INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION & HUMANITIES (IJDIEH)
Volume 2, Issue 2 March–April 2026, pp. 179-200
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20201848
www. ubueajournals.org

THE DOUBLE BURDEN: REFUGEE INFLUX, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND HUMAN SECURITY IN RURAL HOST ECONOMIES OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

The protracted conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) has triggered a significant influx of refugees into the rural economies of Cameroon's East Region, intensifying competition over scarce resources and pressuring local infrastructure. This study aimed to first evaluate the human security status of CAR refugees, host communities, and control groups; second, identify the key drivers of human security; third, investigate the causal effect of humanitarian strategies on human security outcomes. This study employs a rural economics framework drawing on a large-scale survey of 3,540 respondents and focus group discussions. We construct a multidimensional Human Security Index (HSI) to quantify welfare outcomes. Recognising endogeneity in aid placement, we utilise innovative instrumental variables, including conflict intensity, border stretch, and distance from conflict zones, in a two-stage least squares (2SLS) estimation. The findings revealed an alarmingly low aggregate human security status (HSI = 0.457) across all groups, with host communities and control groups faring worse than refugees. The analysis identified that while emergency aid interventions had a positive causal effect on human security, strategies aimed at recovery and resilience-building were critically

inadequate and, for host communities, often had negative effects, failing to mitigate the strain on local labour markets and social services. Key drivers included proximity to conflict, access to aid, and socio-economic characteristics, with the study concluding that the current humanitarian response exacerbates dependency and fails to facilitate a sustainable transition from relief to development within the rural host economy.

Keywords:

Refugee influx, human security, rural labour markets, humanitarian aid, instrumental variables, social services, sustainable livelihoods.

1. Introduction

Humanitarian crises, driven by war, violence, and persecution, have increasingly drawn global attention, with millions of individuals displaced from their homes. The international community, particularly the United Nations, began addressing refugee protection systematically after World War I, establishing critical standards for safeguarding the rights of displaced persons. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016), nearly 70.8 million people were affected by humanitarian crises as of 2016, a historic high since the agency's establishment in 1950. This population includes refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, and stateless individuals (UNHCR, 2011).

Currently, Syria remains the largest source of refugees globally, with 5.5 million individuals fleeing ongoing conflict (UNHCR, 2016), followed by South Sudan, which has produced over 1.4 million refugees (UNHCR, 2016). Across Africa, approximately 26.4 million people are of concern to humanitarian agencies, including 6.3 million refugees (UNHCR, 2018). This data reflects a troubling trend: the number of refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa has nearly tripled over the past decade, accompanied by significant increases in internally displaced populations. For instance, South Sudan alone represents a major displacement crisis, with millions in urgent need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2017).

The socio-economic implications for host countries are profound. Developing nations bear the brunt of refugee inflows, hosting approximately 86% of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2015). By late 2015, Africa had an estimated 16 million people internally displaced or seeking refuge across borders, with Cameroon emerging as a key destination for refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria (D'Orsi, 2016). Cameroon's adherence to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its supportive legal framework make it an appealing destination. However, the country itself faces compounding humanitarian challenges, including rising numbers of refugees and IDPs due to regional conflicts. As of 2018, Cameroon hosted approximately 659,807 persons of concern, predominantly from CAR (UNHCR, 2018). Ongoing insecurity in neighbouring regions, food scarcity, and internal conflicts, such as the Anglophone crisis, further exacerbate this situation.

The continuous influx of CAR refugees since 2013 has imposed significant challenges on both refugees and host communities. UNHCR has documented a substantial rise in refugee

entries through multiple points along Cameroon's long border with CAR. However, a lack of systematic data complicates efforts to understand refugees' needs and facilitate their integration. The humanitarian landscape is fraught with challenges, including potential security risks linked to large refugee populations. Previous studies suggest that refugees from conflict zones may inadvertently introduce instability to host regions (Schneider, 1999). Additional pressing concerns include strain on local resources, environmental degradation, and overburdened social infrastructure, particularly when international assistance is limited. The International Crisis Group (2016) cautions that failure to address these issues may precipitate further conflicts and amplify refugee flows.

According to UNHCR (2018), Cameroon hosts 659,807 people of concern, including 249,053 Central African refugees and 89,543 Nigerian refugees. Demographic breakdowns show 232,081 rural CAR refugees, 87,630 rural Nigerian refugees, 22,145 urban refugees, 7,191 asylum seekers, 241,030 IDPs, and 69,730 returnees. In 2015 alone, 180,485 refugees entered Cameroon's East Region, 69% (123,589) of whom resided outside designated camps. This influx has increased the region's population by 40%, placing considerable pressure on local resources (UNHCR, 2016).

Tensions between host communities and refugees have escalated due to competition over resources and religious differences. Most host community members are Christian, while approximately 96% of CAR refugees are Muslim. Although inter-religious violence is rare in Cameroon, the growing Muslim refugee population raises concerns about potential conflict if humanitarian strategies fail to address these tensions proactively (Catholic Relief Services, 2016). The refugee influx has also intensified agro-pastoral conflicts over land and natural resources, increasing demand for scarce essentials such as land, water, and food, with long-term implications for sustainable development (UNHCR, 1997). UNICEF (2018) reports incidents of violence against refugee women and disputes over water access, further straining intergroup relations. Tragic events, such as the death of a farmer during clashes between herdsmen and farmers, illustrate the severity of these tensions (UNICEF, 2018).

Most response strategies have prioritised immediate relief efforts, including the distribution of non-food items, food assistance, and cash-based transfers, which primarily benefit refugees, while often neglecting the needs of host communities due to funding gaps (UNHCR Central African Republic Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2015). Although refugees have gained access to basic services, the emphasis on short-term relief has exacerbated human security concerns among host populations. Growing humanitarian needs are further strained by significant funding shortfalls. For example, UNICEF's 2017 appeal for $25.4 million received only $1.8 million, resulting in a $21.5 million deficit (UNICEF, 2018). These gaps highlight the urgency of enabling refugees to become self-reliant and productive to mitigate human security challenges. Environmental degradation resulting from refugee settlements adds yet another layer of complexity to Cameroon's burden, further affecting human security dynamics (WFP, 2016).

