

The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War And North Central Nigeria's Border Communities Of The Otrukpo Division: A Re-Reading Of General Gowon's 3r's (Post War Reconstruction) Programme, 1968-1970.

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Abstract: General Gowon shortly before the end of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War conceived the 3 R's post-War programme for the nation. The 3 R's stood for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. The 'R' for Reconstruction has been dismissed like all other R's of the programme as a loud, empty rhetoric. This perhaps was because under the programme, there was no reconstruction of any facility—schools, homes, roads, communication networks etc in Biafra (Igboland) the Civil War theatre. . The study seeks to determine the extent of the implementation of this programme in the Northern Nigeria border towns devastated by the Civil War, To achieve the objectives of this study, quantitative as well as qualitative techniques were employed. This involved in-depth oral interview. Seven (7) locations were selected with ten persons interviewed in each of the locations. Results from the study clearly indicate that General Gowon's 3 R's were judiciously and religiously implemented in the Federal enclave. Before the end of the War, the Federal Military Government of General Gowon had taken vigorous steps towards the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the war devastated areas of the region. By 1968, General Gowon had sent the Federal Commissioner for Rehabilitation to the Division to ascertain the extent of the War damages in the land. Soon thereafter, the region's Rehabilitation Committee was inaugurated by the Federal Government in 1969, a Committee that immediately went into action.

Key words: Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Infrastructure, Relief, Civil War.

Date of Submission: 06-01-2020

Date of Acceptance: 21-01-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

On the 6th of July, 1967, the Nigeria-Biafra War broke out. By 30th July, 1967 the Federal forces had successfully pushed into the Biafran's Northern most border communities of the Nsukka Division(1). Advancing with armored vehicles from two fronts (the Okutu and Enugu-Ezike axes) and freely using para-illuminating bombs, the Federal forces had by July 30 reduced to rubbles almost all the Nsukka border communities/towns of Ette, Okutu, Enugu-Ezike, Okpuje, Obollo Afor, Obollo-Eke, Eha-Amufu etc. Alexander Madiebo described the Federal forces advance from Agila to attack Eha-Amufu in these words:

Thick smoke from far away burning villages was a clear evidence that the enemy was indeed advancing even though there was neither small arms fire nor shelling. During his advance into Eha-Amufu, the enemy stopped to burn down all villages on their route in addition to killing of the livestock(2).

In all the border communities attacked by the Federal troops in the Nsukka Division, no building was left standing. A few not pulled down and burnt were bullet-ridden with their doors and windows removed for construction of bunkers or for the roofing of trenches (3).

. They also targeted for destruction the Division's noncombatant civilian population. Instructions to bomb the Biafra's civilian targets were official (3). In the spirit of the Nigerian Government's scorched earth policy, there was **utter** destruction of all structures for human habitation, livestock and farms in the Division.

By way of retaliation, the first Battalion and 51 Brigade of the Biafran Army by August, 1967 took the War to Northern Nigeria's border communities of Agila, Aloma, Igumale, Ulayi, Idelle, Ijigban, Otrukpo, Obokolo, Orakam, Orukpa etc.

With their notorious B.12, the Biafran soldiers destroyed virtually all residential buildings, schools, roads, hospitals (dispensaries), bridges, and culverts of these northern (Otrukpo Division's) border towns of Igumale, Agila, Idelle, Ulayi, Bagaji etc(2). In the same vandalizing spirit of the Nigerian troops, the Biafran soldiers left no building standing in the communities attacked. The people's homes and houses were demolished and quickly burnt down. The Agila_ Igumale road for instance with 24 culverts and 2 bridges was quickly destroyed by the Biafran soldiers(4). Virtually all the roads, bridges and culverts in the communities were blown to pieces and wholly pulled down by the Biafran troops.

The invading Biafran soldiers destroyed a total of 14 primary schools in the Division. These were Ulayi primary school, Wesley Ikpeba Primary School, Wesley Idelle, Wesley Idumola, R.C.M Idelle, etc(4).

We listen to the commander of the 51 Brigade, Major Gen. Alexander Madiebo whose troops leveled most of the schools and homes in the communities.

His words:

My 51 Brigade took off quite well in the operation and before long, moving across country from the general area of Agila, captured the town of Igumale deep in Northern Nigeria, with little or no opposition. It was easy to move even further to Utonkon or Westwards to Igobido, but mounting administrative and communication difficulties made command and control very difficult (2).

