

**ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR REFUGEES:-  
A STUDY OF ORU REFUGES CAMP IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

Educational provision for refugee is an important component of refugee welfare and protection in Nigeria. The Refugee Act of Nigeria has very specifically made provisions for elementary education. Specifically, the Act points out that education should be made accessible to refugee as an essential component of refugee welfare, and therefore every adult refugee should be encouraged to access education in Nigeria. There were attempts to implement these provisions in Nigeria at Oru refugee camp through the Lagos Liason Office of the National Commission for Refugee (NCFR), the Nigeria's Refugee Management Agency. This paper utilizes both primary and secondary data to assess the attempts to open educational access to refugee in Nigeria. Drawing from these veritable sources of data, it has been established that some tangible efforts were made to open and expand educational access to refugee both at Oru Camp and at some educational institutions of higher learning. The study has been able to show that the opening of educational access to refugee children has not significantly impacted on the children largely due to poor provision of basic learning materials and inadequate facilities at the only refugee children primary school established at Oru refugee camp. Regarding the efforts to provide and expand educational access at institutions of higher learning for Adult refugee by giving recognition to the certificates they obtained before coming to Nigeria and the Issuance of introductory letters to them to help them seek for admission, the paper is able to establish that the efforts yielded little result as some refugee could not go for the higher studies on account of financial constraints.

Keywords: Act, Access, Educational Provision, Refugee, Refugee Protection

**Introduction**

Access to education is a vital component of refugee management enterprise in Nigeria. As envisaged by the Nigeria's Refugee Act in article 22, refugee children should have access to elementary education (mainly primary and junior secondary education) and many hitches in accessing education by adult refugee should be remove. This relates to recognition of their foreign certificates, diplomas and degrees, opportunity for higher studies and the remission of fees and charges payable by the refugee who are willing to further their studies. This means that refugee protection in Nigeria is not comprehensive enough unless sufficient provision is made towards the educational needs of the refugee.

In the years between 1990 and 2010, Nigeria hosted thousands of refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo. Majority of them were settled at Oru refugee Camp with some others voluntarily located at Lagos and other places. At the Oru camp attempts were made by the Nigerian authorities to establish a primary school at the camp to cater for the elementary education of the refugee children.

Also, some adult refugee who possess diploma and degree certificates from their countries of origin have had their certificates recognized and given encouragements to go for higher studies in Nigerian Universities and polytechnics as envisaged by Nigeria's Refugee Act.

This paper is arranged in five sections. Section one is on the introduction. The section two contains the method of collecting data. Section three is an overview of the refugee Act as it relates to education for refugee, section four is about educational provision made for refugee in Nigeria and section five is the conclusion. The paper highlights the provision made to open and expand educational access to the refugee population in Nigeria. The paper seeks to assess the effectiveness of these provisions and how they impact on the quality of learning particularly on the refugee children some of whom have no parents and have lost their identify documents either on transit to Nigeria or during their hurriedly planned movement out of their countries of origin as a result of sporadic shooting either by belligerent rebel groups or forces loyal to functioning government. At the Oru camp primary school was established which the refugee children attend. This study identifies the poor quality of facilities and physical infrastructure in the school such as chairs, desks, chalk, instructional materials, toilet and sanitary conditions, teachers qualification etc as the major hurdles to providing effective education to the refugees.

### **Methodology**

The research collected both primary and secondary data in the conduct of this study. Interview and observation methods were utilized to generate primary data. In this regard refugee populations were the respondents as well as the officials of the Oru refugee Camp as well as staff of the only primary school at the camp. These categories of respondents lived at Oru refugee camp. The Head of the Lagos Liason office of the Nigeria Refugee Commission where a lot of activities central to refugee management in Nigeria are coordinated were also interviewed. Also visit to the Oru refugee camp primary school provides avenue to observe the general school setting, the learning and teaching materials and the subjects taught in relation to the qualification of the teachers. All these gave an insight into the effectiveness of the provisions made towards enhancing access to quality education by the refugee in Nigeria. Secondary data include documents obtained mainly from the office of the Oru Camp Administrator, the Lagos Liason Office, some refugees and at the Oru camp Primary School. The study also found very relevant the content of Nigeria's Refugee Act which, as a public policy on refugee, clearly envisages that access to education be open to refugee as an essential component of refugee protection endeavour. The study utilizes qualitative method of analysis and interprets data from survey research conducted.

