**Forum:** Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

**Issue:** Measures to Empower and Include Young People in Africa: working towards Durable Solutions for Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa

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**Introduction**

After the decolonization of Africa by many of the major world powers in the mid-20th century, it has been left in a sorry state with corruption deeply integrated in every country’s government. Its economy, while, at last, slowly on the rise, has been left battered after the exploitation of its natural resources by colonising countries. Its infrastructure, including healthcare and education, has been extremely underdeveloped, leaving millions of young kids, with seemingly limitless potential, underutilized and left to do manual labour jobs. Seeing that an almost infinite number of conflicts and civil wars are still ongoing[^1], perhaps it is easy for its inhabitants to lose hope and leave their homes, in search of better lives in more developed regions of the world or even within the same country.

However, we have already seen immensely powerful actions being taken by African youth in recognizing and calling for the aid of thousands of refugees fleeing war torn countries, like Libya and Eritrea. For example, in South Africa, despite the country’s already extensive efforts at helping hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, the vocal youth pushed for more reform and action by the government, motivating them to accept even more annually.[^2]

Unfortunately, not many countries are as stable and democratic as South Africa. The majority, in fact, ignore or are ignorant to the instrumental input of youth on these issues due to there being no platforms for them to put forth their ideas. Some dictatorships, which there are plenty of in Africa, are even worse allowing no freedom of speech. This has led to the migration crisis involving tens of millions of impoverished people, around 80% of which internally migrate, from country to country, within Africa. Many efforts have been made to include young minds in the debate by bringing attention to their demands through media and communications. Most notably, earlier this year, the UNESCO foundation launched its campaign on “Empowering Youth in Africa through Media and Communications” to address the issue of misinformation and to strengthen the sense of community.[^3] By bringing more rights to
youth, perhaps their voices will lead the world’s debate on this ever-worsening crisis and help bring a stop to it.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Refugee**

A refugee is someone who is forced out of their country due to social, economic or political factors. This can include things like wars, persecution, discrimination due to religion or political opinion, job instability, or a multitude of other issues threatening their personal security or livelihood. Refugees are only recognised as such as soon as they gain asylum in a country that is not theirs. Thus, they gain special privileges and protections allowing them to continue life in a foreign nation.

**Internally Displaced People (IDP)**

Internal displacement, of people, is used as an umbrella term to refer to the forceful migration or immigration of people within a set boundary due to a host of reasons. It is important to understand the distinction between refugees and displaced people that has become vaguer over time. Whist all refugees are displaced people, not all displaced people are refugees as some are internally displaced. Generally, there are two categories that fall under the term: direct and indirect displacement. Direct displacement is very specific and only results from the destruction of people’s homes due to the land being used for developmental projects. Indirect displacement, on the other hand, can be from a vast array of reasons, including environmental – natural disasters or man-made environmental disasters such as water pollution or flooding due to the building of a dam. It can also be as a result of increased economic instability – for example, during the Great Depression where people had to cede their homes to banks due to not being able to pay their loans and mortgages. Indirect displacement can also be a result of political turmoil caused by riots, protests or wars.

**Returnees**

A returnee is someone who returns to a specific area after spending a period of time outside of it. In this issue’s context, it refers to the many displaced people returning to their countries after they have become more stable or if living abroad has become increasingly difficult. Repatriation of people who have left a country can provide a huge opportunity for a country to thrive economically due to the large number of vocational skills and expertise these people bring back to their country, which helps develop industries.

**Insurgency**
An insurgency is a political movement wherein a group of people with a vested interest attempt to achieve it, mainly through violence. An insurgency is similar to a revolt or a rebellion in many ways, relying on the use of guerilla warfare and military and political tactics and strategies to capture important government buildings like the Parliament and, consequently, take control of all government activities.

**Coup d'état**

A coup d'état, or more simply, a coup, refers to the sudden illegal seizure of power, usually by the military, from a civilian, or otherwise, government followed by the establishment of a military government led by the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces or the highest military officer involved in the coup.

**Bilateral/multilateral organisation**

Bilateral organisations receive funding from the government of the country they have registered in and help funnel these funds into development programs in LICs and NEEs. Multilateral organisations are similar in some ways to bilateral organisations but differ in the fact that they receive funding from multiple governments. These organisations make it easier to provide aid in an effective manner.

**Background Information**

The issue of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons is of significant concern, especially in the continent of Africa, where an increasing amount of people are displaced every year due to political unrest, conflict and poor economies. To be more specific, the region of sub-Saharan Africa, especially, has set world records for the annual net displacement of people in 2018.\(^4\) It is estimated that around 18 million people – around 26% of the world’s refugee population – have been internally displaced across the region, a figure at least three times the enormity of that of the Middle East.\(^5\) Countries like Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Libya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria are facing major economic depressions as they deal with corrupt governments, terrorism and poor infrastructural and service development. This section will dive deeper into the causes of these mass displacements and what the youth of Africa can do to combat this worrying crisis.

