

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES: CASE STUDIES OF THE MINAWAO AND GADO-BADZERE REFUGEE CAMPS, CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the true motives of stakeholder involvement in refugee protection issues, continuously supporting refugee protection programs for a protracted period despite the unsustainability of initiatives. It argues that the persistent gap between relief initiatives and refugee needs and interests, suggests that the initial intentions of relief institutions are not necessarily the sustainability of refugee dependence programs. Indeed, the way of implementation of these programs not only impedes favourable results but also shows a lack of desire to truly find a permanent solution to the refugee problem once and for all. The study concludes that despite consistent efforts and huge funding to support self-reliance initiatives in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps, humanitarian, state actors and other stakeholder and their form of assistance to refugees are implicated in the creation of new challenges for refugees and present refugee protractedness as an asset used by these stakeholders to perpetually coverup hidden agendas.

Keywords: Refugee, Self-reliance, Protracted dependency, Political economy, Cameroon, Minawao, Gado-Badzere, camps

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The number of refugees in Africa has increased rapidly during the past decade, and African refugees not only pose today the largest refugee problem the world must face (Adepoju 2019), but also solutions to repatriate them are not always available. Since 2014, Cameroon has received a massive number of refugees, most of whom are of Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigerian descent fleeing high levels of violence and in need of protection and shelter. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP) and other humanitarian stakeholders have been investing enormously, proposing, and implementing countless humanitarian support schemes to enable conditions appropriate to refugee-specific needs. Refugee support programs have aimed at identifying appropriate

solutions and providing adequate assistance to encourage the realization of refugees' full capacities and oversee their participation in long-term solutions capable of limiting protracted dependence on humanitarian relief assistance.

For humanitarian organizations, the objective of adopting self-reliance initiatives in refugee camps for the benefit of refugees has been a way to foster the spirit of independence, inculcating in them self-sufficiency tendencies, in a bid to curb their grip reliance on humanitarian assistance. Though the organisations' goals for the refugee crisis may be clear, it is evident that they have not been met (Dijkstra, 2002). Self-reliance initiatives for refugees have been regarded as the dominant policy response for most donors around the world, it has also proven to be exceedingly difficult to practice and looked upon as a 'holy grail', despite all efforts to make efforts yield long-lasting impacts (Krause and Hannah 2020)

For the past ten years, Nigerian and CAR refugees living in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps, respectively, have lived in precarity (OCHA, 2023), continuously relying on humanitarian assistance for livelihood sustenance, with no hope of achieving long-term self-sufficiency for their households. Vulnerability levels in these camps have been on the rise despite the yearly disbursement of funds and implementation of several self-reliance initiatives.

The persistent gap between relief initiatives and refugee self-reliance needs, suggests that the sustainability of refugee empowerment and dependence on humanitarian assistance are not often the primary goals of donor assistance. The disbursement of huge humanitarian funds annually for the implementation of self-reliance initiatives for protracted years is hardly synonymous with refugee independence and the ability to become self-sufficient. On the contrary, refugee precarity keeps rising while reliance on humanitarian relief assistance continues despite donor contributions and the adoption of self-reliance schemes. Whereas the fundamental purpose of supporting refugees is to stabilize and reconstruct their lives so that they can take charge of their households on their own eventually. However, most developing countries have failed to see the benefits that come with humanitarian aid for decades (Degnbol-Martinussen and Poul 2003), (Bjørnskov 2010).

Aid in general is regarded as a means of influence, as such donors set the agenda and the conditions for donations; thus, much foreign aid is given to further the interests of donor countries (Serna, 2019) if not, the intriguing questions explored in this article are: why donors continue to sponsor unsuccessful refugee self-reliance schemes for decades when these projects have proven over time to have no long-term effects on beneficiaries? Or in other terms, what benefits do humanitarian organisations get from unproductive "grand plans" in developing countries?

By providing answers to these questions, the paper discusses the real motivations behind stakeholder participation in refugee protection efforts. It provides a comprehensive picture of the causes behind the unviability of several self-reliance initiatives in Cameroonian refugee camps. The article also illustrates the degree of evasiveness these institutions possess in resolving refugee issues through an examination of the policies and initiatives put out by governments and humanitarian organizations in response to the need for refugees. Thus, examples from the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps in Cameroon show how some stakeholders have used the prolonged status of refugees as a tool to conceal ulterior motives.

The primary goal of this study is thus to provide responses and subsequent reflection points on the censuses.

