

REFUGEE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING: ALIGNING LIVELIHOOD NEEDS WITH HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT PACKAGES

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the nexus between refugee participation in decision-making and long-term solutions to their livelihood issues, arguing that humanitarian support programs are not sustainable because they do not align with the needs and interests of their beneficiaries. This argument is contested by sampled refugee opinions collected in two of Cameroon's largest refugee camps, which show that even though refugees are included in key decision-making processes, there is an incongruous unalignment between humanitarian support packages and the needs and interests of refugees. Additionally, several refugee humanitarian assistance initiatives have failed because of this unalignment. The paper also aims to demonstrate that the humanitarian action plan's failure to include beneficiary needs and interests in their action plans suggests that the sustainability of refugee development and reducing dependence on humanitarian support packages are not often the primordial objective of donor assistance.

Keywords: Refugee Participation, decision-making, humanitarian support packages, refugee well-being, Cameroon, refugee camps

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, public concerns have challenged the need for refugee participation as a critical condition that all humanitarian responses must accept as a valid humanitarian practice. Urging humanitarian actors to be actively involved in the process of decision-making that affects the livelihoods and well-being of refugees (CHS, 2014; CHS, 2018; CHS, 2019; WHS, 2016). If participation has been recognized as a global concern, it is because it is believed to be a route through which refugee perspectives of their needs and interests may be sampled and appropriate action taken.

Unfortunately, the literature available in this field suggests that prior approaches to integrating refugees in the formulation of humanitarian programs and policies have been often unsuccessful. Furthermore, efforts to engage refugees have continuously failed to include their voices in a meaningful way, even after years of recognizing the importance of doing so. Rather, humanitarian actors seek to impose their interests while altogether maintaining control and influence over important decisions. Thus, the incongruity between humanitarian support packages and refugee needs and interests, as well as a prolonged refugee problem in the two Cameroon camps under study.

The number of long-term refugees in Africa has grown significantly over the past decade and for many years, the main goal of humanitarian organisations that work to protect refugees has been the core objective of many humanitarian organisations that work to protect refugees. Even though the significance of long-term solutions has long been acknowledged, it has grown more challenging to find these solutions for refugees, which has led to their prolonged stay in camps (Addo & Tanle, 2023; Crisp, 2003;). The "prolonged refugee situation" phenomenon is a result of the incapacity to guarantee prompt solutions for the predicament of refugees. According to the UNHCR, this condition occurs when refugees remain in exile for five years or longer following their original displacement, with no urgent plans to put long-term solutions into place (UNHCR, 2009)

Because lengthy refugee situations were becoming the norm and because refugee needs and interests did not necessarily correspond with humanitarian support programs, most refugee livelihood support programs were doomed to fail or become unsustainable. The Grand Bargain of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit brought together humanitarian actors to find long-term solutions to the refugee issue (WHS, 2016), to guarantee that aid packages are in line with the needs and interests of recipients and that humanitarian responses are prompt and pertinent. The principle of participation was one of the resolutions endorsed during this meeting. This idea would allow recipients of assistance to participate in life-changing decision-making. Finding long-term solutions to the problems faced by refugees in camps requires aligning humanitarian assistance with the demands and interests of beneficiaries.

Without refugee participation in the development of its empowerment programs, sustainability in the context of refugee self-reliance growth over time has proven to be difficult and ineffective (Nabulsi, 2020). Therefore, it has been acknowledged by all humanitarian organizations that involving refugees in decisions that impact their lives in refugee camps is a better way to reduce their reliance on aid, make it possible for refugee self-reliance programs to be sustained, and, most importantly, make sure that aid packages are in alignment with the needs and interests of recipients (Abdelmagid, Francesco, Sylvia, & Abdihamid, 2019; Fratzke, et al., 2021). The principle of participation, among other principles, was seen as a successful way to guarantee that humanitarian assistance packages will be focused on more pertinent developmental action plans for beneficiary participants since each participant or community has a better understanding of their needs and interests and is more knowledgeable about specific humanitarian packages that would best meet their livelihood needs.

Like many other refugee-hosting nations, Cameroon houses refugees in precarious conditions despite the massive sums of money spent on sponsoring initiatives to find long-term solutions to refugee issues. For the past decade, Nigerian and CAR refugees in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps, respectively, have been living in precarity, relying on humanitarian help to sustain their livelihoods, with little to no hope of achieving long-term self-sufficiency for their households.

