

Obolo (Andoni) Women in The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is the activities of women in the Nigerian Civil War. Considering the Obolo (Andoni) experience, it deliberates on their contributions in six major areas. First is the part they played in the causes of the war. Second are their socio-economic roles during the war. The third concerns their enlistment in the army and paramilitary forces. Obolo women also performed broadcasting and propaganda duties. Their presence in the paramedical corps, with which they saved lives, was equally significant. After the war they did not relent in contributing towards the reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes of the war affected areas.

Introduction

The Obolo people are found both in the present-day Rivers and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria. Prior to the war they were together in Opobo Division of Eastern Nigeria and later in Southeastern State during the Nigerian Civil War period. Being in the Niger Delta, they are located in the Eastern Delta between the Rio Real in the west and the Kwa Ibo Rivers in the east. Three water channels in the area, Andoni, Imo and Kwa Ibo Rivers, played significant functions during the Nigerian Civil War. These rivers were the highway that drove the Federal Troops of Nigeria into the hinterland for the liberation of the secessionist enclave.

The Nigerian Civil War was between the Federal Troops headed by the then Head of State of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, and the secessionists' army of Lt. Colonel Chukuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu who was the then Governor of Eastern Nigeria. With Colonel Ojukwu declaring the eastern part of the country as the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967 the entire Eastern Nigeria was Biafra. The war, which was for the secessionists' survival as well as the unity of Nigeria, started on 6 July 1967 and engulfed all parts of Eastern Nigeria including Obolo. Hence the Biafran soldiers immediately occupied most areas without any stiff resistance. They reached Obolo through two major routes, Egwenga in Opobo Division and Kaa in Ogoni Division. Though they settled in different parts of Obolo, Ilotombi was their tactical headquarters where their commander, Captain L. E. Madu, resided. They were in Obolo till 1968 when the Federal Troops liberated the area.

It was the Obolo Chiefs and leaders of thoughts that invited the Federal Army to liberate their area in early 1968 owing to their dissatisfaction with the secessionist's assault on women, in particular. As a result, the Biafran soldiers and some Obolo men and women who could not remain behind were conveyed by canoe to Ogoni mainland where waiting vehicles carried them to the Igbo heartland. As the war progressed, it introduced new dimension of responsibilities for women which this paper is considering, beginning with their contributions to the causes of the war.

Obolo Women and the Causes of the Civil War

Obolo women were noticed in four causes of the war. One of these causes, though they were not involved in it, is said to be the military coup of January 15, 1966 headed by the late Major Chukuma Kaduna Nzeogu. This led to the demise of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, the Premiers of Northern and Western Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Samuel Akintola. Others include the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, and some top military officers. Within the crisis, some Obolo women in Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna and Kano joined others to instigate the eastern extractions to return home. And at home they also joined some easterners in calling for intervention which resulted into secession. Nevertheless was the issue of Port Harcourt. This bitter cause of the war affected Obolo women married to the Igbo and vice versa. Many buildings in this model city were owned by the Igbo ethnicity of their husbands and other relations. As soon as the twelve states structure was created by the then military Head of State of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, they pressurized their husbands to support the declaration of the Republic of Biafra by the Head of State of Biafra, Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu. The contributions of Igbo women married to Obolo men were also loud in this regard.

Obolo women, too, were in the call for one Nigeria. This prompted their sons and daughters to secretly leave for Lagos and enlist in the Nigerian Armed Forces. After training and during the outbreak of hostilities, they were in the war for the unity of Nigeria and freedom of their relations from Biafra. Another instance is the activities of Obolo women in the Nigerian Police Force. Together with non-Obolo police officers, their preliminary investigations to ascertain the secessionist's declaration of war contributed to the causes of the war. They were among the investigators of the strategic positions of Biafra and Colonel Ojukwu's acquisition of ammunitions and readiness for war. The result of their work revealed the secret plans, military arsenals and other preparations of the secessionists. This fuelled the declaration of war by both Gowon and Ojukwu. Hence, the Nigerian Civil War raged for thirty months and enlisted the social and economic roles of Obolo women.