As philosophically as possible, there is a need to raise some fundamental questions and understand the incentives that exist behind the ongoing stakeholder assistance in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps, despite humanitarian agencies' repeated failures to ensure long-term solutions for refugee self-reliance and limiting prolonged reliance on foreign assistance. This paper therefore seeks to demonstrate that the initial intention of humanitarian relief assistance in Cameroon and many other African refugee hosting countries, as stipulated by stakeholders is not necessarily the main goal; rather, keeping refugees stagnant and dependent on the actors involved seems to be a calculated strategy to carry out hidden agendas.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To better support the claims purported in the article, data obtained from Cameroon refugee camps are used as examples to buttress the assertions made. This study is based on a comprehensive examination of field-based data and a literature review collected in the two camps under study, Minawao and Gado-Badzere, which are home to Nigerian and CAR refugees, respectively. The primary sources of information included in this analysis are in-depth semi-structured interviews with refugees, members of the host community, camp police officers, government representatives, and camp managers. Each of these people was seen to have first-hand experience with the vulnerability and living situations of refugees at the two camps under study. Personal observations were also employed to gain deeper and more detailed interpretation and comprehension of a specific circumstance and to completely comprehend the phenomenon under research, hence increasing validity.

To better understand the role of various stakeholders in making use of refugees as resources for their hidden agenda, the study employed a total of 106 respondents, randomly selected. The study also focused largely on the literature on refugee self-reliance, refugee dependency, and empowerment initiative debates, where the focus of the debate lies. To preserve their security and privacy, all participants in this article are identified by pseudonyms or are otherwise anonymized per the concept of secrecy.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Refugee self-reliance and empowerment: State of the debate

The concept of self-reliance and empowerment for refugees has gained major attention in recent years as a suitable blueprint for providing durable livelihood solutions to refugee problems. Scholars in the global refugee regime such as Easton-Calabria and Omata (2018) and Slaughter (2020) consider self-reliance for refugees as a panacea for protracted refugee problems. The assumption here is that self-reliance and empowerment offer a permanent solution to the resettlement and repatriation of refugees (Embiricos 2020). According to donors, self-reliance for refugees is seen as a tool that could save valuable and scarce funding (Skran and Evan 2020). This is particularly true with recurrent donor fatigue or in situations whereby donors simply become worn out or found in the dilemma of choosing between helping most recently arrived refugees or those in protracted stay with a deplorable state of vulnerability.

Also, other documents such as the UNHCR Handbook for Self-reliance on its part, promote self-reliance as a means for refugees to achieve independence, and dignity and create ready environments for return to their various home countries. In the same way, the Handbook also highlights self-reliance initiatives as a crucial component for long-term refugee solutions (UNHCR 2005). The UNHCR took it a step further in 2012 when it declared that self-reliance is "the foundation of sustainable solutions, especially for successful repatriation or local integration." (UNHCR 2012). Therefore, self-reliance can be viewed as a universal cure and the basis of long-lasting solutions, assisting refugees and those who assist them in achieving the main objectives of the international refugee regime.

Many definitions of self-reliance place a strong emphasis on its financial component, i.e., making enough money to meet one's household's essential needs. However, the definition of self-reliance given in this article is consistent with that given by the UNHCR, which defines it as the social and economic ability of an individual, a home, or a community to meet basic needs respectably and sustainably (UNHCR, 2005). Helping refugees become self-reliant and empowered is the objective of many international organizations as a strategy to reduce material assistance given to refugees (Hunter, 2009).

Bousquet outlines the importance of encouraging self-reliance in the development of refugees. He argues that refugees are incapable of planning their lives by themselves and therefore considered vulnerable given that they have lost their possessions and means of subsistence. They require assistance in recovering their voices, learning how to support themselves and starting over (Bousquet 2018). However, for this assistance to be sustainable, there is a need for state organisations and humanitarian and donor organisations to adopt policies that can guarantee the sustainability of refugee protection programs and ensure human rights and freedom of movement for refugees are respected (Betts 2019). It is this decisiveness of stakeholders towards refugee dependence that will determine their level of ingenuousness in resolving refugee problems.

Given the financial constraints that most humanitarian organizations face in the context of multiple humanitarian emergencies, that keep stretching their budgets too thin, some scholars in support of self-reliance initiatives argue that refugee empowerment with a high possibility for sustainability would not only benefit refugees but especially give a breath of relief to humanitarian organizations and donors (Schön, Borchert and Kunst, 2021). The importance of refugee self-reliance has also been justified by the need to break the cycle of poverty and dependence that is often associated with continued aid in refugee camps (Tarp, 2006; Leeson, Bhandari, Myers & Buscher, 2020).