### **Educational Provision in Nigeria's Refugee Act**

The quest to protect the asylum seekers and the refugee is the main goal of Nigeria's Refugee Act. Specifically it seeks to safeguard the interest of persons seeking to become refugees in Nigeria by making provisions that will enhance their welfare (FMG: 1989). To achieve these, the Act through its many sections specifies certain rights and benefits for refugee in Nigeria. Education and particularly access to it both at the elementary and higher levels is one important area which the Act envisages that all refugees in Nigeria should be allowed to enjoy. The Act categorizes the right to educational access into two. The first right relates to access to elementary education (comprising both primary and junior secondary education) which according to the 1st schedule of Article 22 of the Act shall be accorded to refugee in the same way it is accorded to Nigerians (FMG:1989). This specifically pertains to refugee children as they are the ones that enroll and attend primary and Junior Secondary Schools. It is a nine years schooling with six years in Primary and three years in Junior Secondary.

The second category of refugee which the Act envisages that they should be accorded access to education is the adult refugee who has attained levels of education up to Secondary and above in their countries of origin. This category, according to Article 22 (2) of the Act, should be accorded treatment, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally with respect to education. In fact they should, in particular, be allowed access to studies which should be made possible through giving recognition of

their foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the Award of scholarships (FMG:1989).

The Refugee Act envisages that through these provisions, refugee intellectual capacity would be enhanced and their frontier of knowledge expanded. Through these also, the refugee would acquire the right skills and competencies to enable them be self reliant and socialize more freely with their host Nigerian communities. In order to achieve these, the two categories of refugee are to be allowed access to education in line with Nigeria's policy on education whose philosophy, include among others:

- a. The training of the minds in understanding of the world around them.
- b. The inculcating of the right type of values and attitudes for survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- c. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical as requirement for individuals to live in and contribute to the development of the society (NERDC, 1998)

One program designed in Nigeria towards achieving this philosophy and which refugee children utilize is the nine year schooling program called Universal Basic Education (UBE). The central focus of the program as highlighted by Tahir (2003) is to open:

- a. Greater access and retention of learners in Basic education.
- b. Improve quality of facilities as well as delivery mechanisms in schools and learning centres.
- c. Provide a robust and relevant curriculum that is in keeping with our needs and aspirations as a nation.

The Refugee Act envisages refugee children to have their educational needs catered for by this arrangement in the same way it applies to other aliens and Nigerian children. Similarly, all adult refugee that attained educational levels up to diploma and degree levels in their countries prior to their displacement should not only have these certificates recognized in Nigeria but access for furthering their studies in Nigeria should be open for them. The refugee Act provides that practical administrative steps should be taken by the Nigerian refugee management agency to assist refugee in Nigeria to access higher education as a component of its refugee protection enterprise. Some of the measures taken to enable the refugee access education include the provision of some supporting infrastructures. These and the constraints encountered with their effects are discussed in subsequent section.

### **Infrastructural Provisions for Refugee Education in Nigeria**

As demonstrated above, refugee children and adults should be supported to access elementary education and higher education in Nigeria. This accessibility entails making education and the supporting infrastructure both available and adaptable to the refugee population. This is to prevent the children, as an important demographic category of the refugee population, from growing up without education and to also enable the adult to further their studies beyond the levels they reached before their forced displacement. The bulk of the infrastructure was at the Oru refugee camp where most of the refugee resided.

In pursuit of the desire to give refugee children education of the same standard and quality as Nigerians, a primary school was established at Oru camp to lay the foundation for the attainment of primary education which, according to Nigeria's policy on education, is to, among other things:

- a. Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate
- b. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
- c. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- d. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- e. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (NERDC: 1998)

The establishment of this primary school with its eight large classrooms undoubtedly opened and enhanced greater access to education for the refugee children. Unlike what obtains in other parts of the world where children are not allowed to enroll in schools because they are not considered residents of the areas or are unable to pay school fees (Michael, 2001), at the Oru primary school refugee children are unconditionally enrolled. There is no discrimination against any refugee child. No refugee child was ever

denied admission at the school and it is free of charge. They access the school even though some of them voluntarily enrolled in private schools. The school enrolment register contains column for school fees against the refugee names but are marked 'free'.

