

## The Child Refugee Syndrome in Africa: The Case of Lagos, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Refugee crisis in Africa is assuming a new dimension. Parent refugees and other adults are subjecting African children refugees, who constitute approximately half of people living in emergency conditions, to economic exploitation. The plight of children refugees, apart from being a disastrous setback for international humanitarian laws, is also a pointer to the paying of lip service in Africa to child rights and the child as zone of peace. It equally amplifies the gap between theory and practice of international humanitarian measures for child rights generally. The problematic concerns, therefore, are: what is the impetus for children refugees' economic exploitation? What are the conditions of refugees' camps? In other words, what makes street life more attractive to refugees than camp life? What hazards are children refugees exposed to as effects of their exploited street life? What are the basic international humanitarian instruments protecting children refugees? Lastly, what challenges do the illegal exploitation and violation of the rights of children refugees pose to children refugees' advocacy? The study's findings reveal that child refugee exploitation as a new phase in African refugee crisis is a function of the region's deepening economic crisis and therefore, the syndrome has a direct correlation with the struggle for survival in the continent.

**Key words:** Refugees, child rights, conflict, war, child exploitation

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### INTRODUCTION

It seems children are experiencing more than a fair share of effects of emergencies. The reasons for this assertion are not far-fetched. For instance, of the estimated 22 million people that have died in some 127 armed conflicts since World War II which ended in 1945, the greatest impact has been felt by children, with 39 wars between the 1980 and 1990 decade alone exacting a toll of 1.5 million children killed, while 4 million were physically incapacitated and 10 million psychologically traumatized<sup>[1]</sup>. A study by the United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) notes, however, that psycho-social trauma is the most widespread effect of armed conflict on minors. This effect denies the security that promotes natural childhood development and subjects them to sustained stress over a prolonged period of time. Many children express feelings of sadness and anxiety and demonstrate behavioural disorder of various levels of intensity.

Another serious impact of conflicts on children is their displacement both within and outside their countries of origin. Displaced and refugee children, according to the UNICEF statistical records, number approximately 15 million. These categories of children suffer additional trauma of being uprooted from home and resettled and may be moved from one temporary camp to another and subjected to regimented military control thereby depriving them of re-establishing and enjoying a normal life.

The problem of children living in the most difficult circumstances is assuming a new dimension in Africa. African children refugees, who constitute approximately 2.09 million, that is, half of uprooted populations in the region<sup>[2]</sup>, are being subjected to economic exploitation by parent-refugees and other adults contrary to international instruments on refugees and child rights. This phenomenal development is often common in the major capitals of the continent particularly Lagos, Accra, Dakar, Monrovia, Freetown, Yaounde, Kampala, Arusha and Luanda, to mention a few. The prevalence of this attitude across Africa has therefore made it to constitute a regional syndrome.

Using Lagos, Nigeria as the study map, the study has four main objectives. One is the examination of the nature, scope, character and dynamics of children refugees economic exploitation. Two, interrogating the factors and catalysts which made child economic exploitation attractive. Three, assessing the hazards economic exploitation has exposed minor refugees to and implications for their future orientations. Four and finally, advocating alternative humanitarian measures for meeting the challenges of children of armed conflicts.

In achieving these objectives, the study employed, combined structured and unstructured interviews as strategies for primary data collection from both camped and street refugees in Lagos and its neighbouring communities including Oru-Ijebu where there is an international refugee camp.

This study provides a conceptual base which further problematizes the issues of conflict in Africa. The research amplifies some of the international instruments to safeguard the rights of children refugees. The incentives fostering the problematic child refugees' economic exploitation in the study area. The value of the interrogation was enhanced by the researcher-refugees interaction. The concluding remarks, which provides alternative interventionist measures for dealing with the plight of minors in difficult conditions.

**Conceptual analysis and rationalizing child refugees' economic exploitation:**

The United Nations Geneva Convention, 1951 and its Protocol of 1967 define refugees as persons forced out of their country of nationality on account of a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, nationality, religion and membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Traditionally, there is a clear distinction between refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). IDPs are victims of armed conflicts or other similar circumstances stated above which make them to be uprooted or displaced from their original abodes but unable or unwilling to leave their countries. In a way, the internally displaced people experience similar situations like refugees except that the former have not fled across international borders, but remain dislocated within or have not fled their homelands. As a consequence of the thin difference between the two victims of emergencies, there is the tendency now by scholars and humanitarian bodies to expand the definition of refugees to include internally displaced people<sup>[5]</sup>.

