THE UNHCR AND THE MANAGEMENT OF LIBERIAN REFUGEES IN NIGERIA, 1990-2007

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Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is to critically interrogate the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria between 1990 and 2007. Nigeria was major host country of Liberian refugees in West Africa in particular and Africa in general during this period of study. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee was the main agency of the United Nations charged with the responsibility of providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. Through effective collaboration with the government of Nigeria, the UNHCR succeeded in managing Liberian refugees in the country. Major steps taken by UNHCR in conjunction with the governmentof Nigeria towards the management of Liberian refugees during this period were the enactment of refugee laws, the establishment of refugee camps and refugee boards and successful implementation of durable solutions to the problem of the refugees. This is a major contribution of this study, which differ from existing studies that focused on the courses and course of the civil war. The methodology adopted in the study was historical, thematic, qualitative and quantitative utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data collection.

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Introduction

One of the most dramatic episodes in the contemporary world is the massive movement of people across regional borders. In spite of the fact that the phenomenon has taken new dimension since the birth of the 21st century in different continents of the world, it is not new. Hence, the forceful displacement of people is as old as mankind. This can be corroborated with the observation of Paul Hurting, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that:

> Throughout the history of mankind, people have been uprooted against their will. Time and again, lives and values, built from generation to generation have been shattered without warning. Time and again, people in fear, individuals or whole groups, persecuted on account of their profound convictions have had to make a most dramatic decision: to take uncertain, even perilous road to exile, from home, community and homeland….

Historically, the forceful displacement of people has its origin in the Holy Scriptures (the Bible and Quran). For instance, the Holy Bible is full of stories of forcefully displaced people occasioned by famine, natural disaster/climate change, persecution and violence. They included Abraham and Sarah displaced by famine (Gen.12:10); Hagar and Ishmael displaced by persecution (Gen.21:14-16); and all of Israel displaced by oppression (Exo.12:41, 2Kings17:23 and 2 Kings24:14-15). Also, the Holy Quran reveals evidences of how people were forcefully displaced.

For example, Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and his faithful were forced to take refuge in Medina due to religious persecution. The *Hijra* of Prophet Mohammed (SAW) from Mecca to Medina in AD 622 could be regarded as an act of seeking refuge. The term "refugee" was firstcoined in 1573, when it was used to describe Calvinists, who fled politicalrepression in the Spanish-controlled Netherlands with their co-religionists and sought refuge in France. However, refugees were not only defined as victims ofpersecution; they were also seen as individuals with political, religious,economic or other affiliations that aroused solidarity among thosesupporting similar interests in other countries and a corresponding sense ofresponsibility towards them. The above illustration provided the religious perspective to the phenomenon of refugee crises.

From the secular perspective, refugee crisis is not a new phenomenon, but rather one that dates back to the earliest days of humanity. This is because there are historical evidences of forcedmovements of populations in different parts of the world. Meanwhile, there are two conflicting arguments with regard to mapping the historical transformations that most directly contributed to the birth of the modern and internationally recognisable figure of the word "refugee". While some argue that the evolution of refugee phenomenon could be located in the post-World War II Europe, others stress thefact that its genesis could be traced to the early 19th century. Using historical approach in analysing these two conflicting arguments through, a critical look at the dynamics of different refugee episodes over the years, one can conclude that there is no conceptual difference between the refugees of pre 1945 such as the Russian refugees of the 1917, the Jewish refugees of the 1930s;and those of post-1945 like the Hungarian refugees of the 1950s, the Vietnamese refugees of the 1970s, the Rwandan refugees of

the 1990s and theZimbabwean refugees, dawn to the twenty-first century phenomenon. This is because the two different historical epochs witnessed refugee movements though in varying degrees as well as in the management of refugees. However, it was during the post-1945 Europe that certain key techniques for the management of mass displacement of people became first standardised and globalised.Also, as further argued by Malkki, the refugee as a specific social category did not exist in its full modern form before WWII. Besides, though there were specific displaced populations before WWII, there were no encompassing apparatus of administrative procedures such as refugee settlement, refugee camp administration and legal domain of refugee law. All these administrative procedures of refugee management became standardised towards the end of WWII. It is from this point of view that we argue that contemporary refugee movements have certain unique characteristics, which were quite different from the pre-1945 era.