The main objective of this study is to assess the effect of humanitarian aid response strategies on the human security of both Central African Republic (CAR) refugees and host communities in the rural East Region of Cameroon. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a)

evaluate the current status of human security among CAR refugees, host community members, and control communities in the East Region of Cameroon, across its seven dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security, (b) identify and analyze the key socio-economic and contextual drivers that influence the human security status of the affected populations and (c) investigate the causal effect of specific humanitarian response strategies, namely emergency relief, recovery programs, and resilience-building initiatives, on the human security outcomes of the target groups.

Having outlined the introduction in Section One, the subsequent section provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. Section Three details the methodological approach employed in this study. Section Four presents and discusses the empirical findings. Finally, Section Five offers a conclusion and highlights the pertinent policy implications.

2. Literature

The concept of "sustainable humanitarian action," which seeks to bridge short-term relief with long-term development objectives, has been a persistent theme in international discourse since the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (1987). As Tamminga (2011) highlights, this approach is crucial for addressing protracted crises where the lines between emergency response and development blur. The ongoing debate emphasizes the intricate connections between humanitarian crises, disasters, conflicts, and their cumulative impact on the development trajectories of both refugees and host communities. This is reflected in early work by UNHCR (1996), which pondered the integration of humanitarian concerns into broader development efforts, acknowledging that while immediate relief is imperative, it must be designed with long-term sustainability in mind.

This ethos is embedded in the UNHCR's strategic directions (2017-2021), which align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The strategy emphasizes the critical inclusion of refugees in national development frameworks and fosters engagement between host governments, civil society, and public service providers (UNHCR, 2015). The goal is to ensure refugees are integrated into mainstream systems, such as health and education, while simultaneously pursuing durable solutions to displacement. This aligns with a growing body of recent research. For instance, Crawfurd et al. (2023) demonstrate that including refugees in national education systems, rather than parallel structures, leads to better long-term economic integration and social cohesion. Similarly, Clemens and Hunt (2023) argue that granting refugees formal legal rights to work and mobility is a critical driver of economic growth for host nations, transforming humanitarian challenges into development opportunities.

The operational shift towards sustainability is exemplified by integrated programming from agencies like UNICEF (2018), which focuses on pillars such as building protective environments, preventing child exploitation, increasing access to basic services, and strengthening emergency preparedness. These efforts aim to foster community resilience by enhancing collaboration between community-based structures and government

services. Recent evaluations of such integrated approaches show promising results. A study by Maxwell et al. (2024) on multi-year humanitarian funding found that flexible, longer-term financing models are significantly more effective at building resilience and reducing aid dependency than annual earmarked grants. This is further supported by Bleck et al. (2022), whose research in conflict-affected areas highlights that investments in local government capacity and service delivery systems yield greater sustainability than direct implementation by international actors.

The paradigm of human security, formally defined by the UNDP (1994), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these multifaceted vulnerabilities. Moving beyond traditional state-centric security models, human security encompasses "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," focusing on threats to individual safety and well-being. This concept was further refined by the 2012 General Assembly resolution, which emphasized a common understanding centered on threats to people's lives and livelihoods (Ashe, 2014). The original framework outlined in the 1994 Human Development Report identified two core components: safety from chronic threats like hunger and disease, and protection from sudden, harmful disruptions to daily life (UNDP, 1994).

The seven dimensions of human security are often categorized into two pillars: a developmental pillar addressing chronic threats (economic, food, health, and environmental security) and a protective pillar tackling sudden disruptions (personal, community, and political security). The concept was later expanded to include "freedom to live in dignity" (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). Alkire (2014) emphasizes the profound interconnection between these freedoms, arguing that true security necessitates addressing both fear and want, underscoring that economic and social stability are foundational to lasting peace. This view is reinforced by contemporary scholars who posit a symbiotic relationship between security and development, asserting that "there is no security without development" and vice versa (Annan, 2005). Trachsler (2008) further contends that development cooperation is a vital tool for conflict prevention, thereby establishing security as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

This people-centered approach, which addresses pervasive threats to survival, livelihood, and dignity, aligns with the UN Declaration on the Right to Development. Recent studies have applied this framework specifically to the context of displacement. For example, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager (2023) explore how a human security lens shifts focus from the perceived 'threat' of refugees to the shared vulnerabilities and potentials of both displaced and host populations, advocating for interventions that jointly strengthen the social contract.

Focusing on Cameroon, the literature points to specific challenges and gaps in operationalizing these concepts. Buchenrieder, Mack, and Balgah (2017) elaborated on the human security framework within the context of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon, highlighting the importance of its integration into humanitarian responses. However, recent studies suggest that the application remains inconsistent. A 2023 report by the International Crisis Group details how competition over scarce natural resources, exacerbated by climate change and displacement, continues to fuel farmer-herder

conflicts in Cameroon's East Region, directly undermining human security for all residents (International Crisis Group, 2023). Furthermore, Nkengmuo (2022), in a study on refugee-host relations in the East Region, found that humanitarian programs targeting only refugees, without parallel investments in host community infrastructure and livelihoods, inadvertently create tensions and exacerbate perceptions of inequality. This underscores the continued relevance of the call for sustainable, inclusive approaches that simultaneously address the needs of refugees and the development deficits of host communities within the Cameroonian context.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative strategies. A descriptive, correlational, and inferential research design was used to comprehensively address the research objectives. The target population consisted of all individuals in the East Region of Cameroon affected by the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR). According to the Cameroon National Institute of Statistics (2015), the East Region had a total population of 835,600 inhabitants. Of these, approximately 152,058 (18.20%) were refugees from CAR, residing in three of the region's four divisions, Boumba and Ngoko, Kadey, and Lom and Djerem (UNHCR, 2017).

