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Review of Responses to the Refugee Crisis: Rethinking the Promotion of the Concept of ‘Self-Reliance’ For Refugees’ According to Evan Easton-Calabria & Naohiko Omata

By

Ronald Osei Mensah

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

University of Cape Coast, Ghana

*Correspondence email: ronald.mensah@stu.ucc.edu.gh

&

Charles Obeel

M.A Graduate in Social Sciences (Adult Education)

School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE)

University of Ghana

Abstract

This piece gives an important scrutiny into the ongoing substantial subject matter of ‘self-reliance’ for refugees. Statistics available to UNHCR, shows that over 26% of the world’s refugee population can be found in south Saharan Africa, and still counting. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), also acknowledges Africa as home to more than 39% of the world’s internally displaced persons. Africa thus has the second highest number of persons displaced in the world. There are African refugees hosted in Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, among other countries. The prevailing knowledge mostly disregards the inadequacy in historical records of international assistance to advance the course of refugees’ self-reliance as well as the failure to interrogate equally the problems it links to neoliberalism and the concept of ‘dependency’. Methodologically, this paper relies largely on archival information which by itself is also a secondary source of information. The article brings to light the current concept and practice of self-reliance that are to a great extent what international donors consider to be a priority that aims to create a system by which exiting from long-term refugee population would be worthwhile. Though programmes ensure refugee self - reliance have been in place about a century now, they have achieved very little success in that regard. Also, settlements were generally, unsuccessful in their bid to achieve yields that were high enough to be considered as subsistence and to also offer the surplus to refugees’ due poor soil quality and also bad planning. It is therefore recommended that we should make use of actions and discussions to make the ‘self - reliance’ of the refugee a possibility. As part of the recommendations, comprehensive discourse and action are required to make refugee self-reliance a reality and not a mirage.

Keywords: Dependency, rehabilitation, refugee, self-reliance, self-sufficiency

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Introduction

A challenging issue currently confronting the international community is forced displacement. When refugees have been displaced over a long period of time, and are believed to be out of danger, emergency humanitarian aids such as the provision food, shelter and medicine though necessary is not what the refugees really need. Developmental assistance fashioned to enable the refugee to become economically capable of living meaningful lives is what is desired. Self - reliance is defined by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as ‘the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs in a sustainable manner’.

From the definition provided by UNHCR it appears there is a missing link as to what actually constitutes refugee self - reliance; whether as a concept of discussion or as a reality. It is for this reason that this article delves into the issues of promoting self - reliance in the context of the refugee. According to UNHCR reports, ‘one out every hundred people in the world has been forced to flee their homes’ to find safety. Statistics show that 79.5 million people had been displaced from their homes by the end of 2019. It is also true that the number of conflicts around the world had increased with women and children being most affected. The world refugee situation especially in the middle east, the Americas and Africa are high. UNHCR records confirm refugees from Myanmar (1.1 million), Syria (6.7million), Iraq (2 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), Venezuela (4.5 million), Democratic Republic of Congo (900,000), Somalia (980,000), South Sudan (2.3 million) just to mention a few. In view of all these, this paper seeks to get the right responses to refugee crisis and promote refugee self-reliance.

Statement Problem

A representative of one of the agencies explained that, until UNHCR put measures in place to identify refugees that have skills and are given the opportunity to use these learned skills, livelihood support offered them will continue to be inadequate. Another issue of concern in the promotion of self - reliance for refugees is UNHCR’s own belief that refugees are self - reliant when they are able to live without external assistance. What we must interrogate therefore is whether refugees living without external aid are capable of meeting all their ‘essential needs in a sustainable manner and with dignity’ as the UNHCR suggests in their definition.

The Republic of Ghana practically excludes refugees from the formal labour market and also limits their engaging in commercial activities outside the refugees’ camp. Mutual support network with other refugees is what keeps these unfortunate refugees going with very little access to any meaningful and reliable economic opportunities. This paper seeks to investigate and to come out with a solution for refugee crisis and make valuable recommendations that would aid in the liberation process of the refugee.

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Objective

The objective of this paper is to conduct a review summary by finding the right responses to the refugee crisis and promoting refugee self-reliance.

Significance

The refugee crisis is not a new phenomenon. The issue has lingered in some countries for years. The refugee crisis in Syria began in March, 2011. In Ghana, the refugee camp was established in 1996 when Liberian refugees trooped in this country as they fled civil war there. This paper is therefore significant in getting to understand refugee crisis and in fashioning out a solution to the problem.

This paper will serve as a theoretical piece to any individual, researchers or institutions for the purposes of further research into the same or other related area. Lastly, this paper contributes to the body of knowledge.

