

THE ENIGMAS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE EAST REGION OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a significant increase in the number of so called “humanitarian interventions” in Africa, with their activities in total violation of laid downsovereignty and humanitarian rules. The aims of this paper, is to unveil how reliefaid tothe Central African Refugees (CARs) within the East Region of Cameroon were reached in a cryptic or in ways that were characterized with enigmatic characters. Based on qualitative style, this paper contributes a new perspective on the politicization of humanitarian aid with a focus on contestation of fundamental principles of humanitarian intervention of neutrality, impartiality and independence. This article reveals that from 2005, international humanitarian aid was extended to the refugees within theEast Region of Cameroon first by the “non-extradition” or the “non-refoulement” of the refugees, which was followed by multi-facet relief initiatives carried out by the implementing partners of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). It also argues out how relief initiatives to the refugees, were politicized by instrumentalization, militarization and developmentalization by the western relief institutions, which broadened the scope of aid. This made actions of the relief institutions to adopt long term and more political tasks within the region, rather the primary aim of saving lives. All these went in juxtapositions with the humanitarian initiatives which werenot in clear conformity with the aforementioned humanitarian principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that governs humanitarian intervention.

Key Words: Enigma, Humanitarian Assistance and Refugee

Introduction

Within the last two decades of the 20th and 21st centuries, Sub-Saharan African countries have been subjected to major refugee crisis due to human and natural calamities (UNHCR Global Appeal, 2014: 11). The Eastern Region of Cameroon has experienced a brutal increased of its population by around 15percent between the beginning of 2013 and end of 2014, due to the massive influx of refugees from the Central African Republic (PiamouDjamengo and P. S. Fanokoa, 2014: 5). Since 1960, the CAR has witnessed six dramatic civil wars. In 2010; the regime of Francois Bozizé came under fire from opposition leaders who announced their intention to boycott the January 2011 elections in the light of institutional changes affecting

the voter registration process (The International Crisis Group, 2014: 18). When Bozizé was re-elected in 2011, his victory was shrouded by allegations. The inability of Bozize's government to demobilize the rebels resulted to an open scale civil war between the sectarian sects (Weyns et al, 2014: 15). The outcome was the massive influx of more than 175.000 Central African citizens as caseloads, into the East Region of Cameroon, taking the status of refugees. This article seeks to unveil the actions of the relief humanitarian institutions and the byzantine that surrounded humanitarian assistance to the refugees within the region and the oddities which discredited humanitarian action before the eyes of many scholars and analysts.

International and Internal Frameworks for Refugee Protection

The Republic of Cameroon ratified the 1951 convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees. The Republic of Cameroon was part of the 30th October 1961 convention and also ratified the 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees in September 1967 whereby the different signatories agreed to apply most of the articles of the Refugee Convention to all persons covered by the Protocol's refugee definition. Finally, she was a signatory to the 1969 OAU convention governing the specific aspects of refugees' problems in Africa that entered into force on the 20th June 1974. She finally passed the 12 July 2005 law relating to the status of refugees in Cameroon in law No.777/PJL/AN of 2005. The UNHCR has been the sole "HOLY SEE" institution that was created in 1951, vested with the primary duty of refugee affairs (Buergethal, 1988: 25). This institution with its bases in all countries affected by migrants issues was the sole institution that worked with related implementing international partners within the East Region of Cameroon, like the Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Medical Corps (IMC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Relief and Development (IRD-US), *Faites Aux Femmes*, Plan Cameroun, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), *Afrique Solidarité* (AS), *Première Urgence-Aide Médicale Internationale* (PU-AMI), the World Food Programme (WFP), CARE International and *Medicins Sans Frontières* (MSF Switzerland, Belgium and that of France). Other related UN agencies were UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The institutional partners were government's ministerial departments which were formally, led by Ministry of External Relations (MINREX). With all these inter-connected institutional frameworks, the refugees were granted relief aid by the donors whose activities were real and at the same time

with juxtapositions which did not fall squarely within the perimeters of the international humanity laws.

Humanitarian Aid to Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon

In conformity with the international laws, protocols and conventions, the Republic of Cameroon accompanied UNHCR institutionally towards the granting of relief to the refugees from CAR who migrated into the East Region of Cameroon before and after 2013. In compliance to the 2005 refugee law, the Republic of Cameroon strictly applied the international norm of non-refoulement or the non-extradition act of refugees, stating in the Cameroon's refugee law of 2005 that;

No person shall be turned at the border, (*non-refoulement or non-extradition act*) nor subject to measures, whatever, that may force him to return to or remain in a territory where his life, physical integrity or freedom is threatened by any of the reasons mentioned in section 2 of this law.

