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Navigating Changes: Community Resettlement in Namibia Due to Nkurenkuru's Urban Expansion

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Abstract: This study critically investigates the socio-economic effects of urban expansion and forced relocation on peri-urban communities in Nkurenkuru, Namibia. Urban expansion in middle-income countries often has negative impacts on peri-urban and rural communities. Urban expansion leads to the displacement of such communities, and this study focuses on the socio-economic effects of such urbanization-induced displacement. This study used a qualitative research design, with in-depth interviews to chart the effects of relocation on community life and livelihoods. Findings reveal that before relocation, community members were involved in several land-use-related socio-economic activities. Relocation has worsened their living conditions with a significant drop in household income, financial stability, food security, and their access to vital services. Other findings include insufficient support from municipalities during the relocation process. This study shows the socio-economic repercussions of relocation and the importance of community consultations and participation in the urban expansion process.

Keywords: rural–urban migration; community relocation; livelihoods; urbanization; Namibia

1. Introduction

Urbanization, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, is a dynamic and varied phenomenon. It has both beneficial and adverse effects. It increases the concentration of job options and access to services such as healthcare and education and can improve people's overall quality of life [1,2]. On the other hand, unplanned and uncontrolled urban expansion and sprawl into surrounding rural areas has become a major concern [3].

Over the past few decades, there has been a steady increase in the number of people living in urban areas, with projections indicating that this figure will reach 68% of the global population by 2050 [4]. Rapid rural–urban migration, as well as a natural population increase in urban areas, have been among the key drivers of such urban growth worldwide. Such rapid urbanization can result in inefficient land use and agricultural land loss, and it can strain public services and infrastructure, creating socio-economic inequities [5]. Namibia is no exception to this.

Rural–urban migration has positively impacted intergenerational poverty reduction, particularly for rural populations [6]. Although the proportion of Namibia's population residing in rural areas remains slightly higher than that in urban areas, the latter has been steadily increasing, with a rise of 65.5% recorded between 2011 and 2023 [7]. This trend will continue in the coming decades as more people move to cities and towns, searching for employment and other opportunities. This study investigates the socio-economic consequences of relocation on rural communities. It explores various dimensions such as livelihoods, access to resources, and social networks. Particular attention has been focused on land redistribution, relocation, and compensation, key challenges that Namibia faces in the context of increasing urbanization.

Studying the socio-economic impacts of relocation in an emerging town like Nkurenkuru has allowed the authors to observe and analyze the complex interactions between urbanization, land reform, and social dynamics at an earlier stage of development. This perspective can provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to successful urban growth and the potential pitfalls hindering equitable and sustainable development.

Following this brief introduction, Section 2 examines the current debate on the socio-economic impact of rural community relocation due to expanding urban areas, from both a global and regional perspective. Section 3 discusses the methodology, while Sections 4 and 5 present the results and their analysis. The recommendations mentioned in the Conclusions section complete this article.

2. The Socio-Economic Impact of Relocated Communities

2.1. A Global Perspective

While the specific contexts and experiences of communities in different parts of the world may differ, the existing body of international literature on relocation impacts offers valuable insights and lessons that can be applied to relocated communities in Nkurenkuru and other similar settings in Namibia.

The international literature on the socio-economic impact of the relocation of affected communities due to urban expansion underscores the complex and varied consequences of displacement and resettlement. These have implications for policymaking, planning, and support initiatives to promote the well-being and resilience of affected populations.

A primary finding indicates that displacement will significantly alter traditional means of sustenance at the community level. This affects the overall welfare of affected populations. Research findings from studies in Zimbabwe and Nigeria show reduced access to essential services, education, and employment opportunities resulting from such relocation into the urban boundaries of towns [8]. Furthermore, the loss of social networks and community ties can lead to a decline in social capital, social exclusion, and marginalization [9].

Frequently, members of relocated communities are compelled to face new challenges and adapt to identify alternative economic opportunities [10]. Studies examining resettlement schemes [11] have found that the forced relocation of pastoral communities often results in declines in their traditional livelihoods, increased reliance on food aid, and disruptions to social networks and kinship ties.

Research on the involuntary resettlement of communities due to mining activities in South Africa, ref. [12], indicated substantial negative impacts on socio-economic well-being, including the loss of land, property, and livelihoods and the emergence of social tensions and conflicts related to compensation and resource distribution. Another critical subject that surfaced in scholarly works pertains to the effects of displacement on the availability of public amenities and resources like education, healthcare, water, and sanitation for the relocated communities [13]. Resettlement can create tensions and conflict between newcomers and existing residents [14].