Table 1: Sample framework of communities without camps, control communities, and sample size in the East Region, Cameroon

Division	Sub-division	Communities	Refugee density (%)	Refugee sample Men	Refugee sample Women	Total	Community
Ngoko & Dja	Gari Gombo	Gribi Lambo	<10	12	18	58	96
		Libongo	11-40			85	119
		Bela	41-70			106	
Kadey	Bombe Pana	Bombe Pana	11-40	22	33	85	
	Batouri	Bonrongoue	0			100	
	Kette	Oundjiki	<10	14	20	102	
		Beke Chantier	71-100	40	60	104	
Lom & Djerem	Mandjou	Mandjou	>100	48	71	119	
	Guiwa	Yangamo	41-70	44	67	119	
	Garoua-Boulai	Mombal	<10	30	45	112	
		Nandoungue	11-40	38	58	112	
		Lai (Betare Bongo Oya)	0			106	
		Total		377	565	1477	

Source: By authors

In Table 1, we have the sample framework of 11 communities with CAR refugee influx and control communities without refugees. Those communities that are marked with 0% refugee density are the control communities.

To estimate the human security status of Central African Republic (CAR) refugees and host communities, an individualized Human Security Index (HSI) and its sub-indices were constructed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). This dimension-reduction technique was selected over

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) due to the continuous nature of the variables. PCA transforms correlated variables into uncorrelated components, allowing the derivation of a single composite indicator for each dimension of human security (economic, food, health security). These indices were normalized to a 0 and 1 scale using mean values, enabling comparison and aggregation.

To address potential selection bias and ensure that observed differences in human security between treatment and control groups were not driven by observable characteristics, propensity score matching (PSM) was employed. The PSM procedure involved: (1) selecting covariates for propensity score estimation; (2) balancing scores across groups; (3) checking covariate balance within propensity score blocks; (4) selecting a matching algorithm; (5) verifying balance after matching; and (6) estimating average treatment effects.

However, PSM does not account for endogeneity arising from self-selection or non-random program placement. To address this, an instrumental variable (IV) approach was implemented. Three instruments were used: (1) conflict intensity in CAR, measured by the number of reported violent incidents; (2) distance from conflict hotspots in CAR to the East Region of Cameroon; and (3) border stretch, operationalised as the number of official and unofficial entry points along the border.

The Cameroon–CAR border was geospatially delineated using GPS coordinates collected from Garoua Boulai in the north to Libongo in the southeast. Data were projected in ArcGIS 10.1 using the UTM WGS 1984 system, revealing a border span of approximately 488 km with 12 official and numerous unofficial entry points. This porosity, combined with high conflict intensity since 2014, facilitated large and irregular refugee flows, complicating monitoring and aid targeting, thus justifying the use of the border stretch as an instrument.

Conflict intensity data were sourced from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which systematically records conflict events including armed clashes, violence against civilians, and protests. Although other databases like IPIS/DIIS exist, their incident aggregation methods and coverage limitations made ACLED more suitable for granular analysis. ACLED data from March to December 2021 were used to compute the average number of daily conflict events, corresponding to the study's survey period.

Using ArcGIS 14, distances were calculated from conflict-affected CAR prefectures (Mambéré-Kadï, Nana-Mambéré, Ouham-Pendé) to the Cameroonian border, under the assumption that proximity influences displacement patterns and human security outcomes.

Finally, the Durbin–Wu–Hausman test confirmed endogeneity between humanitarian response strategies and human security, necessitating the use of IV regression. The human security generating functions are presented as follows:

$$HS_i = w_1\gamma_{HRSi} + \sum_{k=0}^{3} n_k HRS_k + \omega_1 \dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where, HS and HRS are human security and the endogenous determinant of human security such as humanitarian response strategies; w_1 is a vector of exogenous covariates such as individual, household, and community characteristics; γ is a vector of parameters including the constant term and those of exogenous explanatory variables that correlate with the human security generating function to be estimated; nn_{kk} are the parameters of the potential endogenous explanatory variables (humanitarian response strategies) in the human security generating function; and $\omega\omega_1$ is the error term.

Since humanitarian response strategies are endogenous, we identify potential instruments. The reduced form equations of humanitarian response strategies were derived that accommodate such instrumental variables. Humanitarian response strategies generating functions are therefore presented using the following formulae:

$$ERS_i = w_2\gamma_{ERSi} + \sum_{k=0}^{3} n_k IV_k + \omega_2 \dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Where, ERSi, RCRSi, RSRSi are emergency response strategy, recovery response strategy, and resilience response strategy respectively: IV is a vector of instruments for humanitarian response strategies such as border stretch, incidences, and distance; w_2, w_3, w_4, are vectors of exogenous covariates such as individual, household, and community characteristics; γ are vectors of parameters including the constant term and those of exogenous explanatory variables that correlate with the humanitarian response strategies generating function to be estimated; nn_{kk} are the parameters of the potential instrumental variables in the humanitarian response strategies generating function.