**Political unrest in Africa**
Political unrest is perhaps the leading cause in the creation of an increasing amount of displaced people in Africa. This section will begin to highlight some of the major events that have led to mass migration in the recent history of Africa.

**Boko Haram insurgency**

During the mid-2009 period, precisely on the 26th of July, the organisation, Boko Haram, began its military insurgency on the Nigerian government. Due to a rivalry between religious groups in the region, that dates back decades in the country’s history, the organisation staged the rebellion to establish Islam as the primary religion of the state. It was the increased military activity of the organisation, in 2014, that led it to international infamy for its incredibly violent attacks which killed thousands of people, many of whom were young children. Meanwhile, the organisation had spread to neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger, raising its threat level in the international community. Although the organisation had gained support from fellow terrorist organisation such as Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab, it publicly announced its allegiance to the notorious terrorist multi-national organisation, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). [6] Up to date, it has killed around 50,000 people and led to the internal displacement of around 1.9 million civilians in sub-Saharan Africa. [7]

**South Sudanese civil war**

While South Sudan had been enjoying added freedoms after its liberation from Sudan by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in 2011 [8], things were not going as smoothly as planned. In late 2013, after a falling out between President Salva Kiir of South Sudan and his former Vice President, Riek Machar and some fellow government officials, fighting erupted between the two sides in what would later spiral into the South Sudanese Civil War. [9] Only after several attempts had been made by the international community to mediate negotiations, including by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as well as the African Union, United Nations, People’s Republic of China, the European Union, United States of America, United Kingdom and Norway, was a ceasefire and power-sharing agreement finally introduced. [10] With Machar being reappointed as Vice President, the situation de-escalated, and peace returned to the fledgling state. However, things took a turn for the worse when, in 2016, fighting broke out again and the opposition forces were forced to leave the state. To create an advantage and increase his winning chances, Kiir appointed Taban Deng Gai, who was a high ranking official in the opposition forces, as his deputy. He effectively split the opposition in two. This appointment has led to thousands of conflicts and infightings between different groups within the opposition forces, practically halting any progress. Thus, what seemed like liberation for the South Sudanese ended with a war between factions and tribes, with opposing views. Although another peace agreement has been negotiated in 2018, with a bad record of keeping promises, it is unsure whether the
peace will be long-standing or short-lived. This crisis has cost South Sudan an estimated 2.5 million people who have fled its borders amidst the heated conflict due to insufferable conditions. [11]

The Eternal debt cycle

Many African countries have fallen into a severe debt cycle. By acquiring loans from other countries, or international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, many African countries have been drowned in increasing interest payments and an inability to both support themselves and pay off their debts. This is made worse by the countless crises currently occurring all around Africa: from disease outbreaks in West Africa, to famines in Somalia, to the drying up of water sources due to global warming. Although these loans can help countries develop their infrastructure quickly, allowing for improved healthcare, transportation, utilities and education infrastructure, the result is almost always the same. If a country invest too much into services that, although important for the overall development of the country, do not give them a fast-enough return on investment, interest quickly builds up into insurmountable amounts. Thus, a country can end up having to make compromises in the same areas they hoped to develop. Although initiatives like the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative have helped immensely by writing off hundreds of billions of, United States, dollars in debt, debt is on the rise as of 2014. Currently, around 51% of LICs in Africa are either in debt distress or are in a high risk of reaching it. [12]

The role of youth in working towards durable solutions

With the onset of social media platforms and the ever-increasing self-awareness by youth all over the world, is it feasible that they can create a great impact on the issue of refugees and internally displaced people in Africa? A large majority of Africa’s population is made up of youths under 30 years of age. In fact, it’s a staggering 70%, mainly due to the incredibly low life expectancies in the continent. [13] Unsurprisingly, the influence these youth have, especially online, is instrumental in the betterment of society in many of these countries. Unfortunately, with the globalisation of people through the creation of the internet, the focus of these youth has been decentralized and instead spread out over a multitude of world issues. [14] Although it may be beneficial for more people to be tackling the issue of, for example, climate change, it is even more necessary for local issues to be solved first so that additional future manpower can be devoted to better solutions for international problems. In the context of this issue, by providing platforms for youth to brainstorm solutions on the African refugee, internally displaced and returnee population, heaps of economic and social benefits are bound to flow into many impoverished countries. The world has already seen successes through organisations such as the World Youth Forum (WYF), which host events such as the Arab and African Youth Platform, which has allowed thousands of youth in Africa to present their concerns and ideas about issues in front of world leaders.
Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is perhaps the leading organisation working for the rehabilitation and sheltering of refugees, and those internally displaced, across the world. With increased development across many continents around the world, its focus has mainly shifted onto Africa. The UNHCR states that it hopes to help around 18 million people in sub-Saharan Africa by providing and consolidating services, such as healthcare and education, for the benefit of these people. The UNHCR also improves livelihood through improvements in security, installation of lights in public areas – a necessity for those studying as they become much more able to learn afterschool. They attempt to influence the creation of laws and policies through negotiations with governments, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which helps in the increased protection of the safety and livelihood of refugees all across Africa. They also help monetarily through what they call 'cash-based interventions' which directly aid those in the direst of situations. [15]

