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the **African Refugee Phenomenon**



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My

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I need to particularly thank my professional colleague and associate, Professor Tayo Odumosu, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, who facilitated the conference. Each time I wanted to give up while preparing for the conference, he gave me the courage to go ahead. Dr. Kayode Ojo, Associate Professor of Geography led the team of rapporteurs at the conference. His meticulous dotting of the I's and T's ensured an accurate communiqué. The crop of contributors to this book I must say, are some of the very best in the field. Some are from the academia, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community, the media, etc. I cannot thank them enough because whenever I asked them to make certain amendments to their texts, I was treated to an intellectual feast while they tried to convince me about the necessity or futility of such an enterprise.

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The socio-economic consequences of refugee problems in Africa

- P. F. Adebayo

Introduction

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the phenomenon of the ever-increasing African refugee population with its concomitant problems poses a dilemma for various international actors: governments, international organisations, voluntary agencies, host populations and of course the refugees themselves.

The crisis which has been occasioned by the prevalent political, economic, social upheavals and bad government coupled with natural disasters such as drought, famine, desertification and deforestation in the continent have continued to be of great concern to African leaders, humanitarian to be of great concern to African leaders, humanitarian organisation as well as scholars who have conscientiously endeavoured to research with the hope of resolving the numerous problems confronting refugees all over the world.

The magnitude of the problem in Africa is reflected in the statement of the late president of Sierra Leone, Siaka Stevens, who while speaking for the whole continent at the 1981 International Conference on Assistance to Refugee in Africa, acknowledged that African hospitality has been stretched beyond its limits. The refugee's problem is one of the crucial tragic issues of our time...(and)...there is no time for bickering, conflict or disagreement (Enkson, 1981).

Within the past two and half decades, students of the refugee phenomenon in Africa, have covered wide ranging areas, viz, the practical questions concerning the role of women, the allocation of resources within refugee communities, the status of spontaneously settled refugees, the administration of emergency and rural settlement policies, aspects of emergency assistance and rural settlement which are the two basic assistance provided in Africa as well as economic activities of the refugees (Loescher, 1990). These studies have admittedly guided policy makers on the problems of refugees in the continent. But a lot still has to be done on the overall implications of the refugee problems on the socio-

economic development in Africa in the foreseeable future. Indeed, only depth analytical tool for the study of the future consequences of the problem in Africa. Thus, a study of the implications of the refugee problems in the twenty-first century is justified partly on the ground that it will provide alternative ways of combating the problems in the future, apart from opening further areas of research; and especially because Africa which harbours about half of the world's population of refugees has already strained its economic resources beyond the limited of coping with the demands of the refugee. This shows the urgent need for international assistance. The dislocating causes the dysfunctionality of the family as reflected in the inability to utilize decision-making authority given to women in traditional agrarian economies such as control of certain crops and resources, which may no longer exist in the new environment.

Magnitude of the problem

What are the socio-economic consequences of the refugee problem in the next century? A further consequence of the dislocation is manifested in the usurpation of the traditional functions of the household. The dislocation causes the dysfunctionality of the family as reflected in the inability to utilise decision-making authority given to women in traditional agrarian economies such as control of certain crops and resources, which may no longer exist in the new environment.

More importantly is the fact that, forced migration has inadvertently thrust sudden changes on the rural economy and the family. This is because there is no opportunity for gradual adaptations to develop and agricultural production stops completely. The families who survive the crisis and become members of the refugee community must establish their new households in an alien setting without the comfort and resources of the rural economy they left behind. For instance nomadic and pastoral people are typical forced to abandon livestock raising because they no longer have access to range lands. For many refugee families, this causes identity crisis as well as economic hardship. Also during the crisis, households and family members are often separated; women are forced to flee without their husbands, who are usually left behind. In northern Uganda, for example, Sudanese woman refugees are left alone to manage households without their husbands. Previously dependent on farming in Sudan, these women are left alone with no alternative sources of support.

The dislocation has equally affected the traditional marriage arrangement. Indeed, research among refugee communities in Ethiopia has revealed problems among both Sudanese and Somali populations because of the breakdown of traditional marriage arrangement (*West Africa*, 1991). Also when Nuer and Dinka Sudanese men were unable to afford cattle for traditional payment of bride's family they began to abduct their brides illegally. This kind of kidnapping among Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia has resulted in conflict among families and

a disruption in the refugee community (*West Africa*, 1995). These examples illustrate the need for social services among refugee to help open a dialogue on marriage obligations in the alien refugee camps. Similar problems have also occurred among Somali refugees. This is because the normal payments for bride cannot be secured by Somali refugee men prior to marriage, therefore marriage itself now attracts less commitment and this has made divorce rate to climb up accordingly. It is, thus clear that the impact of the refugee crisis on the family is enormous.