Displacement can lead to considerable stress, trauma, and feelings of loss, negatively impacting mental health and overall well-being [15]. Therefore, it is important to recognize communities' rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Their active involvement can promote local ownership, build trust, and develop context-specific solutions that better address their needs and priorities [16]. Local institutions, through transparent and accountable decision-making processes, can play a pivotal role in ensuring social integration and cohesion among the relocated communities, which can lead to successful assimilation and adaptation to the new environment [17,18]. The role of land reform policies and land tenure security in shaping the experiences of affected populations [19] cannot be underestimated. Insecure land tenure, in fact, exacerbates the vulnerability of relocated communities and limits their access to resources. This constrains their ability to invest in long-term livelihood strategies [20].

2.2. A Namibian Perspective

Land tenure in Africa is primarily governed by customary or traditional practices and legislative policies aimed at enhancing land tenure for farming and promoting agricultural production [21]. This is particularly relevant in Namibia, where communal areas outside towns and cities are classified as rural and owned by the state [22]. The municipalities' need to provide more land to those relocating to cities has resulted in the displacement of rural populations and the loss of their traditional lands. Due to the absence of a clear and transparent compensation mechanism, widespread land grabbing and corruption have had detrimental social and economic implications for the affected communities [23,24].

In Namibia, two primary land tenure systems exist [25]: freehold tenure in urban areas and commercial farms, and customary tenure on communal land, where approximately 1 million people reside [26]. This situation creates significant challenges regarding removal, relocation, and compensation, particularly in the context of growing urbanization. These challenges are further complicated by the complex history of land dispossession and inequality experienced by the population, especially during the colonial and apartheid periods.

After Namibia's political independence in 1990, the government embarked on land reform efforts to address historical injustices and promote more equitable access to land and resources [27]. However, strategies for achieving a unified urban and rural spatial vision were not discussed and developed [28]. Instead, the urban planning system, based on expropriating small-scale communal farms from farmers, was proposed. The implementation of the system has faced delays and obstacles, including mismatches between supply and demand of available land, corruption, and a lack of political will [29]. In addition, compensation for the displaced or relocated due to urban expansion remained a significant concern.

The Namibian Constitution, however, provides for appropriate and equitable compensation in cases where the government seized property for public use. As a result, farmers on communal land have often been removed from the land they farmed to make way for township development and expansion. This removal, nonetheless, has often occurred without compensation. The second National Land Conference, held in 2018, aimed to address the challenges facing both peri-urban and rural areas [30]. It highlighted the government's actions to coordinate the relocation of communities affected by urban expansion [31] and discussed compensation for relocated individuals [32,33].

Examining the integration of relocated groups into Nkurenkuru's social fabric offers insight into the far-reaching ramifications for social cohesion and the creation of inclusive urban environments. It is also essential to understand the role of urban design and policy in achieving equitable outcomes for all residents. Additionally, Nkurenkuru's status as an emerging town underscores its importance as a study site for exploring the socio-economic impacts of relocated communities [34]. As Nkurenkuru transitions from a predominantly rural area to a more urbanized setting, it faces unique challenges and opportunities for development. This transformation presents unique challenges and opportunities for the town's development and for the communities affected by the relocation. Studying the socio-economic impacts of relocation in an emerging town like Nkurenkuru allows researchers to observe and analyze the complex interactions between urbanization, land reform, and social dynamics at an earlier stage of development. This perspective can provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to successful urban growth and highlight potential pitfalls that may hinder equitable and sustainable development.

Nkurenkuru, at the time of the establishment of the Kavango West region, was the only recognized town. The region lacked a central market area for community economic activities. Consequently, it was anticipated that Nkurenkuru would expand further. Since then, the region has experienced rapid urbanization and growth, primarily driven by rural–urban migration and economic development. The town's location along the Kavango River provides opportunities for agriculture, fishing, and various sectors reliant on natural resources. Its proximity to Angola further contributes to the factors driving migration

and relocation processes. The rapid urbanization and expansion of towns in the region, particularly Nkurenkuru, have increased the demand for land for urban development and infrastructure projects [35]. This growth has placed immense pressure on communal land, compelling the relocation of traditional communities residing in these areas to accommodate urban expansion and economic initiatives. Consequently, there has been a rise in demands for land and resources, leading to significant challenges and conflicts over land ownership, usage, and development. This situation has prompted the displacement of communities living on the outskirts of the town to make way for the expanding urban area [36].

