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RESILIENCE AND REFUGE AND THE LIVES OF LIBERIAN REFUGEES IN ORU CAMP, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The slave trade and colonialism between Africa and the outside world led to exploitation and population loss, especially among the active population, which resulted in series of inter-ethnic wars and undermined leadership in African institutions. Africans involved in protracted rivalries as a result of the unholy marriage of ethnic groups by former colonial powers. Armed conflicts have resulted in people fleeing their countries and seeking refuge abroad. For most refugees, life is humiliating. Rivalry between the indigenous and the Americo-Liberian people plunged the country into a decade-long armed conflict. Because of the conflict, scores of children have become orphans, internally displaced, and thousands became refugees. The neighbouring west African countries were overburdened with stranded refugees' but with the aid of the Red Cross Society and the Nigerian government, host of the Liberian refugees were recognised for support. This paper examines the life and administration of Liberian refugees in Oru Camp in Ogun State, Nigeria. Oral interviews and ethnographic fieldwork combined with secondary literature are the qualitative methods the researcher adopted to articulate the subject matter. It concludes that the refugees received social recognition, protection and economic support from their host government, donor organisations, and harmonious reception from the host community. Yet, some of the Liberian refugees chose not to return to their home country, rather integrated themselves into the Nigerian society.

Keywords: Civil war, Conflict, Humanitarians, Host Community, Refugee

INTRODUCTION

In Africa, since the mid-1960s, the number of refugees has increased dramatically. As a result, it is important to figure out how to accommodate and care for these refugees while keeping the lives of the host community as normal as possible (Bilgili and Loschmann 2018: 22-23). Self-settlement, sometimes called spontaneous settlement, involves refugees settling in existing villages with local residents, forming their own villages, and being encouraged, and welcomed by existing residents and authorities (Bilgili and Loschmann 2018: 22-23).

In the wake of Liberian civil wars (1989 – 1996) and (1999 – 2003), thousands of displaced Liberians sought refuge in numerous African states such as Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Ghana

(UNHCR, 1999: 111). Liberian refugees made their way into neighbouring countries at the dispersal point in 1990 (UNHCR, 1999: 111). The Red Cross Society and other agencies such as the National Emergency Relief Agency provided medical care, food, and clothing materials to the first large group of Liberians who arrived by ship in Lagos in 1990 (Babatunde, 2018). The Apapa wharf did not have the facilities to accommodate over 5,000 people. They were exposed to cold at Apapa. Moreover, they lacked clothing and suffered psychological trauma. Their appearance was dejected, untidy, and undernourished (Babatunde 2018). The situation led to an urgent need to relocate the refugee to a better location, a decision that meant finding a better location in Lagos where the refugees could be

accommodated conveniently. In the end, a refugee camp was established at Ijebu Our, near Ijebu Ode at a disused teacher training college. Red Cross Society records indicate that the transportation of the entire Liberian refugee population from Apapa Wharf to Oru in Ogun state was arranged by the organisation alone (Babatunde 2018).

This paper discusses the status of the Liberian refugees at the entry point of the Nigerian port to the camp location. It examines the circumstances under which the refugee camp in Oru was established. The paper describes the administration of the camp and the socio-economic activities of the refugees. It also explores the healthcare facilities, social programs, and educational activities of the refugees. Additionally, it brings to the fore the relief efforts of humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the Nigerian Society of Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations that address the needs of the refugees in Oru camp.

Theoretical Framework

The suitable theory for studying the life and administration of Liberian refugees in Oru Camp, Nigeria, is Alex Honneth's Theory of Recognition. This theory emphasizes the importance of social recognition in shaping individual identity and community dynamics. In the context of refugees, recognition can significantly influence their integration into host societies and their overall well-being. Honneth posits that individuals require recognition from others to develop a sense of self-worth and belonging. For Liberian refugees, the acknowledgment and support from the Nigerian government, humanitarian organizations, and the host community are crucial for their social integration and economic stability. This is because the theory highlights how refugees, despite facing marginalization, can leverage their cultural agency and social capital to transform their living conditions and assert their identity within the host community (Honneth 2014).

Moreover, the application of this theory allows for an exploration of the dynamics between the refugees and the host community, illustrating how mutual recognition enhances harmonious relationships and support systems. This is particularly relevant in Oru Camp, where the refugees have received social recognition and economic support, enabling some to integrate into Nigerian society rather than returning to Liberia. Honneth's Theory of Recognition provides a robust framework for understanding the complexities of refugee life and administration, as it focuses on the interplay of identity, community, and support systems. This is where the focus of this study lies, and why this theory is significant in achieving the objectives of the study regarding the experiences of Liberian refugees, identified with the host communities and humanitarian organisations in the Oru Camp.