However, for humanitarian assistance packages to yield more impacts on the lives of beneficiaries in Cameroon refugee camps and become more effective and significant, it was incumbent on humanitarian actors to include beneficiaries in decision-making and align their assistance packages with refugee needs and interests. The Cameroon government working in collaboration with humanitarian institutions like the United Nations Refugee Commission for

Refugees, World Food Programme, Plan International, Jesuit Refugee Services NGOs, and other private organizations, among other humanitarian actors have been the potential actors working in close collaboration with refugee beneficiaries and involved with the provision of essential humanitarian packages for the sustainability of livelihood endeavours. These entities have been on the scene concerned with refugee issues and have launched many development activities to empower refugees. Different governmental and non-governmental organizations are also aiding empowerment by supporting refugees in starting and developing self-reliant ventures through inclusion and participation.

It is however expected that with the presence of these many humanitarian agencies, in charge of ameliorating the living conditions of refugees and provision of sustainable solutions to refugee precarity and protracted stay in these camps, more sustainable solutions to refugee problems would have been sought by now. Unfortunately, field data has revealed that despite the presence of these many humanitarian agencies in the Cameroon camps, implementing relief actions alongside participants to help better living conditions, levels of precarity have been getting worse and vulnerability levels have been on the rise (OCHA, 2023).

A good emergency response requires a strong command and control structure and a chosen leader who can make difficult decisions based on the needs and preferences of beneficiaries, politics, relationships, or personal interests (Murad, Banks, & Parson, 2015). Since the humanitarian system is constantly evolving to accommodate new situations, affected and vulnerable individuals and communities must be at its core and participate in decision-making. Unfortunately, this is often stated but not accomplished, which contributes to the long-standing refugee problem.

For humanitarian relief assistance to yield sustainable outcomes and provide long-lasting solutions for refugees in the two Cameroon camps in particular, this paper samples the opinions of refugees in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps to support the claim that refugee participation in these two camps is poorly implemented. Even though refugee needs and interests are sampled during inclusion sessions, there is a gross mismatch between refugee needs and humanitarian support packages.

The interviews gathered point to potential causes of the ongoing failure of humanitarian assistance initiatives as well as potential explanations for the lengthy years of refugee stay at camps and their high degrees of dependency. Further, the analysis better enlightens readers on the continuous failure of some relief projects at camps aimed at aiding livelihood programs. This paper, however, seeks to prove that refugee participation in these two camps is poorly implemented. In more detailed terms, the continuous protractedness of refugees in these camps is because of the failure of humanitarian actors to take into consideration participants' needs and interests when implementing humanitarian actions, thus leading to the failure of most relief programs. The fact that humanitarian organizations fail to include beneficiary needs and interests in their action plan may suggest therefore that the sustainability of refugee empowerment and dependence on humanitarian assistance are not often the primary goals of donor assistance.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To better support the claims purported in the article, data obtained from two 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 degree of inclusion of refugees in decisions affecting their lives at the 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 importance of refugee participation in decisions affecting their lives and the need to align refugee needs and interests with support packages, the study employed a total of 106 respondents, randomly selected. The study also focused largely on the literature on refugee participation in finding durable solutions and, the importance of humanitarian support package alignment with refugee needs and interests, 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.

2.1 Background and presentation of the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps

The presence of the Nigerian and CAR refugees in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps respectively dates from 2014. These camps are best described as host to protracted and vulnerable refugees. Geographically, the Minawao and Gado-Badzere refugee camps are in the Far North and Eastern regions of Cameroon, respectively. The Minawao camp is the largest refugee camp in terms of population in Cameroon with a surface area of about 623 hectares of land, made up mostly of a Nigerian refugee population. Though designated to hold just 10,000 refugees at a time, currently harbors 75,000 Nigerian refugees and continues to receive an average of 863 new arrivals monthly including 1,147 births for the first quarter. (UNHCR, 2022).

Meanwhile, The Gado-Badzere camp with a surface area of approximately 55 hectares and designated for slightly below 10,000 refugees is the second largest refugee camp in Cameroon with a refugee population of about 27,000 CAR refugees. (UNHCR, Profil de site de Gado, 2022). The overpopulated state of both camps has not in any way influenced the increase in the total surface area of the camps. Conversely, camp dwellers now live in cramped environments with heightened degrees of vulnerability, providing refugees with little to no privacy and putting them at risk for health issues and sexual assault.

