



Displacement, Food Insecurity, and Loss of Traditional Ecological Knowledge among the Batwa of Southwestern Uganda

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Introduction

The Indigenous **Batwa communities** in southwestern Uganda have traditionally been hunter-gatherers and have deep ecological knowledge (Hamilton et al., 2016). With the creation of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park leading to their **forced eviction** from traditional lands without compensation in the 1990s. They have since been **denied virtually all access to the forest**, barring them from access to traditional foods and medicines, and disrupting their spiritual connection to the land (Bryson et al., 2024).

Objective

This research aims to explore the relationship between the forced eviction of the Batwa people and its effects on traditional ecological knowledge and status on food security. The study compares **generational and gender-based differences** in the retention and transformation of food practices, highlighting the perspectives of elders, youth, men, and women.

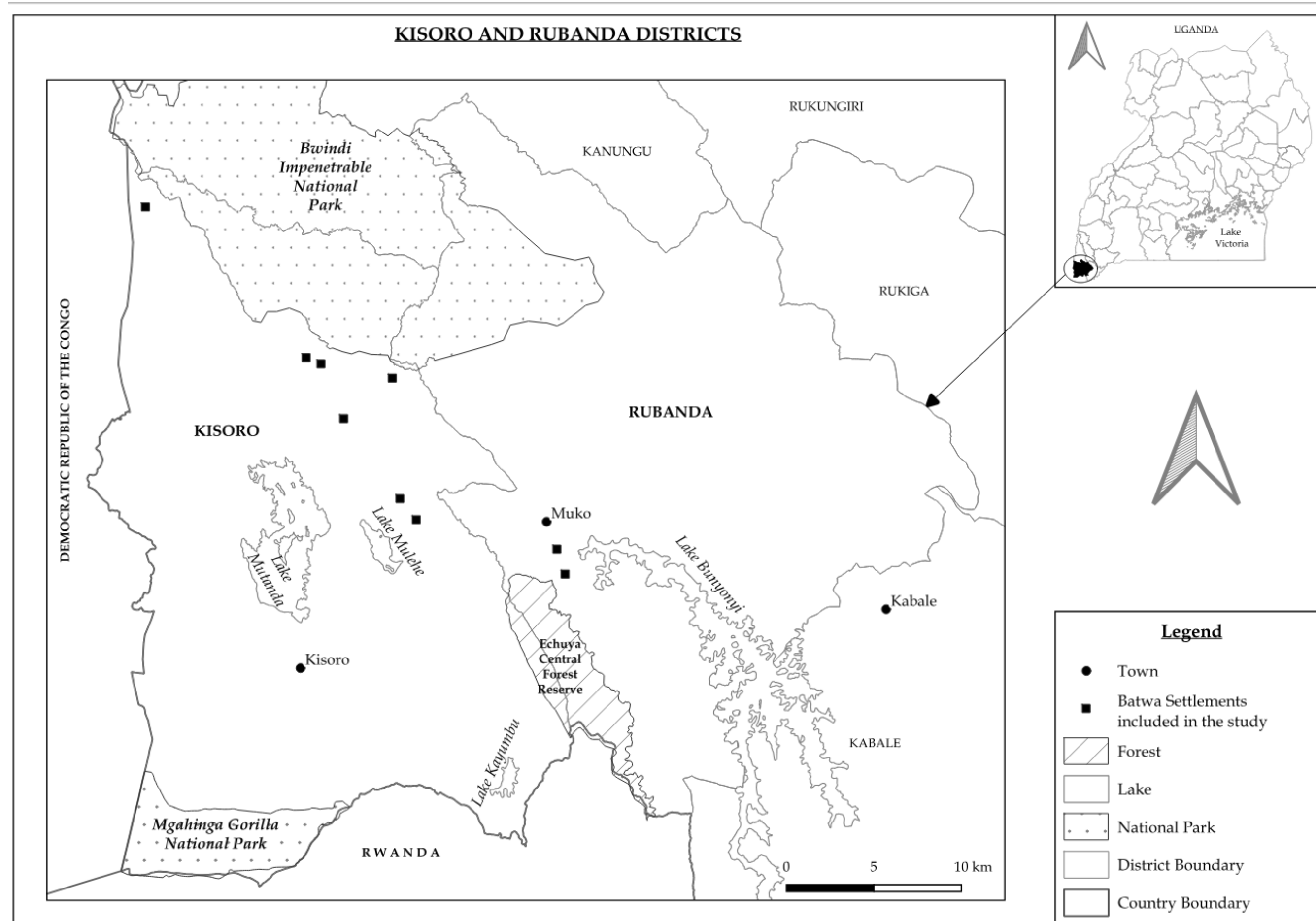
Methodology

Design: Mixed-method study (4 key informant interviews, 67 structured household surveys, and participant observations)

