained by resource scarcity, cultural diversity, institutional procedures, legal requirements, unequal power relations, and the absence of a shared understanding among all stakeholders. The study therefore concludes that Ubuntu can strengthen conflict management in Rwamwanja when it is deliberately integrated with, rather than used to replace, existing legal, humanitarian, and community-based mechanisms. This conclusion fulfills the study's purpose by showing both the practical contribution of Ubuntu and the contextual limits that must be addressed for its consistent application.

The overall goal of the study was to investigate how Ubuntu philosophy is understood, interpreted, practiced, perceived, and potentially integrated into conflict management within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The findings suggest that this goal was achieved to a significant extent. The research generated a detailed understanding of how refugees, host community members, local leaders, humanitarian actors, and policymakers perceive Ubuntu and how its values already influence everyday social relations within the settlement. The study also identified opportunities and constraints associated with the institutionalization of Ubuntu and developed a practical framework through which Ubuntu may contribute to conflict management without replacing existing legal and humanitarian systems.

A central finding of the study is that Ubuntu is not absent within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Rather, Ubuntu exists as a lived moral resource that informs everyday interactions, relationships, and community responses to conflict. Participants consistently associate Ubuntu with values such as caring, sharing, empathy, forgiveness, dialogue, mutual respect, collective responsibility, and peaceful coexistence. These values were reflected in community mediation processes, neighbourly support systems, elder-led reconciliation efforts, and informal mechanisms of dispute management. In this sense, Ubuntu was not experienced merely as a philosophical abstraction. It functioned as an everyday social practice through which people attempted to navigate the realities of displacement, diversity, and uncertainty. The findings, therefore, support the argument that adopting Ubuntu philosophy, which is an indigenous African philosophy, continues to shape social life even within highly institutionalized humanitarian environments, and this is effective for conflict management. At the same time,

the study found that Ubuntu is neither uniformly understood nor consistently practiced. While many participants embraced Ubuntu values, others pointed to significant constraints that limit its application. Resource scarcity, poverty, competition for livelihoods, bureaucratic procedures, donor-driven operational systems, cultural diversity, and the erosion of traditional authority structures all affect the extent to which Ubuntu can function effectively as a conflict management approach. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that certain forms of conflict, particularly serious criminal offenses such as rape, murder, and severe assault, require formal legal intervention rather than community-based reconciliation alone. These findings suggest that Ubuntu should not be taken as a universal solution to all forms of conflict. Rather, its value lies in its ability to complement other mechanisms of conflict management. This further aligns with the proposition that Ubuntu has not been accepted by all stakeholders for various reasons that underlie its functionality.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study proved highly appropriate for examining these complexities. Ubuntu philosophy served as the normative foundation of the research by providing a lens through which conflict management could be understood in terms of relationships, shared humanity, reconciliation, and communal responsibility. Conflict Transformation Theory complemented Ubuntu by explaining how sustainable peace requires changes in relationships, social structures, and patterns of interaction rather than merely the resolution of isolated disputes. Neo-institutionalism contributed to understanding how formal and informal institutions influence the adoption and practice of Ubuntu principles. The ABC model illuminated questions of participation, inclusion, recognition, and voice within refugee governance structures, while Middle-range theory created a bridge between broad philosophical concepts and the empirical realities observed within the settlement. All in all, these theoretical perspectives enabled a multidimensional understanding of conflict management in Rwamwanja. More importantly, they demonstrated that no single theory adequately explains the complexity of conflict in refugee settings. Ubuntu explained why relationships matter. The integrated framework therefore proved valuable not only for interpreting the findings but also for developing the Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management Model proposed by this study.

The methodological choices adopted in this research proved appropriate means for achieving the study's objectives. Guided by the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, the study sought to understand how participants themselves interpreted and experienced Ubuntu within their

social context. The qualitative single-case study design, supported by ethnographic elements, provided the flexibility and depth necessary for examining lived experiences, meanings, values, and community dynamics. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, the study was able to capture perspectives that would have been difficult to access through more structured or quantitative approaches. The inductive orientation of the study further enabled themes and interpretations to emerge from participants' experiences rather than being imposed by predetermined assumptions. The methodological approach proved particularly appropriate because it enabled the study to capture perspectives from a diverse range of actors involved in conflict management within Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. Participants included refugees from different ethnic backgrounds, members of the host community, refugee leaders, local council leaders, police officers, elders, representatives of humanitarian organizations, officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, and other policymakers involved in refugee governance. The diversity of respondents allowed the study to examine Ubuntu from multiple perspectives and facilitated triangulation of experiences across community, institutional, and policy levels.

The methodology was, therefore, consistent with both the theoretical framework and the study's objectives. Ubuntu itself emphasizes listening, dialogue, mutual recognition, and respect for lived experience. The interpretivist approach mirrored these values by prioritizing participants' voices and perspectives. In this regard, methodology was not merely a technical choice but also a philosophical one. It enabled the researcher to investigate Ubuntu in a manner consistent with the relational and human-centered principles that underpin philosophy itself.

The findings also provide important responses to the study's research questions. The first research question sought to explore the lived experiences of refugees and host community members in applying Ubuntu philosophy as an approach to conflict management within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The findings revealed that Ubuntu is not merely a philosophical concept known to a few community leaders or policymakers but rather a set of values and practices that many participants already engage with in their everyday lives, often without explicitly identifying them as Ubuntu. Refugees and host community members described Ubuntu through practical expressions such as caring for neighbors, sharing food and other resources during times of hardship, supporting vulnerable members of the community, welcoming newcomers, participating in communal activities, and assisting one another during crises. These practices reflected a broader understanding of humanity, mutual concern, and

collective responsibility that transcended differences in nationality, ethnicity, language, or religion.