The demolitions combined with frequent and incessant air raids of these communities by the Biafran troops turned every member old and young out as refugees(4). About 18,050 Agila indigenes were pulled out as refugees, Ulayi 2000, Idelle 7,330, Ijigban 3000 etc (4).

At the end of the war, these communities with their social and economic infrastructure in utter ruins needed reconstruction and rehabilitation just like all parts of Igboland. The Gowon's regime through its declared policy of 3R's Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation offered the world a cheerful hope of immediate return of peace, and purposeful healing of war socio-economic wounds.

11. Methods

Research Design and Study Setting

Given that the study is essentially explanatory, the work adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative techniques involve the use of questionnaires to understand the respondents' extent of awareness of what transpired during and after the Civil War in Nigeria. Qualitative method involved in-depth oral interviews used to both enhance and authenticate quantitative results generated in the survey. The study took place in three (3) border states of the Federation of Nigeria. These were Benue, Enugu and Kogi States. Eleven (11) border communities were selected for this study, ten (9) from the Federal enclave and two (2) from Biafra's side. The communities selected from Biafra were Nsukka town (the seat of the University of Nigeria) and Eha-Amufu. The nine (9) border communities of the North central Nigeria involved in the study were Agila, Aloma, Igumale, Ulayi, Idelle, Ijigban, Obokolo, Orakam, and Orukpa. These communities were selected because of their terrible devastations in the War.

The study began with contact setting and visit to relevant authorities especially traditional rulers of these communities requesting from them the permission to be allowed to carry out the study.

Questionnaires and Meeting with Respondents.

On account of the fact that the study was essentially explanatory in view of the subject matter under study, the questions administered to the respondents were limited. Nevertheless, they were sufficient enough to meet the objectives of the study. Questionnaires for this work sought answers to such pertinent questions as sex, age, educational status, occupation, marital status, awareness of what transpired during and after the Civil War, source of such information etc. In each of the communities, a total of 20 questionnaires were distributed. The study took place from April 2017 to May, 2018.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted especially with the elders in the eleven (11) selected communities. In each of the communities ten (10) respondents participated in the in-depth interviews. Seven (7) knowledgeable men and three (3) women were invited and interviewed. So, a total of 110 persons were interviewed and 220 questionnaires distributed to respondents, but only 198 were diligently completed and returned.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the in-depth interviews, the thematic analysis technique was used to uncover themes and trends. Excerpts from quantitative results were used to compliment the qualitative depositions.

Table 1 Respondents Profile

Variable	NO	%
Residence		
Urban	121	36.6%
Rural	209	63.3%
Sex		
Male	237	71.8%
Female	93	28.2%

Marital Status		
Married	276	83.6%
Single	2	0.6%
Widow	33	10%
Widower	19	5.7%
Age		
40-50	150	45.4%
51-60	109	33.0%
61 and above	71	21.5%
Educational level		
No schooling	65	19.7%
Completed Primary School	92	27.9%
Completed Secondary School	66	20%
Tertiary education and equivalents	77	23.3%
Occupation		
Civil Servant/retired	69	20.9%
Artisans	43	13.0%
Trading	38	11.5%
Farmer	164	49.7%
Others	6	1.8%

Source: Author's field survey, 2

A total of 110 persons took part in the in-depth interviews, 77 men and 33 women. 7 men and 3 women were selected and interviewed in each of the 11 communities. The very elderly ones were the preferred in the interview. Eye witness testimonies enjoyed by this study came from this class of respondents. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed in the 11 communities, that is 20 in each community. The distribution went to a total of 160 males and 60 females between the ages of 40-70.

Table 2: Awareness of Implementation of General Gowon's 3 R's programme in the Division and Source of Information

Variable	No	%
Knowledgeable about Gowon's 3R's		
Yes	297	90%
No	33	10%
Total	330	100
Heard about reconstruction of North Central Nigeria by Gowon?		
Yes	288	87.3%
No	42	12.7%
Total	330	100
Source of information of the reconstruction		
Radio	26	7.9%
Newspaper	64	19.4%
Relatives	126	38.2%
Books	68	20.6%
Eye witness	56	16.9%
Total	330	100

Source: Author's field survey, 2017

Evidence from table 2 shows that almost all the respondents were aware of the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the North Central Nigeria's border communities by the Gowon's military regime. About 56 respondents gave eye witness account of the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Division shortly before the end of the war and after. May we listen to an excerpt from one of the eye witness respondents.

