

No Longer Welcome: Life of Former Liberian Refugees in the Buduburam Camp of Ghana After the End of their Refugee Status and Humanitarian Assistance.

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Abstract

This study examined the nature of relationship between former Liberian Refugees in Buduburam camp and the host community and the challenges and resilient strategies of the refugees after the end of humanitarian aid. The study adopted a qualitative research approach through a case study design. A total of 12 former refugees were purposively selected to participate in the study. Data was collected through interviews and observation and analysed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the former Liberian refugees' relationship with the host community during the aid era was cordial but turned sour after the humanitarian assistance to the refugees ceased. The study discovered that the former Liberian refugees are faced with financial difficulties, discrimination, insecurity, unemployment and malnutrition. In order to cope with these challenges, the former Liberian refugees engaged in adaptive and maladaptive activities and behaviours. It is recommended that the government of Ghana and UNHCR should reconsider the policy of integration of the former Liberian refugees who are unwilling to repatriate as well as create a platform to promote refugee-host community interaction in order to build cordiality, mutuality and bonding. This would hopefully minimise the existing tensions, prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination as well as increase socioeconomic opportunities for former Liberian refugees to live meaningful and dignified lives in Ghana.

Key words: Former Refugees, Host Community, Relationship, Challenges and Resilience

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Introduction

Voluntary migration nor forced migration is not a new phenomenon but in the past decade, the latter has become a matter of increasing interest (Omata, 2012). By the end of 2012, about 45.2 million persons worldwide were regarded as forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2013). Within the same period, the number of refugees in Africa was about 2,774,500 (UNHCR, 2013). This has generated policy debates and dialogues (UNHCR, 2010). In Africa, many people have been forced out of their country due to conflicts. Yet, conflicts seem not to be reducing in the continent. This has created a situation whereby refugee situation in the continent has become prevalent and persistent. Nonetheless, when conflicts end, the expectation is that the refugees generated by the conflict would repatriate home to be part of the post conflict peace building and redevelopment of their country. This does not always happen in all refugee situations. Thus, one of the most complex and daunting humanitarian problems faced by the international community is increased protracted refugee situations in the world (Crisp, 2003). The Liberian refugee population in the Buduburam camp of Ghana is one of these protracted refugee cases that the UNHCR has struggled to find a solution to. Some of the former Liberian refugees in Ghana 'refused' to repatriate since the conflict in their country ended and their refugee status in Ghana has also expired. This is because the desire of some to be resettled in a third advanced nation – where their economic wellbeing and security are guaranteed – was different from the solutions that the refugee management bodies presented to them (Addo & Tanle, 2023). As a result, there were about 12,000 Liberian refugees still at the Buduburam refugee settlement after three decades (Bruey, 2022). Since their decision to remain in Ghana, their relationship with the host community appears to have strained. Some local residents have accused the former refugees of crimes in the area. Bruey (2022) also reported the visitation of violence and brutality on them by the police. There were constant threats to demolish the camp and this tend to increase tensions (Addo & Tanle, 2023). Community members threatened to demolish the camp. Consequently, in early 2024, the Buduburam refugee camp was demolished and the Liberian refugees repatriated (Ocansey, 2024; Joy Online, 2024 May 21). Previous studies (such as Tanle, 2013; Macedo, 2012; Omata, 2012; Dauda, 2012; Sarfo-Mensah, 2009; Bortu, 2009; Rumbach, 2007) have documented the experiences and situation of the Liberian refugees in the Buduburam camp in Ghana. However, there appears to be little insights on the nature of the relationship between the former Liberian

refugees and the host community (Buduburam). Additionally, there is paucity of literature on the challenges the former refugees are currently experiencing in Buduburam camp and the coping mechanisms they have adopted since the end of humanitarian assistance. The overarching aim of this paper was to explore and provide an understanding of the nature of refugee-host relationship and the challenges and resiliency of the former Liberian refugees who have remained at the Buduburam camp after the end of humanitarian assistance.

Research Questions

The following questions directed the study:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between former Liberian refugees in Buduburam and the host community after the humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and government of Ghana ended?
2. What challenges are experienced by former Liberian refugees at the Buduburam in their relationship with the host community after the humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and government of Ghana ended?
3. How do former Liberian refugees in Buduburam camp cope in their relationship with the host community after the humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and government of Ghana ended?

Conceptual and Theoretical Discussion

Refugees

Refugees are persons who need or are in need of international protection because their life, freedoms or physical integrity are seriously threatened in their own country due to armed conflict, persecution, serious public disorder or violence and who cannot present themselves to be protected by their own country against these threats (UN General Assembly, 1994). The persons or individual need for international protection is due to their unwillingness to return to their own country and a well-founded fear of being persecuted (UNHCR, 2018).

Relationship between Refugees and Host Communities

Refugees can be trade partners and thus provide a source of market to host communities (Daah et al., 2023) thereby boosting the generation of income and enhancing economic gains in host communities (Agbesi, 2019). These help to boost host communities' economies (Miller, 2018). In the Buduburam refugee camp, Daah et al. (2023) found that the Liberian refugees and members of the host community had friendship and cordial bonds during the early period of their sojourn. However, the refugee-host relationship began to strain in the latter part of their stay partly due to influx of other foreign nationals and the usage of the refugee camp as a criminal hideout (Daah et al., 2023). Sarfo-Mensah (2009) noted the prevalence of distrust, misunderstandings and tensions in the relationship between Liberian refugees and the Ghanaian authorities. He pointed out that such issues gave rise to the deportation of some refugees. Miller (2018) explained that the reasons why refugee-host relationship tends to strain is largely due to the general perception by host communities that refugees put pressure on local resources, facilities/amenities, services and infrastructure.