The findings further demonstrated that while both refugees and host community members embraced values associated with Ubuntu, their experiences were not always identical. Refugees frequently viewed Ubuntu through the lens of survival, solidarity, and mutual support in an environment characterized by displacement and uncertainty. Many described how fellow refugees and members of the host community had provided assistance during difficult moments, helping them navigate unfamiliar social and economic conditions. Host community members, on the other hand, often associated Ubuntu with hospitality, coexistence, and the moral obligation to accommodate and support displaced populations despite facing their own economic challenges. These differing perspectives illustrate how Ubuntu is interpreted through the realities and experiences of different groups while maintaining a common emphasis on shared humanity.

The study also revealed that Ubuntu manifested itself in various conflict management practices. Community members frequently relied on dialogue, mediation by elders, family meetings, religious leaders, and informal negotiations to address disputes before they escalated into formal legal processes. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of preserving relationships and restoring harmony rather than simply identifying winners and losers. Such practices closely align with the restorative principles associated with Ubuntu philosophy. However, the findings also revealed tensions between Ubuntu values and the realities of humanitarian assistance systems. Some participants observed that prolonged dependency on aid, increasing competition for limited resources, and growing economic pressures occasionally weakened communal bonds and encouraged individualistic behavior. These tensions suggest that while Ubuntu remains an important social resource within the settlement, its application is influenced by broader structural and economic conditions. Consequently, the findings indicate that Ubuntu exists not as an idealized or perfect system but as a living social practice that continues to shape everyday relationships while simultaneously adapting to the challenges of displacement and humanitarian governance.

The second research question examined how policymakers perceive Ubuntu philosophy in addressing conflicts within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The findings suggest that policymakers generally recognize and appreciate many of the values associated with Ubuntu, including dialogue, reconciliation, participation, inclusivity, mutual respect, and peaceful

coexistence. Many respondents' occupying leadership, governance, and policy positions acknowledged that successful conflict management often depends on fostering trust and cooperation among different groups. In practice, several policy interventions and community engagement initiatives already reflect principles that are broadly consistent with Ubuntu, even where the philosophy itself is not explicitly referenced.

A particularly significant finding was that Ubuntu remains largely implicit within existing refugee governance structures. Policies implemented by the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR, and partner organizations frequently emphasize community participation, social cohesion, mediation, and peaceful coexistence. However, these initiatives are generally framed within humanitarian, legal, or administrative language rather than being explicitly linked to indigenous African philosophies. As a result, many policymakers recognized the values embodied in Ubuntu but had not necessarily considered Ubuntu itself as a formal framework for conflict management. This observation points to an important disconnect between indigenous knowledge systems and contemporary policy design.

The findings further identified several institutional barriers that limit the formal incorporation of Ubuntu into refugee governance frameworks. These include the dominance of internationally standardized humanitarian procedures, bureaucratic policy structures, concerns about maintaining legal consistency, and the multicultural nature of refugee settlements where populations originate from diverse cultural backgrounds. Some policymakers expressed uncertainty regarding how a philosophy rooted in African traditions could be translated into formal governance mechanisms without excluding non-African or culturally diverse populations. Others highlighted the challenge of balancing restorative approaches with legal obligations related to criminal justice and human rights protection. However, many respondents acknowledged that Ubuntu could complement rather than replace existing structures. The findings therefore suggest that while Ubuntu has not yet been institutionalized within refugee policy frameworks, there is considerable openness among policymakers toward integrating its principles into existing conflict management strategies.

The third research question explored how Ubuntu philosophy could be integrated into conflict management strategies within the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The findings revealed broad consensus among participants that Ubuntu possesses significant potential to strengthen existing approaches to conflict management when applied alongside formal mechanisms. Rather than advocating for the replacement of established legal and administrative systems,

respondents emphasized the importance of creating complementary structures that would allow Ubuntu values to inform everyday conflict management practices.

One of the most frequently proposed pathways for integration involved the training of community leaders, refugee welfare committees, local council leaders, religious leaders, and humanitarian practitioners in Ubuntu-informed approaches to mediation and reconciliation. Participants argued that many local leaders already practice elements of Ubuntu but often do so informally and without a structured framework. Formal training could therefore enhance their capacity to facilitate dialogue, manage disputes, and promote reconciliation while maintaining consistency with humanitarian principles and legal requirements. Such capacity-building initiatives would also contribute to the institutional recognition of indigenous approaches that have traditionally operated outside formal governance structures.

Another important area for integration concerns the establishment and strengthening of community dialogue forums. Participants repeatedly emphasized that many conflicts arise from misunderstandings, misinformation, cultural differences, and communication barriers. Ubuntu-based dialogue platforms could provide opportunities for refugees, host communities, local authorities, and humanitarian actors to discuss emerging concerns before they escalate into serious disputes. Similarly, participants highlighted the potential role of peace committees that incorporate respected community members, elders, women representatives, youth leaders, and religious figures. Such structures could function as accessible and culturally relevant spaces for conflict prevention and mediation. The findings also suggest that Ubuntu could strengthen alternative dispute resolution mechanisms operating within the settlement.

Existing informal mediation processes could be enhanced by explicitly incorporating principles such as empathy, collective responsibility, restorative justice, and reconciliation. More broadly, respondents advocated for the integration of Ubuntu values into community education programmes, leadership development initiatives, and social cohesion projects. All in all, these suggestions indicate that the future contribution of Ubuntu lies not in creating entirely new institutions but in enriching existing structures with values that promote relationship-building, mutual understanding, and sustainable coexistence.

The fourth research question sought to identify other formal and informal conflict management mechanisms operating within the settlement and to examine how they relate to Ubuntu-based approaches. The findings revealed that conflict management in Rwamwanja is already

characterized by a complex and highly interconnected system involving both formal and informal actors. Formal mechanisms include structures established by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Uganda Police Force, local courts, local government authorities, and humanitarian organizations. These institutions provide legal authority, administrative oversight, security, and procedural frameworks for managing disputes. They play a critical role in addressing serious criminal offences, enforcing regulations, and maintaining order within the settlement.