Table 2: Operationalisation variables (differentiated along refugees, host communities, as well as communities without refugees)

No.	Human security dimensions	Possible specifications as explanatory variable
1	Economic Security	• Share of unemployment • Poverty share • Access to social safety net
2	Food Security	• Availability of food • Access to food • Use and utilization
3	Health Security	• Mortality of pre-school children • Access to WASH • Maternal mortality • HIV/AIDS prevalence
4	Environmental Security	• Water scarcity • Desertification/deforestation • Climatic risks
5	Personal Security	• Threats from state • Threats from war • Violence • Threats against women
6	Community Security	• Traditional practices • Financial services • Public services • Safety nets
7	Political Security	• Political repression • Police/community ratio • Civic rules
	Humanitarian aid organization	
	Types of response strategies	• Emergency (yes/no) • Early recovery (yes/no) • Resilience (yes/no)
	Duration response	Duration in years
	Instrumental variable	
	Conflict intensity	• Incidence/year • Refugee arrivals/year

	Distance separating areas	Distance from East conflict areas
	Border stretch	• Number of entry points
	Control variables	
	Age	In years
	Education	Highest education
	Location	Selected communities
	Gender	Male or female
	ODA	Development agencies
	Place of residence	Urban, Semi-urban, rural
	Household head	Male or female

Source: Authors

Notes: WASH = Water, sanitation and hygiene; ODA = Official development aid

The price of farm inputs and food crops that was previewed as an IV was not used because one of the fundamental assumptions of instruments has been violated by the price. We expect that each of the instruments should not have a link with human security, but should have a link with the humanitarian response strategies being implemented. We observed that price directly affects food security, which is a component of human security. This explains the source of the link between price with human security (Brück et al., 2016). Furthermore, the price of inputs and food crops in the East Region of Cameroon is not standardised (Ijang et al., 2016) and thus could not be validated as an appropriate IV.

4. Findings

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal that a majority of the respondents included in the sample were females, constituting a proportion of 1,978 (55.7%). Males constituted a minority of the sample with a size of 1,562 (44%). This finding justifies that more of the refugees in Cameroon are females.

Table 3: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Feminine	1,978	55.7	55.9	55.9
Masculine	1,562	44.0	44.1	100.0
Total	3,540	99.7	100.0	

Source: Constructed by authors using Field Data.

Distribution of respondents by division

As shown in Table 4, a majority of the respondents were from the Kadey division with size 1,490 (42%) that hosts a majority of the refugees, this is closely followed by those from Lom & Djerem division with size 1,197 (33.7%) and those from Bomba & Ngoko division with size 853 (24%) respectively.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by division

Divisions	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Kadey	1,490	42.0	42.1	42.1
Bomba & Ngoko	853	24.0	24.1	66.2
Lom & Djerem	1,197	33.7	33.8	100.0
Total	3,540	99.7	100.0	

Source: Constructed by authors using Field Data

Distribution of Respondents by Sub-Division

The results presented in Figure 1 reveal that most of the respondents were from Garoua-Boulai sub-division (623) as a result of high refugee density, this is followed by those from Kette subdivision (568), Bombe (442), Sala-Poumbe sub-division (435), Gari Gombo (435), those from Batouri (239), those from Mandjou (238), those from Ngoura (231), those from Mbotoro (224) and those from Betare Oya (105) respectively.

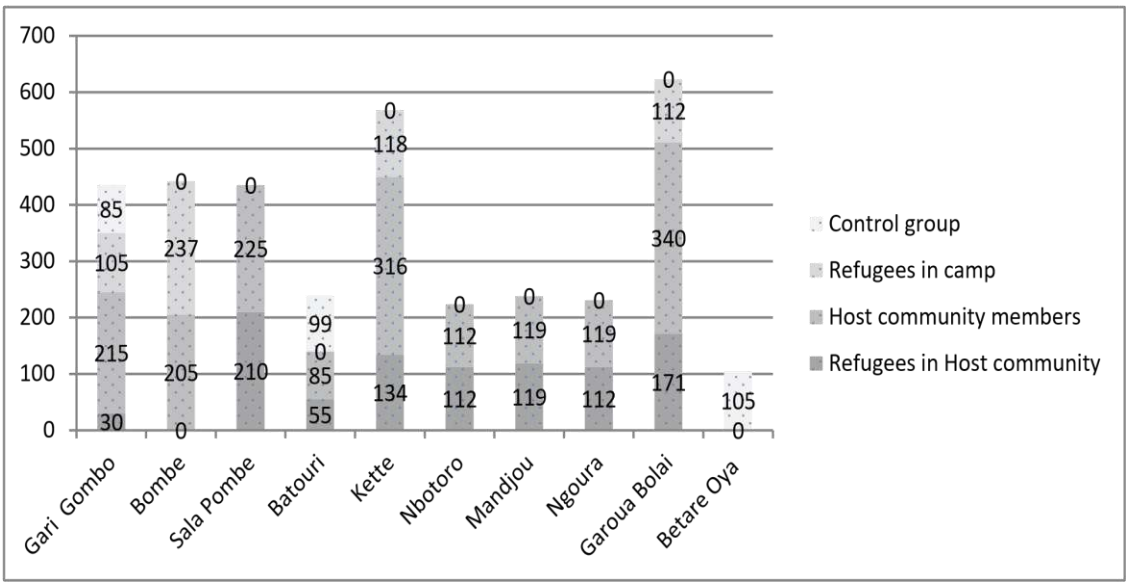

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sub-Division

Source: Constructed by authors using Field Data

Respondent Status

The finding in Figure 2 represents the status of the respondents. The findings show that 49.4 percent of the respondents were host community members, 24 percent being refugees in the host community while 18.2 percent were refugees in the camp, and 8.3 percent of the respondents were in the control group. The findings, therefore, show that refugees are 42.2 percent, constituting quite a portion of the sample population.