While the COVID-19 pandemic has recently brought into sharp relief the significance of refugee self-reliance, the practice itself is not new. Humanitarian groups have been promoting refugee empowerment and self-reliance for many years to reduce the long-term reliance of refugees on relief organizations. The phrase "self-reliance" for refugees, dates to the 1920s when the League of Nations was founded. According to Holborn (1939), a key objective of the League, vis-à-vis refugees, was to strengthen their self-reliance capacities, improve livelihoods, and, most importantly, lessen dependence on humanitarian aid.

Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of self-reliance as the best option to achieve refugee empowerment, independence and self-determination as discussed above, many global

refugee scholars have however classified the initiative as a 'Holy Grail' (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, & Omata, 2017, Krause & Hannah, 2020, Omata 2022). These authors contend that though self-reliance has been acclaimed as a blueprint for refugee problems and empowerment, it has however proven very difficult to practice. This accession is per the point of view portrayed in this article, as empirical findings presented can show that despite the longevity of implementing self-reliance initiatives in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps, refugee precarity and dependence on humanitarian assistance has increased over the years.

If humanitarian assistance has failed to create impacts in the lives of refugees, it is because of the numerous challenges associated with refugee self-reliance initiatives at camps, which are manifold. For instance, Embiricos (2020), reports that though self-reliance has been praised as a useful route to self-empowerment, obstacles such as language barriers and bureaucratic processes hinder self-reliance initiatives. Likewise, Harvey and Jeremy (2005) contend that host governments' policies play a great role in determining refugees' successful self-reliance outcomes as countries with strict refugee confinement in camps and restrictions to work permits are likely to undermine refugee self-reliance initiatives at camps and in turn encourage refugee protracted reliance on humanitarian assistance.

Other authors, such as Murad, Banks, and Parson (2015), contend that the primary reason humanitarian relief initiatives do not yield the expected outcomes is that aid supply is still mostly driven by donors' objectives and interests rather than by humanitarian concerns and recipients' desires for development. Many actors involved including international organisations, host governments, and donors have faced criticism for their engagements with self-reliance activities as well as their purported ulterior objectives in supporting the independence and autonomy of refugees. (Betts, et al. 2017)

Also, as non-citizens, the hostile environment in which refugees live is often regarded as a barrier impeding their attempts to become self-reliant (Kaiser, 2016). Additionally, a considerable number of refugees are unable to benefit from financial institutions' credit and loans in their new countries (Easton-Calabria & Omota, 2016). According to these scholars, this challenge is because most self-reliance initiatives- even those put at their disposal fail due to their inability to secure funds to establish minimal avenues for themselves. It is even harder for them to identify marketplaces in which to sell goods and services, thereby rendering them unemployed for protracted periods. Considering these difficulties, therefore, (Bhagat 2020), contends that promoting self-reliance via neoliberal ideas such as individualism, unrestricted markets, and reduced government intervention is a workable solution for successful and long-lasting refugee self-reliance.

Other scholars opine that, if refugee self-reliance endeavours are faced with so many challenges, it is partly because refugee movements and access to opportunities are hampered by the isolated sites of refugee camps, which are typically found in sparsely populated areas (Turner, 2016). This reduces the chances of refugees achieving autonomy and presents a significant hurdle to the establishment of empowerment ventures. Most especially, host governments are said to set these camps near borders where there are numerous security concerns with comparatively few people with whom refugees can connect (Bulley, 2017).

As a result of this major setback, refugees in camps are faced with lacks in several sectors such as lack of access to infrastructure, work and market opportunities and subsequently limiting

their capacities to achieve sustainable empowerment opportunities. Another consequence of such a challenge is that refugees in camps are bound to experience quick poverty or simply struggle to launch their businesses against all odds (Jahre, et al. 2018). Most of the time, it is quite challenging to establish connections with other communities since getting to the next market or town is either too expensive or almost impossible (Turner 2016)

Other factors that have been identified as further obstacles to the success of refugee self-reliance and empowerment initiatives include the mismatch between the skills of refugees and the labour markets, the refugees' reluctance to pursue opportunities for a livelihood so as not to jeopardize their chances of being resettled, or even the field workers' fear of losing their jobs when fostering self-reliance among refugees (Schön, Al-Saadi, Grubmueller, & Schumann-Bölsche, 2018).