Study area: Kisoro and Rubanda districts, southwestern Uganda

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and WFP Food Consumption Score (FCS) using standard food-group weights and thresholds

Location



Results

Self-reported access to sufficient food
1.8/5 men | 1.3/5 women
1 = very low | 5 = very high

75% depend on casual labour

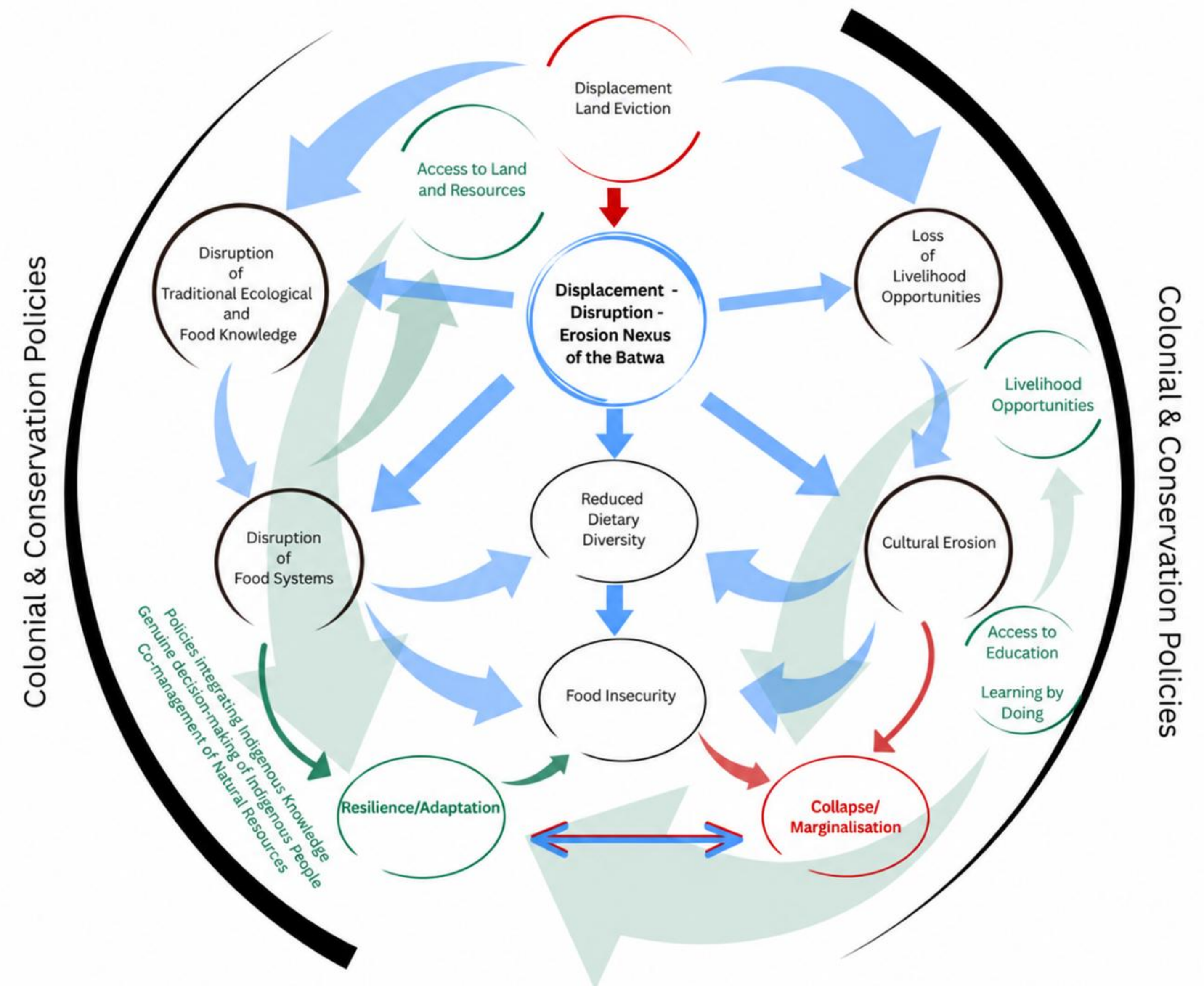