The Socio-Economic Roles of Obolo Women in the War

During the war, Obolo women bore the brunt of social and economic responsibilities. They were caring for their families in the absence of their husbands who were at the war fronts. Within the period, men were mostly needed by both the Biafran and Nigerian Armed Forces to perform military and paramilitary functions. To avoid conscription, some of them also fled into hiding. Young men could neither engage in meaningful economic activities nor fend for themselves and their relatives. Even the fishermen were alleged to be spying for their enemies and stopped from fishing by soldiers. There were also returnees like the civil servants and urban dwellers that lost their sources of livelihood but depended on their wives, mothers, and sisters for survival. To sustain their families and society, Obolo women embarked on various economic activities that became the mainstay of Obolo economy during the war. Under this condition, Obolo women returned to their indigenous economy of fishing, seafood gathering of periwinkles, oyster and cockles. They were also in the long distance trade. It is true that the war disrupted economic activities in Port Harcourt, a

major trading and commercial centre. But women resorted to Egwenga market where they sold fish, prawns and seafood and bought foodstuff to sell at home. This was to alleviate hunger and provide food for the soldiers who depended on the community for sustenance.

Eyewitness account confirmed that Eastern Obolo women were the major contributor of food towards the sustenance of the soldiers in their community. They were also supplying them fuel wood, water and miscellaneous economic services. These provisions were essential to the existence of the people and soldiers who could rarely survive without them. Oral history noted that the period witnessed economic stagnation. No development projects were executed and all social activities were paralyzed. All sources of import and export were closed. Essential commodities like salt became extremely scarce. Obolo women, however, resorted to producing salt from sea-water for household use and for sale to hinterland neighbours.

However, the social roles of Obolo women during the civil war were enormous. They were the emissaries between the military and the civilians because of their relative freedom and less harmful nature. The soldiers were sending them to and from Obolo tidal flats to disseminate information to their colleagues on any signal from their zone and on war developments. A lot of activities revolved around women who continued to perform these duties unlike men that were suspected and thoroughly searched before admission anywhere.

When Obolo was liberated in early 1968 by the Federal troops, there was joy, hope and sense of belonging to the people who regarded them as the messiah that freed Obolo from the secessionists. At this instance, Obolo women welcomed the Nigerian soldiers, demonstrated their solidarity and organized cultural plays in their honour. Ataba Town is a good example where the liberation was celebrated at the expense of the Biafran soldiers who were not so welcomed. On the contrary, it was an experience of mourning and sorrow in the Eastern Obolo communities that were destroyed, arsoned and one hundred persons killed by the Federal Troops. But then Obolo women did not relent in funding the Nigerian soldiers. Their contributions to the 'Federal Troops Comfort Fund' is worthy of mention. From this fund the soldiers were maintained in the different zones in the Niger Delta.

Ataba Town was used as the headquarters of the Nigerian Army in Obolo led by the late Major Isaac Adaka Boro. From here they made their advancements to other Obolo towns and villages. As soon as Obolo was liberated in 1968 and with the support of Obolo women, Ataba became a launching pad through which the Nigerian Army advanced into Okrika area. After performing the military rituals at the Ataba water-front in the Ijaw style, Major Isaac Boro proceeded with his troops to liberate Bolo in Okrika. In a fierce encounter after liberating Bolo, he sustained a serious bullet injury and was rushed to the military base in Ataba where he finally gave up before being taken to Bonny. The role of Obolo women in the liberation of Okrika was clear. They served as the link between soldiers and the civilians on vital information about the war. From the markets, they gathered information and relayed to the soldiers concerning places under the enclave of the enemies.

Even at the early period of the war when the Biafran soldiers occupied Obolo in 1967, Obolo women got involved in the war in several ways, providing humanitarian

and military services. The senior military officers were accommodated in private houses and the junior ones quartered in public places such as school buildings maintained by women. Again, as part of their social responsibilities, women supplied thatches for the roofing of these houses built for the camping of the Biafran and Nigerian soldiers at Ataba and Ilotombi Towns.

As many oral historians could remember, the confrontations between the Biafran soldiers and Obolo men at Unyeada, Egendem and Asarama towns, were saved by women. The latter supplied the men with local missiles, *ibet*. Thus, *ibet* is a sharpened double-edged stick used as a weapon of war in our area of study. Some courageous women participated in the attack with it. They were hurling the missiles at their perceived soldier-enemy. As the soldiers suppressed them, most men fled to other neighbouring Obolo communities for refuge. But majority of the women took custody of these settlements until the return of the men.

Despite the above, some women penetrated the rank and file of the Biafran and Nigerian soldiers and established matrimonial and friendly relationships with them. This helped to relax the tension in the Obolo settlements because of women intervention in controversial matters involving indigenes and the soldiers. Also they assisted to secure the release of their brothers and relations when they were arrested and detained. Some instances will suffice. An Obolo man, Clinton Utong, who was in the Biafran Army, was arrested by his colleague soldiers as he returned from the battle field to visit his parents at Umuahia. But his mother and sister, Madam Lily Ete Utong and Mrs. Naomi Israel Ete, saved him from the unimaginable consequences. They approached a senior military officer and explained his reasons of visiting them and his readiness to return to the battle field. The superior officer directed that he be released immediately.

