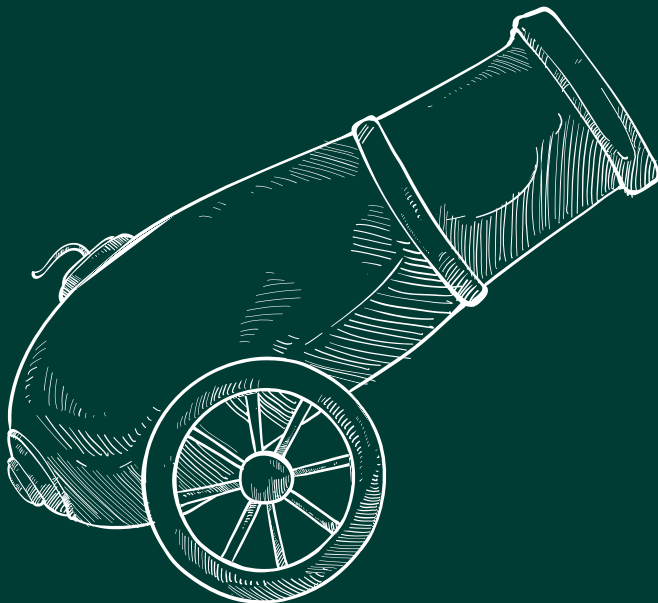




YOUTH ORGANISATION FOR RESEARCH AND JUSTICE ADVOCACY

POLICY BRIEF

UNMET NEEDS AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO REPARATION EFFORTS IN NIGERIA



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Table of CONTENTS

i	Abstract
01	The Civil War (1967-1970) - An Overview
03	Reparation in the Context of Nigeria Post-Civil War
06	The Inadequacy of Reparation Efforts
08	Unmet Needs in Post-Civil War Nigeria
09	Alternative Approaches to Reparation
12	Conclusion
13	References



Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) left a profound and enduring impact on the nation, particularly for survivors who continue to face unmet needs decades after the conflict ended. Despite government's post-conflict initiatives such as the "Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation" (3Rs) program, these efforts have been criticized as superficial and insufficient in addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological legacies of the war. Key policies, including the "twenty pounds flat fee" currency exchange and the "abandoned property" decree, further entrenched marginalization, particularly for Igbo communities and other minority groups in the East.

This policy brief explores the inadequacies of existing reparation efforts, emphasizing the ongoing economic disenfranchisement, psychological trauma, and cultural exclusion faced by war survivors. It highlights the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to reparations that goes beyond financial compensation, to addressing broader socio-economic disparities, mental health support, and cultural reconciliation. Drawing from global best practices such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Rwanda's Gacaca courts, the brief proposes alternative strategies including community-based restorative justice, economic empowerment programs, and the institutionalization of reparative frameworks through legal reforms.

The analysis underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing these unmet needs as a pathway to fostering national unity, healing, and sustainable peace. By adopting these comprehensive approaches, Nigeria can begin to bridge the gap between its post-war policies and the lived realities of its citizens, ensuring that the tragic lessons of the Civil War inform a more equitable and inclusive future.

The Civil War (1967 - 1970) - An Overview

The Nigerian Civil War, commonly referred to as the Biafran War, which took place from 1967 to 1970, left deep and lasting scars on the nation. The conflict, ignited by entrenched ethnic, political, and economic tensions, resulted in the tragic loss of millions of lives, widespread displacement, and significant destruction of property. More than five decades since the end of the war, these wounds remain largely unhealed.



Map of the de-facto republic of Biafra [1]

The Nigerian Civil War began on January 15, 1966, with a military coup. A group of military officers, mostly of Igbo ethnicity, deposed Nigeria's first democratic government, citing grievances such as widespread corruption among public officials, the government's failure to ensure equitable distribution of economic resources, and perceived attempts by northern elites to cement the Northern Region's political dominance over the rest of the federation.[2] The coup was swift and brutal,

culminating in the killing of major political and military officials in a single day. The bulk of those killed were northern politicians, including the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and the Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, together with their families. Additionally, the coup plotters eliminated the highest-ranking northern military officers and the Premier of the Western Region, who belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group. After executing the coup, the plotters handed power over to General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, the Commander of the Nigerian Army, who was also Igbo.

The dominance of Igbo officers in the coup, combined with the assassination of key northern politicians and the subsequent transfer of power to an Igbo General, fuelled northerners' suspicions that the coup was a deliberate attempt to eliminate their leaders and consolidate Igbo dominance over the country.[3] These concerns were heightened when General Ironsi neglected to pursue the coup plotters and instead suggested a unitary form of governance to replace the federal parliamentary structure. This decision was seen as an effort to centralise power, an idea that Igbo leaders fought for during independence to counteract northern control.[4]