The decision to relocate communities was driven by the need to accommodate the rapid urbanization and expansion of Nkurenkuru. As the town grew, the demand for land increased, prompting local authorities to prioritize urban development over the preservation of the existing communal land holdings. The trade-off between urban growth and the protection of traditional land rights has resulted in the displacement of these communities, with far-reaching social, economic, and cultural implications.

Residents within the Nkurenkuru constituency were presented with two options in accordance with the Compensation Policy guidelines for Communal Land [37]. Option 1 was to remain and integrate into the Nkurenkuru town area. Option 2 involved receiving compensation for both their mahangu fields and homesteads, allowing them to relocate to a new site identified by the municipality, ideally, and subject to availability, of similar size to the land they lost. Choosing to be integrated required residents to modify their existing homes to meet municipal standards, in addition to taking on new financial responsibilities such as rates and taxes. Given the financial constraints faced by these communities, the prospect of adapting their homes and assuming these additional financial obligations effectively coerced many affected residents into relocating instead of being absorbed into the town. This decision was also based on the general assumption that they would receive adequate assistance to restart their lives elsewhere, as has often been promised in other instances of relocation elsewhere in the country [38].

According to the records from the Nkurenkuru Town Council, residents received compensation ranging from NAD 6520 to NAD 970,000, most of which was used to construct their new houses and start a small business.

This relocation came at a significant cost to the communities, as they had to abandon the land that had sustained them through agricultural activities for many years. The loss of this ancestral land, which had been the foundation of their livelihoods, represented a heavy burden for these communities.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Overall Methodology

This paper utilized a qualitative research design, which the researchers considered most appropriate for capturing a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals displaced from community lands [39]. An inductive technique was employed, meaning that the development of the explanatory theory was deferred until after data collection and analysis. This strategy allowed the researchers to remain open to discovering new concepts and connections leading to the construction of the theory [40]. By engaging with the subjective experiences of the participants and examining the dynamics of the social environment [41], the researchers were able to gain deeper insights into the complexities and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.2. Research Population and Sampling

The study population was based on Nkurenkuru's constituency, which had 15,887 residents [7]; purposive sampling was used to identify the participants, and data saturation was used to determine the number of participants [42]. A total of 16 participants who had first-hand experience with the effects of relocation were selected for this study. They were invited to share their thoughts and experiences regarding their lives before

and after the move, as well as the socio-economic consequences of the relocation process. These data enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the complex repercussions of relocation on the well-being and livelihoods of those directly affected as well as their families.

In addition to the 16 relocated individuals, four key institutional informants from the constituency were interviewed—two delegates from the Regional Council and two members of the town council. This approach aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relocation process and its underlying reasons. The informants shared valuable insights into the decision-making processes, the implementation of resettlement strategies, and the support systems established to facilitate the relocation.

3.3. Research Location

The Kavango West region of Namibia, where this case study is located, is in the northeastern part of the country. It covers an area of 24,592 km^2 and consists of eight constituencies, namely Mpungu, Nkurenkuru, Tondoro, Musese, Kapako, Ncuncuni, Ncamagoro, and Mamkupi (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Kavango West constituency demarcation (2024) Source: [43].

This region was demarcated in 2013 when the Kavango region was divided into East and West, with Nkurenkuru designated as its capital (Nkurenkuru is both the capital of the region and one of the 8 constituencies). A significant portion of the Kavango West region consists of communal areas [44–46] and has a predominantly rural character. Communal lands are vital for the livelihoods of their inhabitants, who depend on crop cultivation and livestock rearing for both subsistence and sale in local markets.

The capital is strategically located alongside the Kavango River, connecting Kavango West with Kavango East, Ohangwena, and Oshikoto regions, as well as providing access via the Katwitwi border post to the densely populated Kwando Kubango Province in Angola. Currently over 64% of the population in Nkurenkuru's constituency—equivalent to 10,261 individuals—now resides in the capital (Table 1).

Table 1. Population distribution by constituency (2023).

Kavango West Constituencies	Pop 2023	Area km²	Persons per km²
Ncamagoro	8449	5044	1.7
Mpungu	21,098	7977	2.6
Mankumpi	6910	2339	3.0
Tondoro	18,497	4916	3.8
Ncuncuni	10,943	1397	7.8
Musese	13,659	1423	9.6
Kapako	27,823	1224	22.7
Nkurenkuru	15,887	272	58.4
Total Population	123,266		

Source: author's elaboration from [7].