Therefore, this paper sets out to fill a major gap in the historiography of refugee management in Africa by focusing on the Liberian refugees in Nigeria of West Africa between 1990 and 2007. While 1990 marked the genesis of Liberian refugees as well as the year when Oru refugee camp was set up, while 2007 was the year when the UNHCR finally wound up the camp. This interface happens to be the most fundamental history of refugee management in West Africa. The major thrust of this paper is the critical examination of the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria. The work discusses the roles of foreign and local agencies as well as host country in the management of Liberian refugees, who fled their country due to the outbreak of civil war in 1989.

It is against this backdrop that this paper is divided into four major sections. Section one introduces the discussion and the methodology

adopted for the study. The second section focuses on the phenomenon of refugee crisis in West Africa. The third part critically examines the UNHCR and the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria. The last section is the conclusion. The methodological approach is historical, thematic and analytical. Sources include primary and secondary materials derived from oral interviews and extant literature.

The Phenomenon of Refugee Crisis in West Africa: The Liberian Experience

Generally, the historical epoch of refugee phenomenon in Africa began in the early 1960s.However, between the 1960s and 2000s, refugeeism in Africa took several dimensions.These dimensions, which resulted in the increase in the number of refugees in the continent was caused by both internal and external factors.While the politics of independence and the rising tide of political instability (such as domestic strife and civil) in several independent African countries are pertinent internal factors, the external factors derive mainly from situations of racist and minority regimes in Southern Africa and, to an increasing extent, the continued outside intervention in the internal affairs of the independent African states (neo-colonialism).The resultant effect of this developmentduring these years, was unprecedented increase in the number of African refugees to the extent that by the 1980s, Africa had the largest refugee problem in the world.This was why Hamrellaptly described Africa as the home of millions of refugees. For example, the number of African refugees grew from a mere 400,000 in 1964 to about 735,000 in 1967, and later to more than 2.5 million in the 1980s.Both the magnitude and the rapid increase in the number of refugees pose serious problems for the countries of asylum and indeed for the international

organizations concerned with refugee matters. This challenge forced Gould to observe that, “refugees constitute one of the greatest but least well-appreciated and least well-documented tragedies of present day Africa”. Although refugee crisisin Africa began as a liberation struggle, it later took the form of domestic strife and civil war from the 1990s.

Prior to the 1990s development, the majority of African refugees originatedmainly from territories that fought for political independence. While Adepoju argues that the majority of African refugees originated from three territories, which were the Portuguese rule, namely; Angola,Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, especially in the period between 1960s and 1970s and that these refugees lived mostly in three neighbouring countries sympathetic to the liberation cause, namely; Zaire,Senegal and Tanzania, Hamrell explains that the majority of refugee situations in Africa stemmed from the liberation efforts particularly in the Southern part of the continent.Nindi observes that, until the mid-1970s, most African refugees came from countries where bloody wars were being fought by colonial powers or European settlers to suppress nationalist guerrillas such as Algeria, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia. For example, during the Algerian war for independence, which raged for eight years until 1962, about 200,000 Algerians took refuge in neighbouringcountries such as Tunisia and Morocco. During the following decade, the wars in Portugal's colonies spawned huge movements of refugees from Angola, 82,000 from Guinea-Bissau, and 64,000 from Mozambique. Also,as argued by Mathews, the refugee problem in Africa especially between the 1960s and 1980s was acute in four main regions, namely; the Sahel (where the problem arose mainly from drought, except in the Western Sahara and Chad (where political conflicts and civil wars occurred like

Algeria, Cameroun and Niger); Southern Africa, (as a result of Afrikaner racist and political operation, where Africans in South Africa and Namibia, political insurgency in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and the hostility of UNITA and its supporters towards the MPLA government of Angola); Central Africa (where two invasions of Zaire's Shaba province in 1977 and 1978 by political dissidents and opponents of President Mobutu led to the flight of 250,000 Zairians); and the Horn of Africa, where the dislocation of people continued as a result of the great drought of 1973-1974 and internal political upheavals in countries like Ethiopia, Somalia and so on.