Within the camps, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, which is the main refugee catering institution in partnership with other NGOs, and national and international stakeholders provides refugees with basic needs such as nutrition, housing, water, solar panels, health care, and education facilities. Some institutions present at the two camps are the World Food Programme, Plan International, World Health Organization, religious private national and international bodies, and the Cameroon government which is providing the refugee camping space as well as enabling biometrics registrations through the Ministry of External Relations for all incoming refugees. Apart from these institutions, donors of funds for

the running of affairs for refugees in Cameroon include about 20 countries providing both restricted and unrestricted funds with the top three donors being Sweden, Norway, and the United States of America. (UNHCR, 2023)

Despite the yearly donations, Nigerian and CAR refugees' longstanding presence in Cameroon territory has been witnessed with a lot of hardship. These refugees lack key livelihood aspects of social, political, and economic life in the country. Indeed, refugees in these camps are prevented from obtaining work permits, which tends to create more dependent refugees with little to no possibility of making self-reliance initiatives effective. Overall poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and inadequate surroundings have not only restricted living space, thereby offering little or no privacy to housemates but have also exposed them to health hazards thus making the spread of diseases easier. (VOA, 2022). The household size of respondents from both camps ranged from one to twelve members with an average of seven, thereby increasing the likelihood of being vulnerable, poor, and food insecure.

Homes with leaking ceilings or tarpaulin are quite common among camp residents. At least 25% of respondents reported water leaks through their ceilings, some with perforated tarpaulins. The health and well-being of individuals in general and of refugees depend much on the acquisition of adequate housing facilities with the possibility of providing healthy environments free from all health hazards. Several studies have correlated health conditions and poor housing conditions WHO, (2016); Shamsuddin, Norzaimi, Ismail, & Ibrahim, (2015). In most cases, a space of about 20 square meters or less per household is what upholds in these refugee camps with household members ranging from at least 5 members per household to about 15 or even more.

One of the most alarming difficulties for camp residents is the lack of electricity. Lack of electricity is usually said to be a critical challenge in areas where the inhabitants and their safety are at high risk such as hospitals, storage centers and even refugee camps with reports on kidnappings and armed attacks on camp inhabitants and/or neighboring communities are rampant.

Cooking energy sources at the camps are not very diverse and available to camp inhabitants as firewood, though extremely scarce remains the most common for refugees of both camps. Though the increase in refugee population also implies an increase in firewood usage, the scarcity of this precious item especially in the Minawao camp has been a major challenge for camp inhabitants who encounter numerous challenges in their quest to fetch the precious material. Things have even been made worse with severe bans placed by the Cameroon government, prohibiting the cutting down of trees for the use of firewood or any other motive in this region. The sole reliance on firewood over the years has placed a severe environmental burden on the Far North region as the state has indulged in continuous strategies to limit deforestation in the region.

Health for all is a fundamental human right. Preservation of refugee health not only ensures that they can work and provide basic needs for themselves and their families but also enables them to live fruitfully. Unfortunately, adequate medical health care is not a commodity that is always available and accessible to the refugee population in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps inhabitants. Refugees are often classified among the most vulnerable sets of people in a community, and in Cameroon just like in many developing nations, the legal framework is not

developed enough to fully protect the rights of refugees especially not as residents or employees. Likewise, medical healthcare services for refugees are not always a given especially when host nations themselves are equally struggling to fully meet up with national health needs.

Findings reveal that Minawao has two health centers and two maternity units within the camp. Meanwhile, the Gado-Badzere camp has one health center and one maternity unit outside the camp, which serve the health benefits of refugees. While these health facilities located within refugee settlements are meant to care for refugees' basic health needs, refugees with serious health conditions must travel to faraway cities to get specialized treatment.

Though education is not essentially a prerequisite for entry into the refugee camp nor a condition, for most refugees however, education is a key factor in ensuring their participation in major decision-making in these camps. During data collection, respondents in both camps were asked questions about their levels of education, their participation in decisions concerning their livelihoods, and whether their desires and needs were incorporated into major support projects executed at the camps. These variables are believed to have a great influence on refugee participation as those with relatively higher levels of education were those used to relay information to the rest of the people, or their opinions sought on issues concerning needs and interests.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Participation of refugees in major decision-making: A strategy of refugee inclusion and self-representation

Over the past decades, public concerns have urged the need for refugee participation as an important standard that must be adopted by humanitarian responses as an acceptable humanitarian practice. And humanitarian actors have been urged to meaningfully involve refugees in decision-making that impacts their livelihoods and well-being (CHS, 2014; CHS, 2018; CHS, 2019; WHS, 2016). Seeing refugees as 'capable' economic actors who can contribute to their host country and find answers to their problems (Betts & Collier, 2015; Betts, Bloom, & Weaver, 2015; Easton-Calabria, 2014; Easton-Calabria, 2015)