Methodology

This article is anchored on qualitative method that combines both ethnographic and oral interview approaches for data collection and analysis.

Qualitative research deals with the peoples' experience and how they have used their experience from diverse spheres of lives ranging from work, family, and socio-cultural affairs to make sense of their world. Qualitative research focuses on the underlying qualities of subjective experiences and the meanings associated with the subject matter (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. 2014). Qualitative research allows the researcher to elicit information from the participants who are deemed to possess the necessary experience, and in the position of information sharing relevant to the subject matter.

On the ethnographic approach the researcher carried out participatory and observatory study of the Oru Refuge Camp and had discussions with the staff of humanitarian organization like the AREF (African Refugee Foundation). The researcher contacted the AREF staff and sought the permission to volunteer with them in participation to critically engage the camp management and gain access to

the refugee camp for interactions. I also used that opportunity to engage in solidarity with the refugees, and with the host community to understand the social-economic and cultural relationship between them. Volunteering with AREF and the host community provided me with considerable insights into the challenges facing the refugees in the camp.

On the Oral interview, data were gathered from twelve participants through open-ended interviews. The participants involved the refugees and camp officials at the camp and humanitarian organization agents. Seven males, and six females out of which two pleaded anonymities. Among them were five refugees, four camp officials. Three humanitarian organisation agents. The oral interviews I conducted assisted me to juxtapose the findings and the biases in the reports and memoirs of the humanitarian organisations for objective analyses.

Literature Review

Patterns, Problems, and Policy Challenges by Crisp (2000) offers a comprehensive overview of the complexities surrounding refugee dynamics in Africa. He highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by refugees, including political instability, economic hardship, and social marginalization. Crisp argues that effective policy responses must be tailored to the unique contexts of African nations, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts between host countries and international organizations. Crisp (2002) is also crucial for understanding the broader implications of refugee situations on regional stability and development.

Shadle (2018) provides a historical perspective on the refugee experience in Africa, examining how colonial legacies and post-colonial conflicts have influenced patterns of displacement. He situates the refugee experience within broader historical narratives, illustrating the interplay between local and global forces. This work is significant for its focus on historical context, which enriches our understanding of current refugee issues and challenges. Similarly, Adepoju's (2019) gives a

thorough analysis of the complexities surrounding migration and refugee movements across the continent. He highlights the diverse motivations driving migration, including economic factors, conflicts, and environmental changes. Adepoju emphasizes the need for policies that address the unique challenges faced by migrants and refugees while recognizing their contributions to host communities. This comprehensive overview situates African migration within global trends, making it a valuable resource for understanding contemporary issues in migration governance.

Also, Atim (2013) explores how the presence of refugees can exacerbate existing tensions in host countries. While refugees often flee violence, their arrival may lead to competition for resources, triggering conflicts between local populations and displaced individuals. This work highlights the dual nature of refugee impacts serving as both victims of conflict and potential sources of social strain emphasizing the complexities involved in refugee integration. Khan and Sackeyfio (2021), in "Situating the Global Compact on Refugees in Africa," critically examine the implications of the Global Compact on Refugees for African refugees, particularly those in camps. They argue that despite the framework's comprehensive aim to improve refugee conditions, significant gaps remain in translating policy into practice. The authors highlight systemic challenges, including limited resources and political will, which hinder meaningful change for refugees who often face prolonged displacement. Their analysis emphasizes the need for more robust local and regional strategies to ensure that the Global Compact effectively addresses the realities of refugee life in Africa.

Vecsey (2018) provides an overview of the conditions and challenges faced by refugees in various camps across the continent. Vecsey's study and Akinyemi et al (2016) highlight issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to healthcare, and the psychological impact of prolonged displacement. Vecsey calls for

comprehensive policies that address not only immediate humanitarian needs but also long-term integration strategies. Similarly, Tanle (2013) discusses the lived experiences of refugees in the Buduburam Camp in Ghana, offering qualitative insights into their daily lives and coping mechanisms. Through interviews and personal reflections, Tanle reveals the emotional and social challenges faced by refugees, including identity struggles and a desire for community connection.

Owusu (2000) equally examines the experiences of Liberian refugees in Ghana, along with their relationships with both their host country and their homeland. The study highlights the ambivalence many refugees feel; despite fleeing conflict, they grapple with reluctance to fully integrate into Ghanaian society. Owusu discusses the socio-economic challenges they encounter, such as limited access to employment and social services, which often perpetuate their marginalization. The article also explores the psychological impact of displacement, emphasizing how the longing for return complicates their adaptation to life in Ghana. Through qualitative interviews, Owusu reveals personal narratives that illustrate the refugees' struggles and resilience, underscoring the need for policies that acknowledge their unique circumstances.