Again, Clinton Utong, Igbimineye Dibia and Marcus Marcus were arrested in 1968 by the Biafran soldiers stationed at Unyeada and taken to Bori where they were detained. They were sent on errand from Ilotombi to Unyeada by Captain L. E. Madu who was the commander of the secessionist's army in Obolo to confirm the information about the presence of Nigerian soldiers. But the Biafran troops at Unyeada regarded them as spies. Hence Clinton's mother, Madam Lily Ete Utong, intervened and facilitated their release. Within the period of their detention, his mother placed Captain Madu in Clinton's room at Ilotombi in a house-arrest until he produced her son. She told him to remain on his bed until Clinton returns. Such condition compelled Madu's men to hastily locate their whereabouts and subsequent release. It is unimaginable that a soldier of that rank and commander of Biafran Army in Obolo could be subjected to that level of imprisonment. The fact remains that he was influenced by his respect for age and motherhood. This explains the influential role of women that saved lives during the period.

Furthermore, women played a role in Obolo politics during the Nigerian Civil War. They filled the leadership vacuum created in the family by the war and became heads of their households. Though the chiefs were in control of the administration of Obolo, it was not done in isolation of the women. Women leaders were involved in the coordination of various social services. These roles proved the relevance of women in critical periods. They were sustainers of life, a source of information and a

link between the soldiers and the people. Their roles in the administration of Obolo complemented the male leadership role during the period. They also got involved in broadcasting, propaganda and paramedical duties.

Obolo Women as Broadcasters, Propagandists and Paramedical Staff

Oral and documentary evidence recorded Lady Caroline Owonte as a broadcaster in the secessionist's enclave. She used her position to champion the Biafran propaganda outfit and kept the people informed of developments during the civil war. Through her activities, the Obolo in the Federal liberated areas became aware that their kinsmen and women in the secessionist republic were not all dead. Her propaganda also energized the Biafran soldiers of Obolo and non-Obolo origins to do their best for the defunct Republic of Biafra and also to beware of the dangers at the turning points of the war. The interesting music she was using to alert the people during her broadcasting period was in Obolo language. As soon as it was on, the Obolo every where would know that Mrs. Owonte was about speaking to them and would be informative. Although the broadcast was not only in Obolo language, the music was an Obolo song, thus,

Okpongbo, okpongbo sulu mebonokwan-ile
Okpongbo sulu mebonokwan
Okpongbo, okpongbo sulu mebonokwan-Aja
Okpongbo sulu mebonokwan...

Bonga fish plays at the Andoni River estuary
Bonga fish plays at the estuaries
Bonga fish plays at the Aja River estuary
Bonga fish plays at the estuaries

Prominent among the paramedical staff were two Obolo women, Madams Gloria Urombo and Theresa Mbaba. Urombo was a trained and registered nurse in the services of the defunct Republic of Biafra, while Mbaba was in the medical corps of the Nigerian Army. They were in the group of Niger Delta women that rendered selfless services to save souls during the Nigerian Civil War.

Madam Urombo was one of the principal nursing officers that took the sick Biafran children and orphans to Gabon for medical treatment. According to Uwaga, during the war there was economic blockade on Biafra. This accounted for the acute shortage of food, drugs, ammunitions and malnutrition, *kwashiokor*, and other sicknesses became the order of the day. With the assistance from the French government and the German Catholic Charitable Organization (Caritas), the Biafran sick children, including Miss Itong Hudson Ukoima, now Mrs. Awani, and Miss Grace Nyetugo Ikezam, now Dr. (Mrs.) Malachi Brown, were flown to the Republics of Gabon and Ivory Coast by Air France through Uli Airport for medical attention. They were there till the end of hostilities before returning home healthy. For those that went to Gabon, President Omar Bongo of Gabon accommodated them in Liberaville in 26 dormitories, each containing 200 inmates. Adequate care, medical and educational facilities were provided. The children were given identification cards, hung on their necks, bearing

name, address and the illness suffered.