Contrary to the notion that refugee voices have been heard in the humanitarian scene and that their needs and interests have been taken into consideration, the disparity that exists between humanitarian support packages and refugee needs and interests suggests that though refugees are made to participate in major decision-making, their needs are not always taken into consideration. (Abbas, et al., 2018). While Helena & Micael (2002) regard participant voices as "analogous" to political voices, Bennett, Currion, DuBois & Zaman (2018), and DuBois (2018) contend that maintaining the top-down decision-making structure is what genuinely creates a relationship between refugees and humanitarian actors during inclusion sessions. Whereby, refugees are seen as a set of "vulnerable beneficiaries" who need humanitarian actors to make major decisions on their behaviour.

Understanding what participation means in our context is crucial, and as Andrea Cornwall (2008) pointed out, the term is incredibly flexible and can be used to refer to nearly anything involving people. In general terms, participation is a broad idea that encompasses a network of

interrelated rights such the freedom of expression, association, voting, and election. These rights play a role in decision-making platforms and can balance and preserve their fundamental human dignity (Ruma, 2003)

At times, humanitarian actors' primary goals for involving refugees in the creation and execution of initiatives may be far more limited than they are depicted (Tristan & Hobbs, 2020). Instead of being a true strategic engagement that allows a reaction based on what people need and want rather than what commodities and services may be offered, it is thought that refugee participation is primarily embraced as a means of carrying out the agenda of larger institutions and governments (Serna, 2019). As such, evidence to demonstrate refugee participation with hopes of leading to sustainable outcomes is usually observed without tangible outcomes or long-term solutions for refugees.

Scholars have defined the concept of participation as it is portrayed by most humanitarian actors in their action plans, which mainly demonstrate the misguided objective of empowering refugees or enabling them to take charge of their own lives. For instance, Jules Pretty (1995), in his examination of participation in terms of agricultural development, critiques the passive and deceptive forms of participation that certain actors have introduced, whereby individuals participate by being informed on decisions that have already been made or have already taken place.

On the other hand, a more significant yet limited form of participation is the consulting or material incentive participation put forth by Jules Pretty (1995). Jules believes that, to varying degrees, people may participate in this process, but crucial decisions have already been taken and cannot be open for revision or reversed. Unfortunately, these types of engagements is that which prevails nowadays and demonstrate the rapport between humanitarian support packages and refugee needs and interests.

Meanwhile, the kind of participation anticipated during the Grand Bargain in 2016 is the transformative kind of participation which is centered on beneficiary empowerment. This form of participation is meaningful and gives recipients of humanitarian efforts the freedom to choose for themselves what to do and how to act in ways that will sustainably improve their quality of life. Most importantly, Cornwall (2008) argues that representative participation is often promoted when an organization genuinely wishes to avoid creating dependency, is more enduring, and gives beneficiaries a say in determining their development.

Representative participation has the potential to not only lessen dependency but also address important issues associated with refugees' protracted stay in camps because the needs and interests of the sampled refugees will be suitably matched with what humanitarian assistance packages will ultimately offer. When refugee self-reliance programs are created with their needs and interests in mind, the results are believed to have a higher chance of lasting (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Easton-Calabria, 2022).

Just like the idea of participation, humanitarian aid alignment and refugee needs are complementary philosophies that are essential to improving sustainable livelihood possibilities and identifying long-term solutions for refugee camp settlers. Without refugee participation, self-reliance development and refugee livelihood cannot be successful or sustainable, according to anecdotal evidence and growing consensus among parties engaged in refugee

well-being. (Harley, 2021; Nabulsi, 2020). Furthermore, if refugee needs and interests are not considered after being sampled, it will be impossible to find sustainable solutions.

The idea of aligning humanitarian aid with recipient needs is an idea that was first adopted during the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005, where it was recognized that aid could and should be having greater effects. (OECD, 2008). The principle of Aid Effectiveness aimed to ensure that donor assistance would be focused on more relevant development plans in needy communities or beneficiaries, especially as each community better understands their own need and is probably more aware of its own very needs and what activity they believe they could better strive in.

Sadly, it should come as no surprise that those in charge have silenced refugees and kept them out of the planning and execution of assistance programs. According to some academics, humanitarian actors use their perceptions of refugees' fragility, deservingness, or illiteracy levels—as well as their understanding of refugees as an infantilized community—to defend their actions of denying them the freedom to choose. They view refugees as dependents who require representation to make decisions and achieve progress in their lives because they are “incapable” of doing so themselves (Sigona, 2014; Lenette, Bordbar, Hazara, Lang, & Yahya, 2020).