Kassim (2005) critically examines the interplay between civil conflict and refugee movements in West Africa, focusing specifically on Liberians in Nigeria. The study highlights how the prolonged civil wars in Liberia resulted in significant displacement, leading to a humanitarian crisis that impacted both refugees and host communities. Kassim analyzes the socio-political dynamics that prompted mass migration, emphasizing the role of regional instability and the shortcomings of international response mechanisms. He also explores the experiences of Liberian refugees in Nigeria, discussing their struggles with integration, access to resources, and the psychological toll of displacement. Additionally, Kassim addresses the

complexities surrounding identity and citizenship among refugees, who often find themselves torn between their desire to return home and the challenges of rebuilding their lives in a foreign land.

These findings enhance our understanding of the refugee experience in Africa as they inform the importance of policies and historical awareness in addressing the challenges faced by displaced or refugee populations. They highlight the need for comprehensive frameworks that consider both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term integration strategies. Furthermore, these works illuminate the intricacies of life in refugee camps by revealing both the shortcomings in support and the resilience of refugees as they navigate their circumstances in various camps across Africa. Thus, the inadequate exploration of the experiences of Liberian refugees in African camps with specific contextual discussion of Oru camp is the focus of this study.

The Establishment of Oru Camp

Liberian refugee population in Nigeria in 1990 was made up of professionals like doctors, mechanics, and tailors, as well as unskilled labourers (Temowo 1997: 25). About 4 percent of the Liberian refugees were educated and spoke English very fluently, while 60 percent were half-literate, were capable of understanding and speaking Pidgin English, but had not acquired western education (Babatunde, 2018). Other NGOs, such as the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, the Red Crescent, and the Africa Refugee Foundation (AREF), among others, played a significant role in settling refugees in the Oru refugee camp (Temowo, 1997: 25).

The inhabitants of the Oru community are farmers, and most of them live in rural areas. There are several buildings at the camp, including a residential building, an administrative block that also housed the camp clinic, a primary school, and a hall for social activities. In addition, there is a football pitch for the recreational activities of the refugees (Kassim 2009: 183). Therefore, the Liberian refugees at Oru camp were able to settle comfortably. The Red Cross

initially managed the Oru refugee camp, but in 1993, that responsibility was transferred to the National Commission for Refugees which, was established by the Federal Government Decree No.52 in 1989 (Kassim 2009: 183).

Administration of Oru Refugee Camp

A commandant was in charge of the camp administration, who reports directly to the commissioner for refugees in Abuja. He was supported by secretaries, protection officers, male and female counsellors, clerical officers, and a driver mechanic. Several refugees were recruited to assist with the daily operations of the camp as clerical assistants (Bilgili and Loschmann 2018). Nevertheless, social workers and counsellors handled the emotionally distressed refugees who were in a strange environment without their loved ones. Minors, unaccompanied children, and female heads of households were also helped by them to lighten their emotional burdens. The elderly and handicapped received assistance in whatever areas they needed. There are times when private individuals and corporations come to the aid of the refugees directly by contracting the camp commandant and donating whatever they can (Abiodun 1996: 24).

Socio Economic Activities in the Camp

Economic Activities

It is noteworthy that the refugees in the Oru camp engaged in some economic activities within and outside the camp. A few of these economic activities included arts and crafts, and embroidery of materials, some of which were exhibited at trade fairs and sold at open markets within Oru. Training in the production of these items was provided by the home economics centre through workshops and regular practical teaching (Sunday 1996: 28). Mr. Haris Gbayea, a Liberian and clerical staff member at the Camp, says that “the Liberian refugees were encouraged to engage in productive activities so they could benefit to themselves, the host community, and their home country (Sunday 1996: 28).”

As part of their training, the refugees also learned how to make soap and process gari (cassava flakes), (Isitor 2019: 1 – 3). In fact, they produce gari of superior quality, meeting the Ijebus’ quality standard. These were made in commercial quantities and then sold in neighbouring markets in order to earn a living. Gari processing machines were provided by the UNHCR to improve yield and quality as a result of their resounding success in processing gari (Adedoya, 2010). Farming is another major economic activity among refugees. Thus, they were able to cultivate 80 hectares of land. Samuel Ikpoer, one of the farmers on the camp, kindly showed me his farm and was very proud of it. During the year, he said, he grows 4,000 tubers of cassava, 2,000 tubers of yams, as well as vegetables, pepper and 3 baskets of tomatoes. He stated that he made a lot of money selling these foods every year (Interview with Samuel, 2018).”