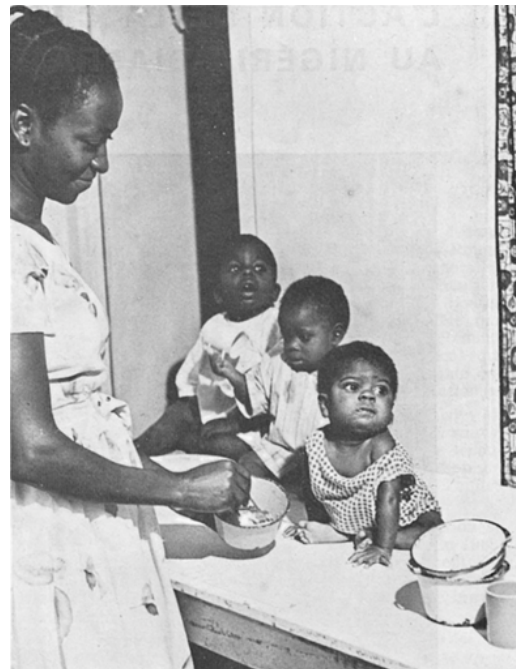
In reaction to the perceived danger, a group of northern officers staged a counter coup in July 1966. This coup was considerably bloodier than the previous, as several high-ranking Igbo officers were killed, including General Ironsi himself. The counter coup resulted in the installation of Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon, a

- [1] [Wikimedia Commons: Biafra independent state map.](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Biafra_independent_state_map-en.svg) Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Biafra_independent_state_map-en.svg (Accessed: 14 July 2024).
- [2] Ademoyega, A. (1981) *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*. London: Evans Brothers.
- [3] Madiebo, A. A. (1980) *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- [4] Kobo, O. M. (2020) "‘No Victor and No Vanquished’ - Fifty Years after the Biafran War", *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*. Available at: <https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/nigerian-civil-war-biafra-anniversary> (Accessed: 27 August 2024).



Christian from the Middle Belt area, as the new head of state. Gowon was first considered as a possible unifier capable of bridging the country's ethnic differences. However, his failure to prevent the slaughter of Igbos in the north exacerbated ethnic tensions, generating rage and resentment among Igbo leaders.

The escalating violence and persecution of the Igbo people culminated in the secession of the Igbo-majority Eastern Region from the Nigerian federation in 1967. Led by Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the region declared itself the Independent Republic of Biafra. Ojukwu, who had served as the military governor of Eastern Nigeria during Ironsi's regime, quickly moved to establish the infrastructure of a sovereign nation, including minting its own currency and seeking diplomatic recognition from foreign nations.



French aid worker feeds Biafran Children (1968) [6]



New Nigerian newspaper reporting the end of the war (January 1970) [5]

In response, desperate to prevent the disintegration of the country, the Nigerian Federal Government declared war on Biafra.[7] By mid-1967, Nigeria had plunged into a full-scale civil war between Biafra and the Federal Government. The Federal Government, leveraging its superior air power and larger army, swiftly captured key strategic assets, including the oil-rich regions in the east, which were critical to Biafra's economy, as well as the major port city of Port Harcourt.[8] The fall of Port Harcourt was catastrophic for Biafra since it allowed the Federal Government to impose a blockade, preventing the transfer of military supplies to Biafran troops. Tragically, the blockage also limited the movement of food and medication, resulting in a humanitarian disaster. The subsequent starvation killed nearly a million Biafran inhabitants, the most of whom were women and children.

[5] Wikipedia, End of the Nigerian civil war with Biafra. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ASC_Leiden_-_Rietveld_Collection_-_Nigeria_1970_-_1973_-_01_-_093_New_Nigerian_newspaper_page_7_January_1970._End_of_the_Nigerian_civil_war_with_Biafra.jpg (Accessed: 27 August 2024).

[6] Gallica, Archives from Nigeria: 1970-1973. Available at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9746778v/f29.item> (Accessed: 27 August 2024).

[7] Clayton, A. (1981) Review of My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970 by O. Obasanjo, African Affairs, 80(320), pp. 423-425. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/721674> (Accessed: 27 August 2024).

[8] Obasanjo, O. (1980) My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970. Ibadan: Heinemann.



The Nigerian Civil War came to an end on January 15, 1970, when Biafran leadership, overwhelmed by the Federal Government's overwhelming military force and the humanitarian calamity confronting its people, formally surrendered. The war left significant scars on the nation, the effects of which continue to resonate in Nigeria's social, political, and economic fabric today.

Reparation in the Context of Nigeria Post-Civil War

Following the war's conclusion, the Nigerian government implemented the strategy of "Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation" (the 3Rs).[9] This project was meant to redress the destruction caused by the conflict, while also healing the country's deep divisions. Central to this approach was the declaration of "No Victor, No Vanquished,"[10] a statement aimed to promote national reconciliation and reintegrate the Biafran area into the larger Nigerian state. However, despite the good intentions underlying these announcements, the 3Rs approach has been severely criticised for being superficial and ineffectual. The fundamental causes of ethnic division and regional inequality, which fuelled the conflict, have persisted long after the war has ended.[11]

The Nigerian government's efforts towards post-war reparations were minimal and often overshadowed by policies that exacerbated the very divisions they were meant to heal. For example, while the "No Victor, No Vanquished" policy was intended to promote unity, other policies, such as the "abandoned property"[12] policy, were aggressively pursued, resulting in significant economic disenfranchisement, particularly for the Igbo people and other minority ethnic groups in the East. Scholars argue that these policies were not merely ineffective but were part of a deliberate strategy to weaken the relationship between the Igbo people and other ethnic groups, further entrenching the economic and social marginalization that had been a hallmark of the legacies of the conflict.[13]



War survivors seen returning after the conflict [14]

[9] Udejah, G. (2017) 'Failure of Gowon's Three Rs, Cause of Separatist Groups', The Guardian. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/politics/failure-of-gowons-three-rs-cause-of-separatist-groups/> (Accessed: 26 August 2024).