Participation is recommended and through participation, beneficiary needs and interests need to match or align with support packages. However, it is also important that humanitarian organizations use their discretion where necessary to bypass beneficiary needs and implement what they think will ultimately benefit both parties long-term. Unfortunately, it is known that humanitarian players also have their own personal interests to implement in these camps (Serna, 2019), as such the dilemma comes up when we cannot decipher the right intention and moment for humanitarian actors to intervene through their discretion because they too come with their interests and motives in these camps. However, it is known that they step in when they feel that beneficiaries are not capacitated to fully understand exactly what they truly need to become self-sufficient or independent (Lenette, Bordbar, Hazara, Lang, & Yahya, 2020)

Research has demonstrated that most refugees living in camp settlements are typically undereducated, and the education they receive is frequently insufficient to give them a foundational understanding necessary to make wise decisions on their own (Shohel, 2022). This partly explains why there are relay agents in camps; these agents are chosen based on their educational backgrounds and are required to have completed at least primary school to be recruited as volunteer or relay agents for humanitarian organizations. Through these relay agents, actors receive information from refugees and vice versa. Though such a form of communication is known to be quick, it is also known for the distortion of important material as relay agents often tend to communicate what they want as individuals and not necessarily what is intended by refugees themselves.

States have also implemented a variety of laws that not only prevent refugees from participating or having their voices heard, but also restrict their freedom of movement, job permits, and expression with no legal protection (Mbua, 2015). Even in governments that claim to support refugees' rights, there are very few direct legal consequences or permissibility for them. (Mandal, 2003). This is in accordance with the fact that refugee participation is mostly welcomed as a way of implementing the agenda of larger institutions and governments rather

than as genuine strategic engagement that enables a response based on what people need and want rather than what goods and services can be supplied (Serna, 2019)

Although the participation of refugees can significantly contribute refugee development program sustainability, alignment does not always equate to development. One cannot claim that participation alone produces favourable results.

It cannot be claimed that the mere act of allowing refugees to participate in decision-making, having their voices heard, and having all their wishes considered and implemented for development projects cannot be said to systematically lead to long lasting outcomes. It would however be misleading to believe otherwise given that outcomes of participation have been said to be hindered in most cases by a lack of education of participants both informally within families and communities (Cheryl, Klthryn, & Bridget, 2008)

Additionally, according to Fung (2015), most public hearings and meetings are frequently low on the empowerment and influence scale, making it rare for them to try to achieve a consensus or majority opinion among participants. This is because at most meetings, officials or guests speak for the most part, with only a few participants contributing during the sessions and the majority listening as spectators. More recommendations from decision-makers than from attendees are ultimately included in the outcomes of these meetings.

3.2 Refugee vulnerability challenges and development priority needs in Cameroon refugee camps

Just as most refugees in settlements in Africa and the world, refugees in Cameroon's Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps are faced with several challenges as the camps continuously receive huge numbers annually. With the many developmental needs of protracted refugees accumulated and the difficulty in providing services to her population, Cameroon is faced with a lot of financial burdens. Also, humanitarian agencies can better appreciate the magnitude of the problems and come up with solutions that can bring long-lasting solutions to the refugee problem. This section addresses the vulnerability challenges of refugees, in the two selected camps, which also pertains to their needs and interests.

3.3 Difficulty finding jobs

A significant challenge facing refugees in these two camps is the difficulty in finding stable jobs. With the high unemployment rate among the local population, the capacity for refugees to compete for the already limited job opportunities becomes a greater challenge. Unemployment in Cameroon and most especially that of the youth has become a major challenge as about 1.2 million youths between the ages of 15 and 25 are unemployed. (Tamghe, 2020). It becomes even harder for refugees to compete in the job market, coupled with the fact that those who struggle to make ends meet still struggle to acquire official identification documents, have difficulties, or are almost impossible to obtain professionally recognized degrees (Worden et al., 2022), which can permit them to boost livelihood. It even becomes more complex for those with pre-obtained skills to find jobs that can match their set skills and therefore have no choice but to suffer from underemployment. Ensuring therefore that refugees can obtain and maintain sustainable jobs will not only resolve a major development need but will also help limit vulnerability levels at camps.

3.4 Environmental Insecurity

Refugees in Cameroon Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps are faced with daily insecurity concerns due to the overcrowded and deplorable living conditions in camp settlements. In the Minawao camp, for instance, harbouring mainly Nigerian refugees. Households mostly use unimproved materials on walls, floors, and roofs and have fewer rooms, usually more than three people sleeping in a room. As a result, at least 62% of camp-based households have deplorable and fewer rooms compared to 51% of refugees living out of camps. (UNHCR, 2022). The overcrowding at camps not only poses a security problem for camp-based refugee women but also suggests a high level of economic vulnerability.