There were also Liberian refugee farmers who grew cassava, which was processed into gari and other cassava derivatives such as starch. In fact, gari processing is one of the success stories of agriculture in the Oru camp in Ogun state (Isitor 2019: 1 – 3). The UN supplied the implements and seedlings required to grow food crops such as cassava, yam, peppers, and tomatoes. At times, they used caterpillars to clear the bushes and make ridges, but more commonly they used hoes and cutlasses. In the camp, agriculture was primarily subsistence, but surplus was sold at the market. Their nutritional intake was improved, as well as their economic status (Lawrence, 2018).

The yield of the farm in the camp is usually high at the end of the year, says the camp commandant, Mr. Lawrence Yegwa, about 15 – 20,000 yam tubers, 18 baskets of pepper, and 21 baskets of tomatoes are produced annually (Lawrence, 2018).” Aside from producing food for sale, the refugees also produce supplements to their own monthly ration, which includes rice, beans, gari, and other materials (Isitor 2019: 1 – 3). A number of refugees also engaged in out-of-camp trading activities like selling their

produce in the market. Others went to the town to work as bus drivers and conductors, then returned to the camp after work. One refugee said, "I normally work as a bus conductor in the morning, make my money, and come back to sleep here in the camp (Anonymous Interview, 2018)."

Healthcare Facilities

At the camp, there was a healthcare clinic staffed by a youth corps resident doctor. Consultants from various fields visited from time to time to handle special cases. There were also registered nurses and midwives working with Red Cross volunteers; serious or emergency cases were taken to University College Hospital, (UCH) Ibadan for proper medical attention (Anonymous Interview, 2018). In addition, there was a health centre in the village. CHEVRON and the United States government (USA) sponsored this initiative by community health workers. According to one of the camp officials, the refugees are being provided with quality medical care both inside and outside the camp. Although no epidemic outbreaks have occurred in the camp; minor health problems such as fevers have been treated there. To reduce the incidence of illness and sickness among them, preventive drugs were also distributed (Anonymous Interview, 2018)."

Within the camp, there are two types of toilet sanitation facilities, a pit latrine dug near the tents

and the water system, both of which have been overstretched due to heavy usage. There are refugees who resort to 'bush attack' by defecating in a nylon plastic bag and throwing them into the nearby bush. Since the bushes where these human excreta are thrown into are also within the camp, the sanitary situation posed a serious health risk to the refugees (Yamamoto 2006: 1 – 5). The bush and swampy nature of the camp caused mosquitoes to breed, resulting in most of these refugees contracting malaria fever (UNHCR 1999: 116). Additionally, in order to ensure proper medical care for the refugees, African Refugee Foundation (AREF) and Korean Medical Volunteers (KMV) made regular visits to the camp during which relief materials and cash were given to the refugees (AREF 2006: 40).

Dr. Suh Han Koo and Dr. Suh Eun Soon, both of the Kohyo Sooji Research Institute, visited the camp on 16 and 28 November 2000 and provided the refugees with Korean Konjo hand therapy (KHT) and eight magnetic foot plates (AREF 2006: 40). On September 1, 2002, another team led by Dr. Kola Akinroye, Head of AREF Medical Volunteer Corps, organized a FREE BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING for the refugees, as well as provided medication for those who were critically ill (Discussion, 2018).

Picture1: Visit of AREF corps of medical volunteers comprising medical doctors, nurses, physiotherapist and other Para-medical staffs to Oru Refugee Camp.



Source: AREF 10th Anniversary Publication, 2003.

Education

Education was provided to refugees at the Oru camp. A UNCHR-sponsored nursery provided education to young children. In accordance with international law protecting refugee status, children and women are entitled to at least elementary primary education in a camp (Smith and Vaux 2003: 12). It was nonetheless possible to attend kindergarten and primary school in the camp, which had six classrooms with an average of thirty students per class. The school is headed by a headmaster (Smith and Vaux 2003: 12). The Special Primary Education Board (SPEB) of Ijebu North, provides teachers to the school as Ogun State is an implementing partner in the education of refugees. The National Primary Education Board regularly visits this school since it has been upgraded and equipped to become part of schools controlled by the Ogun State Schools Board (Discussion, 2018).

At the UNHCR's expense, refugee pupils went to state public schools after primary education. However, given the Commission's limited resources, the Ogun State government allows refugee students free education only in some schools, like Itamerin, Obanta, and Molusi high schools. Successful students proceed to Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics, and colleges of education with the assistance of the Nigerian government, UNCHR or through scholarships provided by NGOs (Discussion, 2018). A number of Liberian refugees attended Nigerian universities, including the University of Ibadan and the University of Ilorin. The majority of those who have returned to their home country hold degrees in different fields of study. Many of them even hold two master's degrees from the university they attended (Discussion, 2018).