Challenges of Refugees in Host Communities

In Ghana, scholarly literature suggests that the challenges Liberian Refugees encountered in the Buduburam camp existed at social, economic, political and cultural levels. Tanle (2013) reported insecurity, discrimination and stigmatization, poor infrastructure and difficulty to access formal sector employment. Sarfo-Mensah (2009) indicated that Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp do not only suffer discrimination from indigenes but also lacked income to meet their needs. They lacked the requisite economic and physical resources to support their livelihood and live meaningful lives (Teye & Yebleh, 2015). As such, poverty is one big challenge that refugees struggle to overcome (Bortu, 2009). Aside these, Dako-Gyeke and Adu (2015) revealed that refugees also struggle with social network disconnection and disputes over local resources. Bruey (2022) also noted the subjection of some refugees to brutal and violent treatment by the police, violating their rights and freedoms. Daah et al. (2023) agree with Tanle (2013) that the security of Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp is poor. Daah et al. (2023) revealed that the refugee camp was turned into a criminal hideout, putting the security of refugees and indigenes in danger. Rape, robbery, prostitution, theft, riots, assault are prevalent in the Buduburam camp (Codjoe et al., 2013). Due to this, Liberian refugees have almost always been accused of being responsible for increased crime rates and social vices such as prostitution, armed robbery and the sale of illicit drugs in the Buduburam community (Codjoe et al., 2013; Daah et al., 2023). They are further accused of increasing cost of goods and services and deterioration of the resources of the environment (Codjoe et al., 2013).

Refugees' Resilient Strategies in Host Communities

Tanle (2013) indicated that petty trading, artisanry and economic assistance from social networks have been relied upon by Liberian refugees at Buduburam to cope with their challenges. Their resiliency over the years at

the Buduburam camp is largely attributed to their social capital such as friends, relations and connections (Teye & Yebleh, 2015). Refugees also rely on God or religion as source of hope for a better future (Rumbach, 2007; Sarfo-Mensah, 2009; Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2015).

Intergroup Contact Theory

Contact Theory is credited to Gordon Allport (1954). The theory indicates that intergroup interaction or contact under appropriate conditions can effectively reduce prejudice and tensions and promote tolerance between majority and minority group members, and vice versa under inappropriate conditions. That is, social contact can reduce intergroup prejudice and vice versa depending on the conditions. The application of the theory in this paper is that interaction between the former Liberian refugees in Buduburam camp and the host community under appropriate conditions help to reduce prejudices, stereotypes and hostility and promote social cohesion between them and vice versa when such interactions are under inappropriate conditions. During the period that the refugee status of the Liberian refugees in Buduburam had not expired, they were provided with aid such as food, shelter, clothing, water, healthcare and were under UNHCR protection. This made the refugees not to depend largely on the host community and compete with them over the scarce resources and opportunities, thereby reducing tensions and promoting cordiality between them. However, the expiration of their refugee status and the withdrawal of UNHCR humanitarian support created an inappropriate condition where refugees who refused to repatriate had to take care of themselves, leading to competition with the host community over scarce resources and opportunities. This transformed the once cordial relationship between the refugees and the host community into a strained one that is now characterized by discrimination, prejudices, stereotypes, hostility towards the refugees. This is because conditions such as equal status, common goals, cooperation, institutional support, and personal interaction (McLeod, 2023) diminished since the end of humanitarian assistance. The host community now perceive the former refugees as competitors for the scarce resources and jobs and this has generated tensions and conflicts in their interactions. Cultural differences such language in particular has not only created communication barrier but has also been used to discriminate against the former refugees in terms of access to jobs. The negative interactions between the refugees and the host community after the expiration of their refugee status and end of humanitarian assistance made it difficult for them to be accepted and integrated into the host community. These negative interactions constraint their access to employment, resources and social connections.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to undertake this study. The goal was to discover the meanings that the former Liberian refugees give to their current status and relationship with the host community (Creswell, 2014). This approach allowed us to get closer to the former Liberian refugees and understand from their own perspective, what life in the Buduburam camp has been for them since the end of humanitarian assistance. We were interested in their lived experiences and what those experiences mean in their daily lives. A descriptive case study design was adopted. We employed a case study because the current context that the former Liberian refugees find themselves in, is significant in shaping how members of the host community relate with them.

The population of the study was the former Liberian refugees in the Buduburam camp. A total of 12 research participants comprising of 3 elders in the camp, 4 camp leaders and 5 members of the camp were selected for the study. The participants were made up of 6 women and 6 men. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. This was because we were interested in former Liberian refugees who have deeper knowledge and experience about their life during and after humanitarian assistance has ended. The criteria for selection were that; the participant must be an adult; must have lived in the camp during and after the period of humanitarian assistance and the participant must be willing to participate in the study. Data was collected through interviews. Participants' verbal consent was sought before the commencement of the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was designed to aid the collection of the data. Questions on the instrument were open-ended allowing participants to freely express their feelings, perspectives and share their experiences regarding their relationship with the host community, challenges and resilience strategies after humanitarian assistance ended.