Norman Mayer<sup>[4]</sup> provides a typology of refugees. According to him, refugees can be classified into political, economic and environmental refugees. Political refugees are victims of political repression and persecution either by the authorities or other groups. The ensuing struggle for political power among concerned groups (often ethnic formations) may trigger hostilities. Economic refugees are those who suffer inequitable social factors. They are experiencing very difficult economic situations at home including high unemployment, food insecurity and a sizeable proportion of the population are hardly able to eke out a living. Hence, the urge to seek for greener pastures and survival outside their shores. This category of refugees is often referred to as economic migrants. Environmental refugees are people who can no longer gain a secured livelihood in their homelands because of drought, soil erosion, desertification, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption. Generation of environmental refugees is in a way a product of effects of adverse environmental change.

Child refugees constitute a special class of refugees because of their tender age. Who then is a child? Article I of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly identified that "a child means every human being below the age of 18 years". The African Charter of the Rights of the Child is in agreement with this definition. A child refugee is therefore a refugee who is below the age of 18 years.

The prevalence of wars in Africa, particularly intra-ethnic conflicts shortly after independence in the early 1960s justify the description of the continent being referred to as a troubled region and a zone of endemic political disorder and instability. Aristide Zolberg<sup>[5]</sup> specifically observes that the most salient characteristic of political life in Africa is that it constitutes an almost institutionless arena with conflict and disorder as its most prominent features. Aina<sup>[6]</sup> agrees with Zolberg when he describes Africa as a scene of some of the most horrifying human tragedies. These submissions cannot be waived aside as there is no sub-region in the continent that has not witnessed armed conflicts. Currently, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Burundi, Liberia, Algeria, Sudan and Zaire are engaged in internal armed struggles.

Empirical explanatory causal analysis provides various models for African conflicts. First, conflicts in Africa are categorized into five major groups namely: boundary conflicts; conflicts of governance; conflicts of economic development; conflicts resulting from foreign intervention and conflicts arising from the militarization of the society as a result of abundance of weaponry in private hands<sup>[7]</sup>.

On the actual root causes of internal conflicts and indeed, refugee flows in Africa, political and economic factors and ethnic tensions have been identified. Politically, the contending competition among individuals and groups have led to militant actions in most states of the continent. For instance, political struggle between Colonel Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State and Colonel Ojukwu, the Eastern regional governor, led to the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970. Similar examples include the civil wars in Angola, Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Zaire and apartheid South Africa, to mention a few.

Economic tensions constitute a major source of refugee flows. Usually, bitter disputes among national elites and groups arising from efforts to preserve or advance the standing of one group at the relative expense of others. Disputes concerning the distribution of resources during general economic decline are the most politically explosive<sup>[8]</sup>. Needs neglect and deprivation is a composite of the economic rationalization of the dialectics of conflicts in Africa. Writing on the "Social and National Questions: The crisis of the state in Africa",

Olufemi<sup>[9]</sup> observes that the pervasive socio-economic and political turbulence in the continent has made life tough for the majority of Africans and the crisis could be measured not only in the extreme harrowing living conditions of the people, but also in the attendant conditions of hopelessness, violence and general disillusionment.

In an attempt to amplify and expatiate on the economic and deprivation thesis of conflicts in Africa, Paul Collins (2000: 4) opines that power-seeking is a variant of predatory theory which explicates that individuals and rebels in a civil war are motivated by a lust for power. He further advances that rebels are propelled by grievances. Such grievance can be political or economic marginalization, or a combination of both. According to him, it may border on resource control.

Civil conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone present good illustrations of hostilities triggered by grievances over internal political economy. A rider to the predatory and economic analysis of internal conflicts is the greed dimension. The greed factor espouses that the greed by the political actors is a more fundamental cause of most conflicts than the grievances they advertised.