In spite of the fact that the challenge of refugee crisis had become well pronounced in other parts of Africa especially between 1960s and 1980s, West Africa mainly entered the race in the 1990s. In the course of the decade, the West African sub-region emerged as a major refugee producing region in Africa. Although Owusu argues that the phenomenon began in the 1980s, making reference to the political discontent in Togo in the mid-1980s, which generated refugee flows, internal crisis did not affect the whole sub-region. For example, in 1988, according to the UNHCR, there were only 20,000 refugees in the West Africa sub-region. It was from the 1990s that refugee crisis became more acute in the sub-region. The phenomenon began with the outbreak of the Liberian civil war in 1989 and was further compounded by the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, all in the 1990s. This corroborates the observation of Valtonenthat while in other parts of Africa, such as the Great Lake Region, where there have been refugee flows since the end of colonialism, the West African sub-region only became substantial refugee generating and receiving region in the 1990s. He further explains that since the 1990s, the West Africa sub-region has continued to generate

substantial proportion of the continent's refugees occasioned by intra-state conflicts in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d' Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Togo. With the emergence of West African sub-region as a major refugee production region in Africa in the 1990s, the number of refugees in the continent had increased tremendously. In 1994 for instance, the number of refugees in West Africa was about 700,000.Also, according to the report of UNHCR in 1999, out of the 21 million refugees in the world, Africa alone accounted for 6 million.

Of the 1990s crises, the Liberian civil war was the main civil war that produced the highest number of refugees in the sub-region.Although there were conflicting figures with respect to the number of refugees produced by the war, which occurred between 1989 and 2003 (during this period, the war occurred in two phases: first phase, 1989-1991, and second phase, 1999-2003), the civil war generated large number of refugees, who sought safety in countries in the sub-region such as Sierra Leone, Cote d' Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea. While Cain observes that during this phase of the war, about 750, 000 refugees and more than1.2 million internally displaced persons were recorded, Dick and Boer argue that, the seven years of violence and bloodshed in Liberia caused the death of about 200,000 people out of a pre-war population of 2.8 million, while more than half of the country's population was forced to flee their homes. Approximately 1.2 million persons were displaced within Liberia, while about 700,000 refugees fled Liberia to neighbouring countries. Also, in the 2003 report of the UNHCR, it was estimated that 160,000 Liberian refugees were in Cote d'Ivoire, 235,000 in Guinea, 14,000 in Sierra Leone and 17,000 in Ghana at the end of 1996.

The UNHCR and the Management of Liberian Refugees in Nigeria,

1990-2007

Following the influx of Liberian refugees into Nigeria, which began in 1990, both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government of Nigeria took frantic efforts towards the management of the refugees. The efforts of the UNHCR and the national government of Nigeria were complemented by the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). While the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS), Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) and African Refugee Foundation (AREF) were the main NGOs that worked with the UNHCR in the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria. Major steps taken by the government of Nigeria towards the management of Liberian refugees during this period were the enactment of refugee laws, the establishment of refugee camps and refugee boards and successful implementation of durable solutions to the problem of the refugees. Although prior to the inflow of Liberian refugees into Nigeria, the country had hosted refugees from other countries, none of the two countries had enacted refugee legislations. It was the emergence of Liberian refugees that facilitated the introduction of refugee laws, mainly for the management of refugees. On 29 December 1989, the government of Nigeria under the leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida issued a Decree, that is Decree 52 of 1989 (later Act) aimed at protecting refugees in the country. While the primary refugee policy governing refugees in Nigeria is contained in the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Act 1989, Cap 244 Laws of the Federation in 1990).The refugee law of Nigeria was incorporated the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee problems in Africa. The refugee lawprohibited the refusal of entry, expulsion, extradition or

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return of persons seeking refuge, until the determination of their status. For instance, Section 1, sub-section 3 of Nigerian refugee law stipulates that:

> No person, claiming to be a refugee within the meaning of this Act who has illegally entered into or is illegally present in Nigeria, shall be expelled, extradited or returned merely by reason of his illegal entry or presence in Nigeria or any part of Nigeria pending the determination of his application for a refugee status.