[10] Gowon, Y. (2014) Civil War: Why We Declared 'No Victor, No Vanquished'. Blueprint. <https://www.blueprint.ng/civil-war-why-we-declared-no-victor-no-vanquished-gowon/> (accessed: 26 August 2024)

[11] Uphoff, N. T., & Ottemoeller, H. (1970) 'After the Nigerian Civil War: With Malice toward Whom?', Africa Today, 17(2), pp. 1-4. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4185069> (Accessed: 26 August 2024).

[12] The phrase "abandoned property" describes assets that were purchased by non-natives in different Nigerian states prior to the Nigerian Civil War and that were abandoned when their owners fled to their home countries as a result of the fighting. This phrase was formally used by the Nigerian government to refer to properties left by Nigerians who fled their homes and returned to their home states during the conflict. This specifically refers to properties, grounds, structures, and lands that belonged to Igbos who lived outside of their native states before the conflict. These properties were turned over to the Abandoned Property (Custody and Management) Authority when they left. The Abandoned Properties Decree No. 90 of 1990, which is now codified as the Abandoned Properties Act, Cap 1 Laws of the Federation, 1990, and the Abandoned Property (Custody and Management) Edict No. 8 of 1969 (Laws of Rivers State) are the legal frameworks that regulate these properties. For further reading, "A Review of the Abandoned Property Saga and the Constitutional Right to Own Property," available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333339692> (Accessed: 20 June 2024).

[13] Obi-Ani, P. (2009) Post-Civil War Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igbo Land, 1970-1983. Nsukka: Great AP Publishers Ltd.

[14] Ndi Igbo Worldwide, Life After Civil War: Photos. Available at: <https://ndiigboworldwide.com/life-after-civil-war-photos/> (Accessed: 10 September 2024).



One of the most glaring examples of economic discrimination in the post-war period was the "twenty pounds flat fee" refund policy.[15] Regardless of the amount of money a Biafran citizen had in the bank before the war, they were only allowed to exchange their old currency for a flat rate of twenty pounds.[16] This approach has been suggested to be an intentional effort to keep the Igbo people economically subjugated,[17] preventing them from recovering from the severe financial losses they sustained during the conflict. It served as a stark reminder that, despite the rhetoric of reconciliation, the reality for many in the Eastern region was one of continued economic repression and systemic inequality.[18]

The post-war reconciliation efforts also suffered a significant setback with the enactment of the Public Officers (Special Provisions) Decree No. 46 of 1970. This decree barred senior Igbo civil servants and public corporation personnel from rejoining their positions, citing their alleged complicity in supporting Biafra's war efforts. As a result, several high-ranking Igbo public workers were either removed or forced to resign from the military forces, prisons, and police. This conclusion contrasted sharply with the pledges of reintegration, exposing the government's underlying purpose to reward ethnic communities that stayed loyal to the federation throughout Biafra's secession, rather than those seen to have fought the state. [19] The situation was

considerably worse for Igbo officers in the military. They were subjected to military tribunals, where some were dismissed without benefits for their involvement in the secession, while others were discharged with full benefits. A handful of officers were imprisoned, and those who were reabsorbed faced up to four years of probation without advancement, aggravating feelings of betrayal and widening national differences.[20]

These issues, among many others, have generated a continuous and rising need for attention to be given to the marginalised groups who have suffered the brunt of the Nigerian Civil War's long-term consequences. Despite the fact that the conflict has been over for more than five decades, the scars caused during this time are still deeply etched in the nation's fabric, especially among the Igbo and other minority groups in the Eastern area. The people of Igboland's discontent with Nigeria's administration has reignited calls for self-determination and independence. The economic, social, and political marginalisation that these communities continue to face emphasises the critical need for a thorough and serious approach to reparations.

The inadequacies and, at times, the outright neglect of the post-war policies, such as the "Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation" (3Rs) initiative, have left many of these groups feeling abandoned by the very state

[15] Nwabueze, B. O. (1985) 'The Igbos in the Context of Modern Politics and Government in Nigeria: A Call for Self-Examination and Self-Correction', presentation at the Ahiajoku Lecture Series, Owerri, Imo State. Also see Obi-Ani, P. (1998) Post-Civil War Social and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland: 1970–1983. Enugu: Milkon Press.