An Obolo woman among the Biafran medical and paramedical staff in Gabon, Madam Gloria Urombo, was instrumental to the identification of sickle cell and handicapped children that were flown from Gabon to France for special medical treatment. Secondly, her concerted efforts made it possible for the Gabonese authorities to allow some non-Nigerian families to play humanitarian roles of hosting some of the children at weekends for a change of environment. Uwaga who was one of the children recorded that some Gabonese and French medical staff of the camps were hosting them from Fridays to Sundays and allowed them to play around with other Gabonese children for recreation. With the educational facilities available, some of them, like Uwaga, completed their primary one in Gabon before returning to Nigeria in 1971 by Air France through Port Harcourt Airport.

A negative effect of the process is the death of some Biafran children in Gabon and Ivory Coast. Secondly, many children lost their parents during the war. This brought the problem of whom to handover some of the children that returned to Nigeria. Owing to this fact, they were claimed falsely by people. In fact, the identification exercise was by their personal data earlier submitted by their parents. Those whose parents could not come forward were claimed falsely by people. Her three friends, Mary, Martha and Olunma became victims for two reasons. They lost their personal data with which the authorities could have used in tracing their villages. Since Biafra was no longer in existence, the Biafran government records could not be found either. This created room for interpolations.

In the case of Grace Ikezam, she nearly fall victim when an unknown woman wanted to claim her erroneously. What saved her was her mother that was coincidentally around and called her by her native name, Nyetugo Ikezam. Her grand mother being an Owerri woman came forward and identified her mother together with the duplicate copies of her personal data earlier submitted by her father. Hence, she was allowed to take her to their country home of Ozuoba in Rivers State. These processes were made easy by the role of the female staff at the camp, including Madam Gloria Urombo from Obolo.

Nevertheless, a coincidence was the role of another Obolo woman, Madam Theresa Mbaba who was a soldier in the Nigerian Army, during the civil war. Thus, as casualties increased, she was posted to the medical corps where they assisted in nursing their wounded female and male colleagues. These functions demonstrated the sensitive and significant part Obolo women played to save human lives in the period under review. They were also in the infantry and paramilitary forces during the Nigerian Civil War.

Obolo Women in the Army and Paramilitary Forces

Obolo women enlisted in the army, militia and civil defence groups. They were recruited voluntarily in Obolo, Port Harcourt, Aba and Umuahia because of their intrepid qualities at such a time that men were avoiding conscription. Eyewitness accounts noted that women enlisted willingly without conscription. Their voluntary involvement was a demonstration of their total commitment to defend Obolo and ensure national unity of Nigeria.

At Ilotombi village in Andoni, those who joined the militia group were Madam Lily Ete Utong, Lydia Harry, Nwayok Orok, Comfort Robinson. Others were Clarina Bathemeus Utong, Rhoda Okwunta, Mrs. Abel Ayagwung, Mrs. Randoff and Naomi Isreal Etete. Women from other Obolo communities like Ikuru Town that were in the Biafran civil defence, militia and army include Lady Caroline Owonte, Agala Jacob, Lovinah Thaddeus and Mary Udebe. These Biafran groups were involved in the security of Obolo territory at the beginning of the war. The militias, as part of their security responsibilities, were to report the presence of the enemies and their incursion on the Obolo territorial waters under their control.

Towards security alertness, Sara recorded how paramilitary men and women were raised by a crack team of military personnel sent for that purpose. After training, Obolo women in the Biafran militia were deployed at strategic positions such as the landing jetties, road junctions, Kwa Ibo, Imo and Andoni Rivers estuaries, the Atlantic and other strategic points. They were to check the intrusion of the Federal Troops who were then at Bonny. For this reason, they embarked on intensive and extensive patrols of the Obolo territorial waterways bordering Obolo, Opobo and Bonny. The women militias were also deployed to strategic positions in other communities in the Niger Delta.

During this period women involvement in the war continued to increase. Though men were entrusted with the major responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of the country, women did not consider it the exclusive right of men. Thus they were poised and enthusiastic to defend their immediate territory for national integration. They voluntarily enlisted into the Nigerian Civil Defence Corps and the Nigerian Army. The functions of the civil defenders like the militia were to render security services considered extremely important by the military. Obolo women involvement in the war complemented the efforts of the men in the army.

Illustrative of this fact is the voluntary enlistment of Theresa Mbaba of Ngo into the Nigerian Army in 1968. Her resolve to join the army was influenced by her desire to secure the release of her father and others arrested in Ngo as well as her enthusiasm to serve the nation. It was a clear case of Obolo woman patriotism. Oral history stated that she left for Ataba Town that was the army headquarters in Obolo where her arrested-father and others were detained. In Ataba, Theresa Mbaba willingly joined the 19 Battalion of the Nigerian Army, commanded by Major Isaac Adaka Boro. Having been enlisted, she later secured the release of her father and other men who later returned home to Ngo.