3.5 Limited resources to set up self-reliance ventures for refugees

Financial resources to start up self-reliant activities at camps for refugees have often been a major challenge both for Cameroon and the humanitarian agencies in charge of refugee livelihood provision. The unprecedented outburst in refugee numbers and the protracted stay of refugees in these camps has put excessive pressure on the Cameroon government, humanitarian agencies, and overstretched community resources over the last decade. (EU, 2023). Also, Cameroon has a significantly growing population and is also facing difficulties in meeting the needs of its population thus difficult to faithfully attend to refugee financial needs capable of guaranteeing suitable self-reliant opportunities for all. Likewise, donors and humanitarian organizations are becoming overwhelmed by the growing number of refugees and are faced with the dilemma of either assisting newcomers or refugees in protracted situations who despite long-lasting support are still in need of assistance. Aside from this limitation, the lack of economic activities has made it such that most of the refugee youth are idling around, thereby leading them to several mishaps such as theft, rape, or pregnancies.

3.6 Reduced or insufficient food assistance coupled with limited variations

One of the significant challenges raised by refugees in both camps is the consistency that the World Food Program has reduced food assistance in the past years. Over the last few years, the WFP assistance has experienced drastic cuts in their food assistance in these two camps. According to them, the ration cuts have been because of the overwhelmingly growing refugee population at these camps. With such a dilemma, the WFP is forced to make the difficult decision of slashing the assistance as revealed by a WFP agent on the field at the Minawao camp

... rations have dropped firstly because donor fatigue has set in where donors have begun to complain about giving money continuously to people without seeing changes in their living conditions. Plus, other more pressing humanitarian issues are arising that necessitate donor attention. Plus the finances that we had before that could benefit 5,000 people yesterday is almost the same thing that we have today to feed 10,000 so we have no option than to slice the rations such that at least everyone can have a small portion ... imagine that if we are given money to buy 100 bags of rice for instance to feed 100 families, each family will receive one bag of rice... but now the population has increased and we are still having the same 100 bags of rice to feed more people. We have no choice but to reduce the food each family is entitled to...

Meanwhile, in the Gado-Badzere camp, a beneficiary of cash assistance complained of cash cuts:

... even the cash we used to have 8800 francs before, then it went down to 6000 now it is 5000 francs. Everything has become difficult....

At least 70% of refugees in need of assistance do not receive support due to funding shortcomings. And until today, 2023, the WFP still requires a lot more funds than what it presently obtains if it must adequately capacitate refugees in camps. (WFP, 2022) Not only did beneficiaries complain of insufficient food rations, but the limited variation was equally a major issue as rations usually consist of rice, beans, oil, salt, and at times sorghum or guinea corn for refugees in these camps. These ration cuts as well as the unchanging variety of rations are not only making vulnerability levels extreme but also worsening vulnerability levels as well as encouraging negative coping mechanisms as refugees seek other means of complementing rations.

3.7 Nexus of Humanitarian Support Packages and Refugee Development Needs.

The reasons for offering and receiving humanitarian development assistance vary depending on the country and actor. Officially, the reasons donors give for assisting Nigerian and Central African Republican (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—for example, the donor country's national security strategy or corporate motivations/interests (Sen, 2018)

The Cameroonian government, working alongside refugee commissions, humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR, WFP, Plan International, Jesuit Refugee Services NGOs, and other private organizations, has launched a multitude of development activities aimed towards empowering refugees. Different governmental and non-governmental organizations are also aiding empowerment by supporting refugees in starting and developing self-reliant ventures through inclusion and participation.

The World Bank on its part has defined the concept of participation as the process by which stakeholders can influence and take part in decision-making and resource allocation related to development projects that concern them directly (World Bank, 1996). On the other hand, one of the tenets of participation and economic inclusion is that community involvement in decisions that impact their lives is essential for development to be successful. Data gathered for this study, however, shows that the programs implemented in the Gado and Minawao camps have either been inadequate or have not always aligned with the requirements and preferences of the beneficiary refugees in the camps in question, thereby disregarding the importance of refugee participation in the adoption of self-reliance initiatives concerning them and leading to the flawed conceptualization of some self-reliance initiatives at camps.