The employment prospect for refugees in Nigeria after formal education are dim considering the unemployment rate even for her own citizens. However, they are encouraged to go into private self-employment where possible, particularly bakery, fashion design, secretarial studies, welding, carpentry, brick moulding, and building construction (Kassim 2009: 183). Furthermore, Liberian refugees at the Oru Camp are encouraged to pursue vocational and technical education. The Ijebu Ode and Ijebu Igbo government technical colleges train students in woodwork, metalwork, and other technical skills.

Additionally, fashion design, tie and dye, cane weaving, soap making, hair dressing, candle making, cream making, and tailoring are taught. The refugees were able to earn some money through the sales of their products through these activities, which kept them busy in the camp and kept them occupied (Kassim 2009: 183). These activities were conducted under the auspices of the AREF and the UNHCR and the NCFR provided funds in form of soft loans, which were repaid upon sale of items produced. Any excesses were reinvested in the business (Anonymous Interview, 2018).

Social Activities

The camp offers recreational facilities for social activities. There was also football, handball, basketball, volleyball, table tennis and lawn tennis courts. In Nigeria, some of these refugees have trained to become coaches and have played with First Division teams. Mr. Doe, a refugee player, scored the most goals in the Nigerian League First Division in 1996. Refugees from Liberian married each other, and others intermarried with Nigerians (Anonymous Interview, 2018).

They also held some cultural events reminiscent of their home country, including a Festival Day. Festival like this feature dances and songs in their native languages. As a way to preserve their cultural heritage, most of the festivals held in their home communities were held at Oru camp as well. Since many of them have learned the Yoruba language, they have good interaction with local (Danmole 2008: 208). Nonetheless, some Liberians in the Oru refugee camp also participated in religious activities. Most of them participate in Christian and Islamic worship, while some do not. The majority of the Christians in the camp worship at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Oru (Danmole 2008: 208). There are also interdenominational services held within the camp which are usually held in the school classrooms. During the Muslims festivals of Eid-I-Fitr and Eid-I-Molud worship in the Mosque (Interview with Paul, 2018).

The camp provided transportation within and outside its boundaries. The most common mode of transportation was the motorcycle, known as "okada." Taxis also served the camp and help those who carry heavy loads in and out of the camp to get around. There was also an official vehicle (Toyota Land Cruiser) for official purposes and to

assist refugees during emergency situations (Interview with Yegwa, 2018).

In recognition of AREF's peace initiatives, the African Independent Television (AIT) invited AREF to facilitate the participation of some refugee children from the Oru refugee camp in its live broadcast to mark the Day of the African Child on June 16, at its studio in Alagbado in 1999 (AREF, 2006). The purpose of the event was to allow the refugee children to have fun and interact with each other children on a day that is specifically set aside for them. Ever since, AREF has made it one of its projects to enable the refugee children to participate in this yearly event. The event has also helped with rehabilitating and developing the social interaction of the refugees. With this action, AREF helps bring smiles to the faces of children. In addition, AREF used the occasion to address the children on the need to forget their current plight and to keep hope alive (AREF 2006: 40).

The Refugee and the Host Community: Social Response
Oru camp was designed to alleviate the plight of war refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. That was in alignment with Nigeria's principle of good neighbourliness. In the preceding pages, it was noted that Oru has been designated as a refugee camp since 1990 (Awoyinfa 2010: 1). Some of the few refugees present in the camp, however, noted that the camp has been technically closed since 2007. They assert that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies promised to integrate them with the host community (Awoyinfa 2010: 1). This promise, they claimed, has not been fulfilled since the camp closed. Interestingly, they asserted that they had made efforts to integrate themselves with the community in 2007. The refugees' move suggest that some of them prefer to stay back in the country which has given them a sense stability in times of need (Awoyinfa 2010: 1).

Moreover, the chairman of the Liberian refugees in the camp, Mr. Mohammed Sackor revealed that since 2007 when the UNHCR and the Federal Government declared the camp to be technically closed, the refugees have continued to suffer serious neglect, hunger, and outbreaks of epidemic (Awoyinfa 2010: 1). In regard to health, there are sexually transmitted diseases among the adolescents within the camp. In spite of the Nigerian Red Cross's constant campaign against reckless sexual behaviour, this persists. Due to a lack of control in the

movement of refugees in the camp, it was discovered that their females are engaged in clandestine acts of prostitution. Those women do this as a means of survival. In essence, the camp has been turned into an indirect brothel that tolerated promiscuity. Almost every weekend, men hang around the camp area in search of female companions. For instance, it was discovered during an interview with one of the female refugees in the camp that they see nothing wrong with their actions. Thus, she asserted that:

"I just have to earn a living or survive, since we are only given food stuff in the camp on monthly basis and this cannot sustain us long for the month, for that reason in order not to die of starvation I decided to get money for myself and survive for the remaining period of the month if the food finishes (Anonymous, 2018)."