The present political situation under which authoritarianism, repression and circumvention of democratic governance (all of which were inherited by African leaders from colonialism), has added considerable weight to the number of refugees thereby leading to stagnated development. Ake has in this regard observed that

repression has led to an enormous waste of human resources, they very engine of development 193 and that the use of coercion has turned Africa into a continent of refugees.

Thus, the present political situation which breeds refugee constitutes an obstacle to development. Angola for example is reported to have lost 20 billion us dollars from the destruction of property in its civil war. Development has stagnated in countries like Chad, Mozambique, Liberia, Somalia, Uganda, Sudan, and Rwanda, where refugee have been produced in large numbers (AREF, 1997). It is clear that in order to improve this stagnated development in Africa, an enabling political environment, capable of fostering development in all spheres, should be encouraged. This means reversing the trend of oppression, exploitation and discrimination which characterize African politics today

The effects of the problem on Africa economies can be seen from the following:

Table 1: World Refugees by Region, 1996

Region	Total (Thousands)
Africa	11,800,000
Asia	7,900,000
Europe	6,800,000
Latin America	180,000
North America	900,000
Oceania	50,000
TOTAL	27,330,000

Source: UNHCR Bulletin, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 1996.

Table 2: Population of Displaced West Africans, 1995

Country of Asylum	Country of Origin	Number Displaced	Total
Cote d'Ivoire	Liberia	360,000	360,000
Ghana	(a) Liberia	16,000	113,700
	(b) Togo	97,700	
Guinea	(a) Liberia	399,000	554,000
	(b) Sierra Leone	155,000	
Liberia	Sierra Leone	120,000	120,000
Nigeria	(a) Chad	1,300	5,300
	(b) Liberia	4,000	
Senegal	(a) Guinea-Bissau	5,000	72,800
	(b) Mauritania	67,000	

Source: UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, 1995 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995).

Table 3: Some basic indicators for selected West African Asylum Countries

Country	Population (mid 1993) (millions)	Per GNP Capita (1993) Dollars	Average Annual Growth	Growth Rate of GNP %		Average Annual rate of Inflation		Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	Adult Illiteracy (1993) Female Total	
				1970	1980	1970	1980			
Cote d'Ivoire	13.3	630	-4.6	6.8—	0.1	13.03	1.5	51	60	46
Ghana	16.4	430	0.1	0.1..	3.5	5.2..	37.0..	56	49	40
Guinea	6.3	500	..	..	3.7..	..	..	45	87	76
Liberia	2.8	695	..	..	..	9.2	..	56	71	61
Nigeria	105.3	300	-0.1	4.6	2.7	15.2	20.6	51	61	49
Senegal	7.9	750	0.0	2.3	2.8	8.5	4.9	50	75	62
Sierra Leone	4.5	180	-1.5	1.6	1.1	12.5	61.6	39	89	79

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1995 (N.Y. Oxford University Press, 1995).

Table 1 shows that in 1996 Africa, had the largest number of refugees in the world with almost 12 million refugees out of a world total population of about 28 million refugees. Table 2 shows that in 1995, The number of refugees in West African varied for a total of about seventy-three thousand (73,000) in Senegal (from Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania) to over half a million in Guinea (from Liberia and Sierra Leone). Cote d'Ivoire accommodated a total refugee population of 360,000 Liberians in 1995, while there were 120,000 displaced Sierra Leoneans in war-torn Liberia.

In terms of country of origin, by 1995 Africa produced 20% of the refugee population in the world. And in terms of country of asylum, 13 of the 28 asylum countries accommodating the largest refugees-population in the world were African. So, in terms of sheer number host African countries bear a substantial refugee burden.

Second, viewed in per capita terms, the African refugee problem is even more dramatic. In Somalia, one out of every ten persons is said to be a refugee while in Sudan and Djibouti one out of every thirty persons is a refugee. In some regions of these countries, refugees can be more than half of the population. And in the Somali case of the refugee host population ratio was 1:10.

There statistics illustrate the impact that large refugee flows can have on already impoverished African countries. Third, as table 3 shows, most of the African countries are exceedingly poor as measured by capital gross national product (GNP) statistics. Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone have per capital GNP of under \$500 a year.