3.2 Self-reliance Initiatives in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere Refugee Camps

Self-reliance has been promoted as a goal for refugees and their communities by UNHCR and other humanitarian and development actors since the start of the twenty-first century (UNHCR, 2003). Since this time, the World Bank, the UNHCR, and other developmental agencies, donor governments and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with refugee host state institutions, have prioritized the empowerment of refugees as a desirable approach to fostering the socioeconomic development of refugee host communities and mitigating their dependence on humanitarian aid. Despite the efforts, not only has the aid failed to achieve successful and sustainable self-reliance programs, but also refugees in Cameroon still live in acute precarity and still actively depend on humanitarian relief for livelihood (Sehngwi, 2023; OCHA, 2023)

No doubt promoting refugee well-being and self-reliance in sustainable ways can contribute positively to assisting these vulnerable populations to have more control over their lives and make meaningful contributions to their surroundings. However, humanitarian, state actors and other stakeholders with their form of assistance to refugees are implicated in the creation of new challenges for refugees (Ilcan, Marcia, & Connoy, 2015). The way these initiatives are implemented not only hinders positive outcomes but also demonstrates the lack of interest in resolving refugee problems once and for all.

Two factors can be examined to shed light on the rhetoric surrounding refugee empowerment and self-reliance programs in our two camps under study as well as in many other refugee camps: whether policies on self-reliance initiatives are adopted for reasons other than sustainability or whether refugee dependence is not an immediate concern. According to Evan Easton-Calabria, refugee self-reliance has a profound and complex political history that dates back more than a century (Easton-Calabria, 2022). This has left many wondering why refugee empowerment initiatives have so few tangible and sustainable impacts despite the history of longevity, investments, and commitments to refugee self-reliance ventures.

To reinforce this accession, empirical findings obtained from Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps demonstrate the failure of stakeholders to consider the existing political, economic, social, and environmental realities and interests of refugees before implementing self-reliance initiatives in the two camps under study. As also demonstrated in this section, it is the lack of ingenuousness in adopting realistic and comprehensive policies that most self-

reliance initiatives in these two camps have been unsustainable. It is also due to this laxity that refugee precarity and dependence on humanitarian assistance have been prolonged. Indeed, the way of implementation of these projects not only impedes favourable results but also shows a lack of desire to truly find a permanent solution to the refugee situation.

This is the typical example of a Jesuit Refugee Service-initiated chicken-rearing program that was implemented in the Gado-Badzere camp. This initiative failed prematurely, with almost all the chicks dying and beneficiaries embezzling equipment leading to the wastage of hundreds of thousands of donor contributions. Though the intentions might have been constructive, the approach was flawed as the initiative failed to take into consideration the fact that refugees, considering their occupational composition before they departed from their home country; comprised of wage workers, farmers, students, nomads, pastoralists, drivers, fishers amongst other occupations. Regardless, all these groups of individuals were merged in this initiative irrespective of their interests and considerations, which partly contributed to the premature failure of the project.

Among these beneficiaries were those who had preferred to gain empowerment in their various spheres of life rather than being merged into such initiatives against their wishes. Among the beneficiaries was Adama who before leaving his native country was a driver and had never had any prior knowledge nor interest in poultry farming but had been merged in this initiative despite his liking. He had even gone as far as declaring that this program was bound to fail prematurely given that most beneficiaries did not have prior knowledge and again training obtained in the camp to care for these chicks was not sufficient to be able to keep up with the activity on a long run (Adama, Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee, 2023).

Another beneficiary of this poultry farming initiative, Thomas revealed that his participation in the initiative was not motivated by interest, but rather due to the fear of being left out of the already scarce empowerment programs. Given the length of time beneficiaries had to wait to be involved in empowerment schemes, Thomas confessed that their 'forceful' participation was spurred by the fear of not being fortunate enough to be chosen for subsequent programs which generally admitted a small number of recipients at a time (Thomas, Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee 2023).

Another clear example of resource depletion and lack of beneficiary interest at the Gado-Badzere refugee camp was the Yogurt-making initiative which absorbed twenty CAR refugee women. This initiative aimed at increasing livelihood strategies through commercialisation as well as boosting refugee diets through consumption as sources of protein. Once again, this program failed as it failed to consider the environmental and social realities of beneficiaries. Not only is taking refugee interest important to ensure that funds are utilised judiciously but also ensures that beneficiaries can become empowered long-term and use profits for livelihood advancement.