As a consequence, such a mentality increases the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including the dreaded HIV/AIDS (Cronin 2008: 1). Furthermore, the camp clinic only operates on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Thus, treating illnesses such as malaria, catarrh, and colds is another challenge facing the refugees in the camp. It is due to the fact that such small cases of illnesses are usually referred to a nearby General Hospital in Ijebu-Ode (Cronin 2008: 1). Besides, the fact that drugs are in short supply in the camp clinic, refugees are often too poor to afford those important prescriptions. Similarly, the clinic's facilities are inadequate to handle the large number of refugees present in the camp (Kassim 2009: 183).

Moreover, the refugees roam the camp during the day without doing anything tangible to support themselves. Many of them are unemployed and idle through the day. In spite of the fact that the Nigerian Legislation on refugees adopted article 22 (1) of the 1951 UNHCR convention relating primarily to primary education, they were unsure whether to continue their education. As stated in the article, 'the contracting states shall accord refugees the same treatment as their nationals with regard to elementary education'. The government does not go beyond this, but most refugees are adolescents and high school graduates who need college and university education for their own personal fulfilment and to contribute to the host community (Kassim 2009: 183).

Since the news of the closure was widely circulated among charitable organisations and institutions that had hitherto provided refugee support, the situation of the

refugees has worsened greatly. In Lebbie's view, the UNHCR promised some incentives prior to the technical closure of the camp, which included accommodation outside the camp and microfinance loans of N150, 000 to those who opted for local integration (Awoyinfa 2010: 1). UNHCR and the Federal Government of Nigeria have not yet fulfilled this obligation. Though 31 December 2008 was deemed the end of the technical closure of the camp, the refugees have not yet left. The planned sensitization for this purpose also did not take place. The worst part was that the heads of local communities should have been informed about local integration process (Awoyinfa 2010: 1).

In the Oru camp, they reported that one of the strategies used to hasten their repatriation to Liberia was a drastic reduction in the ration of their food supply. Nevertheless, a top official of the camp reports that some donors, corporate bodies, and individuals have ceased or drastically reduced their financial and material contributions to the refugees (Anonymous, 2018). Furthermore, nursing mothers, young children, and the elderly were eligible for even this reduced ration. As a result of continued hardship, some of the refugees have decided to return to their country. For this group of people, was given a sum of fifty dollars (\$50) as an assistance to resettle once they returned to their homeland (Commandant, 2018). It is also important to note that some of them who are still living in the country have been trained as technicians, artisans, welders, candle makers and mat makers. These vocations allowed them to work for themselves here in Nigeria. When they eventually return to Liberia, this will no doubt be a great relief for them.

Liberian refugees have eliminated the previous cultural bias they had against Nigerians because of their presence in Nigeria. Nigeria was perceived by some of them as primitive and uncivilized prior to their arrival. For example, they learned about Nigeria's polygamous marriages, which their own culture prohibits, so they frowned on this aspect of Nigerian culture. Their view of this has evolved since their stay in Nigeria, as exemplified by their relationship with the host community (Commandant, 2018). During the war, some Liberians fleeing for safety were forced to fly over some Nigerian cities and were unable to believe what they saw due to their mendacious beliefs about Nigeria's backwardness. After spending time in Nigeria, this opinion changed as

they began to appreciate and embrace the Nigerian way of life and work ethic. Those who returned to Liberia now take pride in saying some popular Yoruba phrases like "Bawonioo?" meaning how are you? (Commandant, 2018).

Kidwai et al (2014) in many ways, the relationship between the refugees and their host community in Nigeria is important. The refugees are no longer regarded as aliens, but as part of the community. Their relationship with the host community remains friendly. (Kidwai, et al 2014: 9). That partly explains why refugees are encouraged to participate in community development exercises, such as environmental sanitation exercises that usually take place every last Saturday of the month.

Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance is critical to help refugees cope with the trauma of flight and poverty, and to address their immediate shocks, stresses, and injuries (Kassim 2009: 183). The Nigerian government focused its intervention strategy on this issue. The provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees has historically been the responsibility of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and other NGOs such as the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC). Further, the Nigerian government has played a major role in providing humanitarian assistance to Liberian refugees in Nigeria and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Liberia through agencies such as National Commission for Refugees and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (Kassim 2009: 183). On 17 June 2003, the UNHCR office in Lagos received a total number of 1,986 asylum seekers from Liberia, where internal conflict was rife. A number of civilians were forced to flee the country. During the same year, 858 women, 564 children and 564 men were housed in the Oru refugee camp. This camp was managed by the Nigerian Red Cross Society, UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR) (Kassim 2009: 183).