Actor's account of Madam Theresa Mbaba stated that as the military ethics demands, she and others proceeded after recruitment to Okrika for training. There, they were given one month intensive military drilling at the Okrika Grammar School camp. After the training she was entrusted with a sensitive responsibility as a signal officer with full communication gadgets. In this position, she disseminated information to her colleagues at the battle field on the war efforts and the necessity to advance and retreat. As a soldier at war, Theresa Mbaba engaged in her first battle during the liberation of Port Harcourt. Their camp then was at Rainbow Town on the Trans-Amadi axis of this garden city.

In the course of the civil war, she was able to rescue some Obolo men and women.

Amongst them were Messrs. Fyneface Ayayi and Gogo, now a beach master at Kaa. After the war, they were camped at Abati Barracks in Lagos where she continued in the Nigerian Army signal corps until Dimka's coup of 1976 when she retired voluntarily. Her involvement in the war did not only depict her courage, bravery and astuteness but also the patriotism of Obolo women in the defence of the Niger Delta and, above all, contributions to national unity of Nigeria. Mbaba inspired other women to rise to the challenges of life, especially in the male dominated fields. Some Obolo women in the Nigeria Police Force like Chief Superintendent Ann Ikuru also played a formidable role during the war. After the end of the Nigerian Civil War on 15 January, 1970 following the surrender of General Phillip Effiong, Obolo women were in the post war developments of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The Task of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Post war developments witnessed Obolo women renewing their vigor for the three "R's", meaning, 'reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction' programmes introduced by the Federal Government to restore hope and reintegrate the secessionists into Nigeria. It had a transforming effect on the generality of Nigerians. Obolo women participated and benefited from the implementation starting from the reconciliation work.

However, the Christian religion as a social vehicle had sociological impact in reconciling the people after the war. The church used the influence of women to contribute to this social revolution in Obolo. One of the denominations is The Apostolic Church Ataba Assembly that was established after the Nigerian Civil War through Mrs. Rosaline Howells. This church helped in the reconciliation work. In the course of her conversion that was an outcome of her healing, many people became members and reconciled with their enemies. The church was formally inaugurated through a three day crusade from Friday to Sunday 22-24 November, 1974. The crusade was conducted at her instance by Pastor Udoma to reconcile the people after the war and open the branches of the church in many Obolo settlements. Women associations were also established in other churches that enhance reconciliation, infrastructural development and philanthropic services. The women in Ataba, Ekede and Ikuru Towns seized this opportunity to build parsonages for the Anglican Mission.

Next was the reconstruction and rehabilitation work proper that started with the field of education. After the war, the national education policy was revised to enable the government take over all private and missionary schools for effective management. Obolo women were recruited as teachers with which many primary and post-primary schools functioned as reconciliatory grounds and rehabilitation gadget in the war affected areas. Gabriel puts it that a remarkable consequence of the Nigerian Civil War was the realization of the importance of female education. In the years after the war, Obolo female teachers contributed to the increase in the number of female's education in both primary and post-primary institutions within and outside Rivers State.

In this respect, four additional primary schools and the first government post-primary institution were established in Obolo in the first decade after the war. The schools were Community Primary Schools at Asuk-Ama in 1973, Muma in 1973,

Okoroboile 1974, Agbama 1975 and Government Secondary School Ngo in 1974. The girls' secondary schools established in neighboring communities like Ogoni offered Obolo girls the opportunity to attend and they began to secure admission into higher institutions and have more access to wage employment. The reduction in the ratio of uneducated women in Obolo affords them more opportunity to contribute positively to the reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes of the government.

Obolo women attachment of more premiums to the value of education contributed to the re-orientation of elite motherhood in Nigeria. They de-emphasized superstitious healthcare methods and encouraged modern healthcare system. It also influenced the household services women render. Educated adult members of the women associations in Obolo encouraged and influenced the women to continually promote education and modern healthcare delivery.

Socially, Obolo women embarked on development projects such as building of schools, post office and health centres. Ikpe analyzed the relevant contributions of women to national development after the Nigerian Civil War and posit that countless women's organizations contributed to the building of community schools and maternity homes in the spirit of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It suffices to say that the Young Ladies Club of Ikuru Town won the health centre project for the community as a reward for their excellent performance during the state organized cultural dance festival. The club was formed in 1972 to replace the defunct women association in the area and contribute to the implementation of the programmes of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction in Obolo.