One major development that emerged in Nigeria towards the management of Liberian refugees during this period was the establishment of refugee management board. The refugee law in the country resulted in the establishment of refugee board, government agency responsible for refugee issues or activities. The 1990 refugee law in Nigeria led to the creation of National Commission for Refugees (NCFR). The NCFR was charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the interest and treatment of persons, who are seeking to become refugees in Nigeria or persons seeking political asylum in Nigeria and other matters incidental thereto. In other words, the NCFR Act provided the legal and administrative framework for refugee management. It also set out guidelines for application and determination of refugee status in Nigeria. It was this boardthat helped the government in the management of Liberian refugees in Oru refugee camp, the major refugee camp established mainly for Liberian refugees in 1990. The camp was administered separately by the refugee management board, in conjunction with other refugee agencies (foreign and local). It is

imperative to point out here that the programmes of government of Nigeria towards the welfare of Liberian refugees were implemented by the refugee management board. However, the board worked in collaboration with the UNHCR and the NGOs.

The major foreign agency solely charged with the responsibility for the management of Liberian refugees in Oru Refugee camp during this period was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR), a subsidiary of the United Nations, set up in 1951 purposely for providing international legal protection for refugees and finding lasting solutions to their problems, which often include homelessness, sickness or other medical disorders, and mental trauma. Although the UNHCR had begun to attract the attention of the African refugees since the 1950s, with respect to West Africa, it started since the 1990s, occasioned by the outbreak of the Liberian civil war. For instance, the emergence of the UNHCR involvement in the management of refugees in Africa began in 1957. This was occasioned by the Algerian war of independence, which broke out in 1957. The war of independence in Algeria led to the influx of about 50,000 Algerian refugees in Tunisia.Owing to the upsurge number of Algerian refugees in Tunisia, the then Tunisian Prime MinisterHabib Bourguiba, asked the UNHCR toexamine the way in which the High Commissionerwould be able to help his government to resolvethe problem of Algerian refugees. The agencyresponded and five years later helped to repatriate 260,005 Algerian refugees from Tunisia andMorocco. This development marked the genesis of theUNHCR's involvement in the management of refugees in Africa. Thus, in 1962, the UNHCR opened itsfirst office in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Burundi. Aside the above identified cases, the UNHCR had equally intervened and contributed largely to the

management of African refugees in Mozambique (who hosted Zimbabwean refugees in 1979), Kenya (who hosted Somali refugees between 1997 and 2003) and so on. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by the 1967 Protocol, article 1 of the Convention, provides a general definition of the term "refugee".

> The term applies to anyperson who "as a result of events occurring before 1January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of beingpersecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or politicalopinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling, to availhimself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country ofhis former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The above conventional definition of a refugee was conceived primarily to solve the European problem such as Russian refugees, Armenian refugees, and refugees from Germany who were displaced and refused to be repatriated during or after the Second World War. Act 1 of the 1967 Protocol deletes the stipulation regarding the deadline of 1 January 1951 and the geographical limitation, that is, refugees resulting from “events occurring in Europe”. This was because, the 1951 Convention could benefit only persons who had become refugees as a result of events occurring prior to 1 January 1951. Thus, the years following 1951

showed that refugee movements were notmerely the temporary results of the Second World War and its aftermath.Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s new refugee groups emerged, in particular in Africa. These refugeeswere in need of protection which could not be granted to them under the limited time-frame of the 1951Convention. Hence, the 1967 Protocol extended the application of the Convention to the situation of "new refugees", that is, persons who, while meeting the Convention definition, had become refugees as a result of events that tookplace after 1 January 1951. It was the 1967 Protocol that eventually facilitated active involvement of the UNHCR in the management of refugees in different parts of Africa.