93% do not legally own land

60% had poor or borderline Food Consumption Scores

Traditional knowledge transmission:
0% under 20 | 31% aged 20–39 | 58% aged 40+

86% of men | 72% of women believed forest access would improve food security

Conceptual Framework



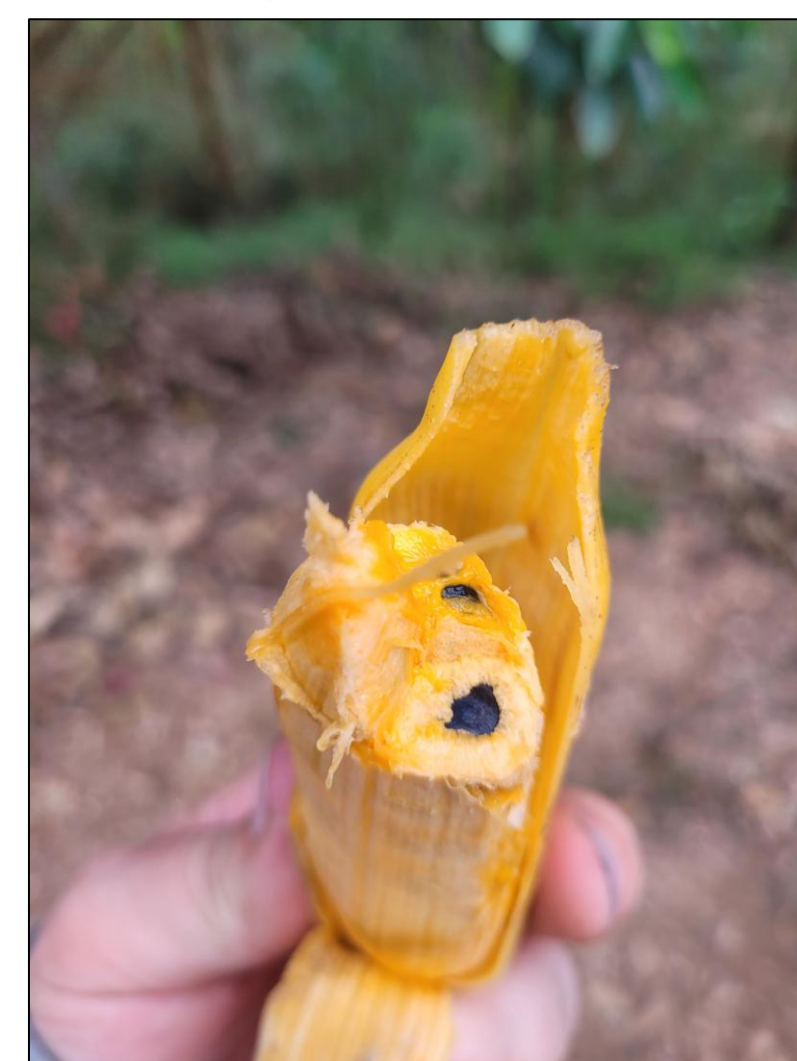
Conceptual model of displacement, food system disruption, and cultural erosion of the Batwa

Results – cont.