Alongside these formal mechanisms, a wide range of informal structures continue to play an important role in everyday conflict management. These include Refugee Welfare Councils, religious leaders, elders, clan leaders, family networks, community mediators, women's groups, youth leaders, and various community-based organizations. Participants frequently reported that many disputes are initially addressed through these informal channels because they are accessible, culturally familiar, and often perceived as more capable of preserving relationships than formal legal processes. Informal mechanisms were particularly valued for their emphasis on dialogue, reconciliation, consensus-building, and community participation.

A key contribution of the study is the recognition that Ubuntu intersects with many of these existing mechanisms rather than functioning as a separate or competing system. Elements of Ubuntu were evident in mediation conducted by elders, reconciliation efforts led by religious leaders, community meetings facilitated by Refugee Welfare Councils, and family-based approaches to dispute resolution. Ubuntu therefore operates as an underlying philosophy that informs many informal practices already present within the settlement.

At the same time, the study found opportunities for strengthening collaboration between formal and informal actors through a hybrid approach to conflict management. Such an approach would allow legal and institutional mechanisms to address issues requiring formal intervention while enabling Ubuntu-inspired practices to contribute to relationship restoration, social cohesion, and community healing. The findings therefore support the argument that sustainable conflict management in refugee settlements is most likely to emerge from constructive interaction between formal governance structures and indigenous approaches grounded in local values and lived experiences.

Beyond its empirical findings, the study contributes to broader scholarly debates in peace and conflict studies, refugee governance, indigenous knowledge systems, and African political thought. It demonstrates that indigenous philosophies should not be viewed merely as cultural

artifacts or historical traditions. Instead, they represent living bodies of knowledge that continue to influence how communities understand justice, coexistence, conflict, and social responsibility. The study therefore challenges assumptions that effective conflict management must necessarily originate from external or Western frameworks. At the same time, it avoids over glorify indigenous approaches by acknowledging their limitations and the continuing necessity of formal legal institutions.

Based on the findings of this study, **several recommendations** are proposed to enhance the contribution of Ubuntu philosophy to conflict management within refugee settlements and similar humanitarian contexts.

At the **policy level**, the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR, and other relevant stakeholders should consider developing policy frameworks that explicitly recognize the value of indigenous African approaches to conflict management. While existing refugee policies emphasize social cohesion, participation, and peaceful coexistence, there is currently limited recognition of the cultural and philosophical foundations that support these objectives. Incorporating Ubuntu principles into policy guidelines would not require abandoning existing legal and humanitarian frameworks. Rather, it would provide an additional normative foundation capable of strengthening community ownership, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

Policymakers should therefore explore opportunities to integrate Ubuntu values into refugee governance strategies, peacebuilding programs, and community engagement initiatives. At the institutional level, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of leaders and practitioners involved in conflict management. Training programs should be developed for refugee leaders, local council officials, community mediators, religious leaders, humanitarian workers, and other stakeholders. Such programs should focus on Ubuntu-informed mediation, restorative justice approaches, dialogue facilitation, and reconciliation processes. Building these capacities would enhance the ability of local actors to address conflicts in ways that preserve relationships while remaining consistent with legal and humanitarian standards. Institutions should also establish mechanisms for documenting and sharing best practices related to indigenous conflict management approaches.

The study recommends **the establishment and strengthening of structured** community dialogue platforms within refugee settlements. Regular forums bringing together refugees, host community members, local authorities, and humanitarian actors would provide opportunities

for discussing concerns, addressing misconceptions, and building mutual understanding. Such forums should deliberately promote participation across different social groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and minority communities. By creating spaces for open communication and collaborative problem-solving, these platforms would contribute to conflict prevention and strengthen social cohesion. At the community level, initiatives aimed at promoting collective responsibility, mutual support, and social integration should be prioritized.

Community-based activities such as cultural exchange programs, joint livelihood projects, sports events, and social cohesion campaigns can help strengthen relationships between refugees and host communities. These initiatives should be designed to reinforce the values associated with Ubuntu, including empathy, cooperation, respect, and shared responsibility. Particular attention should be given to activities that encourage interaction across cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries, thereby reducing stereotypes and fostering a stronger sense of community.

The study also recommends greater collaboration between **formal and informal conflict management structures**. Rather than operating independently, institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister, the police, local courts, and humanitarian organizations should establish stronger partnerships with elders, religious leaders, Refugee Welfare Councils, and community mediators. Such collaboration would facilitate referral mechanisms, improve information sharing, and ensure that conflicts are addressed through the most appropriate channels. A hybrid approach combining legal accountability with restorative principles would be particularly beneficial in addressing the diverse range of conflicts experienced within refugee settlements.

Finally, universities, research institutions, and policy think tanks should invest more resources in studying indigenous approaches to peacebuilding and conflict management. Despite increasing interest in localization and community-led peacebuilding, indigenous philosophies remain underrepresented within refugee studies and humanitarian research. Greater scholarly attention would not only contribute to theoretical development but also generate evidence capable of informing policy and practice. Such efforts are essential if indigenous approaches such as Ubuntu are to move from the margins of academic debate into mainstream discussions of conflict management and peacebuilding.

Future research

The study also opens several avenues for future research. **First, comparative studies** could examine the applicability of Ubuntu across different refugee settlements within Uganda and beyond. Such studies would help determine whether the patterns observed in Rwamwanja are context-specific or reflect broader dynamics within refugee governance.

Secondly, there is a need for longitudinal studies examining how Ubuntu-informed interventions influence conflict management outcome over time. The study took a single case and for a short period of time. The longitudinal study involving different refugee settlements may challenge the results.

Third, future studies could explore how gender, youth participation, disability, and **power relations shape the application** of Ubuntu within refugee settings. Finally, researchers may seek to test and refine the **Ubuntu-Centric Hybrid Conflict Management** Model through practical implementation and evaluation in different humanitarian environments. Since this study focused on a single refugee settlement and employed a qualitative case study design, future research may examine the applicability of Ubuntu across multiple settlements within Uganda and other refugee-hosting countries. Comparative studies involving settlements such as Nakivale, Kyangwali, Bidibidi, Rhino Camp, and Palabek could provide deeper insights into the transferability of the findings. Quantitative and mixed-methods studies may also assess the measurable impact of Ubuntu-informed interventions on conflict management outcomes.