The UNHCR was assisted by other United Nations agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the management of Liberian refugees in West Africa. The governments of Nigeria and Ghana partnered with the UNHCR, through their respective refugee management boards in the management of Liberian refugees in their countries. They didnot only provide the enabling environment, which helped the UNHCR to cater for the welfare of the Liberian refugees during this period of study, but also assisted her to open office in their countries. The activities of the UNHCR in Nigeria and Ghana over the management of Liberian refugees during this period involved provision of fund and relief materials (food and non-food items), which were directly distributed to the refugees by her and through the NGOs (only those that signed agreement with the UNHCR); and the implementation of durable solutions, which is the ultimate objective of refugee protection. The table below shows total budget of the UNHCR towards Liberian refugees in their various host countries in West Africa (Nigeria inclusive) as at 1999 is presented in the table below.

Table 1:UNHCR Budget for Liberian refugees in West Africa as at 1999

Total Budget (USD)	Income from contributions (USD)	Other Funds available (USD)	Total Funds available (USD)	Total expenditure (USD)
24, 487, 299	17, 022, 926	5, 561, 856	22, 584, 782	21, 016,605

Source: UNHCR Global Report 1999 (Special Programme), p.111

The table above shows the UNHCR total budget earmarked for the welfare of Liberian refugees in West Africa. One can see vividly that out of the total budget of $24,487,299, only $21,016,605 was spent. The expenditure related to Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Table 2: UNHCR ANNUAL BUDGET FOR LIBERIAN REFUGEES AS AT 2004

Activities and Services	Annual Programme	Supplementary Programme	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	3,080,482	0	3,080,482
CommunityServices	590,600	8000	598,600
Crop Production	338,900	0	338,900
Domestic Needs /Household support	736,600	200,000	936,600
Education	1,565,100	0	1,565,100
Fisheries	20,000	0	20,000
Food	78,100	20,000	98,100
Forestry	197,500	0	197,500
Health/Nutrition	1, 257,000	20,000	1,277,000
Income generation	563,000	0	563,000
Legal Assistance	214,000	20,000	234,000
Livestock	50,000	0	50,000
Operational support (toAgencies)	1,797,400	100,000	1,897,400
Sanitation	256,600	0	256,600
Shelter/other infrastructure	228,400	80,000	308,400

Source: **OBINNA IDIKA. 2005. UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES UNHCR RESPONSE TO THE LIBERIAN REFUGEE CRISIS. Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, p.57**

Aside the provision of fund and relief materials (food and non-food items), one major contribution of the UNHCR towards the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria during this period was in the area of the implementation of durable solutions. The ultimate objective of refugee protection according to the UNHCR is to seek durable solutions to the problem of people being forced to flee from their homes and to cross an international border. With regard to this principal objective, the UNHCR proposed and implemented three traditional solutions (generally known as Durable Solutions), namely local integration, repatriation and resettlement towards solving the problems of Liberian refugees in West Africa between 2004 and 2007. Generally, these durable solutions focused on assisting Liberian refugees to become self-sufficient, independent and to enable them participate actively in the socio-economic life either at a new place of settlement (destination) or their place of origin. The implementation of durable solutions was based on the agreement reached between the UNHCR, the government of Nigeria; and the government of Liberia. All the three durable solutions were successfully implemented in Nigeria. However, the successful implementation of these durable solutions by the UNHCR was based on the signing of a tripartite agreement between the UNHCR, the government of Liberia (first with the National Transitional Government of Liberia in 2004 and later with the democratically elected government

in 2006) and the national governments of the host countries of Liberian refugees in West Africa, most importantly Nigeria. The implementation of the tripartite agreements between UNHCR, the Liberian Transitional Government and the neighbouring host states in West Africa began in October 2004 while, an operations plan for return and reintegration of the refugees was expected to run until 2007.

The successful implementation of the durable solutions was facilitated by the restoration of peace into Liberia in 2003. The foundation for a lasting peace, stability, national unity and reconciliation in Liberia was laid in Ghana through the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 18 August, 2003, brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with the support of the international community, including the African Union (AU). This development set the tone for the Liberian peace process.It also paved the way for the deployment of the second largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world, (the United Nations Mission in Liberia–UNMIL, consisting of about 15,000 military personnel and 1,115 civilian police officers), to restore order and create the political space for rebuilding the structures of governance and the social fabric of Liberia.This led to the swearing in of the National Transition Government of Liberia (NTGL) on 14 October 2003 under the leadership of Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant as the Chairman and Mr. Wesley Johnson as the Vice-Chairman. With this development, the NTGL and the international community recognised the need to design, plan and assist the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Liberian refugees in accordance with international conventions, norms and practices. Thus, recognising that the right of all citizens to leave and return to their country as basic human right