Described as low income countries by the World Bank and at the bottom of the poverty measure, with per capital GNP of less than \$695 a year, these countries have little to share with the refugees that they must harbour.

Ghana's recent reluctance to take in the second batch of the Liberian seeking asylum can be understood in this context. Fourth, the majority of African countries have experienced a decline, over the past decade, in the growth of their capital gross domestic product GDP.

Their terms of trade are also declining, as the prices of the commodities they sell to the advanced countries are declining relative to the prices of manufactured goods they import from them.

In other words, many of the already poor countries that host refugees are getting poorer. The strain of the refugees' burden on the host countries can be overwhelming. Given the limited resources at the disposal of these governments, when they too have to provide their own people with basic social welfare programmes today it is reasonable to assume that sudden and large influx of refugees can overwhelm their capacities to respond.

While international assistance to refugees may help ease the burden, many of Africa's refugees are spontaneously settled and received no immediate direct international assistance.

From the above analysis it is evident that the implications of the problems for Africa which we have discussed will be enormous in the next century. It is certainly clear that the future is bleak, because there will be a carry over effect of the present problems in to the next century. The crises has shown that the rupture of an established disorder was not limited to one location in Africa (Olusola, 1995). The massive family dislocation has affected the traditional method of farming as well as the agricultural potentials of the African countries as we have stated earlier. With only an infinitesimal minority of people engaged in farming, it simply becomes difficult for Africa to feed its ever-growing population let alone is refugees and displaced people, all of whose population at an alarming rate.

In addition, the earlier mentioned GNP which is very low for African countries and the debt burden hanging over the continent makes it difficult to satisfy the demands of the refugees and displaced people. It is of course in the face of these mounting difficulties and problems of the refugees that the Ugandan Minister of planning and representative to UNHCR said "we can no longer dip our own hands into our pockets at all, because the bottom of the pocket is hollow" (Geneva, 1964).

The way forward

What measures should be taken to lessen the hardship faced by asylum countries. Indeed, the need for appropriate measures becomes urgent when it is realised that achievement of the three durable solutions voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement has been elusive, the refugee problem appears intractable.

In order to sensitize the international community to the plight of African refugees as well as mobilize funds for them, the organisation of African unity (OAU) should be organised before the end of the century the now overdue 3rd International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA). The last ICARA was held in July 1981. Although limited funds were realised in the first ICARA in 1981, nevertheless it succeeded in broadening world attention beyond the horrific plight of the Indo-Chinese "Boat People" (Geneva, 1981). The effectiveness with which public information materials about African refugees were distributed to media all over the world, is reflected in the 200 page handbook of newspaper clippings revealed after ICARA-1. The OAU should endeavour in conjunction with UNHCR to open offices abroad in other to source for funds from donor countries and other international agencies for African refugees. Newly established bodies such as African Refugee Foundation Centres for Refugee studies in both Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria should intensify their efforts in organising conferences and seminars on refugee related problems. Above all, African leaders should be made to understand that there is no substitute for good governance. It is certainly this that would stop the crisis which has been breeding refugees and displaced people all over the continent.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the historical origin of the refugee crisis in Africa and its socio-economic consequences in both the present and the next century. It has shown that Africa's refugee population of about eleven million including displaced people has had a devastating effect on the economic and social structure of the continent. At the macro level this large refugee and displaced population has had severe consequences on the productive growth of Africa.

economies while at the micro level it has had a negative impact on African communities and their families.

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Africa is regarded as the 'continent of refugees'. The harrowing pogroms in Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, etc., lends credence to this label. There is no country in Africa today that does not have its fair share of the refugee and/or displaced persons scourge – either as a receiver or producer of refugees. The magnitude of the 'warfare of ethnicities' on the continent has further intensified the production of refugees. There is now growing awareness of the fact that Africans are at best potential refugees and, at worst, perpetual refugees. How do we handle this problem of refugeeism that is threatening to destroy the continent? This book is an attempt to systematically analyse the problems and proffer solutions.

The twenty-three contributions deal with various aspects of Refugeeism which are grouped under the following headings: Dimensions of the Refugee Problem; Gender and Legal Issues; Refugees and the Environment; Social, Psychological and Cultural Problems; Humanitarian Relief for Refugees; Refugee Education; The Health of Refugees; The Mass Media, Perception of Refugees and General Overview

Editor

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