[16] Achebe, C. (2012) *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Press. Reviewed by Saro-Wiwa, N. (2012) in *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/oct/05/chinua-achebe-there-was-a-country-review> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

[17] Opinion: The Nigerian twenty pounds policy of the seventies—Implementation. *The Will News*. Available at: https://thewillnews.com/opinion-the-nigerian-twenty-pounds-policy-of-the-seventies-implementation/#google_vignette (Accessed: 16 June 2024)

[18] Aduba, B. O. (2017) 'The Nigerian Twenty Pounds Policy of the Seventies' Implementation', *The Will*. Available at: <https://thewillnigeria.com/news/opinion-the-nigerian-twenty-pounds-policy-of-the-seventies-implementation/> (Accessed: 16 June 2024).

[19] Eliagwu, I. J. (1986) *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier Statesman*. Ibadan: West Books Limited.

[20] *Lagos Daily Times* (1971) 'Armed Force Men Lose Their Jobs', *Daily Times*, 11 November 1971, cited in Obi-Ani, P. (1998) Post-Civil War Social and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland: 1970–1983. Enugu: Milkon Press, p. 476.



that promised to heal the divisions caused by the war. The adoption of discriminatory economic measures, such as the twenty-pound return and the Indigenisation Decree,[21] as well as the manipulation of census data,[22] have further exacerbated the feeling of unfairness and exclusion. These policies have not only hindered war-affected areas' economic rehabilitation, but have also created a cycle of marginalisation that prevents them from fully integrating into the nation's socioeconomic fabric.

Given this backdrop, calls for reparations are not merely about seeking pecuniary compensation; they represent a broader demand for recognition, justice, and reconciliation. Reparations are essential to address the historical wrongs that have kept these communities on the margins and to begin the process of rebuilding trust between the state and its citizens. They are a necessary step towards creating national unity and ensuring that the tragic events of the past do not occur again. Addressing the unmet needs through a well-considered reparation framework is crucial to healing the nation's wounds and laying the groundwork for a more equitable and inclusive future.

The failure to adequately address the legacies of the civil war through substantial reparations has exacerbated ongoing ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and political instability in Nigeria.

Reflecting on the conflict, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, stated, *"Biafra was, despite propaganda and the falsification of history, a reflex for self-protection and self-preservation because we were forced. I have no apologies to make. I firmly believe I did my best to protect a people threatened with genocide. I did my utmost capability and could not have done any differently on the basis of the prevailing circumstances at the time."*[23] This perspective underscores the deep-rooted grievances that remain unresolved.

Reparations, in all of its forms, are an important component of transitional justice because they serve to recognise victims' suffering, encourage reconciliation, and prevent conflict from recurring. In the aftermath of Nigeria's civil war, reparations are critical for restoring confidence amongst ethnic groups and establishing national cohesion. The lack of comprehensive reparation efforts has left many needs unmet, exacerbating sentiments of unfairness and marginalisation, especially among the Igbo people. This essay investigates the inadequacies in Nigeria's restitution efforts and recommends alternative alternatives that might more effectively address the conflict's lasting impacts, adding to the country's long-term peace and security.

[21] The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, often known as the Indigenisation Decree, was another postwar program that substantially marginalised the Igbo people. At a period when the Igbo were economically fragile and recuperating from the civil war, the strategy permitted other ethnic groups to purchase shares in Nigerian government-appropriated blue-chip enterprises. This prevented the Igbo from new economic prospects, exacerbating existing economic imbalances caused by the war. Obi-Ani, P. (2009) Post-Civil War Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igbo Land, 1970-1983. Nsukka: Great AP Publishers Ltd.

[22] At the time, the alleged manipulation of population census results exacerbated divides throughout the country. Historically, Nigerian censuses have been accused of manipulation, including the 1973 census, which was allegedly manipulated to increase population counts in some regions, resulting in a demographic advantage. This manipulation had a significant impact on state and municipal government formation, as well as federal revenue allocation. Metz, H. C. (1991) Nigeria: A Country Study: The Society and Its Environment: Census. Library of Congress. Available at: <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/> (Accessed: 20 August 2024).

[23] Ojukwu, E. O. (1989) Because I Am Involved. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p. 176.



The Inadequacy of Reparation Efforts

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) defines reparations in transitional justice processes as “effective and adequate financial as well as non-financial redress or restitution for violations or losses suffered.”[24] Reparations, as outlined in the AUTJP, can take various forms. Material reparations address tangible losses by restoring access or title to lost property, rebuilding properties destroyed by violence, and providing jobs, pensions, or monetary compensation. Healing is essential to truth and reconciliation efforts, supporting individuals and communities in their physical and psychological recovery from the impacts of violence. Rehabilitation includes essential services like medical and psychosocial support, as well as specialized assistance for vulnerable groups especially women and children. Collective reparations focus on community-level restoration, such as returning communal lands, rebuilding health, education, and security infrastructure, and enhancing livelihood systems, especially for children and youth. Lastly, Moral reparations involve non-material actions, including revealing the facts of mistreatment, public acknowledgment and apologies, identifying and exhuming remains, and providing support for burial and memorialization ceremonies.