Those who opted to relocate were moved to Mayara, a reception area located on the outskirts of Nkurenkuru (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Nkurenkuru urban expansion; the red cirlce indicate the are were the people initially resided; the green rectangle area the place where they have been relocated. source: Nkurenkuru Town Council.

3.4. Methods of Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews served as the primary method for gathering qualitative data from participants. This approach allowed researchers to build rapport, encouraging participants to share their experiences and perspectives more openly. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment where participants felt at ease discussing sensitive or personal issues related to the research question. The questioning style, pace, and focus were adjusted according to the dynamics of each interaction, leading to more engaging and productive conversations. This adaptability resulted in more exciting and productive interviews because participants felt more valued and respected when their particular needs and preferences were considered. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the interviews.

The interviews were conducted from April to May 2023 at the Mayara reception area in Nkurenkuru, Kavango West Region. An interview guide was used, and it was pre-tested

on five participants to ensure its effectiveness and clarity. Based on the feedback from the pre-testing, relevant adjustments were made to the questionnaire to enhance its overall quality and relevance [47]. Interviews were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter for participants who did not speak English. This precaution was taken to guarantee that the participants could freely express themselves in their native language and that their thoughts were communicated accurately [48]. Each interview lasted approximately 45 min, allowing for in-depth discussions and analysis of the participants' perspectives. The interviews were recorded, and detailed notes were taken to ensure that no critical insights were overlooked in the process.

3.5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify initial patterns and prospective themes within the data [49]. This method involved systematically coding the data by assigning labels to key segments of text, which facilitated the organization and categorization of the material. This coding technique helped in developing prominent themes that accurately reflected the patterns within the data.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Data of the Research Population

Face-to-face interviews with the selected participants provided valuable insights into the community's experiences before and after relocation, while officials offered an understanding of the processes involved in the relocation and the provision of services. Before describing the findings, it is essential to present the empirical setting of the informal settlement selected for this study.

The local population heavily relies on the resources of the Kavango River, with subsistence farming serving as their primary source of income [46]. Mayara, where this empirical study was conducted, was a rural area bordering Nkurenkuru before it was designated as a town. As such, it was identified as a potential site for Nkurenkuru's expansion and for relocating communities [50]. Several key insights can be drawn from the demographic characteristics of the first group of participants who underwent relocation (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' demographic (people relocated).

Code	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Employment Status	Household Composition	Land Used Before Relocation
P 1	F	38	Gr12	No	CP	Yes
P 2	F	44	Gr10	Self employed	NF	Yes
P 3	F	33	Gr10	None	EF	Yes
P 4	F	30	Gr10	None	CP	Yes
P 5	M	52	Gr7	None	EF	Yes
P 6	M	36	Diploma	None	NF	Yes
P 7	F	58	None	Self employed	MGH	Yes
P 8	F	63	None	None	MGH	Yes
P 9	F	67	None	None	MGH	Yes
P 10	M	55	None	Self employed	MGH	Yes
P 11	F	58	None	None	MGH	Yes
P 12	M	61	None	Self employed	MGH	Yes
P 13	M	65	None	None	MGH	Yes
P 14	M	42	Gr9	None	MGH	Yes
P 15	F	47	Gr3	None	MGH	Yes
P 16	F	51	Gr5	Self employed	MGH	Yes

Legend: CP = cohabiting partners; NF = nuclear family; EF = extended family; MGH = multi-generational household.

The age range of the participants is quite broad, spanning from 30 to 67 years, suggesting that the relocation process has impacted individuals at various life stages, including

those in their prime working years and those approaching retirement. This diversity highlights the importance of addressing the specific needs and challenges that participants face at different points throughout the relocation process. Participants also exhibit a wide range of educational backgrounds, ranging from Grade 3 to Grade 12, with a few individuals having obtained a diploma.

Their employment status is similarly varied; some participants are self-employed, reflecting entrepreneurial activity or independent work, while others are unemployed. The household composition of the participants varies significantly, encompassing different family arrangements such as nuclear families, cohabiting partnerships, extended families, and multi-generational households. This diversity in household structures underscores the need to consider the unique needs and dynamics of various family types during the relocation process. Understanding household composition can inform decision-making regarding housing, infrastructure, and support systems. Lastly, all participants had utilized the land prior to relocation, suggesting a former connection with it. This commonality implies that the relocation process has involved individuals who were familiar with and had a history of interaction with the land.

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the officials participating in this study who were involved in the relocation process.

Table 3. Participants' demographic (officials).