World Youth Forum (WYF)

Hosting its Model African Union (MAU) and Arab and African Youth Platform (AAYP), the World Youth Forum has, without a doubt, done a lot to improve the platforms in which African youth can project their voices on. With the presence of high-profile officials from countries all around Africa, the organisation has provided paramount access to the eyes and ears of the legislators and government officials of their countries, ushering a new era of community engagement and giving their words and actions unparalleled power. [16]

Uganda

Being, the leading African nation in refugee and asylum seeker acceptance, Uganda has established itself as a role model for African nations to follow. At a staggering 1.5 million refugees or asylum seekers currently in the country, and with a GDP per capita of only $666 USD, Uganda is providing an immense service to millions of people while also having issues of its own. [17] With South Sudan to its north and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to its west, it is unsurprising that there has been a huge influx of displaced people into the, relatively, small state. Uganda’s policies regarding refugees is outstanding and is internationally touted as one of the best in the continent. It allows those granted asylum to work freely, access its national healthcare and education services and provides them with shelter. However, the Ugandan response to this issue has also been plagued with fraud and corruption. In an internal audit created and released by the UNHCR in late 2018, it was revealed that Ugandan officials were falsely reporting the number of refugees within their borders, using that as a pretense for a high-level money fraud campaign. A total of 300,000 people were added to the claimed number of refugees within the
country. This has severely hindered the refugee aid effort and cost the UNHCR around $11 million USD to create the audit.\[18\]

**Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**

While the DRC itself has become the home of around half a million refugees, around 5% of its population – 4.5 million people – have become internally displaced.\[19\] Problems began for the DRC in the first months after its independence from its coloniser, Belgium. With the involvement of the Soviet Union (USSR), the newly formed government was effectively split in two – those who supported and didn't support USSR involvement. Following a coup d'état by the Commander of the Army, Joseph Mobutu, a dictatorship was established, giving him the ability to rule as he pleased.\[20\] After the toppling of Mobutu in 1997, it did not take long for the country to erupt into yet another power struggle that still reverberates to this day. In what is now nicknamed the Great War of Africa, the 1998 Congolese Civil War involved nine African countries resulting in millions of deaths, thus, making the war the deadliest since WWII.\[21\] In yet another humanitarian crisis in 2016, millions were displaced, hundreds of thousand being children forced to abruptly end their education.\[22\] These are but a few of the immense humanitarian issues within the DRC, the country is not only struggling with politics but has also suffered from diseases, like Ebola, famines and extremely poor development, thereby giving the DRC the title of the poorest country in the world.\[23\]

**International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

The International Monetary Fund is a multilateral organisation that is fundamental in providing monetary aid in times of immediate or long-term necessity. They have aided many developing African nations by providing them with subsidized loans and other types of monetary aid. They are also one of the biggest contributors through the HIPC along with the World Bank.\[24\]

**Timeline of Events**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 5(^{th}), 1960 – November 25(^{th}), 1965</td>
<td>The Congo Crisis marked the period in which people within the Republic of Congo took to the streets calling for independence from the Belgian Colony.</td>
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The Second Sudanese Civil War spanned two decades – precisely 22 years – making it the one of the longest civil wars in history. It ended with a concession by Sudan giving South Sudan independence in 2011.

July 26th, 2009 The beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

December 15th, 2013 The South Sudanese Civil War. One of the most gruesome and, currently, one of the leading causes of displacement in Africa.