**"Mr. John Ede the Chairman of Igumale Gowon resettlement
na my brother. After they chose am as chairman, Igumale work
to rebuild our homes start. Government bring too much money
for the work, but the big people chop no be small."**

The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the North Central Nigeria's Border Communities of the Otrukpo Division, 1969-1970

The first step of the Federal Military Government towards the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the War devastated areas of the Otrukpo Division of the North Central Nigeria began with the visit of Mr. Timothy Omobare the then Federal Commissioner for Rehabilitation to the Division in December, 1968 to ascertain the extent of the damage and the plight of the refugees. In this visit, he instructed that the Otrukpo Divisional Rehabilitation be set up as a committee at the grass root (4). According to him, all the money for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the people of the Division was to be spent through the Committee.

Following his instruction, in January 27, 1969, the Committee was inaugurated (4). This body was set up as a grass root committee to work as an arm of the Benue Plateau State Rehabilitation Committee. While the work of the State Committee was to provide the Federal Military Government of the period concrete proposals on specific reconstruction and rehabilitation projects to embark on, the Otrukpo Divisional Rehabilitation Committee was put in charge of the real execution of rehabilitation projects in the Division(5).

The Committee drew membership from all over the Division. Its very important members were His Royal Highness, the then Ochi –Idoma, Mr Abraham Ajene Okpabi (the then Army Garrison Commander), and Mr. J.O. Odang (the then Mayor of Otrukpo) Town(5). After the inauguration of the said Divisional Committee, the Benue Plateau Commissioner for Rehabilitation and Resettlement in Company of the State Secretary of the Committee, and the Otrukpo Local Government Council Chairman of the time undertook an intensive tour of the Division's War affected areas(6). By this visit, they met with the people and got firsthand information of their problems and needs. Their findings were quickly passed on to the Federal Military Government which immediately went into action.

Reconstruction of the People's Homes and Emergency Relief

The actual work of the rehabilitation in the region began with the reconstruction of the people's residential homes destroyed by the War. This took off in March, 1969, after the meeting of the Otrukpo Divisional Rehabilitation Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Yahaya Kwande(4). Kwande was the then Senior Divisional officer in charge of Otrukpo Division. At the meeting, it was agreed that it was safe enough for the displaced persons to return to their homes. But as there were no houses that survived the War, the Rehabilitation Committee put forward the people's homes rebuilding or reconstruction plan as the first in their agenda. Indeed, the Divisional Rehabilitation Committee established a Divisional Homes Reconstruction Camp at Igumale. The camp offered accommodation to heads of families that returned home to rebuild their houses before bringing in their women and children.

In essence, Igumale was chosen as the headquarters of the reconstruction and rehabilitation works by the Rehabilitation Committee. Mr. John Ede, one of the members of the Rehabilitation committee was selected to oversee or superintend the camp (7).

The camp did not only offer family heads on home rebuilding mission accommodation, it also offered them food. The inmates of the camp were fed twice daily. Their food was cooked and served by six cooks employed by the Rehabilitation Committee(8). The cooks were each on 4 shillings daily wage(4). These family heads in the camp were, therefore, fed from a common pool of food stuff purchased by the Rehabilitation Committee. The inmates of this camp, not only rebuilt their damaged huts, they also worked on the community roads to enable them access their homes on return. In the rebuilding of family huts and homes the government of General Gowon supplied bundles of zinc sheets, zinc nails, and other nails of various sizes. The Government also supplied planks and other building materials (9) .

Between April and October 1969, almost all of the displaced persons of the Division had been resettled. By October 1969, the following number of persons had returned home. Ijigban community, 3,000 inhabitants, Ulayi 1,320 indigenes, Idelle 5,769. Indeed, out of a total of about 22,000 persons that were pulled out as refugees in the Division, by October 1969, about 11,267 had resettled(9)

With the return of the majority of the people to their homes, the Government came in immediately with emergency relief materials especially food supplies. In October 1969, the Rehabilitation Committee supplied to the resettled families of the various communities a total of 100,000 tubers of yam, 615 bags of rice, 215 bags of beans, 254 bags of garri and 3 bags of maize(10). The Committee also supplied the people several bags of onions, salt, pepper and melon. They also received several baskets of fish, drums of palm oil, cartons of tinned tomatoes, bags of dried okro, tins of groundnut oil and bags of cray-fish. Made available to them also were tins of Cow and Gate, cartons of bango coffee, Lipton tea and cartons of sugar(10).