enshrined in Article 13 (2) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 12 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that voluntary repatriation, where feasible, constitutes the preferred durable solution for the problems of refugees, the UNHCR in conjunction with the NCFR and GRB; and the NTGL fixed between 2004 and 2007 for the implementation of the durable solutions. The implementation of the durable solutions, which began with the NTGL, continued with the emergence of Mrs Ellen Sirleaf Johnson as the new President of Liberia in 2006. Voluntary repatriation, which means the return of refugees to their countries of origin based on their informed and voluntary consent, was successfully implemented in Nigeria and Ghana. The table below shows the total number of Liberian refugees that were repatriated in West Africa as at 2004.

Table 3: Voluntary Repatriation Movements of Liberian Refugees in West Africa in 2004

S/N	From (Main Countries of Asylum	To (Country of Origin)	Total number of those repatriated
1	Guinea	Liberia	22,000
2	Cote d'Ivoire	Liberia	17,000
3	Sierra Leone	Liberia	15,000
4	Ghana	Liberia	1,900
5	Others	Liberia	910

Source: UNHCR, 2004

The above table shows voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees in West Africa as at 2004 when a multipartite agreement was

reached between the NTGL, UNHCR and host countries of Liberian refugees. From the above table, one can see vividly that the first top three countries in West Africa where Liberian refugees were repatriated from were Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. But,others (Nigeria inclusive) had least number.

The repatriation of Liberian refugees from Nigeria came in phases. While the first phase began in October 2004, other phases occurred between 2005 and 2007. In each phase, different number of Liberian refugees was repatriated. For example, in Nigeria, the first batch of Liberian refugees to be repatriated in 2004 completed their registration in October that year. In October that year, about one thousand (1,000) Liberian refugees registered for voluntary repatriation. According to the report of Mrs. Brigitte Eno, an official of the UNHCR Office in Nigeria:

> we have almost finished with the registration of the Liberian refugees who will be repatriated home by mid-October 2004. About 600 who had already registered for the voluntary repatriation would be sent back to Liberia in mid-October 2004 under the First Phase of the exercise expected to run until the end of the year.

Corroborating the report of Mrs. Brigitte Eno, Mr. Soyinka-Onijala, a Nigerian official on refugee issue, reported that the first batch of Liberian refugees to be repatriated from Nigeria under the supervision of UNHCR and NCFR in 2004 was nine hundred and three (903). Although there was no exact figure of total number of Liberian refugees that were repatriated from Nigeria during this period, available documents gave some figures.

The reports of the UNHCR revealed that between December 2004 and May 2007, a total of 2,112 Liberian refugees were voluntarily repatriated from Nigeria out of about 6,000 Liberian refugees registered by the UNHCR and NCFR.

Importantly, local integration of Liberian refugees in Nigeria was fully implemented. After the last batch of Liberian refugees had been repatriated in line with the cut of date for promotional phase of voluntary repatriation, which was 30 June 2007, the remaining Liberian refugees opted for local integration and resettlement. The local integration of Liberian refugees in Nigeria was also facilitated by the signing of a multipartite agreement between the governments of Nigeria and Liberia, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UNHCR in August 2007. This initiative was part of a wider effort to enhance cooperation in West African sub-region on refugee protection and sustainable solutions. According to the provisions of the UNHCR's Executive Committee No.104 (LVI-2005), local integration is a dynamic and multi-faceted two-way process, which require efforts by all parties including a preparedness on the part of the refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forgo their own cultural identity; and a corresponding readiness on the part of the host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population. The multipartite arrangement was a progression from the refugee status to another realm of recognition as citizens of ECOWAS. Under local integration, the refugees become entitled to a set of legal, economic and socio-cultural rights commensurate with those enjoyed by Nigerians and are shielded from any discrimination.