All the interviews were conducted in the Buduburam refugee camp and at the participants' personal locations. The length of each interview was between 10 and 20 minutes. Participants were probed during the interviews to clarify comments or conclusions or claims they made. All the interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. The data collected were analysed thematically. First, the audio-taped interviews were transcribed, read through, screened and coded. After coding, patterns that emerged from the coded data set were categorized and used to form themes. The themes generated were reviewed and a final template was used to present and discuss the findings of the study. Participants' voluntary participation, informed consent,

confidentiality and anonymity were upheld. To ensure anonymity of participants, we assigned pseudonyms to them.

Findings and Discussion

Nature of Relationship between Former Liberian Refugees at Buduburam and the Host Community

Economic Relationship

The data revealed that due to the assistance refugees were given before their refugee status ended, there was cordial refugee-host economic relationship. Participants stated that there was no competition over host community's scarce resources since they were dependent on the UNHCR for their wellbeing and survival, thereby reducing tension and intolerance. Some of the participants stated:

Back then we use to trade among ourselves peacefully. Those were the times the camp was a camp. We bought things from them and they also bought things from us. When we came first and did not bring along things we had to buy things from the community members. Since the UN was assisting us, we sometimes buy few things from the community, especially when we run out of food and the assistance from the UN was delaying. (Field interview with participant 4, 2023)

We did not depend much on the resources in the community so there was no competition. We were depending mostly on the support of the UNHCR. We were not depending on the community resources. Rather, because we were here, the UN provided social amenities such as water, health facilities and others to support our survival. And due to this the community members were even benefitting from such facilities. So, you realized that there was peaceful coexistence between us. We came only to seek refuge and were not interested in the community's resources. They gave us their land to settle and we cherished that and our presence here also brought them some economic benefits. (Field interview with participant 8, 2023).

However, the data revealed that since the end of humanitarian assistance to the refugees, their economic relationship with the host community turned sour. Participants claimed that the indigenes infiltrated their camp and took over the businesses they did to support themselves. Some stated:

Years back the United Nations brought skills training and our ladies who took advantage have been plaiting hair as a means of survival, but how long will that carry you? Now you find most of the natives into the businesses at the camp. Now the natives have also gotten skills in hair dressing and others and are setting up their shops at the camp. So, you would see most of the natives patronizing their fellow natives' hair dressing salons. Because of their prejudices, they want to kick us out of every business we are doing to support ourselves. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023)

...Now the indigenes are into those businesses and there's nothing else to sell. All the containers you see at the camp are all owned by Ghanaians. But then in the early 90s to the 2000s, after me and my family moved here to the camp in 1990, it wasn't so. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

These comments from participants suggest that when the humanitarian assistance ended, all other support and considerations from the host community also ended. There is now competition between the former refugees and the natives over the already scarce resources despite the growing numbers of both the former refugee and host population. The competition between the former refugees and the host tend to generate conflict in the community. Participants claimed that members of the host community treat them as if they are no longer welcome in the community. They claimed that community members encroached and took portions of the land designated for the camp and its activities.

Look, let me tell you something that is increasingly happening nowadays here. This land was given to the camp and was allocated for every refugee to settle. During the period the UN was still assisting us, there was no quarrel over the land. We know that it is not our land. That one we know. But since the UN stopped the assistance and started the repatriation process and we decided to stay back, they have been threatening to take back their land. Just over there where the container shop is, the entire land there is for the camp. But just few months ago we were there and one woman came and started putting up a shop. When we confronted her, she said the place is hers and that she bought it from the chief. Even now you will be there and this person will come and say this chief said the land is his and another time some people will come and say the land is for that chief. So, we don't even know who owns the land. Even they now want to destroy the camp

and take their land. So where should we go? Most of us were born and raised here. I don't know anywhere apart from here. (Field interview with participant 12, 2023)

From the response, it could be noted that there is tension between the former refugees and the host community over land and threats to close down the camp. Participants perceive the community members as intolerant to their continuous stay in the camp. Some claimed that community members no longer want to engage their services:

When they seek your services and get to know that you are a Liberian, they tend to decline giving you the job. The other time one man wanted to install fans and AC and he was directed to me. But due to the language barrier the man got to know that I was a Liberian refugee and said he can no longer give me the job. Even the church that I worship, the pastor wanted to install AC in it and I offered to do it but he said he cannot allow me because when they find out he will be in trouble. (Field interview with participant 5, 2023)

This suggests that exchange of services between the refugees and the host community has strained since the humanitarian assistance stopped, with host community members appearing intolerant in the informal working space.

Social Relationship

Participants disclosed that there was a good rapport between the Buduburam community and them, which encouraged constructive interactions that benefited both groups. They indicated that the host community used to allow them to participate in their social programs and events during the period the UNHCR was still extending humanitarian assistance to the refugees. Participants stated that intermarriage and friendship ties were built between them and the host community throughout the period of humanitarian assistance. The finding thus affirms Daah et al. (2023) study which indicated that the former Liberian refugees at Buduburam and the people of the host community had a cordial social relationship including dating and intermarriage. However, they claimed the cordial social relationship between them strained after their refugee status expired and the UNHCR stopped assisting them. Some participants stated:

The period that we were still being supported by the UN and others was nice. We were associating with the people here and they too were associating with us. When they have their celebrations, they would invite you to come and celebrate with them and we too also invited them when we were doing having our celebrations. So, we have friends among them and they too have friends among our people. Some of the members of the host community dated our ladies and got married to some of them. The men in this community like our ladies. They know that our presence brought them some benefits so they did not see us as people who were threats to their land or community. So, we related really very well during the period the UN was here supporting us. But all these changed since the UN assistance ended and we decided to continue to stay here. They are now mean towards us. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023)