The greed hypothesis has been validated by the situation in Sierra Leone. During the peace negotiations in the country's civil war, Foday Sankoh, leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group was offered and accepted the vice-presidency of the country. But Collier (Ibid, 5) critically observes that one might think that the offer was a good basis for addressing rebel grievances, however, this was not sufficient to persuade the rebel leader to accept the peace terms as he further demanded to be made the Minister of Mining, thereby suggestive that something other than grievance was beneath the surface of the hostilities. However, the citing of Sankoh *vis-à-vis* the power-sharing in Sierra Leon has been controverted by Ibrahim Abdullah<sup>[10]</sup>, a Sierra-Leonean academic who actually took part in the Sierra Leone peace negotiations. He invalidated Collins claims. According to him, Sankoh was never offered the vice-presidency, rather he was accorded a protocol status of vice-president. He also pointed out that Sankoh never asked to be made the Minister of Mining, though, he demanded for the control of eight key ministries including Defence, Mines and International Affairs and at the end of the negotiations, he was only given the control of four ministries<sup>[10]</sup>.

Ethnic tensions imply conflicts between ethnic groups. Ethnic conflict could be a direct outcome of political and economic marginalization of other ethnic groups by a single ethnic group in power. The control of political power and resources of the state by the ruling

elite is done in such a way that other ethnic groups are put at absolute disadvantage. The marginalized groups usually engineer ethnic antagonisms for a position of advantage. Ethnic conflicts have proliferated intensely in Africa to the extent that such conflicts have shot to the forefront a more complex problematic issue of citizenship and identity crisis in the region. Outbreak of hostilities is often accompanied by costs and consequences. Readily discernible consequences are casualties, physical incapacities, maiming and destruction to property and infrastructure. Refugee movements internally and externally are also part of the dare humanitarian costs of war. Sadiq Raheed notes that the proliferation of wars in Africa have turned some 8 million and 40 million Africans respectively to become refugees and displaced people. Refugees flows subject victims to socio-economic dislocations and may be faced with inhumane and poor economic conditions in the host states and refugee camps that may require personal augmentations and initiatives for survival.

#### **Children refugees and international protection instruments:**

It is globally acknowledged that children constitute one of the world's most vulnerable groups. Children, because of their tender ages, are helpless in emergencies. Consequently, within the decade between 1991 and 2000, 6 million children have been declared physically wounded in armed conflicts, while an estimated 10 million have been psychologically traumatized by war (BBC World Service). Besides, many of the conflicts in most parts of Africa have lasted the length of childhood of many African children. For instance, the civil wars in Sudan, Angola, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Algeria and Uganda have lasted decades. Critical infrastructures such as schools and hospitals that are essential for childhood development are often destroyed in the protracted civil wars. The protracted-ness of the conflicts often blurs the memory of most children as to when their country is not in a state of armed violence.

Of the estimated 50 million around the world who are victims of forced displacement, 25 million are children<sup>[11]</sup>. However, of the 22 million people that were actually refugees in the world, minors constitute the UNHCR's largest single 'clientele' of 10 million children, about half of the externally uprooted population. Nearly two-third of world's refugees are in Africa and the Middle East (ibid). The large statistics of children refugees, therefore, implies that special intervention is required to protect them and guarantee their rights under their unimagined conditions.

Generally, the core mandate of the UNHCR is protecting the 50 million world's vulnerable people and it does this in several ways. The first legal authority and tool of the agency is the 1951 Geneva

Refugee Convention. Under the convention, its protection mandate includes securing and ensuring that the basic human rights of vulnerable persons and ensuring asylum. Making sure that refugees and others in need of international protection are granted refuge; implying that refugees will not be returned involuntarily to their country of origin where they face persecution; legal and resettlement assistance. Screening and removal of some refugees may be desirable for security reasons or because of their vulnerability e.g., women and children. The UNHCR also helps refugees to interact in countries of refuge or asylum, or resettle in a third country. It also seeks to provide for the social welfare of refugees by ensuring at least a minimum of shelter, food, water and medical care in the immediate aftermath of any refugee exodus<sup>[12]</sup>.

Promoting refugee law including convention, treaties, protocols and other measures is part of the major activities of UNHCR. UNHCR field offices engage in promoting accession to the 1951 convention relating to the status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol to the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Other promotional activities include helping to enact or revise national legislation strengthening relevant legal and judicial institutions, training staff of government and non-governmental agencies and liaising with relevant human rights bodies<sup>[2]</sup>.