Code	Gender	Age	Level of Education	RC/TC	Years of Experience with Relocation Policies
OP 1	F	38	Gr12	No	CP
OP 2	F	44	Gr10	Self employed	NF
OP 3	F	33	Gr10	None	EF
OP 4	F	30	Gr10	None	CP

Legend: TC = Town Council; RC = Regional Council.

The table includes information on their gender, age, level of education, and the number of years they have worked in the specific department related to relocation.

The average age of the participants is approximately 36 years, reflecting a relatively diverse range of experiences and perspectives. The diversity in educational backgrounds contributes a variety of expertise and knowledge to the relocation process, potentially enhancing the decision-making. Additionally, the range of experience levels suggests a mix of seasoned officials and relatively newer members within the group.

From the first set of interviews, three significant themes emerged: (i) communities' involvement in socio-economic activities, (ii) the impact of relocation on community life and livelihoods, and (iii) assistance dynamics in transitional displacement, which were identified through discussions with the relocated informants.

Two additional themes, (iv) the process of relocation and (v) service provision in the new area, were generated from the responses of the official participants.

Overall, these five themes shed light on the various aspects related to the relocation process, its effects on community life and livelihoods, and the support provided during and after the relocation.

4.2. Communities' Involvement in Socio-Economic Activities

The first theme that emerged from the participants' narrative highlights the effective participation of communities in socio-economic activities prior to the relocation process, utilizing local resources such as land, livestock, and other natural resources.

It appears that most participants indicated that they were involved in socio-economic activities either on communal land or in the nearby town.

> "...we enjoyed the privilege of cultivating land; it was a different era. But now, oh my, the suffering and poverty we experience are agonising" (P7).

This sentiment is echoed by Participants 1 and 5, who noted that prior to the relocation, they had access to information that enabled them to secure job opportunities, which played a critical role in sustaining their livelihoods, in addition to crop and livestock farming:

> *"Before the relocation, we had ownership of cultivating areas, livestock, and access to informal jobs in Town"* (P1).

> *"In the days when we owned cultivable land, livestock, and opportunities for informal jobs in town, life was different. We could easily find work as cleaners or garden boys."* (P5).

Other participants highlighted that their proximity to the river allowed them to fish easily, generating additional income to help cover additional household expenses:

> *"We were involved in crop farming, my mother also had a vegetable garden, and we used to fish"* (P4).

> *"I had crop fields and used to sell fish by the roadside, especially for tourists; here we are isolated by everything."* (P15).

Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of property ownership and the sense of fulfillment it provided.

They expressed that owning land not only contributed to their economic stability but also fostered a sense of belonging and accomplishment that was crucial for their overall well-being.

> *"I could do so much when I had my land, and also just the sense of owning a vital asset just brings so much joy to me, but I cannot say the same now because life is tough"* (P9).

> *"In the past, when we had the rights to cultivate the land, raise livestock, life had a different flavour."* (P11).

4.3. The Impact of Relocation on Community Life and Livelihoods

The narratives of displaced communities provide a sobering insight into the profound impact of relocation on community life and livelihoods. Participants constantly express deep sorrow and sadness, highlighting the difficult economic conditions and extreme poverty they now face as a result of leaving their homeland.

When asked about how relocation affected their ways of life, participants conveyed strong feelings of regret and despair; Participant 1 shared a poignant reflection on the aftermath of relocation, illustrating the emotional and practical challenges they now endure:

> *"Oh, dear! I cannot believe the immense regret I feel for relinquishing my land. It is by far the worst decision I have made in my life. Our current circumstances are dire, and we find ourselves in extreme poverty. Making a living has become an overwhelming challenge".*

Participant 3 echoed this sentiment, expressing regret and the hardships they face:

> *"Goodness, gracious! The decision to give up my land weighs heavily on my heart. I never anticipated the immense difficulties we would face. Our lives are consumed by extreme poverty, and our suffering knows no bounds".*

These accounts portray a harrowing picture of regret and hardship following the decision to relocate, emphasizing the struggles with poverty and the challenges of adapting to their new circumstances. This sentiment is clearly expressed in the narratives shared by Participant 6.

> *"Oh gosh! The decision to relinquish my land haunts me constantly. I never anticipated the hardships that would follow. We are now trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty, and our suffering seems never-ending"*, (P6).

Regarding their current situation after relocation, while most of the participants revealed that continuing with their livelihoods has been challenging, some noted that they had sought alternative sources of income.