Following the signing of the agreement, the governments of Liberia, Nigeria; the ECOWAS Commission and the UNHCR as well as

the UNCT established a Multifunctional Team (MFT) (which comprises eleven UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, WHO, IMO, UNIDO, FAO, UNODC, UNIFEM, UNAIDS), the NCFR, NIS and three Nigerian NGOs, that is JDPC, AREF and NCRS). The MFT was charged with the responsibility to determine the modalities and timing of the transition of Liberian refugees to ECOWAS residence status in Nigeria. In the process of carrying out this task, the MFT decided to conduct a participatory assessments based on age, gender and diversity in Oru camp for the local integration of Liberian refugees outside the Oru refugee camp. The MFT also met with local communities, traditional rulers, local government officials and various community groups to ascertain their willingness and support to the local integration process. Based on the reports of the assessment mission, carried out between 14 and 16 March 2007, a planning workshop was proposed and was fixed between 18 and 19 March 2007. The workshop was put in place to agree and design a plan of action for local integration in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Nigeria, priorities in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as well as State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) of Ogun State.

The workshop comprised representatives of the United Nations agencies (such as UNHCR, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO,WHO, IMO, UNIDO, FAO UNODC); government officials from local governments (Ijebu North and Ijebu-Ode); a representative of Ogun State government; representatives of the Federal government of Nigeria (that is NCFR); officials of the Nigerian Immigration Service; representatives of the Ministry of Interior; officials of the NGOs (JDPC, NRCS and AREF); refugees and some important members of the host communities, most

especially traditional rulers, educated elite from Oru-Ijebu, Ijebu-Igbo and Ijebu-Ode. The activities of the MFT were successful and resulted in the integration of interested Liberian refugees. Although there is no accurate data on the total number of Liberian refugees that were eventually integrated in Nigeria, available information from some documents and intensive oral interviews with some key informants provided different figures. For example, according to the report of UNHCR, after the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees must have been completed on 30 June 2007, it was expected that about 2,500 Liberians would need local integration as durable solution in Nigeria. According to MrOgunjobi, the local integration of Liberian refugees in Nigeria was a gradual process. In 2005, about 70 refugees volunteered to be integrated. Between 2007 and 2008 about 800 refugees registered for integration.

The resettlement of Liberian refugees in the third country was another major durable solution that was effectively implemented in Nigeria by the UNHCR. The decision to resettle a refugee in a third country is usually made in the absence of other options such as voluntary repatriation and local integration or when resettlement is deemed, under a comprehensive approach to durable solutions, as the optimal solution. The issue of the resettlement of Liberian refugees can be seen from two major angles.

They are, the one initiated by the American government, and the one facilitated by the UNHCR. Although this work focuses on resettlement programme of UNHCR, it is imperative to have a glimpse of the one initiated by the United States government during the Liberian civil war. Prior to the introduction and implementation of resettlement programme by the UNHCR as one of the durable solutions to Liberian

refugees' problems in their various host countries in West Africa, the United States had begun the programme right from the inception of the outbreak of civil war in Liberia. While that of the United States (US) began in the early 1990s, that initiated by the UNHCR started around 2004. Shortly after the beginning of the Liberian civil war in 1989, the United States initiateda resettlement programme for Liberian refugees. With the initiation of this programme, large numbers of Liberians made their way to the United States, and to a lesser extent Canada. The US resettlement programme was based on five processing priorities.

Priority oneinvolved persons at risk or those with no long-term solution who were identified by the US embassy or referred by UNHCR. Priority twocomprised groups of special concern to the US embassy, while Priority three to five focused on family reunification. During the period of the war, the US Congress set a ceiling for the number of refugees to be admitted. In 1992, 1993, and 1994, the number of Liberian refugees resettled in the US was 637, 961, and 610 respectively. In 1995, the refugees slowed down to fifty-two. The number comprised those in Priority one alone. Those in Priority three to five was effectively shut down, largely because of concerns of fraud.Between 1992 and 1994, theUnited States admitted 2,211 of the roughly 700,000 Liberians that the WorldRefugee Survey estimated were living in West African countries of first asylum. Ofthe refugees that entered the United States through the resettlement programme,75% were family reunification cases, with many coming from the urban areas ofLiberia.The family reunification resettlement programme was an important and legitimate, durable solution for many; thus it was reopened, with the number of Liberians admitted rising as high as 2,613 in 2000. According to USCR, a total of 9,143 Liberian refugees were admitted in the USA between 1987 and