“You can crush the seeds of the wild banana and make flour from it, to make bread” (M,75y)

“If I could get into the forest, I could get wild yams and other foods, and when I go to the Bakiga, I can get other foods that would give me access to plenty of food” (F,18y)

"I don't see any knowledge available about the traditional food of the forests, but they [external institutions] are just making us join this modern life, and yet we don't have money" (F,58y)



Ensete Ventricosum (Wild Banana)

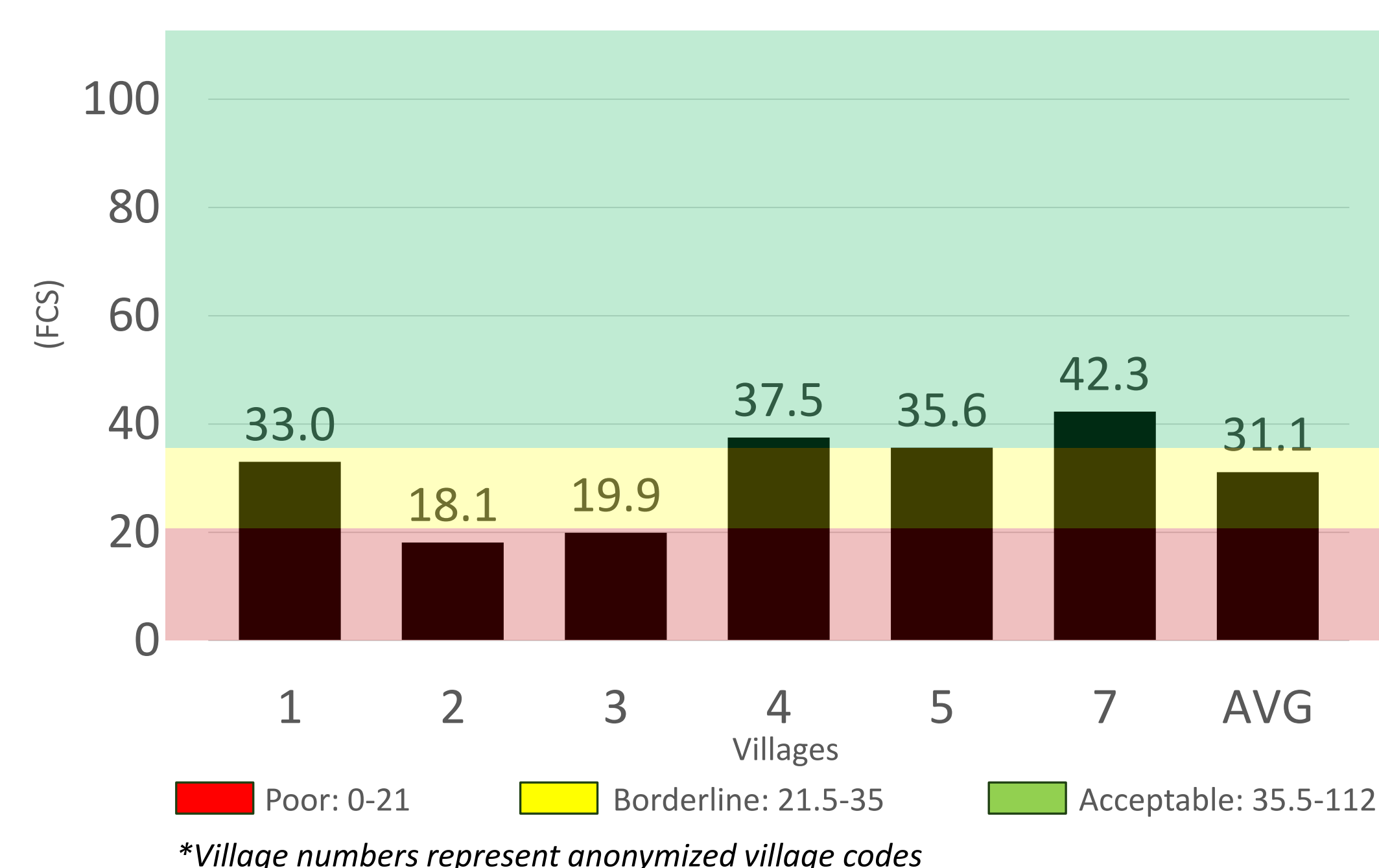


Dioscorea - Ebihama and Ebikwa, (Wild Yams)