As shown in the previous section, junior secondary education is the second component of elementary education after the years of primary schooling. But there is no secondary school at the camp. The justification for the lack of a secondary school at the camp is that there is a secondary school at the neighboring Oru town which the refugee can enroll their children. The encouragement camp management always issue introductory letter to any refugee child wishing to pursue his studies to the secondary level. A perusal into some copies of the introductory letters shows favourable remark about the refugee which facilitated access for their children to Oru secondary school. However, even the primary school at the camp faces infrastructure deficit. The physical and material structures in the school were few. Some refugee complained bitterly about the dilapidated structures which made teaching and learning not conducive.

In all the classes, the chairs, the windows and the doors were broken. The ceilings were eaten by termites and in some classes you can see the sun through the numerous holes in the roofing sheets. The school surrounding was too bushy which exposes the pupils to the risk of attacks by reptiles. The children often return to the school after closing hour to spoil the few facilities available as there are no trained security personnel to guard the school and facilities there.

The school is also under-staffed and some teachers are assigned to teach subjects they don't have the requisite training. There is also lack of compliance with the provision of the National Policy on Education in which the primary curriculum content must include subjects and with teachers on language, mathematics, science and religious knowledge. What obtains at Oru primary school is in contrast with this requirement particularly where it relates to religious knowledge. There is no teacher for Islamic Studies while the Christian Religious Studies is taught by a Muslim teacher who voluntarily offers to do so in addition to her subject, Agricultural science. There is also no provision for counseling services in the school to address the psychological trauma of war conditions experienced by the children and their parents in their home countries. Counseling according to Ehigie (2010), helps in shaping the performance of refugee children in schools.

There was attempt to expand access to education beyond the primary and secondary levels through assisting the refugee to gain admission into Nigerian institutions of higher learning like Polytechnics and Universities. In this regard a number of steps were taken including the recognition of the foreign school certificates possessed by the refugees. This implies that all the foreign certificates (diplomas and degrees) owned by the refugee were recognized which is the first step towards opening them access to higher education. This decision is supported by an initiative of issuing the refugee with an introduction letter which not only testifies to their good conduct, but also lend support to their quest for admission in to Nigeria's tertiary institutions. This has yielded positive results as some of the refugees have pursued their studies up to master's degree level at University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Some have also completed Higher National Diploma at Kaduna Polytechnic. There is however problem with the remit of school fees for disadvantaged groups like refugee which tertiary institutions in Nigeria did not have provision for.

However the inability of the Nigeria's refugee management Agency to press for the remission of fees and charges or the award of scholarship for the refugee have discouraged some of them from pursuing their education despite the recognition of their foreign certificates. This has had negative effect on some of the refugee. Some have to devise and adopt coping strategies like engaging in petty jobs during holidays or call friends and relations in their countries of origin to assist them.

Indeed these difficulties experienced by the refugee have complemented the role of other factors in limiting their access to higher education in Nigeria as confirmed by a report which shows that: The conditions under which refugees live at the Oru camp are better imagined than seen..... Less than 20% of the refugees had access to skill acquisition programmes or tertiary education (Moremi, 2005)

This revelation is quite frightening. It shows the extent to which access to tertiary education among the refugee is hampered by the combined effect of the high school fees which the refugee are expected to pay and the lack of a special scholarship program for them. It is certainly true that low access

to higher education could have been drastically reduced if a well designed scholarship program is instituted in addition to a sustained pressure and moral appeal on the institutions of higher learning to remit fees and charges for the refugees. This would have altered the behaviour, expectations and shared understanding of the refugee towards the pursuit of higher education as an integral part of educational provision for refugee in Nigeria.

#### Conclusion

This paper examined the provision of education for refugee in Nigeria both at policy level as enunciated in the Refugee Act and the practical steps taken to open and expand access to education among the refugee. The paper highlighted the categorization of the Refugee by the Act and their rights to education in Nigeria. The first category are the refugee children to whom access should be given for education at primary and junior secondary school levels while the second category are adult refugee who have attained higher level qualification before coming to Nigeria.

The paper dwelt on the practical steps taken for the two groups to enable them access education. These, as highlighted in the paper, includes the establishment of primary school at Oru camp which was found to be ill-equipped and with dilapidated structures and, for the second group, their foreign certificates were recognized which enable some to gain admission into tertiary institutions. The paper also discussed the problem of high school fees charged by the higher institutions in Nigeria which most refugees cannot afford and the lack of an enduring scholarship program to assist them. In general, the paper is able to demonstrate how lack of good provision for education constitutes a challenge for effective refugee management in Nigeria.

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