Review of Related Literature

Crisis of Refugees in Africa: The Chadian Phenomenon

In Ghana, Chadian refugees that trooped into the country over thirty (30) years ago when they fled the Libyan occasional occupation in the northern territory of Chad and particularly the Aouzou Strip (Toyota War), instigated by then Libyan leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi, that lasted for over ten years, has been a matter of grave concern to both the Ghanaian citizens and the government as a whole. Apart from hosting these refugees, very little has been done in terms of repatriating them back to their country after peace was restored and even after the end of the recent civil war in 2010, nor had efforts been put in place to properly integrate them into the Ghanaian society. It has almost become abnormal not to see these Chadian refugees’ children all of whom were born in Ghana, meander through traffic jams begging for alms or harassing pedestrian passersby. Even in the wake of fCUBE (Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education), and the New Educational Reforms in Ghana, it is surprising to note that most of these refugees who had lived over thirty (30) years in Ghana, had failed to take advantage of them in order to educate their children.

It is a fact that though there are Christians in the south of Chad, most of the refugees who fled from northern Chad are Muslims and available to them is the “Makaranta / Madrasa” or Islamic school system yet they fail to take advantage of that as well. It appears that all they are concerned about is begging for alms; the parents sitting on pavements and their children (usually urchins) on the streets; begging for alms and risking their lives. One would ask where most of these children go when they grow up? Well, the spate of armed robbery that take place from time to time especially on the Kumasi - Tamale road and most of the arrests that are done, identify “Fulanis” as part of the robbery gangs. Fulani people are nomads who move from place to place with their livestock, particularly, cattle.

They are mostly from Mali, Guinea, and Niger and cross into Ghana, Nigeria, Cote D’Ivoire and other West African countries. There had been resents rifts between Ghanaian farmers and Fulanis with the former accusing the Fulanis for allowing their livestock to destroy their farms while the latter accuse the Ghanaians of deliberately killing their livestock. Therefore, these Chadian refugees who easily pass for Fulanis when arrested are reported to be Fulanis thereby increasing the suspicion of the Ghanaian against the Fulani.

The inequality between the West African refugee namely; Sierra Leoneans, Nigerians, Liberians on one side and the Chadians on the other side is that, the West Africa refugees try as much as possible to send their children to free schools provided in the host communities of

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the camps or other Ghanaian schools to get them educated as against most of the Chadian refugees whose specialty is begging for alms.

It is funny why the laws of Ghana had failed to bring to book the Chadian refugees. If the Ghanaian Education System is truly fCUBE, why is the compulsory in the fCUBE not applicable to the refugee children of school going age? This has been a question Ghanaian authority have been unable to answer. Most of the Liberian refugees were housed at Gomoa - Buduburam near Accra. As the city of Accra grows and settlements spread, Kasoa and Buduburam are gradually fusing with Accra and the Liberians who were initially considered “squatters” have assumed ownership of the lands they are made to “squat on” and selling these parcels, of land to the inhabitants; such an irony. It must be added that in Ghana, the land does not belong to the government, rather, it belongs to families, clans, and towns and the various leaders of these places hold them in trust for posterity. Whenever the government of Ghana needs a parcel of land for any developmental purpose, it contacts the local leaders and chiefs and compensation is usually paid for the parcel of land, but sometimes too, it is delivered on gratis to the government especially, when the project is seen as beneficial to the community.

A Brief Account of Refugee Self-Reliance

Archival documents show clearly that the issue of refugee self-reliance has been on the table since the League of Nations in 1921. It supported 1.5 million Greeks to settle in their country from Asia Minor. Though programmes to assist refugee self-reliance have been in place for a century, very little success has been achieved in terms of self-reliance of refugees on a large - scale. The unsuccessful nature of the refugee self - reliance programme on the institutional level could be attributed to a number of reasons, among them are ‘reducing legal pathways to work, poor host economies, restrictions on rights, a lack of administrative planning and limited arable land for farming’. It is worthy to note that Palestinian refugees under United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) mandate, were initially assisted with emergency relief and large- scale public works programmes geared towards economic integration. Nonetheless, these programmes as well as access to micro - finance have not helped the Palestinian refugee self - reliance agenda much.

In this case, it is obvious from the prolonged Palestinian refugee situation that employment opportunities in themselves alone do not lead to refugee self - reliance. The terms ‘Rehabilitation’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ were frequently used in the 1960’s and the 1970’s to facilitate settlement whereas ‘self - help’ and ‘rural animation’ were selected as common goals for African refugees.