An assessment by the Nigerian Red Cross Society indicated that food and non-food items were urgently needed. There was also a problem with open garbage disposal; this posed health risks to the refugees (Cronin 2008: 1). There were also problems with hygiene and inadequate sanitation. As more asylum seekers settled in the camp, the need for water and sanitation increased (Cronin 2008: 1). The refugees lacked basic health services and the only camp clinic lacked essential drugs.

Moreover, the Nigerian Government, through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR), decided to take responsibility for the overall coordination and management of the refugee camp, including status determination, protection, security, and accommodation (Olaoluwa 2009: 178).

On June 23, the Lagos office of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies received a letter from the UNHCR office in Lagos, asking for assistance with food rations for the first two months and non-food items in order to help the Liberian refugees (IFRC, 2003). Therefore, the Government and the Nigerian Red Cross do not have an agreement for the care and sheltering of refugees. The National Society is, however, a member of NEMA, whose National Disaster Response Plan for the country delegated to the Red Cross responsibility of providing mass care, emergency health, search, and rescue, etc (IFRC, 2003).

In general, the UNHCR office in Lagos liaised regularly with the above-mentioned governmental bodies and humanitarian agencies, Red Cross, UNICEF to mention a few, in an attempt to coordinate effort towards assisting the refugees (IFRC, 2003). UNICEF donated some non-food items, including medical supplies and water/sanitation assistance due to this. Furthermore, UNHCR prepared a provisional assistance programme for an estimated 2500 persons for one month that included both food and non-food items (IFRC, 2003).

NRCS has been the only major UNHCR operational partner in Nigeria, assisting the asylum seekers since their arrival in the country with assistance from the International Federation of the Red Cross (UNHCR 1999: 114). NRCS clinics in Lagos and Oru camp provided medical assistance to the Liberians in the camp. Besides on a rapid assessment of immediate needs in the camp, the NRCS provided the following items: ten large tents; eight rolls of plastic sheeting; and malaria tablets and analgesics prescribed by medical staff from the Lagos clinic (UNHCR, 1999). Six volunteers provided temporary assistance to the Liberians in the camp. A health education program was also conducted. UNICEF provided water and sanitation assistance. Save The Children Foundation in the UK (SCF-UK) also participated in this humanitarian effort by conducting camp visits, focusing particularly on the needs of children (Akinyemi et al 2006:

280). A total of 100 Red Cross Message forms meant for tracing have been distributed by the ICRC office in Lagos (IFRC 2003: 1 – 4).

Nigerian Red Cross Society

An agreement between the NRCS and UNHCR had been in place since 1990 (IFRC, 2003).

The agreement stipulates the responsibilities of the respective agencies, and it is reviewed and renewed annually. Furthermore, the NRCS has provided for food and non-food distribution through volunteers, who have also provided health education to the refugees. UNHCR (1999) provided funding to meet cover the costs distributing relief items, transport, and costs for Red Cross volunteers. Previously, it provided a vehicle and covered maintenance costs in order to help the Federal Government aid refugees.

UNHCR (1999) also prepared its own resources to assume full responsibility of the to the assistance programme, in light of the request for assistance from the NRSC and Lagos Regional Office of the Federation. Federal Government's Lagos Regional Office expressed readiness to assist the NRCS in assisting the refugees. The NRCS has committed to providing five Red Cross volunteers who would help with the distribution of non-food items and cover the maintenance costs to enable the Federal Government to assist refugees (Kassim 2009: 183). In terms of managing the Oru refugee camp, the NRCS provides overall coordination, financial and logistical support, as well as monitoring of the refugees (UNHCR 1999: 118). The Society's decentralised Zonal Office for Lagos and Ogun States provides direct supervision to project staff and volunteers (IFRC 2003: 1 – 9). The Zonal office also offered the service of at least 100 first-aid workers who can be contacted in an emergency (IFRC 2003: 7). Here are some of the logistical resources available to the NCRS Zonal office monitoring the affairs of the refugees in Lagos and Ogun States.