Whatever the reason for humanitarian support given to refugees, beneficiary refugees should be made to participate and the support package unanimous with what refugee needs and

requirements are. This is according to the principle of participation agreed upon at the Grand Bargain summit as a way of making humanitarian aid to refugees have more impact.

However, because motives and justifications are not always consistent, at times humanitarian support is driven by donors' interests. (Murad, Banks, & Parson, 2015). It should be noted that aid organizations adopt rules or policies based on their interests, prospects, beliefs, or understanding of recipient states, which are not always true of the needs and interests of recipient countries. (McKinlay & Richard, 1977). Therefore, some humanitarian support programs for refugees aimed at helping them become less dependent on humanitarian support often tend to fail. This assertion is simultaneously backed by field data obtained in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps revealing that most empowerment training programs undertaken within the two camps are not just failing to take beneficiary environmental, cultural, and social needs into consideration, but are also failing to take the programs inclusive enough to absorb a large majority of refugees.

As demonstrated in this section, it is the humanitarian actor's failure to include the needs of refugees and adopting unrealistic and uncomprehensive policies that led to the failure of these support programs. Indeed, it is also due to this laxity that refugee precarity and dependency levels keep soaring over the years. The manner of implementation of these support programs not only impeded favourable results but also demonstrated a lack of willingness to truly find long-lasting solutions to refugee problems.

This is a typical example of the Jesuit Refugee Service who initiated a chicken-rearing scheme that was implemented in the Gado-Badzere camp. This initiative failed in its early stage, with nearly all the chicks dying and beneficiaries embezzling equipment leading to hundreds of thousands of donor cash being lost. Despite initiative's admirable goals the approach was flawed as the initiative failed to take into consideration the reality that refugees had worked as wage workers, farmers, students, nomads, pastoralists, drivers, and fishermen before fleeing their homeland. In any event, this project brought together all these groups of people despite their differences in interests and concerns, which contributed to the project's premature failure.

These recipients included people who had wanted to be empowered in their various spheres of life rather than being coerced into such programs. One of the recipients was Adama, who had no prior experience or interest in poultry farming and had previously worked as a driver before leaving his native country. He was part of this program even though he didn't like the practice. Most of the beneficiaries lacked prior knowledge, and the training they received in the camp to care for these chicks was insufficient to sustain the activity over the long term. According to Adama, he even went so far as to say that this program was destined to fail early given the beneficiary lack of knowledge in the initiative, which to him was not sufficient to keep up with the activity long term. Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee (2023)

Thomas, another recipient of this chicken farming initiative, disclosed that he joined the program not out of enthusiasm but out of fear of being excluded from the already limited empowerment programs. Thomas acknowledged that because of the length of time beneficiaries had to wait to participate in empowerment programs, they participated "forcefully" out of fear of not being selected for later programs, which typically admitted a small number of recipients at a time (Thomas, Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee 2023).

The yogurt-making project, which employed 20 CAR refugee women, is another glaring illustration of resource depletion and initiative with low beneficiary interest at the Gado-Badzere refugee camp. The Yogurt making program sought to improve refugee diets by consuming them as sources of protein and expanding livelihood strategies through commercialization. Once more, this program failed because it ignored the beneficiaries' social and environmental reality. In addition to ensuring that funds are used wisely, considering refugee interest guarantees that recipients can gain long-term empowerment and use earnings to improve their standard of living.

According to an interview with Miriam, a CAR beneficiary of the Yogurt making initiative, the support program was destined to fail because the program initiators neglected to consider the fact that the camp was without electricity and had been using solar panels for a long time, which were insufficient to power the entire camp. Therefore, plans for the storage of manufactured goods were never considered. Miriam believes that the availability of continuous electricity may not have made a significant difference because she made fun of the fact that refugees' limited financial resources prevented them from affording a refrigerator, which she viewed as a luxury that allowed them to store yogurt (Miriam, Gado-Badzere, CAR refugee 2023).

Consequently, failing to align humanitarian support programs with refugee needs and interests, primary data obtained in both camps has demonstrated a nexus with resource waste and program discontinuity shortly after authority departure, as well as embezzlement of business finances and the sale of provided equipment. Concerns have been raised about the fact that donors lack awareness of recipient needs and objectives. Suggestions have therefore been made on suitable ways of designing aid initiatives such that they suit recipient interests better, with the hope of achieving better development results. (OECD, 2005). Humanitarian assistance alignment with recipient needs, for instance, is one of the many conditions highlighted during the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, which stated that for humanitarian help to be more effective, it must be aligned with recipient needs and interests. (OECD, 2005).