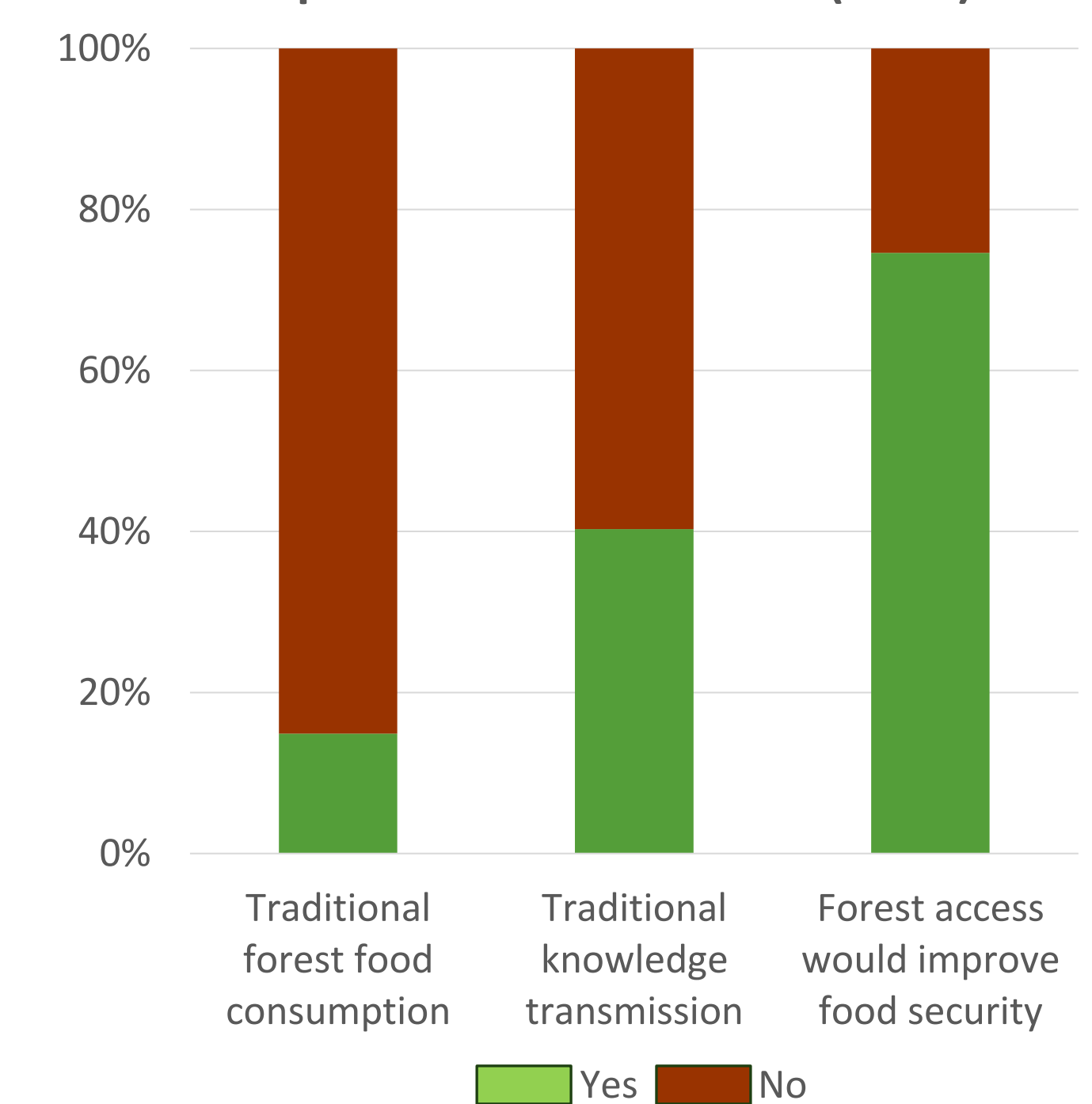


Kashiya Batwa village agriculture project supported by BIDO

Mean Food Consumption Score (FCS) by Village



Traditional Food Practices and Perceptions of Forest Access (n=67)



Conclusion

- Conservation-driven displacement has disrupted Batwa food systems, increased dependence on casual labour, and weakened connections to traditional food practices.
- Dependence on casual labour and purchased food has increased household vulnerability to food shortages.
- Generational differences suggest that traditional ecological knowledge is at risk of further decline without opportunities for practical learning and engagement with traditional food systems.
- Restoring meaningful access to land and forest resources could support both nutritional outcomes and cultural revitalisation.

Acknowledgment

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