Oh! I know some of our people who married some of the people here during that time we were still under the UN support. Their men loved our ladies when we came first. I dated one guy who is from here but unfortunately, we couldn't get married. We were cool with them and they too were cool with us. We were friends and brothers and sisters. I cannot say that is still the case in the present time. Hmmm! If I want to say everything that is now happening between us, I will get angry now." (Field interview with participant 6, 2023)

Participants explained that their social relationship with the host community strained after the end of the humanitarian support from the UN because members of the host community saw them as liabilities. They claimed that having been labeled as liabilities, the host community have been intolerant and hostile towards them. The contact theory argues that when there is an interaction between two groups especially a minority group and majority group under an unfavourable or inappropriate condition, it can cause intolerance, hostility and stereotypes.

Local Politics

Also, access to citizenship, political representation, and legal protections changed for the worst after the humanitarian assistance ended. The interviews revealed that during humanitarian assistance era, power and control over the use of land and establishment of facilities were largely decided by the refugees. Participants indicated that they were allowed to make decisions within the camp without interference by the host community and without having to seek the consent or approval of the host community. However, they claimed that since the

end of their refugee status and humanitarian assistance, the host community no longer allows them to have the freedom to use the camp land for their welfare. Participants stated that the chiefs and leaders of the host community now control the camp land and make decisions on it without recourse to them including selling it to third parties. Some participants indicated:

Unlike when the UN was still here and assisting us, now we don't have any power over the camp and things that happen here. Previously, we could on our own decide to use any portion of the camp land to put up a shop for business. We were allowed to function and take our own decisions regarding our lives and stay here and the people here didn't have any problem with us. We didn't have to go to the chief to ask for permission before we could use any portion of the camp land for anything we wanted. But since the UN left and we decided to stay back, that has changed. Now, the chiefs and community members have taken control of the camp land and even threatening to remove us from the camp land. We cannot do anything on the land again without the permission of the chiefs. The chiefs are now selling and giving out the land to the community people to set up their businesses. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

The findings indicated that chiefs and leaders of the host community have taken back the power of control over the camp land from the refugees and tend to make decisions regarding land sales without recourse to the camp leaders. As such, the former Liberian refugees feel unprotected after the humanitarian assistance era. Also, participants stated that promises of integration, citizenship and participation in local elections and other political processes have not been fulfilled. One of the participants indicated:

They told us that those of us who choose to stay will be granted Ghanaian citizenship and integrated into the Ghanaian community. They said they will give us ID cards and we can even participate in elections and all that. But now it is not easy to get the ID card meant for refugees. You apply for the card and it is very difficult to get it after paying all kinds of monies. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023)

Participants claimed that the community members are putting pressure on government to demolish the camp as a strategy to get them out of the community. Eventually, the Buduburam refugee camp was demolished in 2024 and most of the refugees were transported in buses back to Liberia. However, some of them have since returned, claiming Ghana is the only home they know.

Cultural Relationship

The findings revealed that cultural relationship between the refugees and the host community before the end of the aid period was not strained despite the differences in language, norms, and values. Both were tolerant of their diversities and interacted cordially. However, participants claimed their cultural differences such as language were used to deny them employment or work opportunities in the informal sector.

When we first arrived here, things were cool even though there was language barrier and some differences in the norms that we hold. They were tolerant and they did not say because you are a Liberian or because you cannot speak Twi they would not help you or work with you. Our presence was bringing some benefits to them so we were very fine with each other. But now it is no more like that. (Field interview with participant 1, 2023)

Now if you are a Liberian and you cannot speak the Twi, it will be difficult to get a job. When they interact with you and you tell them you cannot speak their language, they will ask whether you are a Liberian and when you say yes, that is all, you will not get the job. As I told you, the other time I went to work on one man house wiring and because I couldn't speak Twi he said he can no longer give me the contract. The only way you can get some work to do is to speak the Twi very well. For them anyone who speaks Twi is a Ghanaian but I don't know whether everyone in Ghana speaks Twi. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023)

Most of us have employable skills to work and earn income to support ourselves but now because of our inability to speak the language of the people we are sometimes denied jobs. I know how to install AC but the only way I can get a job is to hide my identity. But even that, if they get to find out you are a former refugee they will not engage your services again. (Field interview with participant 6, 2023)

From the responses, we noted that language barrier has been weaponized by the host community to discriminate against the refugees. The interaction between the refugee population and host community at the cultural level has been characterized by prejudices and intolerance since the end of the humanitarian assistance from the UN. This

finding is affirmed by the contact theory (Allport, 1954) which indicates that interaction between two groups (majority and minority group) under inappropriate condition can breed prejudices and tensions. The findings showed the need to promote cultural exchange between refugees and host communities in order to reduce tensions and promote social cohesion.

Overall, the findings are affirmed by Hardgrove (2009) and Fee's (2021) works which stated that there is positive association between relief activities and host community's perception of refugees. Indeed, livelihood of hosts and refugees can affect the nature of their relationship significantly (Porter et al., 2008). In this regard, Tanle and Tetey (2017) argue that when aid organizations help refugees, local populations unquestionably benefit greatly in terms of social amenities. This can reduce tensions and promote cordial relationships between refugees and host community. Invariably, an end in the provision of aid to refugees can affect their coexistence with host community negatively. The findings also draw attention to the fact that host country's social and economic issues are what give rise to the conflicts, and depending on how the government and aid organizations handle their integration policies, refugee situation either makes those issues worse or makes them go away (Fomekong, 2022; Fransen & Kuschminder, 2014; Ludwig, 2013).