NRCS Warehouse stock (non-food items):

- First aid kits (20 units)
- Tents (100 big and small size)
- Stretchers (100)
- Plastic sheeting (100 rolls, size 30m x 10m)
- Disinfectant (24 tins/4 litres)
- Dressing materials (10 boxes)

Transport:

- One 4x4 field vehicle donated by the UNHCR

- One Ambulance vehicle
- Two Field vehicles

In support of UNHCR's request for assistance, the NRCS requested CHF 30,187 in order to procure and distribute non-food items to 2,000 Liberian asylum seekers in Oru camp. Asylum seekers in the camp are most in need of non-food items like mattresses, blankets, and cutlery. The local hiring of vehicle to transport relief items to the camp required funding, no doubt. Under the support of the Federal Government, the Nigerian Red Cross Society, planned to distribute non-food items to 2,000 Liberian asylum seekers in the Oru Camp (IFRC 2003: 6). Disaster Management staff from NRCS office in Lagos and Ogun States also assessed the refugees' needs and devised activities to assist them. Accordingly, the UNHCR's request and the NRC assessment have been used to determine needs. Items distributed include, blankets (3 pieces per family), nylon mats, buckets, and cooking pots (2 units per family) for 400 families, and a stove for each family (IFRC 2003: 6 – 7).

The following table is a summary of the non-food items for 2,000 people.

NON-FOOD ITEMS

In Swiss Franc (CHF)

On Food Items	Quantity Cost	Quantity Cost
Blankets	1,200 pcs	7,500
Nylon mats	800 pcs	3,500
Cooking pots	800 pcs	2,200
Bucket	800 pcs	2,200
Stoves	400 pcs	2,500
Kerosene	20ltr/family of 400	4,500
Plates and spoons	167 dozen of each	397
Sub Total:	No Non-Food Cost	CHF22,797

Local transportation hiring cost	500
Volunteer allowance	2,200
National Society running costs	2,000
Core cost (Lagos Regional Office)	1,200
Geneva Over/Head	1,490
Total Funds required:	CHF 30,187

Source: (IFRC) Info Bulletin no.1/2003; Nigeria: Assistance to Liberian Asylum Seekers

Basically, NRCS planned, to provide emergency assistance to an additional 3,000 asylum seekers for one month in the event that the situation worsened, and more refugees arrived in Nigeria. Its main assets were its experienced volunteers, its network, and its ability to quickly mobilize its resources for emergency interventions, whereas the National Commission for Refugees worked with UNHCR to provide a long-term solution.

For most Nigerians, Friday, October 20, 2006, was just another day, they had seen and put behind them (Ebunugwo 2006: 18). However, for the refugees at the Oru camp in Ogun state, Nigeria it was a special day they will long remember with pleasure. It was a day when their beloved "Florence Nightingale," the woman they call mother, Dr. (Mrs.) Shambahavi V. Murthy Gopalkrishna, came to visit as usual with bags of goodies. On this trip, Dr. Gopalkrishna was accompanied by two Nigerian companies, Olam Nigeria and Indomie (Ebunugwo 2006: 18).

Picture 2: shows humanitarian donations by groups to



the refugee camp at Oru.

Source: AREF 10th Anniversary, Publication, 2003.

Moreover, she encouraged corporate giving as a regular feature of refugee assistance programs. The Dana team, which accompanied Dr. Gopalkrishna, was represented by members of the Sri Sai Vandana Foundation (SSVF). The Dana Foundation at the request of Dr. Gopalkrishna sponsored three scholarships for refugee students to enable them further their education up to university level (Ebunugwo 2006: 18).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that life outside home for refugees is full of challenges, many of which they often devise strategies to overcome. In 1990, when the first wave of Liberian refugees landed at the Lagos Apapa Sea Port, and subsequently settled in Oru, Ogun State, a number of international and local NGOs showed them love and concern. The government of Nigeria and Ogun State in particular have played a pivotal role in providing shelter and relief supplies to the Liberian refugees. The refugees were also provided with skills and training for self-sufficiency.

Without mincing words, the research revealed that the humanitarian agencies made a substantial impact in the lives of refugees through the provision of basic amenities, be it medical or educational. It showed that the refugees benefitted in the educational setting from humanitarian support. Nevertheless, the research reported that the NRCS provided immediate assistance to the refugees on

arrival with food and non-food items from its very limited resources. With this action, it indicated the NRCS demonstrated its readiness and capacity to render aids during emergencies and build trust with humanitarian agencies, including the UNHCR.

Above all, the research revealed that it was the support and assistance provided by both local and international donors, combined with the hospitable gestures of the host community, that made it easier for the refugees to integrate into the community and cohabit. Since the permanent closure of the camp in 2012 many have returned home safely (Liberia), and others chose to settle permanently in Nigeria.

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- 20) Interview with camp official, Mr. Paul John, Oru, 28 November 2018.
- 21) Interview with Liberia refugee on what they do to remember their home country, 28 November 2018.
- 22) Interview with Mr. Rex Babatunde, an official of the Nigeria Red Cross Society, 28 November 2018; The National Commission for Refugee was established in 1990 in response to the refugee problems in the West Africa sub-region.
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