August, 2018 The biggest, out of ten, Zaire ebolavirus outbreaks in the DRC, the virus was named after the country's former name, Zaire. With at least 2500 cases and 1500 deaths, the outbreak is already the second biggest in history. [25]

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on youth: dialogue and mutual understanding, 26 July 2011 (A/RES/65/312)
- Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, 3 February 2017 (A/RES/71/173)
- Policies and programs involving youth, 17 January 2018 (A/RES/72/146)
- Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, 21 August 2019 (A/RES/74/322)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There have been previous attempts in solving Africa’s economic crises. First and foremost, Africa is seeing increased investments, by world superpowers like China, into countless types of developmental projects. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, around $300 billion have been spent, with $60 billion more being invested in the coming years. [26] The primary investments being into developing the mining and oil
industries, infrastructure such as utilities (electricity, water, etc...), telecommunications, port construction and transportation. [27]

As stated before, the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative, which is financed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and many of the world’s most developed countries and largest multilateral organisations. It has already cleared around $100 billion in debt to 30 of Africa’s poorest nations. In return, countries need to have a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) in order to ensure that the money saved, from not paying debts, will be effectively used to get the country out of poverty. [28]

Organisations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), through their ‘Empowering Youth in Africa through Media and Communication’ campaign has improved media coverage on migration-related issues through improvements in journalist safety and by improving the standard of media outlets in the region. The project, which was initiated on the 13th of May 2019, helps bring awareness to the least represented minorities, such as young migrant women.

Possible Solutions

One of the most important steps in improving the refugee crisis in Africa is education. With education, there more opportunities for jobs which increases both the economic stability within a country and the disposable income of the population which is, consequently, reinvested into local businesses leading to a multiplier effect. Education also helps with the development and modernization of industries allowing for improved efficiency and a higher ability to meet the population’s demands. With skilled workers and intelligent minds being a direct result of education, solutions to complex problems can be introduced without the aid of foreign nations and organisations. To bring education to a developing nation is not easy. Firstly, the installation of lights in homes is an important step towards this goal. Although electricity might seem like a common commodity in MEDCs and NEEs, without electricity and lighting, studying at home becomes nearly impossible. This might seem trivial, but this forces students to give up studying after sunset contributing to a large amount of wasted time. Transportation infrastructure must also be improved in order to make it easier for children, who have to take trips to far away water sources, every day, to bring clean water to their families. By making these journeys easier and quicker, children can spend more time on more important tasks or, alternatively, other members of the family can take on the role of collecting water. The construction of more schools is, naturally, extremely vital to improve education, especially in the rural regions of a country.

Another possible solution is to encourage global firms and transnational corporations to invest in a country. This, not only, provides jobs and manufactured goods or services to a country, but brings in new expertise and advanced technologies that can develop the national industries. For example, the
presence of the Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) in Nigeria not only brings them tens of thousands of high skilled jobs and an increase in the refinement of crude oil, the RDS has also invested in education facilities and local communities as it sees a potential in creating a profitable business in the country by hiring future workers locally. Although this may be another money-making tactic by a multi-billion-dollar company, there is little doubt that it is spurring development within the country. The encouragement of firms to invest in a country can be a task achieved by youth through school projects and other means.

Awareness is, perhaps, the most underrated tool that can help improve the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa. It has been proven, through the countless past successes, that awareness is incredibly vital in securing international aid. Let us take the 2017 social media campaign calling for donations to help Somalia, which had been and still is, going through a massive drought and famine crisis that has been affecting millions of people.\(^{29}\) The awareness campaign raised $2.7 million which helped get 60 metric tonnes of food to Somalia providing them with immediate, life-saving aid.\(^{30}\) Awareness is a tool that everyone can use, but this is especially true with youth. Social media has ushered a new opportunity for people to share experiences and concern. Just this year, many social media campaigns, bringing awareness to the saddening situation of people in Sudan and Yemen, have gone viral. Although awareness on its own is similar to a blunt knife, it has the possibility of bringing major issues to the eyes of the people who can actively make a difference. However, this is not just true of social media. Programs like the Model United Nations (MUN), Model African Union (MAU) and the World Youth Forum (WYF) bring attention to international issues in an intuitive way. In some cases, they even bring the attention of world leaders and even the United Nations, people who can put into effect the solutions that are being proposed, making these events fundamental in creating change. The entire idea of these programs has been to empower youth, giving them a platform to voice concerns and come up with solutions. Thus, creating better ways to raise awareness is vital to solving the issue of refugees, returnees, and internally displaced people in Africa.

### Guiding Questions

1. Should MEDCs be accepting more refugees than they currently are?
2. Do youth currently have a big role in influencing decisions regarding displaced people, returnees and refugees in Africa?
3. Is it possible to decrease the number of displaced people in Africa, considering the large number of factors contributing to the crisis?
4. Is debt relief a viable long-term solution to the issue or should we be looking for more sustainable solutions?

5. Will transnational corporations really be beneficial to development in Africa or will they do more harm than good?

Bibliography


www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/famine-somalia