Between May and August 1970, food supplied by the Divisional Rehabilitation Committee to Agila community alone were 130,000 tubers of yam, 500 bags of garri, 35 bags of salt, 12 basket of fish, and six drums of palm oil. Agila then had an estimated resettled population of 16,050(11). Within the 1970/71 financial year, a total of €7,000 was said to have been spent by the Divisional Rehabilitation Committee on emergency relief (11). The Division's emergency feeding and relief services went on until the returnees

harvested their first crops. This fact ushers in the rehabilitation of the people's agricultural occupation by the government.

Rehabilitation of the People's Agricultural Occupation

To rehabilitate the agricultural life of the people, the Government promptly supplied the resettled communities thousands of seed yams, bags of maize seeds, bags of groundnut seeds, rice seeds etc (12). The resettled people of the Agila community in October 1969, got from the Rehabilitation Committee a total of 50,000 seed yams, 20 bags of rice seeds, 10 bags of fertilizer(4) :

In rehabilitating the people's agricultural occupation, not only did the government supply seedlings, they also procured farm implements for the returnees. The government made available to the people thousands of big and small hoes, thousands of machetes, axes, picks etc. It is on record that the government spent the following on the procurement of the people's farming implements and seed crops(13).

•	Cutlasses	-	-	-	-	-	€4,500
•	Hoes	-	-	-	-	-	€6,750
•	Axes	-	-	-	-	-	€5,400
•	Diggers	-	-	-	-	€5400	
•	Sees crop	-	-	-	-	-	€78,845:17 ^s :6 ^d

In essence, the rehabilitation of the agricultural life of the communities of the Division cost the government the whopping sum of €1,00896:7^s:6^d.

By October 1969, the Ulayi, Ijigban, Idelle, and Agila communities had all been resettled and supplied with adequate planting seeds and cultivation implements(14). The ministry of Agricultural also sent experts to the communities to advise the returnees on crops cultivation and care. €500 which was allocated by the Federal Military Government of General Gowon to help the returnees rear chickens was quickly distributed to these farmers(9). The farmers who received this money were to be assisted in the rearing by the Federal Government experts of the Ministry of Agricultural and Natural Resources by offering them professional advice. By August 1970, the returnees had started to harvest their crops and to sale their birds. Therefore, emergency relief feeding soon faded to rehabilitation(15):

Rehabilitaion of Roads

At the end of the war, many roads in the Division destroyed by the "rebel" troops needed rehabilitation. A few of such roads were the Agila-Igumale road, an 18km length of road with its 1 bridge and 24 culverts blown off by the Biafran troops. There was also the Igumale- Ulayi-Ijigban road, with its 3 bridges and 10 culverts devastated badly by the war. The Utorkwo- Idelle road with 6 small bridges and 29 culverts was also reduced to rubbles by the war and called for rehabilitation(4).

The roads destroyed by the war in the Division were rehabilitated by the Gowon's Government assisted by local or community labour, volunteer students of Ahmed Bello University, Zaria, and student of Government Teachers College, Jos and some Teachers of Otrukpo Local Education Authority. A good member of Man -.O.- War members also participated in the rehabilitation of the roads in the Division(16). On the rehabilitation of the Agila-Igumale road alone, the Government was said to have spent the total sum of €15,000. The sum was spent as follows: the Adu bridge €300; the road drainage system € 2,000, and the 24 culverts €10,000(4).

The Itabomo community's Adu bridge across the Adu stream constructed by the Itabomo community before the Nigerian civil War collapsed during the war. It was this motorable bridge that helped the Federal forces in their capture of the Igbo strategic border towns like Obollo-Eke, Ikem, and Eha-Amufu. Following excessive traffic of heavy military vehicles to and fro that road, the bridge collapsed. Unfortunately, at the end of the hostilities the Federal Government rehabilitation programmes completely excluded the reconstruction of this bridge of the Itabomo community(17):

The community's Development Union, therefore, in the early 1970 undertook the bridge's reconstruction at the cost of € 1,500. But on the 1st of August, 1970, in a letter signed by the executives of the community's Development Union. Dr. I. Obe (of Salem Hospital), T.U. Oko, W.A. Ochagwu, and S.S. Agbo, the community appealed to the Government for financial assistance(17) The body appealed to the Plateau State Military Government for assistance through the State's Commissioner for Rehabilitation and Resettlement. It is not on record whether the assistance came.

Although the Federal Military Government of General Gowon was at the centre of roads rehabilitation in the Division, some roads destroyed by the war were wholly fixed back through local labour. The Utorkwo-Idelle road with its 6 small local bridges, and 29 culverts was rehabilitated through community labour(18).