To sum up therefore, this study began with a simple but important question. In a world where displacement, diversity, and conflict increasingly shape human experience, can Ubuntu as an indigenous African philosophy contribute meaningfully to the management of conflict within refugee communities? The findings suggest that the answer is yes, but only partially and under certain conditions. Ubuntu alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities, resource scarcity, or institutional constraints. However, it offers something that many formal systems struggle to provide: a language of shared humanity, a framework for rebuilding relationships, and a vision of coexistence grounded in mutual recognition and collective responsibility.

The journey that began in Chapter One with concerns about persistent conflicts in Rwamwanja refugee settlement therefore concludes with a more refined understanding of conflict management itself. Conflict management is not simply about controlling disputes or enforcing

rules. It is equally about restoring relationships, strengthening trust, fostering belonging, and creating conditions under which diverse communities can live together despite their differences. Ubuntu does not provide all the answers, but it offers an important reminder that peace is ultimately built through human relationships. In the context of Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, and perhaps in many other settings beyond it, this reminder remains both timely and necessary.

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APPENDIX 1. KEY-INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ubuntu Philosophy: An approach for conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee settlement:

Researcher

Date

Duration.....

Participant code.....

Location

Recording.....

Participant role/position.....

INTERVIEW GUIDE (MAINLY FOR KEY INFORMANTS)

Introduction and objective of the interview;

To build rapport with participants, the cultural norm of greeting and introducing myself was followed. Other procedures such as anonymity, consent, appreciation, duration, recording, etc. were all agreed upon by the respondents.

Good morning/afternoon, Sir/Madam. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to undertake this interview with you despite your busy schedule.

My name is Doreen Basemera. I am a Ugandan by nationality, studying in Poland at the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków. I am working on my PhD research on the topic **of Ubuntu philosophy: An approach for conflict management in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, Uganda**. The interviews I am carrying out are to fulfill the academic purpose of my study (purely academic). You are free to choose whether or not to answer the questions we will discuss, and I would like to request permission to record our conversation. It will take between 40-60 minutes. As an expert, your experience working with refugees and the community will be beneficial to this study and will help answer questions in relation to policy and integration strategies.

CONSENT CONFIRMATION BEFORE PROCEEDING

- ☐ The participant confirms that they are aged 18 years and above.
- ☐ The participant has received and understood information about the study.
- ☐ The participant explicitly and voluntarily consents to participate.
- ☐ The participant agrees to note-taking. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- ☐ The participant agrees to audio recording. ☐ Yes ☐ No

GUIDING QUESTIONS (semi-structured)

1. How long have you worked in, or been associated with, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, and what is your current role?

2. How do you understand the concept of Ubuntu?

3. What are the main types and causes of conflict recorded or observed in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement?

4. How do these conflicts affect your work or operations as a leader or practitioner?

5. In what ways, if any, do these conflicts affect the implementation of policies in the settlement?

6. To what extent are Ubuntu values/principles reflected in the interpretation, implementation, and day-to-day operation of policies in Rwamwanja?

7. What formal and informal mechanisms have been established to prevent, manage, or resolve conflict in the settlement?

8. Within these operational systems and conflict-management mechanisms, where do you observe Ubuntu philosophy in practice?

9. Apart from approaches associated with Ubuntu, what other conflict-management methods do you employ or observe?

10. What recommendations would you make for strengthening conflict management, policy implementation, and social integration in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement?

11. Is there anything else you consider important to understanding Ubuntu, conflict management, policy implementation, or community integration in Rwamwanja?

12. May I contact you for clarification or follow-up, if necessary?

All principal questions permit follow-up probing to clarify meaning, elicit examples, explore relevant experiences, and verify the interviewer's understanding. Probes will remain neutral, non-leading, and responsive to the participant's answers.

Closing statement

Thank you for sharing your time and expertise. I greatly appreciate your contribution, which will support the academic objectives of this doctoral research.

Ethical considerations and data protection

Adult participation and informed consent. The study involves adults aged 18 years or older. Participation takes place only after the researcher has provided adequate information about the study and obtained the participant's explicit, freely given informed consent.

Voluntary participation. Participants may refuse to answer any question, pause the interview, or withdraw in accordance with the approved study procedures, without penalty or adverse consequences.

Confidentiality and coding of personal data. Personal data will be minimized and coded using participant identifiers. Names and other direct identifiers will be separated from interview data, and quotations or findings will be presented in a manner intended to prevent identification, subject to any limits explained during consent.

Audio recording and secure handling. Audio recording will occur only with explicit permission. Recordings, transcripts, consent documentation, and coded data will be stored securely, accessed only by authorized persons, retained for the period specified in the approved research protocol, and then securely deleted or archived as required.

Methodological and institutional standards. The research will be conducted in accordance with the approved research protocol, applicable institutional ethical requirements, and recognized methodological standards for research involving human participants.

Use and dissemination of findings. The results will be presented in a doctoral dissertation and may also be disseminated through scientific publications and presentations at academic conferences, seminars, and other scientific events. Reporting will use aggregated or appropriately anonymized/pseudonymized material.

Respect and minimization of harm. The interview will be conducted respectfully and with sensitivity to participants' experiences. The researcher will avoid unnecessary intrusion, allow breaks where needed, and follow the approved procedure if distress, safeguarding concerns, or disclosures requiring referral arise.

APPENDIX 2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Ubuntu philosophy: An approach for conflict management in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement Uganda

Refugees and Host Community Members

Researcher

Group code

Location.....

Study focus.....

Date.....

Duration.....

Community represented: ☐ Refugee community ☐ Host community ☐ Mixed group

Facilitator: _____

Interpreter(s)/language(s):

Number present: _____ Audio recording agreed by all participants: ☐ Yes ☐ No

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Participant group and research focus. This focus group discussion was designed mainly for refugees and host community members and primarily addresses Research Questions 1 and 4.