"I have a cuca-shop (A Cuca store is a Southern African word for a "Shebeen", an unauthorised establishment that sells alcoholic beverages and some essential household groceries, mostly in informal locations [51].) which I opened with the bit of money I got from my previous land", (P2).

On the other hand, some participants rely on financial support from family members while others attempt to sustain themselves through government assistance in the form of social grants:

"I am unemployed, and my uncle and brothers who live in Windhoek used to send us money to survive; sometimes I am called to clean people's houses but the distance and taxi costs are a lot", (P3).

"Me, I am unemployed and have grandchildren to look after; the only source of income is the social grants, N$1400 on a monthly basis to cater for a family of 25 people", (R8).

This reliance on external support highlights the precarious nature of their current circumstances, as many have found it difficult to regain their previous livelihoods. The financial aid they receive is often crucial for meeting basic needs, but it may not be sufficient to fully restore their sense of stability and independence.

Concerning access to essential services, most participants voiced their dissatisfaction. They lamented the poor state of these services, highlighting their decline compared to the past:

"The quality of services like schools, clinics, and police has significantly declined compared to the past. Moreover, the absence of street lights has made crime rampant, becoming a daily occurrence. Additionally, our children must endure long walks to reach their schools" (P1).

This total lack of basic facilities was also evidenced by Participant 10:

"Here, there are no services; imagine considering that we do not even have toilets; what if a snake bites you, the response will take forever".

The financial impact of the relocation on participants was overwhelmingly negative. Many reported a significant reduction in their incomes following the move, with the lack of available land for cultivation cited as a major contributing factor:

"... imagine having just one person to work it is not easy, at least if we have had cultivating areas, I could be in the field to help out my boyfriend" (P1), and:

"Household income has reduced because we are not even allowed crop fields here" (P14).

One particularly poignant account came from a struggling business owner, who expressed frustration over declining profits attributed to decreased spending within the community. As noted by Participant 7, this drop in consumer activity has not only affected individual businesses but has also contributed to a broader economic downturn in the area:

"Things are not the same even me with a business. The profits are not good because people do not have money to spend".

This situation underscores the interconnectedness of livelihoods within the community, where the loss of agricultural opportunities and financial stability has ripple effects that extend beyond individual families to impact local businesses and the overall economy. Without farming, the ability to feed families became a significant challenge, and many participants reportedly ate less frequently, with some families even eating just once a day:

"Access to a good meal is not the same, now we can even eat once a day; we fear they might get sick" (P3).

Children were the most affected by the relocation; in addition to the health implications of frequently attending school on empty stomachs, they also exhibited decreased academic performance in school. One participant emphasized that

"Children are the biggest victims because they go to school on an empty stomach, and when they come back, they just drink water, and their first meal is dinner; they are not even performing well at school" (P5).

The relocation of residents has also affected their ability to participate in local cultural events such as the Uukwangali festival. This festival serves as a platform for the Uukwangali community to come together, share historical memories, and preserve their cultural heritage. When participants were asked about the impact of relocation on their participation in such events, they emphasized that the associated travel expenses had made attendance more costly.

Despite these challenges, many expressed a strong desire to participate in the festival, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining cultural ties and community connections. Their efforts to attend, even when faced with financial barriers, reflect the importance of these events in fostering a sense of belonging and cultural identity within the community.

4.4. Assistance Dynamics in Transitional Displacement

This third theme explores the types and quality of assistance provided by local authorities to communities during and after displacement. This support typically includes the provision of essential services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and safety. However, participants in this study expressed significant dissatisfaction with the assistance offered, particularly by the Town Council. While water and power were generally available at the new sites, access to water was limited to community taps, which were subject to charges. In contrast, a comprehensive sanitation system was notably absent, forcing residents to adopt unhealthy practices that raised safety concerns, especially for women and children. Additionally, poor road conditions and limited network connectivity further contributed to the overall dissatisfaction with the support provided.

Participants 1 and 4 succinctly remarked on the situation, stating there was *"only water and electricity."*, with Participant 3 adding that

"Even the water, we do not have taps in our yards but from the communal one, and the communal one even used to finish at times."

Participant 14 also lamented that

"Water is provided, but we pay for it at the Town Council, and I am not even working."

Several participants reported a complete absence of sanitation services, forcing them to resort to using the bushes. The lack of proper sanitation services has raised serious safety concerns, especially for women and children.

Regarding the support provided during relocation, all participants stated that they *"...only received the money* [for the relocation]" (P1 to P16).