Another notable legal tool to protect especially children refugees is the 1989 UN convention on the Rights of the Child. Though, the statute applies generally to all cadres of children living in normal situations and in emergencies. It entered into force on September 2, 1990 and has been ratified by 191 countries. Deserving significant attention are Articles 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 37 and 38. Article 2 mandates state parties to respect and ensure the rights, in the present Convention. Articles 6-8 spell out these child's rights and they include rights to: life; freedom of association; identity; communication; privacy; leisure and recreation; health; freedom from discrimination; and protection against exploitation and inhuman treatment. Article 11 mandates states parties to take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad. This proviso specifically targets child trafficking across borders for cheap labour.

Article 37(a) of the Convention further requires all state parties to ensure that "no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". The Convention in its Article 38 (2 and 3) refrain state parties from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into the armed forces or made to take direct part in hostilities. Similarly,

Article 38 (4) mandates states to "take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict". Article 39 requires states to take appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social integration of child victims of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. Of much more significant is Article 22. It expressly states that:

States shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said states are parties.

Above all, studies provides that "in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration".

Two Optional Protocols were adopted and ratified by the General Assembly of the UN on 25 May 2000 and entered into force on 18 January, 2002. The first one, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in armed conflict is meant to strengthen Article 38 of the 1989 Convention regarding 15 years minimum age limit for children to be recruited into armed forces or taking part in hostilities. Article 1 of the Protocol reviewed upward to 18 years the minimum age for states members armed forces and for direct participation in hostilities. The Optional Protocol to the convention on the Rights of the child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is meant to enhance article 1, 11, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36 of the 1989 convention.

Other relevant international humanitarian instruments include; African Charter on Child Rights and Welfare<sup>[13]</sup>. Specifically, Article 23 on Refugee Children enjoins states parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic laws shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by parents, legal guardians or close

relatives, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of the rights set out in this Charter and other international human rights and humanitarian instruments to which the states are parties. This provision is a prototype of the 1989 Child convention Article.

The Accra Declaration on War-Affected children in West Africa adopted in the ECOWAS meeting of 27-28 April 2000 adopts several declarations which include; acknowledging that children, as nation-builders, are the guarantors of the future; resolve to ratify and fully implement the provisions of international instruments on the rights of the child; commit to ratify the statute of the international criminal court and to bring to justice those who commit violations against children and establish an office within ECOWAS for the protection of war-affected children and decide to review the activities of ECOWAS in the protection of war affected children in the region<sup>[14]</sup>.

Other relevant international instruments on children in armed conflict include the OAU Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict; Recommendation No R(87)8 of the Committee of Ministers to members states Regarding Conscientious objection to compulsory Military Service; Guidelines on Refugee children and the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. All these re-echo and re-affirm the protection and rights guaranteed by the aforementioned international measures on emergencies and armed conflicts. They note the necessity to identify and meet the particular needs of children and additional rights as refugees including their welfare and education.

**Patterns of children refugees' economic exploitation:** In spite of the varied international humanitarian laws to protect children refugees, the lots of children are constantly being discriminated against, rights repressed and violated and actively exploited. The phenomenon of child-soldiering is on the increase and remains unabated despite anti-child soldier clause in the various statutes. Today, there are around 300,000 youngsters worldwide who were kidnapped or coerced into becoming soldiers<sup>[12]</sup>. Out of the figure, 120,000 are participating in armed conflicts across Africa<sup>[15]</sup>. Besides violating humanitarian laws which prohibit the use of minors in hostilities, the act is in all totality economic exploitation which the existing measures also make illegal. Child soldiers lack the intelligence and skill to bargain for a good pay like the regular soldiers. They cannot even bargain because very many of them were coerced into the force. And a few others who joined voluntarily must have done so for survivalist reasons-need for physical and food security as many of their parents had died in the hostilities. Child

conscription into armed forces is a worst form of child labour and abuse of power by adults over the vulnerable and the weak, which contravenes ILO convention No. 182 of 1999 and other humanitarian laws.

In the study map survey area, Lagos has an estimated 5000 refugees in its sprawling streets. Half of the population was children. The refugee population is a combination of victims of armed conflicts and economic crisis. In the category of the former were the Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Sudanese, Zaireans and Somalis. In the latter group we had the Nigerians and Chadians who were economic migrant-refugees.