Purpose. The purpose was to explore group dynamics in understanding Ubuntu and to enable participants to share their experiences of living together.

Welcome and introduction

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. My name is Doreen Basemera. I am a student from the National Commission Education University in Krakow, Poland. I am conducting a study for my PhD regarding Ubuntu philosophy: An approach for conflict management in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement.

The aim of this discussion is to better understand how people in the community, including both refugees and host members, experience and practice conflict management or resolution, especially in ways that reflect Ubuntu.

PURPOSE OF THE DISCUSSION

Today's session is a group conversation where we hope to learn from your experiences, opinions, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your honesty, thoughts, and stories. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have a right to leave at any point or choose not to answer every question. Everything shared in this discussion will be kept strictly confidential. Your names will be left anonymous unless, with your permission, we can use them. We request to take notes and record the discussion. This helps us to capture responses. The information given is purely for academic purposes.

Guidelines for Discussion

- We would wish to hear from everyone; please feel free to speak one at a time.
- Feel free to speak in the language you understand best; we have interpreters who will help us to interpret
- Please respect everyone's views, even if they are different from your own. There's no need to agree with others; diverse views are helpful.
- We shall record attendance of all members present, and our discussion will take between 40-60 minutes.

Consent confirmation before discussion

- ☐ All participants confirm that they are aged 18 years and above.
- ☐ Each participant has received and understood information about the study.
- ☐ Each participant has explicitly and voluntarily consented to participate.
- ☐ Permission to take notes has been obtained.
- ☐ Permission to audio-record has been obtained from every participant. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- ☐ Participants agree to respect the privacy of other group members.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How do you understand the term “Ubuntu,” and what does it mean in your community?

2. Can you share with us a short story or give an example where people acted according to Ubuntu?

3. What are the common causes of conflicts in your community?

4. How are these conflicts normally resolved?

5. In what ways are Ubuntu values (forgiveness, mutual respect, and dialogue) used to solve problems? Give examples.

6. Are there times when these values are ignored? What happens then?

7. How do refugees and the host community stay together?

8. What challenges or success have you experienced in living together?

9. How do you think Ubuntu can better be used to solve conflict in your community?

10. What kind of support is needed to promote the Ubuntu approach?

Closing statement

Thank you for sharing your experiences, opinions, and ideas. Your contribution is appreciated and will support the academic objectives of this doctoral research.

Ethical considerations and data protection

Adult participation and explicit consent. The study is conducted with adults aged 18 years and above. Every participant will receive adequate information and take part only after giving explicit, freely given informed consent.

Voluntary participation. Participants may decline to answer any question or leave the discussion at any point, without penalty or adverse consequences, in accordance with the approved study procedures.

Privacy in a group setting. The researcher will protect research records and will ask participants to respect one another's privacy. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group because participants hear one another's contributions.

Coding of personal data. Attendance and research data will use participant codes. Names and other direct identifiers will be separated from discussion notes, recordings, and transcripts. Reporting will use aggregated or appropriately anonymized/pseudonymized information.

Recording and secure data handling. Notes and audio recordings will be made only with explicit permission. Research materials will be stored securely, accessed only by authorized persons, retained for the period specified in the approved protocol, and deleted or archived as required.

Methodological and institutional standards. The research will be conducted in compliance with the approved research protocol, applicable institutional ethical requirements, and recognized methodological standards for research involving human participants.

Use and dissemination of findings. The study results will be presented in a doctoral dissertation, disseminated through scientific publications, and presented at conferences, seminars, and other scientific events. Material will be reported in a manner intended to protect participants' identities.

Respect, interpretation, and minimization of harm. The discussion will be facilitated respectfully, interpreters will be expected to observe confidentiality, and participants may request a break. The approved procedure will be followed if distress, safeguarding concerns, or disclosures requiring referral arise.

APPENDIX 3. OBSERVATION CHECKLIST AND FIELD DIARY

Conflict interaction and Ubuntu-informed practices

Researcher.....

Observation code.....

Date.....

Time.....

Location/setting.....

Diary entry no.....

Type of setting: ☐ Community meeting ☐ Mediation ☐ Public interaction ☐ Other:

Consent/authorization confirmed where required: ☐ Yes ☐ Not applicable ☐

Observation stopped

Immediate safety or safeguarding concern: ☐ No ☐ Yes-follow approved procedure

Purpose of the observation record

The diary was meant to document the day's events and any conflicts that required recording during the study.

Daily field Diary

Brief description of what happened that day:

Conflict(s) requiring a checklist record:

☐ None observed ☐ One conflict ☐ More than one conflict (use a separate checklist for each)

Observation check list

1. Who is involved in a conflict? Observed, not observed, not applicable

Evidence.....

2. Is communication respectful? Are people listening or not?

Evidence

3. Is there blaming, accusing, or generalization? Is the “I” used more or less?

Evidence.....

4. Are decisions imposed or negotiated?

Evidence

.....

5. Are there efforts towards mutual understanding?

Evidence.....

6. What solutions have been proposed?

Evidence.....

7. What support may be needed (policies, mediators, or trainers) to prevent such things from happening in the future?

Evidence

.....
.....

Ethical considerations and data protection

Informed consent and authorisation Where required, informed consent and appropriate authorisation must be obtained before the observation begins. Participants should know the study’s purpose, what the observation entails, how the information will be used, and their right to refuse or withdraw without penalty.

Privacy and confidentiality Observations were conducted with respect for the privacy and dignity of all persons involved. Information obtained during the observation was treated as confidential and was not to be shared with unauthorised persons.

Non-interference The researcher should observe without influencing, directing, or becoming involved in the conflict. The researcher should only intervene where the approved safety or safeguarding procedure requires action.

Respect and cultural sensitivity The researcher respected the values, customs, language, beliefs, and dignity of the people being observed without personal bias.

Researcher reflexivity Concrete observations were to be recorded separately from personal interpretations. This was for the researcher to consider how their identity, position, expectations, and relationship with the setting may affect what is observed and recorded.