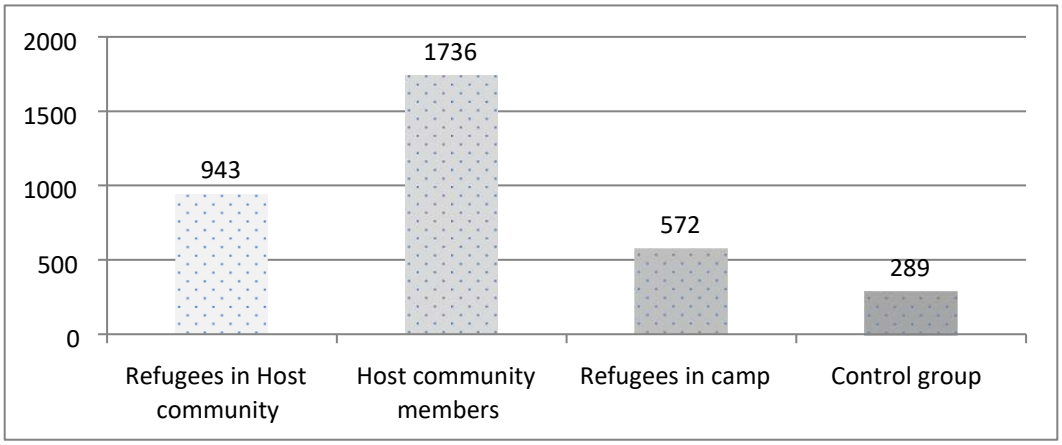

Figure 2: Respondent Status

Source: Constructed by authors using Field Data

Table 5: Summary descriptive characteristics of instruments and humanitarian treatment variables

		Community members n=2,044		Refugees n=1,496	
Mean (Std. Dev.)	Full sample (n=3,540)	Host communities (n=1,747)	Control communities (n=297)	In communities (n=851)	In camps (n=645)
Instruments					
Conflict intensity (number of reported incidences in CAR)	4224.585 (184.080)	4223.504 (174.080)	4180.952 (190.454)	4220.647 (193.534)	4260.902 (192.643)
Distance in km separating conflict areas in CAR from East Region	0.500 (0.283)	0.497 (0.281)	0.507 (0.289)	0.493 (0.288)	0.511 (0.280)
Border stretch (number of entry points into the East Region)	0.499 (0.286)	0.495 (0.284)	0.506 (0.290)	0.492 (0.290)	0.511 (0.282)
Humanitarian treatment variables					
Emergency (continuous normalized indicator)	0.408 (0.136)	0.404 (0.142)	0.440 (0.150)	0.424 (0.133)	0.384 (0.110)
Recovery (continuous normalized indicator)	0.187 (0.122)	0.198 (0.132)	0.157 (0.089)	0.181 (0.119)	0.181 (0.106)
Resilience (continuous normalized indicator)	0.078 (0.131)	0.056 (0.077)	0.058 (0.081)	0.094 (0.164)	0.122 (0.191)
Composite variable for treatments (continuous normalized indicator)	0.389 (0.118)	0.0387 (0.109)	0.349 (0.102)	0.387 (0.129)	0.421 (0.126)

Source: Constructed by authors using STATA 14

Notes: Number of valid observations in full sample 3540. Incidence is defined as the occurrence, rate, or frequency of conflicts

As indicated in Table 5, within the humanitarian treatment variable, three indicators (emergency, recovery, and resilience) measure the response strategies of humanitarian aid organisations. The treatment variables are measured as sub-incidences per person per year and normalised using the min-max approach of OECD (2008). The composite variable for treatments, being the average of the treatment variables, is also measured using the same method.

The mean value relating to the emergency indicator of humanitarian treatment is 0.408, indicating a relatively low average treatment number per person per year. Surprisingly, despite initiatives inscribed by humanitarian aid organisations, refugees in camps reported an even lower mean value of 0.384. This result shows that more refugees in host communities were benefiting from emergency aid (relief aid). However, humanitarian organisations continuously face challenges of reduced funds and resources to sustain refugees, especially between the years 2012-2015, when refugee influx was at its peak and five camps were established. Furthermore, the researcher realised that refugees in camps did not value shelter, WASH, and health facilities as part of relief aid. They recognise mostly food and cash transfers as relief aid, but not non-food items. Therefore,

this humanitarian aid variable may be systematically underestimated by refugees in camps. Whether this is true for refugees in communities cannot be said.

The mean value for the recovery aid indicator shows a very low average of 0.187 per person per year. This figure can be interpreted to mean that dependency on emergencies is still very high despite the initiation of recovery activities by humanitarian aid organisations. This is confirmed by Lancaster (1999), "adjustments to high levels of aid over several years are all part of what is often referred to as 'aid dependence". A dependence on high aid inflows is not necessarily a bad thing. If the aid is used productively to promote social and economic progress, its net effect is likely to be highly positive for development in the country receiving the aid. But where the aid is ineffective, it is important to consider the potential negative effects of that aid". The study realised that there was a low recovery among refugees, with no difference in means found between refugees in host communities and those in camps. This is because most refugees living in communities, in addition to the assistance they received from humanitarian aid organisations, brought in some resources that enable them to quickly integrate and kick-start economic activities, whereas those in camps are provided resources for small enterprise development. The difference in the mean value of the recovery aid indicator between refugees in host communities and host community members may be a result of the ratio of 70% to 30%. This ratio is determined by some donors, especially in the case of UN agencies (UNHCR and WFP) and imposed on implementing partners. This was different with CRS implementing a 60% to 40% ratio with funds from BPRM within the same area of intervention and types of response. This discretionary ratio of treatment selection by humanitarian organisations is bringing about tension among host community members and refugees, as explained by village heads.

The results show a low mean value of 0.078 for the resilience indicator is indicating a very low access to resilience measures for the treatment groups. The situation is not very different for host community members. However, a slight increase in mean value for refugees, with a little bit more for those in camps, is observed. This implies that humanitarian aid organisations provide more assistance to enhance resilience to refugees to enable them to become self-reliant, but as the general values of human security in Table 5 may imply. Humanitarian aid organisations provide even less often assistance for resilience to the host community members.