Challenges Former Liberian Refugees at Buduburam Face after the End of Humanitarian Aid

Financial Difficulties

The interviews revealed that after the end of the humanitarian assistance, the former Liberian refugees in the Buduburam camp battle with financial challenges which makes them unable to afford basic necessities such as food, education and health care services. Some participants stated:

Our major problem is money. We don't have money to take care of ourselves. Things are hard so if we get money, we support ourselves and start up something. (Field interview with participant 1, 2023)

We are suffering. No money. As I sit, I don't know where my next meal will come from. It is just the grace of God if not hmmm! No money to buy food and eat. Even when I am sick and I don't go to the hospital because I cannot pay even 5ghc if they ask me to pay that. (Field interview with participant 7, 2023)

The findings indicated that lack of financial resources is a major challenge facing the Liberian refugees since the end of the provision of humanitarian assistance to them. They struggle to feed, seek healthcare and take care of their children's needs because they do not have money. Financial difficulties hinder former refugees who have learned a trade from establishing their own businesses. As such, they bemoaned their inability to put their talents and skills into practice. One of them stated:

Even when you learn a trade and you don't have money to empower you that training become dormant. I can sew very well but where is the money for me to start up my own shop and work. There is no money. The UN that was supporting us stooped long ago and since then it has been hardship and it is only the grace of God that is keeping us. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

The implication is that former refugees are further pushed down the poverty line, making it daunting to live dignified and fulfilling lives. In order to survive, participants reported engaging in menial jobs such as sale of pure water, washing clothes for people and sale of groceries in small stalls in front of their residences. The income they earn is insufficient to meet their needs. The findings agree with Sarfo-Mensah's (2009) argument that lack of income is a major challenge faced by Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp. It also supports Teye and Yebleh (2015) assertion that Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp lacked the economic and physical resources needed to live meaningful lives or support their livelihood.

Discrimination

The former Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp also reported being discriminated against in their relationship with the host community since the end of the humanitarian support to them. This affirms Sarfo-Mensah (2009) and Tanle's (2013) findings that indicated that Liberian refugees were discriminated against and are stigmatized. Tanle (2013) noted that such discrimination was prevalent in spaces such as schools and health facilities. This study observed that discrimination against the former refugees seemed pervasive especially with regard to employment or economic opportunities as well as in interpersonal relationships. Atiyat (2018) indicated that there are likely to be disparities between natives and refugees in the majority of the refugee-affected and hosting locations and that such disparities can lead to conflicts. All the participants in the study indicated that they experience prejudice or unequal treatment from members of the host community since the humanitarian assistance to them stopped. This finding supports the argument of Allport's (1954) contact theory that prejudices

occur when intergroup interaction occurs under an inappropriate condition. The end of humanitarian assistance created an unfavourable condition, where the refugees were seen as burden and people who will be competing with members of the host community over the scarce resources and opportunities in the community. Consequently, participants shared that they are discriminated against in the exchange of goods and services by the host community and employment. Some participants stated:

When they have a job and you go for it and they get to know that you are a refugee they will not give it to you. As I told you when I started talking, I know how to do wiring. So, one day someone connected me to a man who wants to wire his building. When I went and we started to negotiate about the cost and how much he will pay me he realized I couldn't speak the Twi language and asked where I am from and I told him I am a Liberian. Then his face quickly changed. I was still there and then he pretended to be receiving a call with someone and after the call he said he is going somewhere and that he will call me when is back. That was the end of the matter. He never called and the house was wired by someone else. So, you see what I am talking about. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023).

When you go, they say that you don't speak the 'Twi' and so you don't fit into the society. My own teacher who taught me how to install CCTV cameras told me even if you could speak small of the local dialect I will put you somewhere. (Field interview with participant 7, 2023)

Also, the refugees in the study reported being discriminated against in the sharing of educational opportunities. Some of the participants claimed that educational scholarships that were only established for the refugees were rather given to Ghanaians under the guise of the latter being refugees. A participant indicated:

As part of the assistance to us, educational scholarship scheme was instituted for qualified refugees who want to study abroad to do so. There was a time I was selected but I was not told about it. The Ghanaian people decided to give it to one lady who used my name. The scholarship was to Canada and as I am speaking to you, I am still looking for that lady. When I heard that my scholarship was given to another person who is not even a refugee, I was mad [angry] and went to Accra to register my displeasure. The people in charge of refugees in Ghana were rather giving the scholarship meant for the refugees to Ghanaians. They say I make trouble but if you don't step on my toes I will not come after you. I went to the office at Accra several times and they said there was nothing they could do since the lady was already in Canada studying. (Field interview with participant 5, 2023)

Again, participants stated that they are sometimes falsely accused of crime and sent to prison without proper investigations. They also mentioned how armed men tend to invade the camp and shoot sporadically without regard for UN conventions protecting refugees. A participant stated:

This is a country where always UN rules are violated. This is a refugee camp and no armed men are allowed to enter with arms but they will come and shoot here and yet from government down to the religious leaders, no one will speak up against these wrongful acts. This is the country that takes refugees to court, accuse them falsely and throw them into in prison. (Field interview with participant 8, 2023)

In addition, participants bemoaned that Ghanaians do not honor the identity documents issued by the government of Ghana and the UNHCR leading to unfair treatment whenever they try to access services in the country. A participant stated:

There is no respect for us. When my friend abroad feels sorry for me and sends me \$50 or \$100 and I take the refugee ID issued by the Ghana Government and UNHCR they reject it but if I take the same ID to Ivory Coast and Togo they honor it. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

Participants claimed that discrimination against them is used as a tactic by the host community to force them to leave the Buduburam refugee camp on their own because they felt government was taking any action to demolish the camp. Hence, one explanation for the straining of the relationship between former Liberian refugees and members of the host community at the Buduburam camp is the discriminatory attitudes towards the refugees.