Ethical approval The observations were conducted in accordance with the approved research protocol, the requirements of the relevant ethics committee, and the policies of the institution or organisation responsible for the study.

Data minimization: Only information that was necessary for the purpose of the study was to be collected. Names, contact details, photographs, audio recordings, and unnecessary identifying details were omitted.

Use of participant codes . Each participant, conflict, location, and observation was identified using a unique code

Reporting and publication. Findings must be reported in a way that does not identify individual participants, families, organizations, or locations. Quotations and descriptions must be anonymized, and identifying details should be removed or changed where necessary.

Data breach: Any loss, unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or destruction of research data must be reported immediately through the approved institutional data-breach procedure.

APPENDIX 4. LIST OF CODES GENERATED FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPTS

This appendix presents the initial codes generated from the analysis of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts. Each code represents a specific idea, experience, practice, perception, or issue identified in the participants' accounts. The items listed here are codes rather than themes. During the subsequent stage of analysis, related codes were compared, interpreted, and grouped into broader categories and themes presented in the findings chapter. The codes are listed individually in this appendix to provide transparency regarding how the thematic findings were developed from the transcribed data.

Code ID	transcript-derived code
C01	Ubuntu as sharing
C02	Ubuntu as togetherness
C03	Ubuntu as community belonging
C04	Ubuntu as Caring
C05	Ubuntu as living together
C06	Ubuntu as eating together
C07	Ubuntu as loving one's neighbour
C08	Refugee-host community conflict
C09	Theft of livestock and crops
C10	Land-related conflicts
C11	Humanitarian Identity ("We are all under one Umbrella")
C12	Domestic violence
C13	Sexual violence
C14	Rape and defilement
C15	Murder
C16	Poverty as a driver of conflict
C17	Economic stress and conflict
C18	Family neglect and failure to provide
C19	Marital instability and infidelity
C20	high refugee population pressure

- C21 assault and physical fighting
- C22 Mob justice
- C23 Host–refugee tensions
- C24 Cross-cultural conflict
- C25 Dispute-escalation pathways
- C26 Crime normalization in high-density settings
- C27 Poverty as a driver of conflict
- C28 Economic stress and conflict
- C29 Family neglect and failure to provide
- C30 Marital instability and infidelity
- C31 High refugee-population pressure
- C32 Role of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID)
- C33 Role of the Child and Family Protection Unit
- C34 Police handling of minor cases
- C35 Intelligence gathering in policing
- C36 Community-policing programmes
- C37 Protection of life and property
- C38 Cross-cultural conflict
- C39 Dispute-escalation pathways
- C40 Crime normalization in high-density settings
- C41 Integration challenges
- C42 Refugee vulnerability and marginalization
- C43 Gendered dimensions of conflict
- C44 Child-protection concerns
- C45 Community-policing programmes
- C46 Protection of life and property
- C47 Security management in refugee settings
- C48 Preventive policing strategies
- C49 Sensitization and awareness creation
- C50 Counselling and reconciliation
- C51 Alternative dispute resolution
- C52 Referral of cases to local leaders
- C53 Use of formal courts
- C54 Early intervention in disputes

- C55 Law-enforcement legitimacy
- C56 Human rights-based policing
- C57 Inclusivity in service provision
- C58 Legal pluralism: interaction between formal and informal systems
- C59 Reliance on informal justice systems
- C60 Informal settlement of serious criminal cases
- C61 Concealment of rape and defilement cases
- C62 Negotiated justice outside the formal legal system
- C63 Community-engagement forums
- C64 Community leadership and mediation
- C65 Rehabilitation through counselling
- C66 Reintegration following conflict resolution
- C67 Conflict prevention through education
- C68 Behavioural change through awareness
- C69 Fear of legal consequences as a deterrent
- C70 Freedom of movement for refugees
- C71 Refugees' adaptation to host-country laws
- C72 Legal sensitization of refugees
- C73 Cultural differences in understanding the law
- C74 Perceived bias in gender-related laws
- C75 Resource constraints in policing
- C76 Limited transport and fuel
- C77 Police personnel shortages
- C78 Decentralized conflict resolution
- C79 Accessibility of justice
- C80 Power dynamics in dispute resolution
- C81 Role of local governance structures, including Refugee Welfare Councils and Local Councils
- C82 Legal equality of refugees under Ugandan law
- C83 Integration of refugees into the national legal system
- C84 Orientation of police officers on refugee management
- C85 Humanitarian coordination framework
- C86 Collaboration with UNHCR and other partners
- C87 Police–community relationship building

- C88 Social-cohesion initiatives
- C89 Community belonging and inclusion
- C90 Multi-agency coordination
- C91 Humanitarian coordination framework
- C92 Collaboration with UNHCR and other partners
- C93 Use of international guidelines
- C94 Application of national policies
- C95 Refugee-identification systems
- C96 Institutional-capacity limitations
- C97. Operational complexity of policing refugee settings
- C98 Local leaders' interference in cases
- C99 Evidence-collection challenges
- C100 Limitations in forensic investigation
- C101 Police–community relationship building
- C102 Social-cohesion initiatives
- C103 Community belonging and inclusion
- C104 Multi-agency coordination
- C105 Institutional-capacity limitations
- C106 Operational complexity of policing refugee settings
- C107 Local leaders' interference in cases
- C108 Evidence-collection challenges
- C109 Limitations in forensic investigation
- C110 Resource Competition
- C111 Changing land agreements
- C112 Role of the Office of the Prime Minister
- C113 Shared Service delivery

APPENDIX 5. GROUPING OF TRANSCRIPT-DERIVED CODES INTO CATEGORIES

Following the initial coding of the interview and focus group discussion transcripts, the individual codes presented in Appendix 4 were compared according to their conceptual similarities and relationships. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories to support the development of themes

The table below shows how all the transcript-derived codes provided in Appendix 4 were organized into related categories. The bold headings represent code groupings or categories rather than the final themes. The subsequent development of themes was based on further interpretation of the relationships within and across these categories.