The composite index, which is the average of the treatment variables, reveals a low mean of 0.389 treatments per person per year for the treatment groups. The lowest value is seen in host communities, followed by refugees in host communities and a relatively low mean of 0.421 for refugees in camps. If we descriptively link the mean treatment to the results of human security as depicted in Table 5, we could hypothesise that humanitarian treatment could do better for human security. Yet it seems that refugees in camps benefit more often from humanitarian aid, as the means of human security for those in camps are higher. With regard to host community members, it is realised that from the onset of interventions, there was minimal support provided by humanitarian organisations. This is because humanitarian organisations assumed it to be the responsibility of the Cameroonian government to cater to its citizens, although the refugee influx compounded their susceptibility.

Result of modelling Human Security and Humanitarian Response Strategies for the Full Sample

The reduced form estimates for the full sample in Table 6 show that an increase in the number of reported incidences of conflicts in CAR will decrease emergency response from humanitarian organisations significantly at 1%, but increases humanitarian efforts in recovery and resilience responses, respectively, as seen in Table 6. The influence of the number of reported incidences of conflicts in CAR on emergency response is statistically significant at 1%. Therefore, the number of conflict incidents is a better instrument for emergency than recovery and resilience response strategies.

The instrument distance shows that a 1 km increase in the distance separating conflict areas in CAR from the East Region will decrease emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies by 1.697, 1.419, and 0.557, respectively. The effect of the instrument distance on emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies are all significant at 1%. This shows that distance in km separating conflict areas in CAR from East Region is a fundamental instrument for emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies. This finding reveals that the further the distance in km separating conflict areas in CAR from East Region, there will be less influx of CAR refugees, thereby decreasing emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies.

The instrument border stretch measured by the number of entry points (official and non-official) into the East Region shows that an increase in the number of entry points into the East Region will increase emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies by 1.665, 0.921, and 0.768, respectively. The number of entry points (official and non-official) into the East Region significantly affects emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies at 1% significance. Therefore, if there are more entry points, there will be a greater need for emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies.

The control variable age of the refugees, host community members, and the age of the control group show that a one-year increase in their ages will decrease emergency response but increase recovery and resilience responses, respectively. These effects are significant in the full sample. Findings on the education control variable show that if the different groups have attained no education, it will decrease emergency response strategies by 0.256, but increase recovery and resilience responses by 0.0772 and 0.0457, respectively. The finding is significant at 1 percent for the emergency. If they attained primary education, it would decrease emergency response strategies by 0.299, but increase recovery and resilience responses by 0.0601 and 0.0429, respectively. The finding is significant at 1 percent for the emergency. If they attained secondary education, it would decrease emergency response strategies by 0.289, but increase recovery and resilience responses by 0.0666 and 0.0273, respectively. The finding is significant at 1 percent for emergency response.

The control variable location shows that an increase in the number of communities (location) will decrease emergency and recovery, but increase resilience response strategies. The effect of location on emergency and recovery is significant at 1%. The

gender variable shows that emergency and recovery are more for males compared to females, significant at 1%. Resilience is lower for males compared to females, insignificant. This shows that there is a purposeful targeting of females over males in resilience than in emergency response by humanitarian organisations.

The coefficient of ODA shows that if the different groups receive aid, it will decrease emergency and recovery response strategies but increase resilience response strategies, significant at 1%. This is because development organisations' target is focused more on persons who already have some resource base to ensure resilience than on emergency and recovery. The coefficient of the place of residence shows that an individual moving from a rural to an urban area will decrease emergency and resilience but will increase recovery. The influence is significant at 1% for emergency and resilience response strategies.

The results show that emergency and resilience are more for female-headed households than male-headed households, while recovery is more for male-headed households than female-headed households. This is significant at 1% recovery, but significant at 10% for emergency and resilience response strategies, respectively. The F-statistics for all the reduced form equations are significant at 1% showing that all the models are reliable at 99%. The adjusted R-squares show that 10.6 percent of the variations in emergency are due to variations in the included variables, 6.88 of the variations in recovery are due to variations in included variables, and 79.5% of the variations in resilience are due to joint variations in the included variables. The Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroscedasticity shows traces of non-constancy of the variance of the error term, indicating heteroscedasticity. The model is, therefore, run with robust standard errors to take care of such problems. The variance inflation factor test for multicollinearity is below the benchmark of 2.5, indicating the absence of the problem of multicollinearity in the regression model. The absence of these econometric problems of estimation further validates the reliability of the results from this study with regard to the full sample.

Table 6: Result of Reduced Form Equations for Full Sample (Disaggregated Response Strategies)

VARIABLES	(OLS) Emergency / Resilience	(OLS) Recovery	(OLS) Normalized indicator
Conflict intensity (number of incidences in CAR)	-7.54e-05*** (1.46e-05)	2.21e-05 (1.41e-05)	7.39e-06 (7.07e-06)
Distance separating conflict areas	-1.697*** (0.419)	-1.419*** (0.405)	-0.557*** (0.203)
Border stretch	1.665*** (0.361)	0.921*** (0.349)	0.768*** (0.175)
Control variables			
Age of household members	-0.000531*** (0.000200)	0.00117*** (0.000193)	0.000171* (9.68e-05)
No education	-0.256*** (0.0642)	0.0772 (0.0620)	0.0457 (0.0311)
Primary education	-0.299*** (0.0642)	0.0601 (0.0621)	0.0429 (0.0311)
Secondary education	-0.289*** (0.0645)	0.0666 (0.0623)	0.0273 (0.0312)
Location	-0.00321***	-0.00274***	0.000211
Gender	0.0427***	0.0339***	-0.000296
ODA	-0.0129***	-0.00768***	0.0944***

Place of residence	-0.0218***	0.0122**	-0.0131***
Household head	-0.0109*	0.0235***	-0.00465*
Constant	1.065***	0.0366	0.0564
Observations	3,540	3,540	3,540
F value	31.49	19.52	993.7
R^2	0.110	0.0711	0.796
r2_a	0.106	0.0674	0.795
Instrumental variables			

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Source: Constructed by authors using STATA 14

Note: R2 and r2_a. When R2 is adjusted for the degrees of freedom, we obtain r2_a. What is more reliable is the r2_a. Both the R2 and the r2_a are low and others are high, depending more on the difference in the strength of influence of the samples.