Insecurity

The data further revealed that the former Liberian refugees are concerned about their security and safety in the camp. Tanle (2013) stated that the security of the former Liberian refugees in Buduburam camp is porous.

Participants in this study raised concerns about increasing threats from the host community members to remove them from the camp. They indicated that threats of demolishing of their camp tend to heighten tensions and cause fear and panic among the refugee population. The threat of demolishing of the camp makes refugees to feel insecure. A participant stated:

Since we decided to stay after the UN stopped assisting us the community members have been threatening to remove us from the camp. Whenever the issue of the camp demolishing comes up there is always serious tension, fear and uncertainty in the community. We will not just sit and watch them demolish the camp. So, there is always resistance and push back. So, you normally see that tension is high. As we are here, we feel unsafe. I don't know when they will get up and come and start destroying the camp. (Field interview with participant 7, 2023)

Again, the participants reported the occurring of sudden swoops and arbitrary arrest in the camp by Ghanaian security personnel. They explained that when such sudden arbitrary arrests occur, it creates fear and uncertainty about their safety and lives. A participant stated:

You can just be there and the police will swoop in and start arresting our young men. They will arrest them and send them to court under false accusation. So, you will see that everyone is always living in fear. (Field interview with participant 8, 2023)

The study discovered from the participants that they also face insecurity because criminals from other parts of the country use the refugee camp as a hideout after committing criminal acts. One of the participants stated:

We live in fear sometime because when people commit crimes they run to this place and hide and when they are arrested the news people will report that it is Liberian refugees. You will see security men coming in here plenty and causing panic. Sometimes they end up arresting us the refugees and accusing us falsely. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

This finding is consistent with Daah et al.'s (2023) study which discovered that criminals from other parts of Ghana have turned the Buduburam community into their hiding ground. Also, participants noted that hardship and lack of economic opportunities to refugees pushed some of them to engage in illegal activities such as prostitution. Further, the refugees reported being harassed by criminal gangs, who recruit their youth to join them in their criminal activities thus putting the security of the camp at high risk. One of them stated:

But then there are some bad guys who we use to call land guards but have changed their name to Zongo guys. They have been constantly harassing us. They establish ghettos where they smoke and do drugs and harass people at night. That cartel is negatively influencing our youth here because as we know, if a man is idle, he's obliged to get into things that would not benefit him and that makes them indulge in that kind of behavior. (Field interview with participant 8, 2023)

Participants indicated that they live in fear because any time they reported members of the criminal gangs in the area to the police in the hope that they would be arrested, those very criminals are often seen walking around with impunity. They claimed that such gangs have gone after people they perceive are against their criminal activities. A participant stated:

As we speak now, we have ten of the zones hosting those ghettos here where we have those guys dwelling and they have their own government therefore they do whatever they like and so if they feel that you are against them, they will arraign you to their tribunal and discipline you. We have always reported to the police but the worst part is that when they are arrested, the next day you see them walking in town. Other criminals have taken advantage of that and this same group of people harbors the criminals and are some of the reasons why people say the camp is bad, partly that would be correct because of the activities of these Zongo guys. (Field interview with participant 12, 2023)

The operations of criminal gangs and the recruitment of refugee youth into their ranks are serious security threats. Act 999 prohibits their existence. Their continuous existence is a threat to personal, community and state security. Similarly, the recruitment of Liberian refugee youth by criminal gangs into in social vices puts life and safety in both the refugee camp and the host community at risk. The finding affirms Porter et al.'s (2008) study which noted that rise in criminal acts linked to non-law-abiding refugees may pose a threat to internal peace and security.

Unemployment

Unemployment is one of the challenges faced by former Liberian refugees in the Buduburam. Participants stated that they are unemployed because they lack the credentials and paperwork that businesses in Ghana required. Others claimed that they have the educational qualifications to work but are often denied employment opportunities in the formal sector because their identity as refugees. Indeed, Tanle (2013) argued that difficulty in accessing formal sector employment is a major challenge encountered by Liberian refugees in Ghana. Some of the participants stated:

Look many businesses are always demanding for the papers that we don't have whenever you go seeking for job. You go here and they ask for your papers and you don't have it so they don't give you the job. To work here that you need a permit and we don't have... (Field interview with participant 2, 2023)

I have university degree and I can work in the formal sector. I can teach but because I am a refugee it is difficult to get a job in Ghana. Even Ghanaians themselves are not getting jobs how will I get one. When we were running to this place due to the war, I could pick my certificates and others but it is difficult to get job. Since then, I have been unemployed. Most of us in the camp are unemployed and that is one of our problems. (Field interview with participant 7, 2023)

Overall, the data suggest that some of the former Liberian refugees are denied employment opportunities because they do not have documents to work in Ghana, perceived as non-citizens and inability to speak the 'Twi' language. Due to their lack of access to employment opportunities, many former refugees tend to engage in petty businesses in front of their abodes to support themselves. Those who have learned a trade or skill bemoaned their inability to apply those skills due to the unwillingness by their host community to grant them employment opportunities.