Reparation attempts by the Nigerian government to address the aftermath of the Civil War, have been criticized as superficial and largely inadequate.[25] Scholars have contended that while the post-civil war reconstruction programs were well-intentioned and commendable, their implementation was lackluster and, in some instances, appeared designed to further disempower and marginalize the Igbo people. These efforts fell short of the expectations for



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African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP)

reintegrating the Igbo into Nigeria's political and economic mainstream.[26] In the absence of sustained government support, communities were forced to use self-help measures to rehabilitate themselves. When displaced people returned home after the war, they rebuilt their houses and infrastructure on their own initiative. When humanitarian aid dwindled, these communities were forced to depend on their own socioeconomic resources, mobilising collective efforts to repair and reconstruct their homes.

At the end of the Nigerian Civil War in January 1970, the people's most urgent needs were food, medicine, and shelter. Recognising the gravity of the situation, the Governor of the Midwest State, Col. Ogbemudia, admitted that the state's

[24] African Union (2024) African Union Transitional Justice Policy. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36541-doc-au_tj_policy_eng_web.pdf (Accessed: 30 August 2024).

[25] Ojukwu, E. O. (1989) *Because I Am Involved*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p. 176.

[26] As an illustration of the Nigerian government's unsuccessful attempts, in 2017 the government agreed to resolve a class-action lawsuit brought by the communities harmed by the Biafra War by paying ₦88 billion in compensation to the victims. This settlement, which included ₦50 billion for direct compensation for victims and ₦38 billion for the removal of unexploded ordnance, was intended to remedy the damages caused by landmines and explosives left over from the battle. However, some contend that because the program ignored the wider financial and psychological effects of the war on impacted communities, it fell short of offering full reparations. The efficacy of the procedure was further undermined by reports that it lacked openness. Vanguard Nigeria (2017) 'FG to Pay N88bn Compensation to Victims of Biafra War', Vanguard. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/10/fg-pay-n88bn-compensation-victims-biafra-war/> (Accessed: 30 August 2024).



reconstruction demands greatly surpassed its financial capabilities. He encouraged individuals to take the lead in their own recovery endeavours. [27] During the rebuilding phase, the Federal and Midwest State governments underperformed in reconstructing destroyed infrastructure in Western Igboland, leaving a huge gap. This shortage pushed the surrounding communities to embark on major self-driven rebuilding activities.[28]



Biafran children ravaged by hunger during the war [29]

The majority of these efforts, which aimed to reconstruct education, healthcare, electricity, water supply, and other critical infrastructure, were led by local unions, social clubs, women's organisations, and age-grade groups.[30] These organizations became crucial agents of

development, working tirelessly to rebuild their war-torn communities and repair the social infrastructure destroyed by the conflict.[31]

As part of the post-war rehabilitation project aimed at housing internally displaced persons (IDPs), providing shelter for the homeless, feeding the hungry, reabsorbing public servants, and fostering genuine national reconciliation, the Federal Ministry of Finance developed a blueprint outlining the guiding principles for Nigeria's rehabilitation and reconstruction program.[32] The blueprint emphasized several key tenets: caring for the surviving victims of past disturbances and military operations with utmost compassion; rehabilitating and faithfully employing all soldiers, regardless of which side they fought on, to prevent post-war unemployment; reasonably compensating those whose property was destroyed or damaged due to civil disturbances; resettling those who had fled from their homes or businesses and assisting them in making a new start; and reconstructing all roads, bridges, and public buildings destroyed during the conflict.

Another initiative of the Federal Government was the establishment of the National Rehabilitation Commission for Emergency Relief Operations and Post-War Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and

[27] Daniel, O., & Uchenna, A. (2020) 'Post-Nigerian Civil War Community Reconstruction Strategies in (Anioma) Western Igboland, 1970–1991', *Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 5(10), pp. 215–232.

[28] Daily Times (1970) 'End of the Nigerian Civil War', *Daily Times*, 6 August 1970.

[29] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2024) Opening Archives: 1966–1975. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/opening-archives-1966-1975> (Accessed: 15 September 2024).

[30] This sense of community went well beyond individual attempts to reconstruct homes; it included entire communities cooperating to create infrastructure that was advantageous to everybody. To address post-war issues by giving the municipality much-needed recreational facilities, the Asaba community, for example, banded together to build its Township Stadium. The state government subsequently took up this project and enlarged it into the current Stephen Keshi Stadium. By leading the construction of the town's post office, water supply, and electrical projects, the Okpanam Community Development Union also significantly contributed to the post-war rehabilitation. In a similar vein, the Ibusa community showed its commitment to community development and recovery by clearing the site for the town's General Hospital in addition to providing the property. Further reading: Okafor, O. (1978) *Community Mobilization and Development: The Asaba Development Association*. Benin City: Manla Enterprises Nigeria Ltd.

[31] Uchendu, E. (2007) *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

[32] Federal Ministry of Information (1968) *Blueprint for Post-War Reconstruction*. Lagos: Government Printer, pp. 4–5.