The concentrations of the street refugees were most found at Oju-Elegba, Oyingbo, Yaba, National Stadium, Oshodi, Ketu and Ojota bus stops<sup>[16]</sup>. The over-concentration of the refugees in Lagos is with reasons. One, there is an international refugees camp at Ijebu-Oru very close to Lagos from where they usually make influx to the metropolis. Two and more important, Lagos is the economic capital of Nigeria and is one of the most populated urban centers in the country. These two factors make Lagos a very viable place for beggars soliciting for arms. And if the religious factor is added, Lagos has the highest number of churches and a sizeable number of mosques in Nigeria thereby making people to be sympathetic towards beggars, more particularly minor refugees that are being used as fronts by their parents.

Economic exploitation of children refugees in Lagos takes two forms. One and the more visible in the major streets and roads and bus stops is the practice by the parents/adult refugees who sit at nearby strategic locations while they order their children refugees to solicit for alms from the public at bus stops, moving vehicles, markets, motor parks and other areas with heavy human traffic. The child refugees constantly make returns of proceeds to their parents/adults who are awaiting such returns. The parent/adult refugees have found this practice very lucrative because of the sizeable amount often earned by the minors. Each child earns as much as between N1,000 and N1,500 Naira daily<sup>[16]</sup>. This is to the extent that they preferred begging for alms to being hosted at the UNHCR refugee camp for reasons (Ibid.). Interrogation of many of the children refugees revealed that they were satisfied with the "job" because it guarantees their feeding and buying of other things. And moreso, they could not turn down the orders of their parents/guardians as they were responsible for their welfare and protection. Many of the children claimed they preferred to stay out of the camp because they were always hungry there.

The adult refugees corroborated the claim of the children refugees that conditions in the camp were not conducive to living. They complained of lack of food, no

money to buy basic needs and inadequate accommodation and that they were jobless in the camp. Social life was also poor.

On exposure to risk and danger, the street children refugees are vulnerable to mild dangers such as bad weather, but they are also exposed to very serious adversities such as being knocked down by vehicles on the highways, raping and illegal abduction of female children refugees and kidnapping by ritualists and child traffickers. Two of the female children confessed they had been raped by some unknown men having been drawn away from the glare of their parents under the pretense they would be given alms<sup>[16]</sup>. Four families revealed five cases of loss of children. Investigation also revealed that at the Ojota location, three of the beggars' children refugees had been crushed to death by trailers.

Social miscreants in Lagos called "Area Boys" had not spared the young refugees. They had been subjected to daylight robberies of their monies and valuables.

Many of female children refugees claimed they had not engaged in prostitution for a living, because they used to collect money from begging and the people were very generous to them. They however confessed that the adult female refugees did engage in prostitution to survive.

The second pattern of children refugees' exploitation relates to the engagement of children refugees as "slave" labourers. This is not as transparent as street begging by the children refugees. The slave labour practice is manifested by a group of elites engaged in networking in two or more countries in the African region. The engagement of children refugees takes two variants. First, they are engaged in the host states as cheap labour by sending them to willing "clients" who on the other hand engage them as either houseboys/girls or "security" men, drivers, gardeners, street hawkers and bus conductors. This category of refugee children is usually from Ghana, Benin Republic, Togo, Cameroon, Liberia, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Niger Republic.

They are used in farm plantations, industries, construction sites in Lagos and its suburbs such as Abeokuta, Ijebu and Shagamu. According to the United States Agency for International Development, in the West African sub-region alone, there are about 284,000 trafficked child labourers working in hazardous conditions on Cocoa farms<sup>[13]</sup>. The exploitative aspects of the practice are: One, they are paid very cheap remunerations, the negotiation for which they did not take part. Two, to compound the latter problem, only half of the "agreed" wage is paid to the child labourer and the other half to the 'labour merchant', that is, the child refugee's boss or procurer. Three, field survey also revealed that most of the child labourers work full time,

throughout the week, month and year on meager wages. And four, they are often treated as sub-human beings and second degree citizens who are not allowed to mix with the families of their "employers" and thereby subjected to segregated life. The houseboys and girls, in addition live regimented life with their rights of movement restricted.