In 1973 the club represented Obolo in the government sponsored cultural festival in Calabar as a reconciliatory measure of Nigerians of the then Southeastern State. They emerged the overall best cultural group. When the government of Southeastern State demanded that they should request for any social infrastructural project as a reward, the women wisely requested for a health centre to provide a place for safe delivery of pregnant women. In granting this request, Government of Southeastern State of Nigeria, headed by Brigadier-General U. J. Esuene, supported them with the provision of zinc and nails for roofing. From here the Young Ladies Club laid the foundation of the health centre building in 1975 and completed it before the end of 1970s. Prior to the completion of the building, the health centre had commenced at Mr. Abraham Morris' house with government staff duly posted to Ikuru Town.

The same club was committed to more development projects. Oral history maintained that they built the Ikuru Town Post Office which was approved by the government in 1974. The post office that also served as passengers waiting hall justifies Obolo women desire to sustain the source of communication in the area and to provide a link between them and the outside world. One cannot deny the importance of information and communication in any society, but appreciate their efforts to enhance it. The cultural performance of the Young Ladies Club underscores the cultural relevance of Obolo women to the developmental history of the area. It could be remembered that the health centre with modern medical facilities had reduced the maternal and infant mortality rates in Obolo, increased their life span and provided solution to the treatment of some diseases that defy traditional medicines.

Prior to the above, Ikuru Town women were the bulwark of the advancement of their children's education to primary six. The women pulled their resources together to pay for the fees to retain elementary six when it was imminent that the government wanted to withdraw it from St. Simon's Primary School, Ikuru Town. The money was given to the then headmaster of the school, late Mr. W.T. Aganin, to pay for them at the General Manager's Office in Port Harcourt.

In the same vein of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, Ataba Women Association started the building of their maternity health centre after the war and completed it before the end of the 1970s. Oral evidence of Mr. B.D. Uraka noted that Asarama Health Centre, approved in 1960, was completed by the women under the leadership of late Madam Janet Harry in the early 1970s. Also Madam Keziah Ukot organised Asarama women, *Ebibanran Ibot Ama*, who stayed at Ibot Ama fishing settlement in Ataba territory to build the Asarama town hall. The hall provided a modern venue for the general meetings and other social functions of the community. Before the association ceased to exist in 1973 during the Andoni-Ogoni War, the tenure of Janet Harry also contributed to the building of Ross Grammar School Asarama in 1972. They donated all the periwinkle, oyster, whelk and cockle shells that were used in the construction work. It was the first post-primary school established in the entire Obolo area of the Niger Delta. Later, it translated into Government Secondary School Asarama in 1976.

Nevertheless, the Agwut-Obolo Women Development Association formed in 1971 also intervened in the development of educational facilities. This saved them of the government decision to remove the school from the area if the six classroom block, originated through communal efforts, that was under construction remains uncompleted. As a result, the association provided the needed emergency finance for the roofing and immediate completion of the school building.

Ekede provides another example of women enthusiasm towards sustaining education and improving the welfare of teachers in Obolo. As Mrs. Ukete noted in oral evidence, Old Ekede Women Association was instrumental to the development of the area. They were influenced by the development impact of similar association in Ataba where Mrs. Ukete stayed before returning home. At home she formed this association in 1969 and became its secretary. Though it was ephemeral, women recorded monumental achievement in promoting education. They were able to build the headmaster's quarters in 1971 and contributed to the reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

From the foregoing, it is established that the post war period witnessed significant contributions of Obolo women to the reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes of the Nigerian government. They built health centres, schools and post offices. There was remarkable improvement in women education which enabled them to gain more wage employment and rehabilitate themselves and their loved ones. More churches were as well established by the women as reconciliatory grounds. One cannot but conclude that Obolo women were a vital vehicle for the provision of social amenities fundamental to the transformation of the area in the post war reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction policy.

Conclusion

The work has shown the changing roles of Obolo women during the thirty months Nigerian Civil War and after. They participated in the civil war in different respects such as the causes of the war, socio-economic roles, broadcasting and paramedical duties. They were also among the combatants and paramilitary personnel. Women made more tremendous contributions for the social transformation of Obolo during the post war period of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. These contributions show the historical significance of Obolo women in the Nigerian Civil War.

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- Madam Theresa Mbaba in an oral account on 24/4/2005.
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