

From Survival to Systems: A Refugee Leader's Framework for Community-Driven Education, Research, and Innovation

Statement of Purpose / Thesis

This proposal argues that refugees must no longer be positioned solely as beneficiaries of education systems, but as active architects of knowledge, leadership, and innovation within their own communities. Drawing from lived experience as a refugee leader in Nigeria, this presentation introduces a practical framework for refugee-led systems development that integrates education, digital empowerment, and community governance. It demonstrates how even in resource-constrained environments, refugees are already building structures that can inform global approaches to education, research, and social integration.

Outline of the Presentation

1. Lived Reality: Leadership from Within Displacement

As Secretary General of a refugee settlement and a national refugee network in Nigeria, I operate not as an external observer, but as an embedded leader within the system. Refugee communities are often described through vulnerability; However, a parallel reality exist — refugees are organizing, teaching, mentoring, and creating informal systems of survival and growth.

This presentation begins by reframing the narrative—from crisis to capability.

2. The Gap: Top-Down Systems vs. Ground Reality

Despite global efforts, many educational and development programs remain externally designed and insufficiently aligned with the lived realities of displaced populations. This creates a gap between:

- Academic research and practical implementation
- Institutional frameworks and community needs
- Policy intentions and actual impact

As a result, refugee voices are often underrepresented in decision-making, and their potential as contributors to knowledge and innovation remains underutilized.

The issue is not only access to support, but whether systems are designed to recognize and activate refugee agency.

3. Building From Almost Nothing: A Field-Based Approach

Through my work as Founder of **Nevor Circle Foundation (NCF)**—a legally registered, community-driven organization—and as lead of grassroots initiatives including **Digital Systems Technology Hub (DS Tech Hub)**, I have facilitated practical interventions that integrate:

- Digital literacy and ICT training using minimal tools
- Youth leadership and peer-to-peer mentorship
- Community coordination and advocacy systems
- Informal education pathways adapted to local realities

These initiatives operate with extremely limited resources—often no more than a mobile phone, small financial contributions, and community trust—yet demonstrate that meaningful systems can emerge from within when ownership is local and purpose is clear.

4. The Refugee-Led Systems Model

At the core of this presentation is the **Refugee-Led Systems Model**, developed through lived practice and community engagement. It is built on four interconnected pillars:

- **Internal Leadership:** Refugees lead and manage initiatives within their communities
- **Integrated Learning:** Education is combined with digital skills, leadership, and real-world application
- **Community Ownership:** Solutions are culturally relevant and locally sustained
- **Scalable Simplicity:** Systems are adaptable and replicable across displacement contexts

This model aligns with the conference focus on “*Refugees as Researchers*” by demonstrating how refugees can generate knowledge, document their realities, and lead social innovation.

5. Practical Takeaways for Institutions and Practitioners

This presentation offers actionable insights for academics, institutions, and practitioners, including:

- A replicable framework for refugee-led education and empowerment systems
- Strategies for bridging the gap between research and frontline practice
- Methods for integrating refugee leadership into program design and policy development
- Real examples of low-resource, high-impact initiatives from within a refugee settlement

Participants will leave with a working model that can be adapted and implemented.

6. A Shift in Perspective: From Inclusion to Partnership

The future of refugee education must go beyond inclusion—it must embrace partnership.

Refugees are not waiting to be empowered. They are already building, leading, and innovating. What is required is a shift in approach: from designing for refugees to building with them.

Brief Biography

Bate Neville Agbor is a refugee leader based in Nigeria, currently serving as Secretary General of Adagom 1 Refugee Settlement and Secretary General of the Refugee Organizations' Network in Nigeria (RON). He is the Founder of **Nevor Circle Foundation (NCF)**, a legally registered organization focused on community empowerment, and leads grassroots initiatives such as **Digital Systems Technology Hub (DS Tech Hub)**, which promotes digital literacy, youth development, and innovation within refugee communities.

His work centers on building practical, scalable systems that integrate leadership, technology, and education despite limited resources. He is committed to advancing refugee-led solutions

that transform communities from within and contribute to global conversations on education, dignity, and human development.