2000. The USA's decision to open a resettlement processing office in Accra in 2001 in order to facilitate a more efficient process led to more refugees seeking for resettlement in the US. Until 2001, all resettlement cases were processed by the Joint Voluntary Association (JVA), which wasa cumbersome process. However, in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, when the terrorist attacked Washington, the number of refugees to the USA significantly reduced, even as the resettlement programme continued.Over the next nine years, the United States continued to resettle Liberianrefugees, with the numbers jumping from 44 in 1995 to 3,444 in 2003. Even at that, by 2003, an estimated 250,000 Liberians still lived in exile in Ghana, Guinea,Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Many of these Liberians were classified as dualflightrefugees, or refugees who fled their location of first asylum dueto political unrest.Despite the introduction of resettlement programme by the UNHCR, the USA continued with resettlement of Liberian refugees, particularly family re-unification programme up till September 2006.

With specific reference to the Liberia situation, UNHCR's Multi-Year Operations Plan for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and Internally Displaced persons (2004-2007) provides that "resettlement activities for individual cases of Liberian refugees to third countries, from the various countries of asylum, would be pursued as part of protection and durable solution strategies". In Nigeria for example, after the winding up of the camp on 30 June 2007, someLiberian refugees were still in the camp waiting for either local integration or resettlement. According Mr Ogunjobi, more than 600 Liberian refugees opted for resettlement. However, due to the large number, the UNHCR decided to set up a committee to look into the possibility of resettling the refugees in a third country. Forms were issued out to the interested refugees, who

were given the opportunity to indicate countries of their choice and the reason for seeking for resettlement. The procedure was in three stages. The first stage dealt with registration. The second stage involved interview and assessment. The third stage was an interview stage. After registering and filling a form, interested refugees would appear for the committee for an interview and assessment. After the interview might have been conducted, the camp counsellor and the camp protection officer were invited for consultation on the applications of the refugees. Successful applicants were also invited to the UNHCR Office in Lagos for the final interview. At this stage of interview, representatives of the countries to which the refugees wish to be resettled would be represented. Applications of the interested refugee would be verified. Those that scaled through this second stage of interview would be duly informed after about three months. The third stage is the immigration interview for those that would be finally resettled. They would go for medical test. The successful ones would be told to be waiting for the departure time and their ticket. The UNCHR and NCFR organise the movement of the successful candidates from the camp to the Airport for their flight to the resettled country. In all, only few Liberian refugees were resettled in USA, Canada and Australia.

Conclusion

The foregoing has examined the significant role played by the UNHCR in the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria between 1990 and 2007. It argued that the protection and the giving of assistanceto Liberian refugees and the findingof durable solutions to their plight of the refugees through voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement in Nigeria during this period cannot be overemphasised. However, the

effective implementation of these goals by the UNHCR was as a result of her collaboration with the national governments of the host countries of the refugees and the NGOs in those countries. In fact, while the UNHCR was mainly providing fund, and sometime relief materials, the national governments, through their constituted boards (that is, refugee management boards) and the NGOs, were the direct implementers of the programmes of the UNHCR towards the Liberian refugees in Nigeria.

The UNHCR equally worked with other agencies of the United Nations like WFP and UNICEF in the performance of her responsibilities to the refugees. The organization also solicited financial and material support from developed countries, such as Canada, France, Japan, USA, United Kingdom among others towards effective management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria in particular and West Africa in general. All the aforementioned countries gave voluntary donations to the UNHCR in the management of Liberian refugees in West Africa.Another major important aspect of the UNHCR examined in the paper focuses on finding durable solutions to the plight of the Liberian refugees in Nigeria. All the three durable solutions introduced by the UNHCR towards the management of Liberian refugees were implemented in Nigeria. This work is a major complement to existing works on Liberian Civil war, by focusing major on the role of the UNCHR in the management of Liberian refugees in Nigeria. However, it differs from existing works which focused mainly on the causes and course of the Liberian civil wars, that broke out between 1989 and 2007.

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