Table 6 Showing grouping of transcript-derived codes into categories.

Ubuntu and Social Philosophy • Ubuntu as sharing • Ubuntu as togetherness • Ubuntu as community belonging • Mutual understanding • Caring and giving • Loving • Working together • Staying together	Types of Conflict and Crime • Refugee–host community conflict • Theft (livestock and crops) • Land-related conflicts • Domestic violence • Sexual violence • Rape and defilement cases • Murder cases • Assault/fighting • mob justice • Resource competition	Drivers and Causes of Conflict • Poverty as driver of conflict • Family neglect and provision failure • Marital instability and infidelity • Economic stress and conflict linkage • Cross-cultural conflict dynamics • High refugee population pressure • Crime normalization in high-density settings	Policing Structures and Institutional Roles • Crime Investigation Department (CID role) • Child and Family Protection Unit role • Minor case policing (MCP) • Intelligence gathering in policing • Role of the office of the prime minister
Policing Strategies and Approaches • Community policing program • Preventive policing strategies • Early intervention in disputes	Dispute Resolution Mechanisms • Counseling and reconciliation • Alternative dispute resolution • Case referral to local leaders • Use of formal courts	Legal Systems and Justice Frameworks • Legal pluralism (formal and informal systems) • Protection of life and property mandate • Changing land agreements	Community Engagement and Trust Building • Sensitization and awareness creation • Community engagement forums • Building trust through engagement

• Conflict prevention through education • Behavioral change through awareness	• Dispute escalation pathways • Rehabilitation through counseling • Reintegration after conflict resolution	• Refugee legal equality under Ugandan law • Use of international guidelines • Use of national policies • Justice accessibility challenges • Law enforcement legitimacy	• Police-community relationship building • Community distrust or distance from police
Refugee Integration and Inclusion • Refugee integration into legal system • Inclusivity in service provision • Refugees as part of community • Humanitarian identity (“we are all under one umbrella”) • Refugee vulnerability and marginalization • Integration challenges • Social cohesion efforts • Shared service delivery	Governance and Local Leadership • Role of local governance structures (RWC/LC systems) • Decentralized conflict resolution • Community leadership mediation role • Power dynamics in dispute resolution • Local leader interference in cases	Humanitarian and Multi-Agency Coordination • Orientation training for officers on refugee management • Humanitarian coordination framework • Collaboration with UNHCR and partners • Multi-agency coordination • Human rights-based approach	Operational Challenges in Policing • Resource constraints in policing • Limited transport and fuel • Manpower shortages • High population-to-police ratio • Institutional capacity limitations • Operational complexity in refugee policing
Challenges in Justice and Case Handling • Informal settlements of serious crimes • Concealment of cases (rape/defilement)	Legal Awareness and Adaptation • Cultural differences in legal understanding • Legal sensitization of refugees • Refugee adaptation to host country laws	Protection and Vulnerable Groups • Child protection concerns • Gendered dimensions of conflict • Security management in refugee settings	Refugee Rights, Systems, and Administration • Refugee identification systems • Free movement of refugees

• Negotiated justice outside formal system • Evidence collection challenges • Forensic investigation limitations	• Perceived bias in gender laws		
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Source: Researcher's analysis of interview and focus group discussion transcripts.

The analysis began with the generation of initial codes from the interview and focus group transcripts. A complete list of these transcript-derived codes is provided in Appendix 4. The codes were then compared for conceptual similarity and grouped into broader analytical categories, as shown in Appendix 5. These code groupings informed the subsequent development and refinement of the study's themes.

APPENDIX 6. ORGANISATION OF CODES INTO THEMES

The individual codes presented in Appendix 4 were first grouped into analytical categories according to their conceptual relationships, as shown in Appendix 5. These categories were then reviewed, compared and interpreted in relation to the research questions. Through this process, the codes were organized into the seven themes presented in the table below. The table demonstrates the relationship between the transcript derived codes and the themes developed from them. Thus, the themes represent broader patterns of meaning across related codes rather than independent concepts introduced by the researcher.

Table 7 Showing organization of transcript derived codes into major themes

Themes	Codes
Everyday realities of conflicts among refugees and host members	Theft of animals and crops; Land disputes; Resource competition (firewood, land, food); Domestic violence; Poverty-related conflicts; Marriage-related conflicts; Changing land agreements; Assault and fighting; Murder cases; Sexual violence (rape and defilement); Community accusations against refugees; High population pressure; Livelihood struggles
Ubuntu as lived practice	Sharing as Ubuntu; Community care and support; Marriage between refugees and hosts; Treating people equally regardless of status; Seeing individuals as “a person who needs services”; Informal reconciliation practices; Counselling and guidance; Giving comfort to refugees; Inclusion and belonging; Humanitarian attitude towards refugees
Theme 3: Community engagement & trust building	Community policing program; Sensitization meetings; Community engagement sessions; Use of local leaders (RWCs, LCs); Mobilization through community structures; Building relationships with communities; Police-community interaction; Orientation training on refugee handling; Counselling

	services; Reconciliation sessions; Trust-building through dialogue
Theme 4: Pathway for integrating Ubuntu	Strengthening community systems; Sensitization and education; Training of officers on refugee management; Inclusive service provision; Promoting belonging and integration; Encouraging dialogue and interaction; Embedding humanitarian values in practice; Using existing community structures; Encouraging peaceful coexistence
Challenges & constraints for application of Ubuntu	Resource shortages (fuel, logistics); Limited manpower; High population per officer; Interference by local leaders; Hidden/undisclosed cases; Out-of-court settlements undermining justice; Cultural differences; Different legal expectations; Poverty and inequality; Capacity limitations; Institutional weaknesses
Theme 6: Hybrid conflict management system	Use of formal legal systems (courts, police); Informal mediation and reconciliation; Role of RWCs in conflict resolution; Role of local leaders (LCs); Counselling and reconciliation mechanisms; Referral systems (local leaders, courts); Community-based dispute resolution; Police handling of serious crimes; Combination of formal and informal approaches
Institutional and policy framing of conflict management	Following national laws; Use of international protocols; Integration policy (refugees in national plans); Shared service delivery (schools, health centers); Role of Office of the Prime Minister; Role of humanitarian organizations; Alignment with UN guidelines; Legal frameworks for refugees; Free movement policy; Refugee identification systems; Government responsibility for refugee protection

Source: Researcher's analysis of interview and focus group discussion transcripts.