Based on an interview with Miriam, a CAR beneficiary to this initiative, the program was doomed to fail as initiators of this empowerment initiative had failed to consider the fact that the camp had no electricity and had been running on solar panels for a long time, which is unable to supply power to the entire camp. As such, provisions for the storage of manufactured products were known to never be considered. Miriam thinks that the presence of constant electricity might not have changed much as she mocked the simple fact that the economic

purchasing power of refugees did not permit them to afford a refrigerator, which she considered an item of luxury which produced Yogurt could be stored (Miriam, Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee 2023)

Moreover, data gathered from these two camps to further buttress the reasons for the failure of self-reliance includes the elevated level of economic exclusion of refugee empowerment initiatives at settlement Camps. Scholars like Naohiko Omata in one of his recent publications have promoted refugee sustainable economic inclusion as one of the strategies to promote refugee empowerment and dependence on humanitarian relief assistance (Omata 2022). Given the overpopulated nature of the Minawao settlement for instance, it only makes sense that humanitarian groups spearheading project execution would aim at selecting more than a handful of beneficiaries at each self-reliance training session for more comprehensive outcomes. Likewise, other authors like Rosenstein-Rodan in 1961 had projected that selecting a larger number of refugees per training session had the potential to have a more profound and significant impact on beneficiary lives and eventually yielded more sustainable outcomes (Rosenstein-Rodan, 1961)

In the Minawao camp for instance, where camp inhabitants exceeded 70,000 refugees, self-reliance training programs in domains such as bricklaying, cattle rearing, and tailoring usually absorbed just between 6 to 30 beneficiaries at a time. Respondents interviewed found this inappropriate and discouraging as refugees who were not lucky enough to be selected, had to wait for indefinite durations and at times in vain for more programs to be launched. A sizable portion of respondents to the study expressed dissatisfaction over their protracted wait time to be included in empowerment programs at camps. As similarly observed in the Gado-Badzere, this indefinite wait has pushed some Minawao camp beneficiaries to participate in donor-suggested projects with little to no enthusiasm.

The lack of beneficiary consideration and failure to take their interests into account is what has led to the failure of some self-reliance initiatives, fund dilapidation, loss of assets as well as premature termination of empowerment programs. The consistency in failure of program implementation has not only impeded favourable results but has also demonstrated a lack of desire to truly find permanent solutions to the Nigerian and CAR refugee problems once and for all. Indeed, the continuous and persistent gap between these relief initiatives suggests the initial intentions of relief institutions are not necessarily the sustainability of refugee dependence programs.

3.3 Explaining continued dependence amidst self-reliance measures in Cameroon refugee camps: A political analysis

Refugee dependency as used in this article alludes to the impossibility of camp settlers to reach economic self-sufficiency, thereby leaving them permanently dependent on external assistance. It also suggests a lack of capacity to be self-sufficient and take actions that can enable them to attain both short- and long-term self-sufficiency, even in the context of enabling interventions and when there is an opportunity to earn revenue (Kibreab 1993). It is widespread knowledge that refugees in most camps become dependent after protracted years of relying on foreign assistance. This is exactly the case for the Nigerian and CAR refugees living in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps. These refugees, despite their protracted stay in

these camps and the presence of enabling self-reliance interventions, have still been living in extreme precarity and still heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance.

In terms therefore of the international refugee regime's reaction to the global refugee issue, protection and solution against protractedness, self-reliance for refugees in camps has essentially emerged as the most effective method. Self-reliance has soon supplanted repatriation, resettlement, and integration as the primary policy response for donors in North America, Europe, and other international organizations, as well as the UNHCR generally. Even though repatriation, resettlement, and integration are additional solutions to the refugee problem and undoubtedly play a part in refugee protection, self-reliance has proven over time to be a blueprint for the future operations of UNHCR and the international community.

Unfortunately, achieving sustainable self-reliance has also proven to be quite challenging in real life. Even when the best self-reliance techniques and practices are used, the results of self-reliance nevertheless expose significant flaws, shortcomings, and complexity. As demonstrated in this section, many international organizations, host governments, and funders have demonstrated disingenuity in their attempts to participate in self-reliance in our two camps. Therefore, implementing self-reliance in many refugee settlements is politically tumultuous. This dishonesty has revealed ulterior motives beyond advancing the independence and self-reliance of refugees.

Any policy on refugee protection must, to be sustainable, respect their basic human rights and rights to freedom of movement as well as provide them with adequate protection; it must also allow for the operation of a system that can recognize these rights; and it must, above all, create an atmosphere that is favourable to their pursuit of self-reliance. Unfortunately, the implementation and respect of refugee rights have proven to be almost impossible in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps.