This theme exposes the harsh reality faced by displaced communities struggling with limited and inadequate assistance, which has severe consequences for their quality of life. When asked about their feelings regarding the relocation decision, participants expressed significant regret and disappointment. The prevailing sentiment was one of profound dissatisfaction, with many feeling that this decision was one of their worst experiences.

4.5. Officials' Responses as per the Themes Emerged

Two themes emerged from the conversation with the Town Council and Regional Council officials, which were *(i) the process of relocation and (ii) service provision in the new area.*

4.5.1. The Process of Relocation

The officials provided clear justifications for relocating communities, pointing to development purposes and economic advancement as the primary motivations.

One official (OP1) asserts that the communities were relocated to facilitate the town's development:

"The communities were relocated due to development purposes considering that there was a need, and there is still a need, to develop Nkurenkuru."

Another official elaborated on the options presented to the residents, explaining that

"Residents could be absorbed within the Nkurenkuru town and build permanent structures or compensated to go and start fresh in the relocated areas." (OP2).

The majority of residents opted for this latter option, as indicated by the official:

". . .they could not afford to build permanent structures as per the Town Council regulations." (OP2).

This situation underscores the critical role that economic circumstances and policies play in transitional displacement, often compelling individuals to make decisions that further exacerbate their socio-economic challenges.

Officials also provided insight into the legal ownership of land at the new location, emphasizing that residents did not possess secure title deeds.

"Residents do not have title deeds, they have certificates, and need to consult the Town Council for confirming sizes and obtaining title deeds", (OP2 and OP1).

This absence of secure ownership significantly impacts access to resources, the ability to construct permanent structures, and opportunities for economic development, all of which ultimately affect the socio-economic situation of the resettled communities. Without title deeds, residents cannot fully access resources or invest in their properties, which can hinder their long-term stability and growth.

In discussing the role of local governance in this context, officials noted that the Town Council bore primary responsibility for overseeing the relocation process. However, their support was limited to financial compensation and the allocation of plots, leaving residents to manage other aspects of the relocation on their own. One official stated:

"The Town Council provided financial compensation and provision of ravens, with no logistical support." (OP2).

Furthermore, the officials also expressed frustration over the lack of involvement from the Regional and Constituency Council, feeling that these bodies should have played a central role in the decision-making process. As one official remarked:

"We feel they [Town Council] *were also supposed to involve the Regional and Constituency Council, it is us that programme on sanitation provision, and if we are not involved, it is difficult to plan for the people needs accordingly."* (OP4).

This statement underscores the necessity for more comprehensive engagement and collaboration among different levels of governance to better address community needs, particularly regarding sanitation, during relocation processes.

4.5.2. Service Provision at the New Area

Regarding the provision of services at a new location, the officials indicated that

"We only provided them with water, but the ones who have money were able to construct septic tanks for themselves." (OP1), and

"We provided them with water and electricity and the main road has a good gravel road for accessibility." (OP2).

These statements corroborate the participants' narrative that while water and electricity were provided, sanitation services were lacking. This situation places a significant burden on residents who cannot afford to build their own septic tanks, creating potential health hazards for the community and the public at large.

5. Discussion

This study's findings confirm that prior to relocation, residents were actively engaged in crop and livestock farming as well as horticulture activities, which served as a source of livelihood for the family. This aligns with results presented in [52]. Similarly, this study revealed that the relocation led to the loss of access to natural resources, reduced income-generating opportunities, and increased vulnerability to food insecurity, echoing the conclusion of [53]. Furthermore, the findings support [18], who indicated that the forced relocation of pastoral communities resulted in a decline in traditional livelihoods, increased reliance on food aid, and disruptions to essential social networks and kinship ties that are crucial for resilience and well-being.

This study further found that village members were no longer permitted to own agricultural land or raise cattle, making their way of life extremely difficult, pushing many into abject poverty. The narratives from the resettled individuals highlight the challenges they face in securing employment in the new location due to lack of information. This reiterates the findings of [54], who showed that forced migration reduces access to information and limits career possibilities.

Additionally, this study provided a nuanced evaluation of public service delivery. Participants indicated that while water points and electricity were provided, they often had to pay for access to these services. In line with the findings of [55], a significant majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction and frustration regarding their access to essential services such as schools, clinics, and police protection. This discontent further exacerbates the community's vulnerability and sense of insecurity.

These results are supported by the existing literature, which indicates that relocated communities usually face challenges in securing adequate shelter, accessing essential services, and maintaining social connections. These difficulties can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities and disparities [56,57]. However, contrary to the finding of [58], this study revealed that the relocation had minimal impact on the community's social interactions and networks, as most of their neighbors remained in the area.