**Interrogating catalysts for de-camping by refugees:** In order to ascertain or verify the claims of the street refugees, adults and children living in the UNHCR camp at Ijebu-Oru and those engaging in street begging, an unstructured survey was conducted in the camp. The camp was founded in October 1990 by the Red Cross Society specifically for the Liberian refugees and later taken over by the UNHCR. The UNHCR, Nigerian Government, the Catholic Mission and some other non-governmental organizations jointly funded it. The camp hosts about 2700 refugees, 75% of whom are children and women. The profile of nationals in the camp includes Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Ivoriens, Sudanese, Burundians, Chadians and those from Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo Brazzaville

Regarding social facilities, a camp official revealed that there are a primary school, pipe-borne water, electricity and playing facilities. The official also claimed that there are medical care facilities. Asked about the urban (street) refugees in Lagos, the official volunteered that there were as many as 7000 of them in Lagos and that they were in the streets by choice and could not be compelled to be in camp as they have the freedom of movement<sup>[17]</sup>.

Verifying these claims from camp inmates, several complaints were lodged about conditions in the camp. First was the issue of accommodation. There was allegation of gross shortage of accommodation. It was transparently clear that the camp was over-populated. Refugees of different nationalities and backgrounds were said to be lodged in the same room and thereby causing over-crowding and lack of privacy. Second, refugees complained bitterly about food insecurity in the camp thereby arousing intense hunger particularly in the aged and children. It was revealed that food rations were given on quarterly basis but had been stopped since January, 2002. Food assistance to Liberians actually stopped in 1997<sup>[18]</sup>. The refugees also complained of non-payment of daily/monthly stipends to them, this coupled with lack of employment or jobs to do, robbed them of economic capability to purchase the barest basic needs. On medical care, the refugees complained of poor health care due to lack of drugs in the camp clinic which opens only thrice in a week. The UNHCR and other agencies have stopped supplying drugs. Six inmates had died of tuberculosis arising from overcrowding and lack of vaccines against

tuberculosis<sup>[19]</sup>. Individual patients had to buy drugs on their own. A camp official confirmed the poor state of medical care in the camp due to lack of funding from donors. UNHCR has actually stopped funding the camp (ibid: 1-2).

Finally, refugees were asked how they were coping in the camp in terms of their welfare. It was made known that there were varied survivalist strategies adopted. One was engaging in menial jobs, which most often were not available because of the rural nature of the camp location without any industries. Two was ladies and girls engaging in commercial sex work (prostitution). Unattached female refugees go as far as Calabar, Benin and Abuja, distances ranging from 300 to 1000 kilometres from either the camp location or Lagos, to engage in sexual sales. Because of this claim by the refugees, camp officials were asked if there were cases of HIV/AIDS. Three cases were said to be recorded but the persons were said to have left the camp. However, an HIV/AIDS casualty was later recorded (ibid:1-2).

**Concluding remarks and prospects for better child refugee advocacy:** Unimaginable conditions for children, the most vulnerable group, have remained the outcome of the struggles for peace and the rash of ethno-national conflicts in Africa. Existing international humanitarian measures seem sufficient in terms of provisional requirements, but like refugees in general, as aptly noted by the ECOWAS Committee of Ministers (1987), refugee children continue to suffer violation of their rights to safety and liberty. The committee observed further that in different refugee situations, children are victims of; armed attacks in camps and settlements, recruitment into armed forces or rebel groups, forced, cheap, labour, torture, abduction, physical and/ or sexual abuse, exploitation, abandonment and neglect. Refugee children continued to be exposed to and suffered, direct physical injury and psychological trauma. In general, children refugees suffer serious developmental retardation.

The inhuman acts these children are exposed to arising from emergencies in addition to their being denied education and social and medical care therefore call into question the type of future, adults are planning for the children who are regarded as leaders of tomorrow. The truth of the matter is that most of the children refugees have no future. Children brought up in environments of violence cannot appreciate peace in adulthood, because, the context in which a child grows up determines his orientation to and appreciation of, conflict and peace.