These impossibilities are immense even though Cameroon is a signatory to the Convention on Refugees (1951) and the Organization of African Unity (1967). According to these accords, nations must provide refugees the freedom to work, to move, and to enjoy access to public services. Also, recently, Cameroon passed national legislation, such as Act No. 2005/006 and Decree 2011/389 on Refugee Management Structures, guaranteeing certain rights to refugees. Despite representing significant advancements for refugees seeking access to rights, these laws are not adequately enforced in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps.

Despite the adoption of these conventions, a handful of refugees have disclosed explicitly how challenging it is for them to move out of settlements freely or to secure work permits from the camp administration, which severely restricts their access to the market. This is regardless of their abilities and willingness to work and provide suitable livelihoods for themselves. Even when permits are eventually granted, they typically become difficult to obtain and are only issued for periods of three months at a time. Following this, it is expected that refugees return to the camps with new applications that need to be approved once more by the UNHCE head office.

Camp inhabitants interviewed regarding this procedure expressed their displeasure as UNHCR usually took too long to react to these requests which at times led to them eventually losing the job opportunity. Given that refugee human rights laws in Cameroon are not properly enforced,

Minawao and Gado-Badzere camp residents are sometimes said to be involved in casual labour, which in most cases are strictly in the informal sector which increases their susceptibility to exploitative wages over which they have no legal rights to contest. And with employment opportunities becoming increasingly difficult or impossible for them, some are bound to work for Cameroonians under exploitative conditions. Increasing in their numbers, those unable to find work opportunities simply rely on humanitarian assistance for subsistence.

Worst still, most refugees who wish to engage in entrepreneurship find it hard to do so due to their inability to secure funds from financial institutions to establish minimal avenues for themselves. Interviews conducted reveal that, apart from the unavailability of funds, it is even harder for refugees in these camps to identify marketplaces in which to sell goods and services. Even when refugees manage to establish petty businesses, most of their customers are camp inhabitants and in most cases are poor and unable to offer reasonable prices for the goods and services. This has reduced the chances of refugee ability to achieve autonomy and has presented a significant hurdle to the establishment of sustainable empowerment ventures, thereby making dependence on humanitarian organisations the only option for them.

The Cameroon government has developed a system of assisting refugees in their self-reliance endeavours by negotiating with neighbouring villages to spare agricultural land for Nigerian and CAR refugees. Beneficiaries to these lands however revealed that it was hard for them to get access to some of these farmlands as crops were sometimes destroyed by cattle from neighbouring villages. Worst still, after cultivation, villagers harvested yields or simply put the farm ablaze causing them to lose everything.

Johnson, a CAR refugee in the Gado-Badzere camp recounted that the lands obtained from the state authorities have often been limited and packed with challenges, whereby beneficiaries eventually ended up losing the lands. The interview with Johnson further revealed that not only was it hard to obtain such lands but also refugees had gotten into serious confrontations with villagers from neighbouring villages due to these lands. He added that, though negotiations with neighbouring village chiefs were made with state authorities for refugees to be given plots of land for cultivation, it was common to have indigenes come up to claim ownership of these lands afterwards (Johnson, CAR refugee, Gado-Badzere, 2023)

Those refugees who could not resort to farming but rather get employment also found their sources of livelihood cut short as the foundations of these activities are not often sustainable. Specifically, employment obtained within the camp mostly targeted refugees with minimal levels of education and are usually employed within the camp through incentive works via international organisations. Such employments include teaching jobs, and community relay agents for international organisations, who usually act as middlemen between organisations they represent and other refugees. Even while many camp settlers envied refugees for performing such occupations, recruiting institutions either failed to guarantee the sustainability of jobs or payments were often in the form of compensations and unable to fully cover up livelihood necessities.

Interviewing Mrs. Ibrahim, a secondary school graduate in the Minawao camp who taught in Nigeria before coming to the camp, she details the sharp decline in her primary school teaching salary before her eventual layoff, stating that it had gone from 100,000 Francs in 2015 to 70,000 and then 35,000 in previous years and that it had dropped to 20,000 before she was laid off in

2022. Before losing her job, Mrs. Ibrahim noted that although several challenges made camp life hard, at least with a job, she could boast of something small to purchase basic commodities like medication, school needs, a variety of food items and other necessities of life. Sadly, with no job, she is now totally dependent on the World Food Program and other humanitarian relief organizations for food and other basic supplies (Mrs. Ibrahim, Nigerian Refugee Minawao camp, 2023)

Considering these worries, it is evident that the stakeholder efforts to offer long-term relief to refugees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria can be regarded as a farce. Not only is the form of assistance implicated in creating more challenges for refugees in these two camps but also demonstrates through their way of policy administration a lack of desire to truly procure permanent solutions to refugee problems.