Reconciliation. The Commission was responsible with gathering and delivering humanitarian supplies from international organisations to villages ravaged by the violence. However, one important shortcoming in this project was the exclusion of specific portions of the region from its scope of operation. This exclusion caused an unequal allocation of relief efforts, leaving many impacted areas to confront the difficulties of recovery with little or no assistance. As a result, many communities were left to negotiate the intricate process of rebuilding almost completely on their own, deepening postwar imbalances and marginalising those who were already struggling.[33]

The most significant flaw in the post-war reparation efforts has been the absence of a broad and inclusive strategy.[34] Reparations, where they have been made, have often been limited to monetary compensation,[35] which, while important, does not address the full spectrum of needs arising from the war.[36] The loss of lives, the trauma experienced by survivors, the destruction of communities, and the economic marginalisation of certain groups have not been adequately addressed. Moreover, the process of identifying beneficiaries and disbursing reparations has been fraught with challenges.[37] Corruption, bureaucracy, and a lack of transparency have hampered these attempts, creating distrust among the affected populations.[38] Many war victims, especially those in rural and

marginalized communities, have not received any form of reparation,[39] further exacerbating their sense of injustice and exclusion.[40]

Unmet Needs in Post-Civil War Nigeria

The unmet needs of post-Civil War Nigeria, especially among Biafran survivors, need a multifaceted approach to restitution that goes beyond financial recompense. The scars of the Nigerian Civil War were deeply ingrained in communities, particularly among the most vulnerable groups: the elderly, women, and children who survived the harrowing effects of the conflict and have now been passed down as a generational injustice to succeeding populations from the region.[41] For any reparation program to be meaningful, it must adopt a holistic approach that recognizes these groups' unique needs and circumstances, incorporating community-based initiatives, mental health support, economic empowerment, and cultural reconciliation to address the war's enduring effects.

The unmet needs of Nigeria's post-Civil War era are varied and complex. One of the most critical areas of neglect is the lack of psychological support for war survivors. Many people continue to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health concerns that have gone unattended for decades. War survivors, particularly women and children who have faced the brunt of violence and

[33] Nwaokocha, O. A. (2020) 'Post-War Reintegration, Reconstruction and Reconciliation Among the Anioma People of Nigeria', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 42(1). Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/F7421051074> (Accessed: 26 August 2024).

[34] Obi-Ani, N. (2009) *Post-War Regeneration in Eastern Nigeria: Policies and Politics in the Integration of the Igbo in Nigeria, 1970-1980*. Nsukka: Great AP Publishers Ltd.

[35] Agbu, O. (2006) *West Africa's Trouble Spots and the Imperative for Peace-Building*. Oxford: African Books Collective.

[36] Anugwom, E. (2021) *The Struggles of Post-Independence Nigeria: A Historical Perspective*. Ibadan: Safari Books Ltd.

[37] Ikelegbe, A., & Garuba, D. (2010) *Militias, Rebels and Islamists: Human Insecurity and State Crises in Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

[38] Ahamefula, U. (2018) *Corruption and Bureaucracy in Nigeria: The Double-Edged Sword of Administrative Failure*. Abuja: Apex Books.

[39] Nwankwo, A. (1987) *Nigeria: The Stolen Billions*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.

[40] Uche, C. U. (2014) 'The Impact of the Nigerian Civil War on Nigeria's Financial System', *African Affairs*, 113(452), pp. 607–635.

[41] Harneit-Sievers, A., Ahazuem, J., & Emezue, S. (1998) *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.



relocation, are often forced to deal alone, with no institutional outlets for counselling or mental health treatment. For the elderly, the trauma of the conflict is exacerbated by socioeconomic issues, leaving them vulnerable and without proper assistance.

Beyond psychological wounds, the war left a legacy of socioeconomic disparity, notably in the southern area where the fighting was most violent. The conflict destroyed local infrastructure and drained resources, creating socioeconomic inequities that endure today, and this area is still struggling with underdevelopment some decades later. Despite efforts to rebuild, many communities remain marginalised, with limited access to jobs, healthcare, and education. The economic gap between the southeastern states and the rest of the nation remains, creating sentiments of isolation and dissatisfaction.

Cultural reconciliation is also necessary to resolve the long-standing concerns left by the Civil War. The violence harmed community cohesiveness and created a legacy of hostility among ethnic and regional groupings. Initiatives such as inter-community discussion, cultural exchange programs, and conflict resolution seminars may help to build mutual understanding and reconciliation. Reviving ancient customs and rites that emphasise reconciliation may also aid in the restoration of a shared cultural identity.

Additionally, there is a pressing need for historical recognition and education around the Nigerian Civil War. As one of the most sensitive and often avoided subjects in Nigeria's national discourse, the conflict remains a source of unresolved grievances, particularly for those communities directly affected. This lack of open dialogue and formal recognition around this traumatic period has perpetuated unresolved grievances and a feeling of marginalization and exclusion among survivors and their descendants. There is a critical need for Nigeria to acknowledge the full extent of the war's impact, not just in a symbolic sense but as a step toward national healing.