The greatest challenge to children refugees' advocacy is how to actively, meaningfully and permanently improve the conditions of children who are victims of hostilities. The imperative of strengthening the existing children humanitarian codes should be of central

attraction. The polity is replete with varied measures but which are regrettably lacking determination in their implementation. The system is generally good in making lots of rules but poor in achieving the goals of such rules. The various statutes adequately safeguard the interests of children in all ramifications but only to fail in actually putting them into concrete use. All known humanitarian statutes condemn child exploitation of any kind.

To put an end to the present gulf between law and practice, establishment of a special International Court for Crimes against Children (ICCC) can be effective international control to retard increasing trends in violations of regimes for protecting children and therefore deter adult opportunists who benefit from such crimes. The court will be empowered to award punishments for child right abuse and violation. Such punishments will make children to be respected as zone of peace.

Children are the hardest hit by the adult-inspired armed conflicts yet, they are most marginalized in post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes which are often planned for adults particularly men who directly participated in the hostilities (soldiers and rebels). Specific and concrete post-conflict actions and services are urgently desirable for the minors of wars. "Go Back to School Programme" is urgently canvassed as first step to rehabilitate and restore the future of refugee children. Regional and sub-regional International Refugee Children's schools with all costs of feeding, uniform books and tuition duly shouldered by the UNHCR, regional/ sub-regional international organizations and humanitarian NGOS. Enrolment should be made compulsory for all victim minors. Funding of such schools should be out of the purview of host nations/communities for reasons. One, most of the host-states are not economically viable. Two, asking host states to bear such obligation may be deemed as unnecessary burden and therefore may not genuinely support such a plan.

The funding of refugee camps is poor as showcased by the Ijebu Oru Camp. The practice of leaving the funding and maintenance of refugee camps to public sympathy and emotional gesture will continue to deny them steady flow of funds on permanent basis. The United Nations must of necessity increase significantly the official budget to the UNHCR to be able to actively carry out its action plans in refugee camps worldwide and specifically, funding the Oru camp by the UNHCR must be urgently restored. It is projected that the National Commission for Refugees needs an annual \$5 million to be able to credibly execute its mandate<sup>[19]</sup>. Doing this will enhance the capacity of the camps to provide adequate social and welfare services for inmates and thereby create attractions for their stay in the camps without adults forcing children refugees to the streets for begging for alms in order to survive.

Finally, creating vocational centres in refugee camps should be part of ways to reduce the plight of refugees. Beside poor conditions of the camps, another factor that makes camp life unbearable to refugees is boredom emanating from idleness. Idleness results from the non-employment of the refugees in productive activities. Refugees are denied job opportunities in host-countries. Most often, this is not out of discrimination against the refugees. Most host-states suffer lack of employment for their citizens. It is therefore difficult to employ refugees instead of nationals who are permanent residents. Localities of most refugee camps are rural communities without industrial activities which can take up labour service that can be rendered by willing refugees. Vocational centers where various trades can be learned by refugees should be made available at the camps. Vocations such as tailoring, barbing, hair dressing, catering, laundering, shoe- repairing, car- washing and other activities that can be easily learned within a short-time and with little capital to set up. It should be noted that it is not enough to train refugees in vocations, the capital to start up such services at the conclusion of training must be available to them either as take-off grants or small credit loans.

Benefits derivable from making refugees self-employed cannot be quantified. One, it abates their boredom and idleness. Two, work has a natural therapeutic power, which promotes the body system and consequently promotes health. Three is that earnings from self-employment will empower refugees economically and make them self-sustaining. It will also reduce the over-dependence of camped refugees on the UNHCR and thereby ameliorate the financial burden on camp authorities. Four is the prospects of drastically stemming the rising trends of child refugee economic exploitation syndrome, which has become the hallmark of virtually the major capitals in Africa. If parent guardian refugees possess the economic where whither, they will be less tempted to abuse and exploit refugee minors by using them to arouse public sympathy for alms and cheap labour in order to survive. It is when the conditions that make child refugee's abuse and exploitation by the adult refugees are subdued that child refugee rights as guaranteed by the various international humanitarian laws can be sustained in practice and the expectations of being future leaders be genuinely ascertained. Attempts at a durable solution to the problems of future world peace and development must not neglect the address of the plight of minors in difficult conditions who need to be urgently relieved of the physical, social and psychological

insecurity to which they have been exposed. Investment in child refugee security can therefore only be appropriately perceived as investment in future peace and stability.

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