The findings also indicate that the community required substantial support from local authorities during the relocation process; however, neither the regional council nor the constituency office was involved. The two bodies only provided financial assistance, leaving residents to arrange their own transportation and clean up the area by themselves. Additionally, the issue of land tenure security becomes apparent as relocated communities may face increased vulnerabilities, including reduced access to resources and limitations on their ability to invest in long-term livelihood strategies [20].

As a result, the residents felt misled when they saw houses being built on their land instead of the malls, as they had been promised. It was particularly frustrating that the community was neither mentally nor physically prepared for the relocation.

The inadequate support provided to the community during the relocation process is consistent with findings from other studies that highlight shortcomings in the planning and implementation of forced relocations [59–61]. These studies underline the need for improved communication, transparency, and community engagement in relocation processes to foster more positive outcomes [62]. This perspective is echoed by [63], who suggest that a multi-stakeholder approach is essential for enabling responsive and comprehensive planning amid urban transformations.

This study underscored that the complexities of community relocation, such as those experienced in Nkurenkuru, constitute a complicated balancing act involving developmental progress, socio-economic adjustments, and sociocultural changes. Residents of Nkurenkuru endured significant economic hardships due to rising living costs and new municipality regulations that led to relocation. This echo [64] remarks that urban development programs can damage communities' social fabric and livelihoods, underlining the importance of considering social and cultural factors alongside economic objectives. The issue of land ownership exemplifies the challenges associated with urban transformations. Although Nkurenkuru households possess certificates, they lack formal legal title docu-

ments, creating uncertainty about their ownership status, hindering access to resources and economic advancement. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing the necessity of addressing legal issues, particularly regarding land ownership, in community relocation initiatives [65].

Furthermore, the role of governance and institutional capacity in managing relocation processes significantly affects the experiences of displaced communities [24,57]. Well-designed governance structures, policies, and legal frameworks are essential for mitigating the adverse effects of displacement and promoting more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes for uprooted communities [66]. By prioritizing strong governance and community engagement, policymakers can create a supportive environment that enhances resilience and promotes social cohesion among displaced populations. The effectiveness of these governance mechanisms can determine how well the needs of displaced individuals are addressed, ultimately influencing their ability to adapt to new circumstances and rebuild their lives.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to evaluate the socio-economic impacts of displacement in Nkurenkuru's communal peri-urban areas as a result of town expansion. The findings revealed a significant decline in the relocated community's living conditions and access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and security. This deterioration was exacerbated by a decrease in household income, financial stability, and food security, primarily due to the loss of agricultural land, livestock, and informal employment opportunities. This research highlighted the limited role of local government in providing assistance, noting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by relocated communities in emerging towns like Nkurenkuru. In these areas, the provision of basic infrastructure and public services such as water supply, sanitation, healthcare, and education is still in development. Therefore, based on these findings, future relocation efforts should focus on strengthening community awareness, ensuring the provision of essential services, improving sanitation facilities, and incorporating key stakeholders in decision-making processes and dialogues.

These measures aim to mitigate the negative impacts of relocation and support the displaced communities in adapting to their new environments.

This study serves as a stepping stone towards a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic implications of community relocation and land redistribution within the broader context of sustainable development. It contributes to the discourse on the role of governance and institutional capacity in managing land reform initiatives. The insights gained in this context can inform the design and implementation of land policies in other countries facing similar land-related challenges.

From a policy perspective, this research emphasizes the necessity for a more inclusive and participatory approach to resettlement and urban development planning. Policymakers must engage with communities at every stage of the resettlement process, from planning and implementation to post-resettlement support. This engagement ensures that the concerns and needs of affected communities are addressed, safeguarding their rights and well-being.

While this study focused on Nkurenkuru as a unique case, future research could explore the experiences of relocated communities in other peri-urban areas to provide a more complete picture of the socio-economic consequences of relocation. Longitudinal studies could also offer a deeper assessment of the long-term consequences of relocation on impacted populations and identify factors that contribute to successful or unsuccessful adaptation to new living conditions. Adopting a human rights-based approach to displacement and resettlement can help address the challenges associated with relocation, ensuring that the rights and needs of affected communities remain central to policy and planning processes. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize the significance of social capital and networks in determining the resilience and adaptation capacity of relocated communities. Given the narratives provided by both officials and community participants, further

research is needed to investigate whether gender-specific vulnerabilities are prevalent in Nkurenkuru.

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