Inadequate Feeding

The data revealed that refugees have difficulty in getting food to feed themselves due to financial challenges. Thus, refugees are worried about the potential health implications on their younger ones due to their inability to obtain regular meals and balanced diets. Some of the participant stated:

Our children are our concern now. I am not able to buy fish so we live on eggs every day. I am just fighting for the children to be strong. If somebody can come in and help us with our children by supporting them that would be good because as for me my life is already finished. The life here is tough for us. Now I cannot come from home to my kiosk and sit here, when I am hungry and they are selling food, you are not expecting me that when I get seven cedis and I am hungry then I buy food, then my children will be hungry. (Field interview with participant 4, 2023)

Every day, I buy egg, just to fry for the children to eat with rice, the whole week we been eating that till Saturday, then I go buy like potatoes to cook two-day food. For Sunday and Monday, Tuesday it is finished again then we start again to fry egg because I'm not able to go to the market and buy fish, sixteen cedis, thirteen cedis. And we cannot join the other people on the streets to do armed robbery and I don't want my children to go that way... (Field interview with participant 10, 2023)

The participant's comment that "we cannot join the other people on the streets to do armed robbery and I don't want my children to go that way" confirms the earlier claims that some refugees engage in criminal activities.

Difficulty in Accessing Services

Participants indicated that access to economic, security, social and healthcare services is one of the many challenges they experience in the camp. Similar observation was made by Tanle (2013) that Liberian refugees struggle to access services. Some of the participants claimed that they have been denied access to financial transactions at banks and healthcare services in some health facilities because the identity documents given to them by the Ghanaian government and UNHCR are not honored. Some participants shared their ordeals in accessing services in Ghana in the following responses:

When you fall sick, they won't acknowledge we are refugees. They will take the same requirement and not even think we are refugees. There is a big police station yet when you go there for help, they ask for transportation or when it is late in the night, they say there is only one person on duty so they cannot abandon their post. (Field interview with participant 7, 2023)

There are other Liberians who opted for exemption, meaning they don't want to go back home, they do not want to be integrated so when immigration assessed they only took five hundred and twenty out of three thousand plus and the rest have been denied. As we speak, they don't have documentation with no identification apart from the 2003 refugee card which has no effect and it is also a major challenge. (Field interview with participant 8, 2023)

Access to market spaces which was previously unhindered also became a challenge since the refugee status of the Liberian refugees ended. A participant stated:

Even though the market was purposely built for the refugees, the host community has taken the major portion of the market and it's also a challenge in the market there too. The government collects taxes and the chiefs also take compensation on monthly bases. (Field interview with participant 11, 2023)

The findings of the study highlight that the former Liberian refugees at Buduburam face myriad of challenges since the provision of aid to them stopped. This is partly because their relationship with the host community has strained after the aid ceased. Unemployment, economic and financial challenges make it difficult for the former Liberian refugees to live in peace, achieve their goals, or realize their full potential. Sarfo-Mensah (2009) noted that some of these challenges refugees face strain their lives and make it difficult for them to negotiate their stay in the camp. Though repatriation or resettlement in a third country was a viable alternative by some Liberian refugees, those who remained in the Ghanaian host community appear uninterested in repatriating despite the difficult conditions experienced in the country. One explanation is that they consider Ghana the only home they know. Having to begin a new life elsewhere or in Liberia is a daunting task they are unwilling to take.

Former Liberian Refugees Resilient Strategies at the Buduburam Camp

Support from Social Networks

The data revealed that support from social network such as friends and family members within and outside Ghana helps the former Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp to cope with their challenges. This finding corroborates Tanle (2013) and Teye and Yebileh (2015) argument that Liberian refugees' resiliency over the years has been aided by economic support from their social networks. This study realized that support from social connections range from economic to social and emotional support. Some of the participant stated:

Some friends who came here to Ghana with us have traveled overseas from here, from time to time they will call then and they will ask, are you still at the camp? When you tell them that you are here then they send you something little for yourself. (Field interview with participant 6, 2023)

Sometimes some of our friends give us money and other provisions to sustain ourselves because we don't have any work. This phone I have was given to me by a friend. When he came to Ghana and we met he asked about how I was doing and told him my struggles. He asked for my phone number so that we can keep in touch but I told him I don't have a phone and he was shocked. So, he decided to give me one of his phones. It is an expensive phone so when people see they will think I am rich and pretending to be poor but someone gave it to me. He gave me some money before he left and once a while he sends me money. So that is how I manage to survive here. (Field interview with participant 2, 2023)

These comments suggested that financial remittances and material gifts from social network support the resiliency of the former Liberian refugees against their challenges. Support from social networks is a critical element of resiliency against the challenges former refugees faced in the host community.