It was not until about 24th December 1970 that reconstruction work on the 14 schools destroyed by the war in the Division began. For their reconstruction, the United States Agency for International Development gave a grant to the sum of €72,632 through the Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction(4). The money was also to be used in the rehabilitation of 3 dispensary halls, and teachers'

quarters destroyed by the war in Agila, Ulayi Ijigban, and Idelle. The schools after a few months were soon back to life as the pupils returned of their classes.

Very important to mention at this juncture is the voluntary rehabilitation and resettlement bodies/organizations that assisted in the Division's Rehabilitation works. There was the Nigerian Red Cross. This body donated 10-ton Mercedes Lorry and a Land Rover for the relief and rehabilitation works in the Division(9). Members of this body also taught the returnees basic hygiene, basic nutrition, basic malaria prevention and baby care. They **were** assisted by the Federal Ministry of Health that seconded nurses to the Division. The nurses that took care of the health needs of the people were based in Agila(19). The OXFAM through the Methodist Church Nigeria, Otrukpo also supplied nurses that attended to the health needs of the people of Igumale, Ulayi, Adelle etc(20). The Sudan Interior Mission donated 5000 shirts and shorts which were distributed to the returnees in the resettled areas. The Christian Council of Nigeria also assisted in rehabilitating the returnees.

Very significant to state here is the fact that the relief and rehabilitation programmes of both the Federal Government and the Otrukpo Divisional Rehabilitation Committee excluded over 24,000 Igbo settlers in the Division who were also greatly devastated by the War. The Divisional Rehabilitation Committee and the Federal Government of the time had no plans in their agenda for the rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of the Igbo (Ezzas, Izzis, Effirms etc) who were living in the Otrukpo Division before the war and who lost their agricultural occupation, businesses and houses to the War(21).

In the same vein, although the war officially ended in January 1970, by the second half of 1969, many Igbo especially the Nsukka-Igbo had started to return to their homes. Like in the Otrukpo Division, they returned home to behold sights of their war- torn landscape. In the words of one of the returnees, Nsukka Division was almost standing still at that time. The devastation of the war had nearly wiped the town off the map. Even the University was not spared.....Everything was completely damaged (3).

Another returnee to Nsukka described the level of devastation and carnage in these words:

There were no houses in sight. Occasionally, you will find a house standing but no door, or roof or window. The corrugated iron sheets of our buildings Missing or bullet- ridden; The wooden windows and doors had either been stolen or destroyed or misused for the building of bunkers or for the roofing of trenches. Many of these house were broken down by the federal troops as a security measure against guerrillas(3).

But in spite of the Division's sorrowful level of devastation and carnage, their return to functional communities after the war was on the basis of communal and individual self- help efforts. In Igboland (Biafra), there was no reconstruction by the Federal Government of any facility-school, roads, health institution, communication networks, agricultural occupation etc. Following Gowon's conceived plan of 3R's, the then administrator of East Central State, Mr. Ukpabi Asika, announced a conservative £ 400 million for the reconstruction of war damages in Igbo land.⁴ In the words of Oha-na-Eze Ndi Igbo (the Apex Organization of the entire Igbo people of Nigeria):

The Federal Government did not release any substantial share because it claimed that it had no money(21)

But as Oha-na-EzeNdi Igbo also pointed out, The denial of economic reconstruction help to war-torn Igbo land was promoted by reasons other than poor treasury because it was the period the head of the Military Government, Gen. Gowon announcement to the world that money was not a problem for Nigeria. (because of oil boom). He was lavishing money aids on foreign countries and was spending colossal sums on preparation for the hosting of FESTAC(21).

II. CONCLUSION

The implementation of Gen Gowon's 3 R's Post- Civil War reconstruction policy in the nation's Federal enclave was impressive. Under the policy, Gowon's military regime of the period restored the people of the Division to their pre-Civil War socio-economic well-being. Conversely, Igboland the major theatre of the War was denied social and economic reconstruction by the Gowon's administration. Igboland seems to have been deliberately excluded in his post-War reconstruction and rehabilitation agenda. Treated as the neglected, hated and vanquished in the polity by the Federal military Government, the Igbo have ever since lived with that shock, pain and horror.

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Eze, Jonas (PhD). "The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War And North Central Nigeria's Border Communities Of The Otrukpo Division: A Re-Reading Of General Gowon's 3r's (Post War Reconstruction) Programme, 1968-1970." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(1), 2020, pp. 39-45.