In sum, resolving Nigeria's unmet needs after the Civil War requires a comprehensive reparative strategy that takes into account economic, social, cultural, and historical factors. By focusing on long-term, community-centered solutions, Nigeria may get closer to healing the grave wounds created by the war and creating a future that recognises, learns from, and heals the past.

Alternative Approaches to Reparation

Given the limits of previous initiatives, it is necessary to investigate new ways to reparations that are more comprehensive, inclusive, and capable of meeting the different demands of war survivors and impacted communities. Traditional cash compensation, although necessary, is inadequate to repair the profound wounds caused by the war. Reparations should prioritise a multidimensional strategy that considers psychological, societal, and economic factors.

- **Community Based Restorative Justice Programs:** One of the most effective ways to address the unmet needs of post-war Nigeria is through community-based restorative justice mechanisms. Unlike punitive measures, restorative justice focusses on healing and reconciliation. These community-driven projects would complement state-led efforts by focussing on healing and reconciliation in war-torn areas. Restorative justice enables victims and offenders to engage in a process of dialogue, which often results in genuine recompense or symbolic gestures such as apologies and reparative services. Providing opportunities for war survivors, former combatants, and communities to participate in truth-telling and discourse promotes mutual understanding and long-term peace. Such efforts might involve the formation of truth commissions to chronicle survivors' stories and publicly recognise the conflict's consequences. Community-led reconciliation efforts that engage local leaders and stakeholders would also encourage broader participation and acceptance.



The experience of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) offers a useful model. The TRC's focus on dialogue, confessions, and forgiveness led to a level of healing and national reconciliation in the post-apartheid period, even if its outcomes were not generally accepted.[42] Another example is Rwanda's Gacaca courts, which used traditional legal systems to foster reconciliation after the 1994 genocide. These community-led efforts supported the reintegration of abusers while emphasising communal healing.[43]

In Nigeria, adopting community-based justice might be especially beneficial in the Southeast, where marginalised Biafran groups have long been excluded from state-led initiatives. This method might provide a more personalised kind of justice by allowing people to express their concerns and seek remedy via non-judicial ways, so building communal cohesiveness.

Community-driven programs that prioritise socioeconomic rehabilitation above direct monetary compensation have the potential to address basic structural disparities. This might involve repairing local infrastructure, investing in vocational training centres, implementing affirmative action measures for under-represented groups, such as women in politics, and constructing hospital and educational facilities in afflicted communities. Prioritising programs that benefit all war-affected communities restores dignity, strengthens local economies, and provides more sustainable lives.

- **Economic Empowerment Programs:** A second key component of alternative reparations is the establishment of targeted economic empowerment initiatives for the war-affected people, especially in the Southeast. The conflict decimated the local economy, and decades later, economic disparities remain a major concern. Reparations should not only give cash compensation, but also promote long-term economic growth via development projects. Individuals in war-affected communities might benefit considerably from initiatives like as vocational training, microfinance programs, and small business support.

Reparations strategies must be integrated into wider national development objectives, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, Goal 8 of the SDGs focusses on "Decent Work and Economic Growth," which is consistent with the aims of economic reparations. By prioritizing education, skills training, and infrastructure development, reparations can support long-term economic resilience, offering a pathway out of poverty for war survivors.[44]

Additionally, targeted investment in infrastructure in the Southeast, including schools, hospitals, and transportation systems, would help bridge the economic gap between regions. Economic empowerment as a reparation mechanism can promote self-sufficiency and equip conflict survivors with the resources they need to restore their lives.

[42] Lambourne, W. (2001) 'Justice and Reconciliation: Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Cambodia and Rwanda', in Abu-Nimer, M. (ed.) *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 311–330.

[43] United Nations (2014) Rwanda: Backgrounder on Justice. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/assets/pdf/Backgrounder%20Justice%202014.pdf> (Accessed: 8 November 2024).

[44] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015) Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: www.undp.org (Accessed: 17 December 2024).



- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support:** Addressing mental health and psychosocial support is a vital yet often overlooked aspect of post-conflict reparations, particularly in the context of the Nigerian Civil War. The psychological toll of the war is still felt strongly among survivors, particularly vulnerable groups like as women, children, and the elderly. Many people, including children of former victims, continue to struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), vicarious trauma, anxiety, and other trauma-related mental health issues, with little access to adequate treatment. In several instances, this trauma has been handed down several generations since the war.

To properly address this issue, a comprehensive mental health assistance strategy must be prioritised. This involves creating accessible mental health facilities such as counselling centres, trauma support groups, and psychiatric treatment that is customised to war survivors' specific experiences. Integrating these services into existing public healthcare infrastructure enhances their sustainability and reach.

Drawing from successful models like Liberia's community-based mental health programs, implemented by organizations such as the Carter Center,[45] Nigeria can develop initiatives that combine formal mental health services with culturally relevant and traditional healing practices. Training local healthcare providers in trauma-informed care particularly those acquainted with community traditions, may assist to bridge the gap between contemporary psychiatric procedures and traditional methods of healing.