Typically, the way stakeholders have often demonstrated in attempting to protect the human rights and freedom of movement of refugees in these two camps has merely served to prolong the precarious conditions and ultimately increased their need for humanitarian assistance. Though camp settlers have demonstrated the capability and desire to work, unfavourable conditions put in place by stakeholder institutions towards the dependence of refugees have proven to be the main determinants that shape the viability of self-reliance in these camps. As a way of providing better and sustainable conditions for refugees, it is our duty to privilege refugees, increase their mobility by facilitating connections or linkages to markets and above all ensure their rights as humans are respected, if at all we want to limit continuous reliance on assistance.

3.4 Refugee continuous dependence, an ‘asset’ to stakeholder hidden agendas

In some host communities, the presence of refugees has been a major force behind creativity, economic growth, and skill development. However, in other contexts, their continued presence and dependence have been seen as a valuable resource that those in positions of power have used to further covert agendas to their advantage and to the detriment of these refugees who are forced to live in extremely precarious conditions and perpetually rely on aid organizations and government officials.

Nowadays, everyone talks about giving refugees a safe haven, but no one truly wants to take up the extra space on their own. As this article tries to show, refugees in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps, have sometimes been looked upon as a ‘resource’ by some institutions and utilized accordingly. Findings obtained during this research demonstrate how international organisations, host governments, donors and other stakeholders involved with refugee protection have been taking advantage of the presence of refugees in camps for ulterior motives and incentives other than the provision of sustainable livelihood ventures and limiting dependence.

For instance, data obtained revealed that a less expensive but quite common practice at the Minawao refugee camp consisted of recruiting refugees during political electoral campaigns. During which, national identification cards were made and given to these refugees of Nigerian descent despite being non-Cameroonians. This is to facilitate refugee participation in elections and help sway election results (Stephen, Zamai host member neighbouring village, 2023). Naturally, when refugees are allowed to wallow in precarious situations for protracted periods

of seven or ten years, it becomes easier for them to be manipulated and influenced by targeted benefits. So long as refugees in these camps are kept vulnerable, always reliant on unsustainable sources of livelihood, they will always be susceptible to manipulation by the authorities in charge.

Bribes in refugee camps between Cameroonian officials and refugees are not always given in cash, however, this is arguably the most typical in vulnerable refugee settings where refugees have little or nothing to maintain their families and are readily duped by such election malpractices. Such plagues within the camp settlement are said to have increased over the years, thereby creating local corrupt elites whose power might depend solely on the presence of refugees in the camp. These elites therefore become an interest group primarily working hard to ensure themselves continued privileges and income at the detriment of susceptible refugees.

It is no news that many organizations will go out of business if there are no refugees or camps to oversee. It follows that finding long-term answers to the refugee crisis will not only remove all need for relief aid entirely but will also enable the full layoff of all humanitarian workers. Having stated that we can conclude that for humanitarian aid workers to be employed in the context of refugee protection, there must be a continuous reliance on humanitarian assistance for their presence to be viable.

The World Food Programme for instance which serves as both an emergency and development agency is one of the UN's largest hunger relief organisations, employing over 23,000 people globally (WFP, 2022). The UNHCR, on the other hand, employs around 20,739 people to care for people of concern to the organization (UNHCR, 2022). These two organisations among many have been working in the Cameroonian refugee camps for the past 10 years of refugee presence in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps. During this time, part of donor contributions, which make up a significant part of all contributions are directed towards the payment of these staff who are continuously being deployed in areas of concern to refugee protection.

Unfortunately, the possibilities of refugee dependence might not be close given the extremely high level of dependence refugees in these camps have on WFP food and cash assistance. Among the beneficiaries interviewed, a greater majority still demonstrate an incapacity to care for their ever-growing families, an inability to make savings from self-reliance ventures and worst of all preference for WFP assistance over the establishment of robust empowerment opportunities capable of making them autonomous sustainably. From observation, these cases were a result of the great reliance refugees had built up towards free assistance for protracted periods. Despite Nigerian and CAR refugees' ten-year stay in these camps, one would have expected them to start thinking about better alternatives for themselves rather than expect more WFP assistance. On the contrary, a larger majority expected to not only continuously receive WFP rations, but also expected an increase in rations as rations continuously dropped over the years.