Also, the information gathered about the degree of economic inclusion of refugees in the Minawao and Gado-Badzere camps indicates that these camps' humanitarian support programs have not been sufficiently inclusive. Given the size of the refugee population in both camps, it makes sense that the humanitarian groups spearheading the execution of projects aimed at empowering the refugees would select more than just a handful of recipients for each empowerment or training session. It is expected however that the selection of a larger and more comprehensive number of refugees per session will have a more profound effect on beneficiary lives and yield more sustainable outcomes (Rosenstein-Rodan, 1961).

This belief is based on Rosenstein Rodan's Big Push theory, which highlights that for development's effects to be sustained, and significant, a comprehensive investment is required in every effort to promote development. (Rosenstein-Rodan, 1961). According to Rodan, this is the only way that development efforts' results can have a long-lasting impact on the lives of their recipients. Regretfully, empowerment efforts in the Gado and Minawao refugee camps are reported to admit only between 6 and 30 people per training session, even though the number of refugees in the two camps under study has reportedly increased over the years.

Also, a significant portion of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction over their protracted wait times to be included in such empowerment programs. As was previously indicated, the protracted wait has forced some beneficiaries to participate in suggested projects with little to no enthusiasm. This has only contributed to the failure of most self-reliance projects especially because most programs with unenthusiastic members ended up being terminated as soon as training for the program came to an end, funds dilapidated, or assets lost. This is the very case of the chicken breeding initiatives where beneficiaries of that program revealed the loss of almost all their chicks at a very early stage due to a lack of expertise and thorough follow-up of implementation agencies.

On the other hand, it is also believed that the implementation to the latter of participation resolutions equally can undermine development efforts and rather encourage dependency on support packages for protracted periods (Ilcan, Marcia, & Connoy, 2015). The notion is that once people become used to receiving free communities, the concern is usually that they will not be inclined to put extra effort into their personal development. When beneficiaries concentrate on requesting what will benefit them and make their lives easier for a short while rather than what will make their livelihoods sustainable, it becomes incumbent on humanitarian actors to ignore participant interests and take actions that can yield long-lasting outcomes for both parties. At least 85% of refugee beneficiaries of WFP support packages for instance despite their prolonged stay at camps requested an increase in the number of monthly support rations.

Again, data acquired in this study demonstrated that refugees' continuous dependency on humanitarian organizations is due to the agency's failure to communicate its action plan to beneficiaries upon their initial arrival at the camps. Data collected from both camps demonstrated that most respondents were unaware that WFP, UNHCR, or any other humanitarian help was not designed to be permanent and that they would eventually have to fend for themselves. Despite their prolonged stay in these camps, most refugee responses reflected common signs of not being fully informed about the long-term humanitarian plans programmed for them by humanitarian support actors.

All 85 refugees interviewed expected an increase in the quality and quantity of monthly rations. Respondents attributed the decline in rations to a global catastrophe, such as the Ukraine/Russia war, rather than donor fatigue. At the same time, previous planning in communicating assistance plans will better enable recipients to begin thinking about taking control of their livelihoods as soon as humanitarian aid is discontinued. Most of these refugees had stayed in camps for at least 5 years and had not realized how dependent they had become on WFP ration support. To the extent that they would rather choose an increase in these free rations rather than choose the establishment of an empowerment venture.

4.0 CONCLUSION

For every humanitarian relief action to be effective, efficient, and sustainable, there is a need for great transparency of humanitarian operations, and beneficiary participation among other principles as stipulated by the Grand Bargain. It is believed that when people affected by a humanitarian crisis and their communities are included in the decision-making process, there is certainty that the humanitarian response becomes more relevant, timely, effective, and efficient. For this to work, recommendations are that accessible information and effective

processes for participation and feedback be put in place and that design and management decisions be responsive to the views of affected communities and people. In this light, donors and aid organizations should work to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups considering gender, age, ethnicity, language, and special needs are heard and acted upon. Such is expected to create an atmosphere of greater trust, transparency, and accountability.

Though participation is partially effective, the mismatch that exists between some humanitarian support programs has however demonstrated a lack of desire on the part of stakeholders to bring up long-lasting solutions to truly finding solutions to refugee problems. This is demonstrated by the simple fact that refugee-desired programs are sometimes disregarded, and the actor's own choice is implemented instead. Whether humanitarian actors are acting in favour of beneficiaries or not, it truly becomes difficult to tell when these actors act in the interest of the refugees or their interests. Humanitarian actors disregard the importance of refugee participation which has only led to a more flawed conceptualisation of refugee sustainable autonomy and continuous dependency levels.

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