In this study, we tested for the relevance, strength, and exogeneity of instruments (Table 6). According to Shea (1997), the first-stage F statistic and the partial R^2 convey vital information as to the validity and relevance of excluded instruments. From this result, the first-stage F statistic on excluded instruments is 31.49, 19.52, and 993.7, respectively, with p-values that are all significant at 1% for the synthetic variables emergency, recovery, and resilience. This shows that the excluded instruments are justifiably excludable. The Cragg–Donald statistic is needed to assess the strength of the excluded instruments in this study (Stock and Yogo, 2004). This value was 7.873, which is greater than the Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values: 10% maximal IV relative bias. This implies the instruments are strong enough to eliminate the endogeneity of emergency, recovery, and resilience humanitarian response strategies. So, the instruments are good for this study. The Dubin Wu Hausman test statistics stand at 33.917 with a p-value of 0.0000, significant at 1%. Therefore, endogeneity is a problem in the full sample model in this study. This reveals that emergency, recovery, and resilience response strategies with human security are endogenously determined. This indicates that the OLS estimates are not reliable for inference, implying that the IV estimates are preferred, given that it control for the problem of endogeneity. This is seen in the results for OLS and IV2SLS estimates, given that the OLS coefficients appear smaller than the IV2SLS coefficients due to the existence of the problem of endogeneity in the OLS results, which can reduce the magnitude of the effects. Finally, as shown in Table 7, the Sargan Chisq test statistic of 0.000 (insignificant) casts no doubt on the validity of the excluded instruments. This is an indication that the excluded instruments are justifiably excludable, that is, are appropriately independent of the error process, as the Sargan statistic is insignificant. Also, the Aderson Canon Corr. LR Statistics is 23.538 with a p-value of 0.0000, significant at 1% indicating that the equations are exactly identified.

Table 7: Instrumental Variable Two-Stage Least Squares Results for Full Sample

VARIABLES	**(OLS) normal IHS**	**(IV2SLS) normal IHS**
Independent variables		
Emergency (continuous normalized indicator)	0.0910*** (0.00581)	1.426*** (0.367)
Recovery (continuous normalized indicator)	0.141*** (0.00602)	0.925*** (0.334)

Resilience (continuous normalized indicator)	-0.0118* (0.00610)	-1.512*** (0.563)
Control variables		
Age of household members	0.000827***	0.000639
No education	-0.108***	0.121
Primary education	-0.0865***	0.217
Secondary education	-0.0493***	0.240
University education	0.0355***	-
Location	-0.00162***	0.00741***
Gender	0.0124***	-0.0565**
ODA	0.000139	0.161***
Place of residence	-0.0104***	-0.0516***
Household head	0.0307***	0.0591***
Constant	0.463***	-0.349
Observations	3,540	3,540
R-square	0.555	0.545

Under identification test (Anderson canon. corr. LM statistic): 23.538 Chi-sq (1) P-value=0.0000

Weak identification test (Cragg-Donald Wald F statistic): 7.873

Stock-Yogo weak ID test critical values: <0.000>

Endogeneity test of endogenous regressors: 33.917 Chi-sq (1) P-val=0.0000

Number of observations: 3,540

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Normal-IHS (Human security normalized to continue between 0 and 1)

Source: Constructed by authors using STATA 14

As indicated in Table 7, the economic dimension of human security of refugees and host communities is low, as exemplified by the 0.513 index. The situation is worse in control communities and host communities and shows medium indices (0.555) in refugees in host communities and refugees in camps (0.642), respectively. Within the framework of this study, economic security focused on the spending capability of refugees and host community members on basic needs and specific areas of spending. It also analysed their sources of income and whether the earnings were able to fulfil their needs. As found out, the main sources (occupation) of disposable personal income of the target groups were farming and petty trading, with host community members performing more agriculture than refugees. Agriculture plays a leading role in the target communities due to the favourable climate, available water for agricultural use, and fertile soils. The majority of the treated group members cultivate maize, cassava, and groundnuts.

Specifically, other sources of income for refugees included crafts, the selling of fuelwood (especially by women and young girls), cash-for-work programs, or cash transfers from humanitarian organisations. Although refugees are regarded as poor and dependent, they are economically active and doing business with local community members, and not all of them are exclusively dependent on humanitarian actors and donors (Staps, 2018; Betts et al., 2018; and Samuel Hall, 2015). In addition, other observable sources of income generated through self-employment by refugees are: owning of small shops and businesses, which usually involve retail businesses, selling, coffee/tea, local barbecue (roasted beef locally called soya), groceries in kiosks, and hawking, although in a disorganised manner. This was also established by IRC (2018), Swisscontact (2017), Samuel Hall (2016), Kimetrica (2016), and Fox and Kamau (2013). It was realised that

types of economic activities differ among the refugees in camps, refugees in host communities, community members, and control group members. With regards to gender, female refugees engage in individual economic activities and frequently cooperate with other women of the host communities when found in open markets. Sales of productive assets (livestock and farm tools), sales of non-preferred food (sorghum, beans) supplied by humanitarian organisations, prostitution, and street begging are some negative coping strategies exhibited by refugees of the East region of Cameroon. This research confirms what was found out by Betts et al., (2018), and Kimetrica, (2016) that refugees in the camps often sell some of the food items distributed by humanitarian organizations in the markets, both within and outside the camps, and some also trade their in-kind goods (crop seeds, livestock and NFIs) with the host community members, in exchange for cash or other resources such as fuelwood (firewood, vegetables, and cassava). This is because their income and earnings could not fulfil all their basic needs. This justifies the basic needs concept theory, which, according to Stewart (2006), gives priority to meeting people's basic needs. More to this, UNHCR (2017) states in its "Basic Needs Approach in the Refugee Response" that this approach is a way to enable refugees to meet their basic needs and achieve longer-term well-being through means to survive and services based on their socio-economic vulnerabilities and capacities. Yet humanitarian aid organisations responding to the CAR refugee crisis in the East Region of Cameroon are still finding their feet to fully empower refugees to be financially autonomous. Although the research found that Food for Asset (FFA) has been introduced by WFP, though not on a large scale, to reduce negative coping strategies, there are still huge gaps in terms of meeting basic needs due to chronic underfunding of UNHCR (2018).