Engaging in Petty Businesses or Jobs

The study revealed that the former Liberian refugees engage in petty businesses, jobs or trade in order to cope with life since the humanitarian assistance from the UN ended. They resort to menial jobs such as labourer at construction sites in Buduburam and in nearby communities, selling of sachet water and washing of people's clothes. A participant indicated:

Our young boys look for labourer works at where they are doing construction in Buduburam or around the nearby communities to make some money to support themselves and their families. Our ladies sell pure water on the streets and the small, small they make they use it to feed. Some of them go around and wash people's clothes for them and clean their houses just to get some money. (Field interview with participant 1, 2023)

We observed that some of the former refugees set up small table shops where they sell provisions such as matches, salt, toffee, groundnuts, gari, sugar, shaving blades, among others. A participant stated:

Hmmm! It is not easy but we are there. As you can see, I sell these small things here. How much can these bring me? Just few toffees, matches, and groundnut that I sell so, life has been difficult but that is what I use to support myself. I also sew clothes but the machine spoiled long ago and I couldn't repair it because I don't have the money. So, this man came here today and I asked him to look at it and see what he can do about it. So that is what he is trying to fix. If he is able to fix it, I will be able to sew things for people and make small money. (Field interview with participant 6, 2023)

Since the humanitarian assistance previously offered items such as food, shelter, and medical aid for the refugees, some stated that one could cope without having to engage in petty business or job. However, since the aid ceased, petty trade and jobs have become major sources of their livelihoods apart from assistance from social networks. The finding is consistent with Tanle (2013) work which indicated that petty trading and artisanship were resorted to by Liberian refugees in the Buduburam camp to cope with their economic challenges.

Reliance on God

Also, the data revealed that the former Liberian refugees at Buduburam relied on divine intervention in their lives to cope with their challenges since the humanitarian assistance from the UNHCR ended. Participants said they consider God as their first and last option in navigating their challenges at the Buduburam camp. That is to say, refugees turn to God in the face of their challenges to provide their needs and help them to overcome their difficulties. They explained that their faith in God gives them a sense of comfort, hope and peace of mind. According to one participant, they turn to God to provide their needs. The participant indicated:

Since I came to the refugee camp, I would say it is the grace of God that is keeping me up. The kind of love I demonstrated in Liberia, sorry to say I have not seen it in Ghanaians but I guess we are all different in many ways. The good old Book says train up a child the way he should go and when he grows, he will not depart from it but our children are going wayward. It is our belief in God and our faith in him that comforts us and makes us to have hope. Sometimes you can be disturbed but the word of God helps to relieve you of such stress or distress. (Field interview with participant 5, 2023)

By the grace of God, we have come this far by faith and we know that God who said it will bring it to fulfillment that is what we are still here for. With all this hardship God is still sustaining us and because of God grace upon my life I am eating every day. By the grace of God, we are surviving in Buduburam camp. (Field interview with participant 4, 2023)

By turning to God and religion, refugees find the strength and resilience they need to cope with the challenges associated with displacement and integration into the Ghanaian community. While their coping mechanisms may be problem-focused, faith or reliance on God provides hope, a sense of purpose and guides them to actively try to solve their problems. To this end, even though they are faced with hardships, they have hope and look forward to a better future especially for their younger ones. The findings affirm Rumbach (2007), Sarfo-Mensah (2009) and Dako-Gyeke and Adu (2015) studies which indicated that Liberian refugees rely on God and religion to cope with their challenges.

Illegal Activities

Participants alleged that some of their members who have no jobs or businesses to support themselves resorted to illegal activities to cope including stealing, prostitution and selling of illegal drugs. This finding is consistent with Daah et al.'s (2023) revelation that some Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp were engaged in the selling of narcotics and prostitution. It also affirms Codjoe et al. (2013) finding that prostitution, rape, robbery and theft are common in the Buduburam refugee camp. Some of the participants stated:

Some of our girls enter into bad behaviours just to survive. You know what I am talking about? I mean prostitution." (Field interview with participant 5, 2023)

Our young boys sit idle doing nothing. And as you know the devil will get work for anyone who doesn't have one. So, they end up engage in stealing and selling drugs. (Field interview with participant 9, 2023)

It is important to note that participants attribute some refugees' engagement in illegal activities to the systemic barriers and the lack of opportunities and support for them in Ghana. This implies that if refugees are provided with lawful means of livelihoods, that may likely help prevent them from resorting to illegal activities.

Conclusion and Implications

The relationship between former Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp and members of the host community has strained. There have been tensions, occasional clashes, threats, and resistance by the former refugees against attempts by the host community to demolish the camp since the end of the humanitarian aid. Dynamics of power and control over access to and use of land in the refugee camp has shifted from the refugee community to the host community (chiefs and elders). Also, the former Liberian refugees at the Buduburam camp are faced with financial hardship, discrimination, inadequate feeding, and insecurity. They are treated by the host community as people who are no longer welcome. To cope with these challenges, some of the refugees rely on assistance from social networks, faith and God, petty trade and jobs while others engaged in maladaptive mechanisms as their only resiliency strategies. Though most of the former refugees were transported in buses to Liberia, many of them have since returned to Ghana. The implication of their return to Ghana is that many of them could face harsher challenges in terms obtaining shelter, food, water, clothing and other means of subsistence. Those who are unable to obtain legitimate means to support their lives may resort to illegitimate acts to survive. Similarly, the absence of basic necessities like food, shelter and employment makes the former Liberian refugees susceptible to exploitation or manipulation by others in the host country. There is thus a need for a reconsideration of a proper integration of the former Liberian refugees who are unwilling to repatriate or those who have returned to Ghana. Overall, the findings demonstrate that for better interaction and cordial relationship to be achieved between the former Liberian refugees and the host community, both groups must engage equally, work together and cooperate in pursuit of their common goals. There is need for the government of Ghana to work with the UNHCR and the Ghana Refugee Board to revisit the policy of reintegration in order to ensure the proper integration of the former Liberian refugees who opted for integration rather than repatriation.

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