In this light, with this section of the national law and on *Prima Facie*ⁱ, the government of the Republic of Cameroon from 2009 opened her eastern borders of Yamba, Ngaoui, Gbatoua Ngodole, Gbiti, Mboy, Kentzou and Gari Gombo etc to the refugees from CAR. By 2013, there were over 175.000 Central African Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon that were camped in the Timangolo, Mbilé, Garoua Boulai, Lolo, Nyabi, Borgop, Gado Badzere and Yokadouma refugee sites (Nkatow Mafany, 2020: 54). In the domain of identification, the National Assembly of the Republic in 2005 set up organs in charge of status management called the Commission of Eligibility on Refugee Status (CERS) and the Refugee Appeal Board (Nchinda Keming, 2006: 195). Coupled with the inability or dormant nature of these boards, the UNHCR in 2012 was entrusted with the role of determining the status of refugees by the government of the Republic of Cameroon. The UNHCR carried registration or the documentation of the refugees through a special biometric system as a pilot project. By the year 2015, over 125,000 refugees were registered, protected and were assisted by the UNHCR and her implementing partners with strict collaboration with the institutions of the Republic of Cameroon.

This was followed by the provision of food to the refugees in the different sites by the WFP, the CRS, IMC, Plan Cameroon, CARE International and *ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM* etc. The

nutritional Programme was divided into three, which were: Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme (BSFP), Food by Prescription (FP) and Food for Access (FA) that addressed over 90% cases of malnutrition. Between 2009 and 2013 the budget of UNHCR that was distributed to her implementing partners amounted to 100.000.000US-Dollars (European Union, 2016: 1). In addition, the UNHCR through her implementing partners also provided potable water to the refugees. The targeted places were the camps, the different host communities and in schools that had a sizeable number of the refugees enrolled, like the case of Gbiti, Nyabi, Kuete, Kambelle and Gadji etc. By 2013 over 250 of the water pump boreholes were registered just within the KadeyDivision (UNHCR, 2014: 12). The implementing partners of UNHCR deployed teams to the refugee host villages, who successfully preached and facilitated peaceful coexistence of the refugees with the host communities. This facilitated the smooth integration of the refugees into the societal life.

Since one of the Millennium Development Goals was “free and universal education to all”, the UNHCR/UNICEF in synergy with their partners also facilitated the enrolment of the refugee in the basic and secondary educational levels. Scholarships were given to the refugees in terms of *kits Scolaire*ⁱⁱ that came from UNICEF and DAFI.ⁱⁱⁱ Between 2009 and 2015, over 1.500 refugee pupils and students were facilitated admissions into the educational levels with their tuition and examination fees being taken care of by the implementing partners of UNHCR. The last domain of intervention was universal health care to all. This was championed by *MSF*, *CARE International*, the *IMC*, the *IFRC*, the *WFP*, *AHA* and *ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM* etc. from 2012 to 2014, over 2.968 critical health cases related to malnutrition and tuberculosis were addressed by the Batouri district hospital alone by the medical personnel that were posted to the health centers by the implementing partner (IMC, 2012: 12). All these humanitarian initiatives alleviated the vulnerable situation of the Central African Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon between 2009 and 2015. This was in direct conformity with the norms that were ratified by the government of the Republic of Cameroon in 2005 in relation to the 1951 refugee convention and protocol. From a critical perspective, humanitarianism to the Central African Refugees in the East Region of Cameroon had a lot of juxtapositions in conformity with the views of other critical analysts like Dany Charlotte and M. H. Atmar.

The Paradoxes of Humanitarianism within the East Region of Region

The international refugee law and the Humanitarian principles are rooted in international humanitarian law (Pictet, 1975: 12). Humanitarian aid has been situated within the complexity of a multi-level context, “reflecting the interconnectedness of multiple governance levels and policy arenas in the policy process” (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014: 15). The unfathomable of humanitarian aid to the Central African Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon from 2009 were at the level of Politization of the relief initiatives. This was because humanitarian aid has become political in the last two decades, as “it has become a political project in politico-geostrategic spheres”. Politicization of humanitarian aid to the Central African Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon was reserved to substantial policy changes that diverted humanitarian aid to the region, away from their original principal characters. In other words, Politicization of humanitarian aid has been used to describe situations in which the principles of humanitarian action were compromised by the implementing partners of UNHCR, at the cost of more political rationales, due to ethical dilemmas faced by humanitarian aid organizations.¹ Politicization was indeed a pursuit of domestic and foreign policies of key donors through “humanitarian means” (Atmar, 2001: 3).