Table 8: Stratified propensity score matching, the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) of humanitarian response strategies on the human security index (HSI)

Variables	No of treated observations	No of untreated observations	Difference observed	ATT
Total Sample (n=3,243)				
Emergency interventions on HSI	1,817	1,723	-0.252	0.143*** (0.153)
Recovery interventions on HSI	1,002	2,538	0.284	0.506*** (0.153)
Resilience interventions on HSI	395	3,145	-0.163	0.367*** (0.153)
Refugees in host communities (n=851)				
Emergency interventions on HSI	473	378	0.0865	0.981*** (0.219)
Recovery interventions on HSI	222	629	0.0675	0.878*** (0.305)
Resilience interventions on HSI	112	739	0.0816	-7.176** (0.253)

Refugees in camps (n=645)				
Emergency interventions on HSI	286	359	0.0747	0.586*** (0.997)
Recovery interventions on HSI	182	463	-0.0208	0.868*** (0.643)
Resilience interventions on HSI	114	531	-0.0712	-6.056* (0.104)
Host community members (n=1,747)				
Emergency interventions on HSI	883	863	0.0622	0.461*** (0.155)
Recovery interventions on HSI	531	1,216	0.0531	-9.276** (0.162)
Resilience interventions on HSI	145	1602	0.159	-7.056** (0.644)

Constructed by authors using STATA 14

Notes: ATT = average treatment effect on the treated. HSI = Human security indicator, ranging from 0 to 1. Total observations=3,243. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Significance level: * at 10%, ** at 5%, *** at 1%.

The results in Table 8 show that for refugees in camps, emergency and recovery response interventions have a positive effect on the overall HSI, significant at 1% level, while resilience response interventions portray a negative effect on the HSI; however, only with a 10% significance level. Concerning the host community members, only emergency response interventions affect human security positively, but not the other two types of interventions. The humanitarian aid organisations appear to better manage emergency response interventions for refugees and host community members. The study also realised that these organizations are not consistent in their responses since there is no clear-cut timing for transition (concerning the emergency, recovery, and resilience interventions) in their response strategies, as the CAR conflict has not ceased, refugees continue to flow into the East Region, though at a slow rate. Therefore, the transition is a non-linear process (FAO, 2013), as response strategies gather pace at various stages of the humanitarian aid interventions process and their intensity peak at different times (UNDP, 2013).

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study set out to assess the impact of humanitarian aid strategies on the human security of both Central African Republic (CAR) refugees and host communities in Cameroon's East Region. Using a mixed-methods approach and robust econometric techniques to account for endogeneity, the study constructed a multidimensional Human Security Index (HSI) to evaluate seven key dimensions of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.

The findings reveal a critically low level of human security across all groups, with an aggregate HSI of 0.457, well below the threshold of 0.550 required for medium security. While refugees in camps exhibited slightly better economic security (HSI = 0.642), host communities and control groups fared significantly worse, underscoring the double burden placed on already vulnerable rural economies. The analysis confirmed that humanitarian interventions have had a mixed impact: emergency aid showed positive effects, but programs aimed at recovery and resilience were largely inadequate or, in some cases, counterproductive. Crucially, the results identified significant endogeneity in aid distribution, necessitating the use of instrumental variables, including conflict intensity, distance from conflict zones, and border porosity, to derive unbiased estimates.

The study concludes that the current humanitarian response model, heavily skewed toward short-term emergency relief and plagued by funding shortfalls, poor coordination, and unsustainable project cycles, fails to address the underlying drivers of human insecurity. Without a decisive shift toward integrated, long-term strategies that simultaneously bolster the resilience of both refugees and host communities, the cycle of dependency and inter-community tension is likely to persist.

Based on the empirical findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian and development interventions:
Adopt Integrated, Multi-Phased Programming: Humanitarian organisations should design programs with clear, phased strategies that explicitly transition from emergency relief to recovery and resilience-building. Each phase must have defined entry and exit criteria based on measurable human security indicators, moving beyond annual funding cycles to multi-annual commitments that support sustainable integration.

Prioritize Inclusive Livelihood and Market Development: Interventions must consciously target both refugees and host communities to avoid exacerbating tensions. Programs should focus on creating shared economic opportunities, such as strengthening local value chains, supporting agro-pastoral cooperatives, and facilitating access to markets and financial services, to improve economic security for all.

Strengthen Local Systems and Government Capacity: Donors and aid agencies should work through and invest in local government structures and national systems (e.g., education, health, and extension services). This includes advocating for and supporting the Cameroonian government to formally include refugee needs in regional development plans and national budgets, ensuring the sustainability of interventions beyond the humanitarian funding horizon.

Enhance Coordination and Accountability: A shared digital database of projects and beneficiaries should be established to improve coordination among actors, prevent duplication, and enhance targeting. Furthermore, organisations must implement robust community-based feedback and accountability mechanisms, ensuring the participation of women, youth, and community leaders in all stages of project design, implementation, and evaluation.

Secure, Flexible and Predictable Funding: Donors should provide unearmarked and multi-year funding to allow organisations to respond adaptively to evolving needs and invest in longer-term resilience strategies. This is critical to closing the current funding gaps and enabling a more strategic approach to improving human security.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and practitioners can better support the journey towards self-reliance and sustainable human security for both displaced populations and the communities that host them.

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