APPENDIX 7. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZATION LETTER -UGANDA. (OPM)



Vision 2040

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

PLOT 9-11 APOLLO KAGGWA ROAD, P.O. BOX 341, KAMPALA, UGANDA
TELEPHONES: General Line 0417 770500, Web: www.opm.go.ug, E-mail: ps@opm.go.ug

In any correspondence on this subject, please quote No: **OPM/R/41/1**

28th July 2025

Ms Doreen Basemera, National ID Card No. CF8001010829UD
University of the National Education Commission in Krakow,
Poland

*Allowed to access
the settlement for
research
James
28-8-25
28-8-25*

Permission to Carry Out Research in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

Reference is made to your letter dated 20th June 2025 regarding the above subject matter.

This is to inform you that permission has been granted to you to carry out research in
Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement for your PhD Study on the title: "UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY:
AN APPROACH FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN REFUGEE SETTLEMENT IN
UGANDA: A CASE OF RWAMWANJA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT from 4th July to
30th August.

You are required to share your findings with Office of the prime Minister by uploading the
report onto the Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring System, Access the system from
OPM website (www.oprn.go.ug) by clicking Refugees Department; Refugee Partner
Engagement;

Publications/studies)

OPM Vision: A Public Sector that is responsive and accountable in steering
Uganda towards rapid economic growth and development.

By copy of this letter, the responsible officers are requested to accord you the necessary assistance and you are requested to observe the rules and regulations governing the refugee settlement and MOH guidelines.



For PERMANENT SECRETARY,

c.c.: Refugee Desk Officer, Mbarara

c.c.: Settlement Commandant, Rwamwänja Refugee Settlement.

APPENDIX 8. INTRODUCTORY LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY

KOMISJA EDUKACJI NARODOWEJ
W KRAKOWIE
Szkoła Doktorska
004 Kraków, ul. Podchorążych 2
tel. 12 662 64 41

UKEN



Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie

Supervisor's introductory and recommendation letter

As a supervisor, I would like to certify the high scientific qualifications and ethically justified research intentions of my doctoral student Basemera Doreen. She proved to be a talented, friendly and hardworking person. Her research has strictly academic orientation and is prepared in accordance with the principles of scientific research methodology;

The future results of this research could give all of us hope for a better understanding of the determinants of the fate and life of refugees, as well as better planning of local Practices and public policies to solve their problems.

Recommending the high scientific and personal value of Doreen Basemera, I kindly ask you to facilitate her access to possible data and organizational resources that will enable her to continue her research well and achieve an optimal results.

Sincerely Yours,

Jacek Sroka, prof. dr hab.
National Education Commission in Kraków, Poland
Institute of Journalism and International Relations
Podchorążych str. 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland
jacek.sroka@uken.krakow.pl

[_WwW.uken.krakow.pl](http://WwW.uken.krakow.pl)

APPENDIX 9 FIELDWORK PHOTOGRAPHS



Focus Group with refugees at base camp 1 (author own photo)



Focus group discussion host community(author own Photo)

Doreen Basemera... imię, nazwisko/ name

Kraków, dnia/date...10.09.26r.....

OŚWIADCZENIE/ DECLARATION Świadomy/a odpowiedzialności oświadczam, że przedłożona rozprawa doktorska pt.: Aware of my responsibility, I declare that the submitted dissertation entitled:

“Ubuntu Philosophy: An approach for conflict Management in Rwamwanja Refugee settlement in Uganda”

jest mojego autorstwa.

is my own creation.

Jednocześnie oświadczam, że w/w rozprawa nie narusza praw autorskich w rozumieniu Ustawy z dnia 4 lutego 1994 roku o prawie autorskim i prawach pokrewnych (Dz.U. z 2021 r. poz. 1062 z późn. zmianami) oraz dóbr osobistych chronionych prawem cywilnym.

At the same time, I declare that the aforementioned dissertation does not infringe upon copyrights within the meaning of the Act of 4 February 1994 on Copyright and Related Rights (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1062, as amended) and personal rights protected by civil law.

Przedłożona praca nie zawiera danych empirycznych ani też informacji, które uzyskałem/am w sposób niedozwolony.

The submitted work does not contain empirical data or information that I have obtained by unauthorised means.

Stwierdzam, iż przedstawiona praca w całości ani też w części nie była wcześniej podstawą żadnej innej urzędowej procedury związanej z zakończeniem kształcenia w szkole doktorskiej.

I certify that the submitted work, in whole or in part, has not previously formed the basis of any other official procedure relating to the completion of training in doctoral school.

...10.09.26r.....

Doreen Basemera.....

Data/date

Podpis doktoranta/ PhD student's signature

...Doreen Basemera Imię, nazwisko/ name

Kraków, dnia/date.10.09.26r.....

OŚWIADCZENIE / DECLARATION

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I, the undersigned, consent/do not consent* to my dissertation being made available in hard
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Krakow 10.09.2026

Doreen Basemera



Data/date

Podpis doktoranta/ PhD student's signature

...Doreen Basemera.....

dnia/date..10.09.26r.....

imię, nazwisko/ name

Kraków,

OŚWIADCZENIE / DECLARATION

o zgodności wersji elektronicznej z wydrukiem

on the conformity of the electronic version with the hard copy

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I, the undersigned*, declare that the electronic version is compatible with the paper version of the dissertation.

Krakow, 10.09.2026

Doreen Basemera



Data/date

Podpis doktoranta/ PhD student's signature