Sadly, a large majority of refugees in both camps did not even understand the implications of rations cuts, to them it had nothing to do with donor fatigue as most of those questioned as per this topic related the reason for the drastic cuts of their rations to the ongoing Ukraine / Russian War. This simply implied that for the past ten years of refugee stay in camps, authorities in

charge had failed to educate refugees on the need to quickly become autonomous unless donor cuts set in and rendered camp life unbearable for reliant refugees.

Additionally, most refugees who had come into the camps with some considerable amount of savings only started getting self-reliance talks after these savings were already spent on other livelihood needs. Whereas, introducing self-reliance initiatives as soon as refugees arrive at camps, or at least during their first few years would have been the optimal time for humanitarian organisations to make proper use of refugee assets and capacities already acquired prior to arrival at camps to optimize self-reliance sustainability. Despite the high feasibility of this strategy in making self-reliance options more sustainable, the disingenuousness of stakeholder actions has only led to the adoption and implementation of several unsuccessful programs and the dilapidation of donor funds.

To this, Degnbol-Martinussen & Poul, content that, if donors on their part continuously sponsor unsuccessful programs, it is simply due to the ‘misleading’ reports dished out to them by humanitarian field workers who at all costs want to keep their jobs. They also state that many of the research institutions participating in donor aid evaluations are so reliant on the payments for this work that it would be difficult for them to disagree with the donor organizations (Degnbol-Martinussen and Poul 2003) thereby hindering their ability to take critical stances on solutions with long term benefits.

Despite an organisation’s knowledge of field demands and beneficiary interests and desires, organisations might turn to limited recommendations on what they believe will be of donor interests. This assertion is simultaneously backed by field data obtained in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps which reveal that most training programs undertaken within the camps are determined by humanitarian authorities in place, without necessarily taking into account refugee common needs and realities, and that skill training and livelihood programs are not sufficiently inclusive. This lack of consideration towards refugees and a need to please donors to secure funding has not only led to the continuous unsuccessfulness of self-reliance program outcomes but has questioned the genuineness of authorities to truly want the refugee problem permanently resolved.

The reasons for offering and receiving development assistance vary depending on the country and actor. Officially, the reasons donors give for assisting Nigerian and Central African Republic (CAR) refugees in Cameroon are tied to the goal of meeting the overall sustainable development goals, which revolve around addressing emergency needs, eradicating poverty, and contributing to the development and economic growth of low-income states Radelet, (2006), Gulrajani, (2016). Nonetheless, there may be numerous other motivations in recipient nations that are not directly related to the development goal.

Though some donors’ motivation is apolitical, guided by humanitarian considerations which are more philanthropic and development-driven, many scholars however have been able to prove that the provision of aid is motivated more by donors’ objectives rather than humanitarian considerations and development pursuits of aid recipients (Murad, Banks and Parson 2015). Though there is no thorough research and clear proof that clearly explains the motives of donors to earmark their contribution to refugee protection in Cameroon, the continuous flow of donor contributions despite unsuccessful self-reliance initiatives in these camps could suggest that donors’ interests in these regions surpass refugee development and

protection. If not, why do donors continue to sponsor unsuccessful refugee self-reliance schemes for decades when these projects have proven over time to have no long-term effects on beneficiaries? Or in other terms, what benefits do foreign donors get from unproductive "grand plans" in developing countries?

4.0 CONCLUSION

This article has examined the genuine motivations of stakeholder involvement in refugee protection issues in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps. It has demonstrated how authorities have concealed their true intentions behind disingenuous actions and prolonged refugee situations. The paper has also illustrated how stakeholders through their form of policies and programs, are implicated in the creation of new challenges for refugees and how authorities have taken advantage of refugees' continuous dependence to easily manipulate and sway their actions.

The approach stakeholders have demonstrated in an attempt to protect the human rights and freedom of movement of refugees in these two camps has merely served to prolong the precarious conditions and ultimately increased their need for humanitarian assistance. Though camp settlers have demonstrated the capability and desire to work, unfavourable conditions put in place by stakeholder institutions towards the dependence of refugees have proven to be the main determinants that shape the viability of self-reliance. Continuous dependence on refugees has been hard to eradicate and self-reliance hard to sustain, in practice, these are shaped by power dynamics in place.

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