The juxtapositions of aid by Politization were visible in the domains of instrumentalization, militarization and developmentalization. The instrumentalization of humanitarian aid within the East Region of Cameroon to the Central African Refugees was a means by UNHCR and her implementing partners in advancing the political, economic and security interests of the donors. Some studies have shown that many donors thus, departed from a strict needs-approach, for example, between 2009 and 2015, most of the UNHCR’s implementing partners provided aid mainly to Divisions like the Kadey, with capital Batouri, and Lom and Djerem Divisions where resources like gold and diamond were abundant and commercialized in an illicit manner through criminalization. This was to the neglect of other Divisions of Mboumba-Ngoko and Upper Nyong with over 55.000 refugees (Mafany, 2020: 164). The mazy attitude of humanitarian institutions led UNHCR in the provision of aid to the refugees within the East Region of Cameroon, compromised international humanitarian principle of impartiality.

The paradox of the militarization of humanitarian aid was a manner within the region through which actions of humanitarian aid and military actors become blurred. This was most obvious when aid became part of a counter-insurgency strategy. Militarization was manifested in between 2009 and 2015 in the region as members of the armed forces or private military companies^{iv} guarded the delivery of humanitarian aid against the danger of myth of attacks by unknown. The paradox of militarizing aid delivery and provision within the East Region of Cameroon compromised the principles of armed neutrality and also independence as guiding principles of humanitarian assistance.

The undecipherable nature of aid to the Central African Refugees within the East Region of Cameroon by developmentalization as a form of Politization broadened the scope of aid. Humanitarian aid now adopted longer-term and more political tasks rather than the primordial character of saving lives. Many humanitarian agencies like the CRS, AHA, and *ACTIONCONTRE LA FAIM*, led by UNHCR incorporated human rights or the promotion of democratic norms into their activities that were carried out in meeting with the plethora plights of the Central African Refugees. This greatly reduced the differences that exist between humanitarian action and developmental aid (Barnett, 2009: 12). This diverted the initial humanitarian attention away from the narrow focus on alleviating suffering, which greatly compromised the principles of neutrality, impartiality and even independence as it often means working more closely with government of the republic Cameroon in achieving her political plan of action.

Conclusion

Within the last decade, the East Region of Cameroon has witnessed humanitarian crisis, due to the presence of the Central African Refugees. This paper examined the meandering attitudes of humanitarianism within the East Region of Cameroon. The protection of refugee is a human right, which was reaffirmed and adopted by the government of the Republic of Cameroon in 2005. One of the principal axes was the compliance to the non-extradition act. Humanitarianism was extended by the implementing partners of UNHCR in the domain of universal health care, the provision of food, the provision of shelter, potable water, universal education and the provision of refugee identification documents co-ordinate by the UNHCR, in partner with related government institutions. From critical analyses, the provision of aid to

the Central African Refugees, to an extent by the implementing partners of UNHCR, did not conform to the principles of humanitarian assistance. This was seen in the manners in which humanitarian aid was being politicized by the implementing partners through militarization, Developmentalism and instrumentalization, contrary to the set out humanitarian principles and laws as aforementioned.

Notes

ⁱ*Prima Facie* is one of the determinant factors of recognizing refugees. This recognition base is on “first sight”. It is a factor that enables recipient states to welcome, recognize and protect anybody called refugee, without any question from the person.

ⁱⁱ*Kits Scolaire* include a bag bearing UNICEF, with textbooks, ruler, uniform, a pair of shoe, pen , pencil, a math’s set, exercise books and other related teaching-learning aid.

ⁱⁱⁱDAFI is the name of a renowned institution that was set up in Germany by the famous philosopher called Albert Ainstain. He was a refugee in Germany. The wealth that he made was used in the establishment of an institution known as the Dafi institution in Germany. This institution has been in charge of granting yearly scholarships to refugee children worldwide, basically to those at the vocational and the higher education. Since the CARs were also interested with vocational trainings, they were granted Dafi scholarships which were channeled to them by the UNHCR and it collaborating partners, available at www.zapmeta.ws/DAFI+Scholarship/Now, retrieved on the 17 of February 2018.

^{iv}The “DAK” is a private institution, in form of an organization that recruits and trains security personnel. The security personnel are then placed at the disposal of companies, international, national (NGOs) and bourgeoisies etc for the maintenance of security.

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