One of the efforts aimed at collective refugee self - reliance which were carried out, was ‘the development of refugee cooperatives in Tanzania’ but its inability to compete favourably in the market and restrictions meted out by the host country posed serious challenges. Settlers in East Africa for instance, were given a specific amount of cash as their quota and ‘subsistence crops’ to cultivate, and their ability to produce these plants determined whether they were self - sufficient or not without considering other factors. As may be expected, the yields of most families were barely adequate to feed themselves talk less of surplus, for refugees. Poor planning as well as poor soil quality accounted for the above failure. In 1982, a report from UNHCR stated that only 30 out of 107 refugee settlements were self - sufficient, and 21 out of them must be given aid. The 1980’s witnessed more awareness creation of ‘long - term exile’ (which has come to be known as ‘protracted refugee

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situations’) and an equal Western restriction to people seeking asylum. The prolonged refugee situations have led to numerous attempts to close the ‘humanitarian development gap’ in the quest of enhancing refugee self - reliance.

Refugee Self-Reliance: Myth or Reality

The settlement of refugees in Europe, Australia, United States of America and Canada have achieved very positive results. This is largely due to the strong economies these countries have and “robust support systems”. There are practical examples to show off settled refugees remitting funds home to help their families further their education, put up buildings, pay hospital bills, among others. The African refugees do not have such privileges. Only very few, especially, the Nigerians, who are able to “go out of way” to make ends meet and to remit some sort of money home.

This is not without resistance from the Ghanaian petty traders association who are ‘up in arms’ against Nigerians indulging in petty trading and closing down the shops of these ‘economic refugees’ regardless of their refugee status. Unfortunately, the ECOWAS protocols that these Nigerians are relying upon, is failing them woefully; the ‘free movements of people and trade’ is becoming a mere “paper tiger”. It is for this reason that the speaker of the Nigerian parliament met with the Ghanaian President and the Ghanaian Speaker of parliament to solve the ‘petty trade quarrels’ between Ghanaians and Nigerians. Therefore, judging from the “Alms Begging and harassment, to suspected involvement in armed robberies by the Chadian refugees, the landlordism allegations levelled against the Liberian refugees, and usurpation of the ‘petty trading ventures’ by the Nigerians, only point to that fact ‘refugee self-reliance’ in Ghana is more of a myth than a reality.

The Political and Economic Systems of Neoliberalism: A Contemporary Understanding of Refugee Self-Reliance

‘Neoliberalism is a rationalize version of classical political economy developed in the thinking of free-market economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman’. The reason for neoliberalism is to ‘abate the frontiers of the welfare state’ with the hope that market capitalism that is unrestricted will effectively ensure growth and development. The ‘Childminder State’ is seen as that which ensures ‘a culture of dependence and to undermine freedom of choice in the marketplace’.

Neoliberalism has rendered a kind of operational model or ‘ideological software’ for propagating global competition, doing away with traditional welfare state and advancing the importance of the market, leading privatization and playing active role in individualism, which have become the underlying factors in present day politics. Neoliberal ideology has greatly affected the development of policies and practice, making the concept of self-reliance a slogan in international development discussions for some decades now.

Advancement of Refugee Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is supposedly promoted so as to strengthen the economic potentials of the refugee with the introduction of approaches that aim at development and to uplift the ‘socioeconomic needs of the refugee in a sustainable way. This must comprise a drastic shift from the conventional relief aid to development - oriented assistance and providing conditions necessary for refugees to make a decent living for themselves.

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Substantial evidence points to the fact that refugees in developing countries mostly assist another and are supported by their relations abroad. It is ironic to note that when refugees’ dependency is communal and among themselves it is viewed as a sign of ‘community resilience’. However, when the refugees look up to the UNHCR and its partner agencies for support, they are stigmatized as having a ‘dependency mentality’.

Promotion of Refugee Self-Reliance and the Paradox of Protectionism

Self - reliance is associated with the state providing very little assistance. Looked at as a ‘surrogate state’, the UNHCR initially concentrated on refugee welfare, and one of their duties was to ensure the well - being of the refugee. Due to budgetary constraints, it appears UNHCR has succumb to the interest of ‘Northern Donor Governments’ as against the actual protection mandate that it has as an international organisation.

Additionally, the concept promoting self - reliance can create a situation whereby socioeconomic disparity among refugees would be worsened. One of the greatest challenges the refugees face in their economic activities are the restrictions put on their right to move freely and to work. This challenge is beyond control of the refugee and ‘the mother organization’ (UNHCR) mandated to facilitate refugee self – reliance. The UNHCR must put measures in place to protect the refugee rather than limiting their movements and activities. It is paramount to note that the developed countries who are financiers of UNHCR, must act more responsibly. In their quest to limit their financial commitment to the UNHCR, they tend to promote the idea of self - reliance by closing their eyes on the fact that in attaining ‘true self - reliance’ more external inputs are required.