This multifaceted approach not only improves

individual healing and well-being, but it also strengthens community resilience. By addressing intergenerational trauma and providing pathways for emotional recovery, mental health care creates a foundation for real reparations and long-term social repair.

- **Cultural and Historical Recognition:** Reparations must involve a strong commitment to cultural and historical justice, since they are critical for true healing and long-term reconciliation. Creating venues for memory and education regarding the Nigerian Civil War is critical for promoting communal reflection and learning. Museums, monuments, and educational initiatives may help to preserve the war's historical truths while also encouraging national discourse, unity, and reconciliation.

Incorporating the Nigerian Civil War into the national school curriculum is an important step towards ensuring that future generations comprehend its historical context and relevance. Nigeria may encourage peacebuilding and reconciliation by incorporating wartime learning into schools, while also preserving the war's imprint on national consciousness. Countries such as Germany give valuable models, having memorialised the Holocaust with public monuments, museums, and rigorous educational programs that emphasise the significance of reflection, accountability, and reconciliation.[46]

Additionally, public memory initiatives should go beyond static representations of the past. Efforts to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and cultural exchange programs can play a pivotal role in addressing the lingering divides caused by the war. Such initiatives may provide forums

[45] The Carter Center (2013) 'Liberia Mental Health Initiative'. Available at: https://www.cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/index.html (Accessed: 17 December 2024).

[46] Assmann, A. (2010) 'Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past', *Performance Research*, 15(5), pp. 8–17.



for meaningful interaction amongst ethnic groups, notably the Biafran population and other conflict-affected communities, building mutual understanding, empathy, and a shared national identity.

By prioritizing cultural reconciliation and preserving public memory, Nigeria can create spaces for healing while building a national ethos rooted in unity, historical awareness, and the collective pursuit of peace.

- **Legal and Institutional Reforms:** To ensure meaningful reparations for victims of the Nigerian Civil War, it is essential to establish robust legal frameworks and transparent governance structures. Currently, Nigeria lacks a comprehensive legal mechanism that addresses the war's enduring legacy, leaving reparation claims insufficiently defined and poorly enforced. A structured, legally binding approach is critical to ensure accountability, equitable resource distribution, and justice for survivors.

The creation of an independent commission for reparations would be a significant step forward. Such a body would not only oversee the transparent implementation of reparation programs but also serve as a platform for victims to voice grievances and seek justice. By institutionalizing reparative justice, this commission could strengthen legal protections, particularly in cases of state violence, and provide a clear pathway for addressing historical injustices.

Nigeria can draw valuable lessons from countries like South Africa, where the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act provided the legal foundation for

reparations to victims of apartheid.[47] Adopting a similar approach through a dedicated Reparations Act or integrating reparative measures into Nigeria's broader transitional justice policies would move reparations beyond symbolic gestures, making them legally enforceable obligations.

Implementing these legislative reforms will not only leave a legacy of accountability, but also provide an organised, transparent, and inclusive framework for addressing the grievances of Biafran war survivors. By incorporating reparative justice into Nigeria's legal and governance structures, the country may take a significant step towards national reconciliation and long-term rebuilding.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Civil War no doubt left deep scars on the country's social, economic, and psychological fabric. While the war officially ended in 1970, many communities are still impacted by its legacy, especially those in southeast Nigeria. The post-Civil War era is still marked by unmet need and unfulfilled demands. The entire range of damage brought about by the conflict has not been adequately addressed by the current reparations initiatives. It is crucial to investigate other strategies that are more comprehensive, inclusive, and able to promote genuine healing and reconciliation as the nation progresses. Nigeria may start addressing the core causes that have persisted after the conclusion of the Civil War and endeavour to create a more equitable and cohesive country by adopting restorative justice, community-based rehabilitation, mental health support, cultural acknowledgement, and legislative changes.

[47] Chapman, A. & Van der Merwe, H. (2008) Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC Deliver?. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.



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YORJA
YOUTH ORGANIZATION FOR RESEARCH & JUSTICE ADVOCACY

ABOUT YORJA

The African Union, with support from the U.S. Missions to the African Union, held the third edition of the African Youth for Transitional Training (AY4TJ) in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, from November 2 to 4, 2022. Fifty successful applicants attended the three-day training on the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP).

The Youths were trained on critical aspects of the Policy, and inducted into the already established continental youth platform on transitional justice for experience-sharing, mentorship, and research on post-conflict reconstruction processes.

All this in a bid to strengthen youth participation in ongoing transitional justice

programmes across various AU member states, to operationalize the African Union's Youth for Transitional Justice in Africa (AU-YTJ), and to build a platform that would promote the implementation of transitional justice processes to conflict resolution.

The Youth Organization for Research and Justice Advocacy (YORJA) is founded by the participants of the training in Malabo. Its goal is to lead the implementation of the AUTJP, encourage active youth participation in TJ processes, and to provide a platform through which youths can interrogate and be a part of the policy making process.

YORJA is a registered Trust under the laws of the Republic of Kenya.

The Youth Organization for Research and Justice Advocacy is a brainchild of the participants of the training in Malabo.



Participants at the 3rd AY4TJ Training, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea



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