Theoretical orientation and Method

The paper was characterized by theories of dependency and neoliberalism. Relevant Archival documents provided us with the required literature to support the writing of this paper. This was done in a systematic manner.

Findings

Though programmes ensure refugee self - reliance have been in place about a century now, they have achieved very little success in that regard. Also, settlements were generally, unsuccessful in their bid to achieve yields that were high enough to be considered as subsistence and to also offer the surplus to refugees’ due poor soil quality and also bad planning.

The 1980’s witnessed more awareness creation of ‘long - term exile’ (which has come to be known as ‘protracted refugee situations’) and an equal Western restriction to people seeking asylum. In truly promoting refugee self – reliance, the focus must move from the ordinary relief, to development support aimed at enabling refugees have meaningful lives of economic opportunities. The Republic of Ghana practically excludes refugees from its formal labour market and also limits their engaging in commercial activities outside the refugees’ camp.

Sociological Implications of Refugee Crisis in Ghana on Education and Health

Ghana plays host to refugees and asylum seekers from 38 different countries. The African Countries whose citizens seek refuge and asylum statuses include Sudan, Cote D’Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria, and Chad. There are about 13,366 refugees and asylum seekers in Ghana with Ivoirians forming the majority. There are several camps in Ghana but the three main refugee

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camps are; Buduburam, Krisan, and Ampain Camps. Buduburam Camp is at Gomoa near Kasoa, in the Central Region about 44 kilometres west of the capital, Accra.

The camp was specifically cited for the refugees who fled the two Liberian civil wars; between 1989 - 1996, and between 1999 - 2003. The camp is also home to Sierra Leonean refugees who fled the eleven-year civil war in their country (1991 - 2002). After Liberia returned to democratic rule, it gave the opportunity for its citizens to return home but some of them chose to stay behind in Ghana. One other camp is the Krisan Camp in the Nzema East District of the Western Region of Ghana. Refugees from several African countries housed at Krisan. Some from the Darfur region of Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo Brazzaville, Rwanda, and Chad.

The Ampain Refugee Camp is located at the Ellembelle District of the Western Region of Ghana and it was established to receive Ivorian refugees fleeing the 2010 Presidential election disturbances in that country. All the camps are manned by the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) of Ghana and supported by the Ghana Refugee Board. It is obvious to state that in the heart of the refugee activities and service provision is the UNHCR. It is important to state that not all refugees and asylum seekers live in camps. Some 3,500 Togolese refugees who arrived in Ghana from 1993 to 1994 and also in 2005 live in host communities in the Volta Region because their dialects are mutually intelligible. Nigerians, Lebanese, and Syrians prefer to be in the capital city, Accra or other regional capitals for strategic reasons.

Education

The UNHCR in Ghana, handed 3 completed schools blocks to the Ghana Education Service (GES), in the host community of Gomoa - Buduburam in the year 2008. The UNHCR donated another school to the GES where the Krisan camp is situated at the Ellembelle District of the Western Region in 2010. The gesture by the UNHCR is to ensure that both refugees and children from host communities get equal access to basic education. This is a positive side of refugee crisis but more can be

Health

The use of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) card to access health care by refugees in Ghana is seen as one of the best policies to ensure that refugees obtain primary, secondary and tertiary health care in the most affordable way. The scheme makes it possible for refugees to also get access to specialized medical services without the intervention of UNHCR. It would be interesting to note that the NHIS card was excluded from accepted identification cards (IDs) accepted for voter registration towards the 2020 elections because Non-Ghanaians have access to these cards.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the inadequacies we have found from ‘self-reliance’, it is obvious that the term must be seen as a panacea (total solution) for the refugee crisis. Having said that, we do not seek to downplay or belittle the relevance of self - reliance to refugees but to offer suggestions that would help promote ‘genuine refugee self - reliance’ by enhancing the refugees’ ability to make a living in a sustainable and dignified way. To achieve this, it is crucial we make use of actions and discussions to make the ‘self - reliance’ of the refugee a possibility.

As it is now, self - reliance of the refugee is seen as an individual affair and this reduces the importance placed on ‘group or communal attainment of self - reliance’ and

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further worsening the inequalities that persist among refugees. Comprehensive discourse and action are required to make refugee self-reliance a reality and not a mirage.

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