

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE IN A CHALLENGING ECONOMY: FOCUS ON UMU-OWELLE CLAN, 1966-1975.

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Abstract

The Nigeria-Biafra war, which started on July 6, 1967 and ended on January 15, 1970 posed tremendous challenge to Umu-owelle women. The challenges ranged from targeted attacks, displacements, rape, starvation to abduction. The war did not only distort agriculture, local crafts production and trade which formed the basis of Umu-owelle economy, it also placed the onus of production on women who, before the war played a second fiddle in the production chain. The women were therefore faced with the challenges of reviving the economy so as to generate more resources to cushion the effects of the war. In response to these challenges, they attended to their farm early in the morning and in the evening, and moved in groups to avoid rape and abduction by the troops. Through their efforts, the economy was revived to ensure food security not only to their immediate family but to the Umu-owelle society at large. However, how the war affected Umu-owelle women and agricultural practice during the war and after, and how they tried to solve and survive the challenging situation has not been documented. The study therefore sought to unravel the activities of Umu-owelle women as it pertains to wars and economic insolvency. To this end, the Challenge and Response theory were employed. The research relies mainly on primary sources and also secondary sources of data. Available data will be analyzed using qualitative research methodology. The work covers the four communities that make up Umu-owelle, which include Nimo, Abagana, Abba and Eziowelle and the study starts from 1966 and terminates in 1975. The study recommends for lessons to be drawn from Umu-owelle women's efforts in reviving the war-time economy, especially for the sake of good gender relations and, ultimately, gender equality.

Keywords: Food, Family, War, Security,

Introduction

The attainment of political Independence by Nigeria in 1960 was greeted with great optimism. However, the euphoria was soon dampened by series of crisis which led to a civil war seven years later.¹ The burning issues that brought about the crisis that eventually led to the civil war are not farfetched. The first coup of 15th January, 1966 and the counter coup of 29th July of the same year are pointers to the fact that the civil war and the attendant holocaust were inevitable.² This was particularly so as neither the Federal Government on the Nigerian side headed by Colonel Yakubu Gowon nor the Biafra side led by Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was prepared to concede.³

An era of lawlessness and massacre of people especially the Igbo ethnic group ensued in many parts of the country; particularly in the Northern region.³ The Igbo in a bid to run for safety, then drifted eastwards to their kith and kin.⁴ The internally displaced persons' problem went beyond imaginable dimensions; and this culminated into bitterness, hatred for the Nigerian state and a resolve by the Easterners to establish a separate state called Biafra.⁵ The conflict ended with grave consequences for the people of Nigeria especially the Biafran side. Umu-owelle began to feel the impact upon the mass return of their people from North.

Umu-Owelle women were not left out of it as the women bore the brunt of the war of which they responded to. The war exacerbated Umu-Owelle women's insecurities, vulnerabilities and pauperisation and exposed them, especially as refugees, farmers, frontline traders, sex workers, or beggars, to new forms of violence.⁶ They were faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter.

The challenges of ensuring the food security for their families and households encouraged the women to take certain actions for their survival. Women's responses to the war were not only varied but also critical in determining their fate. Some women became displaced in internally displaced persons' camps while others tried to earn a living through agriculture, either eking out a

marginal existence or even prospering.⁷ Umu-Owelle women were thus simultaneously victims of war, succumbing to their fate, and active agents of change, transforming their situation and society.

A Geographical Description of Umu-Owelle

The geographical location of Umu-Owelle is important in the understanding of the present analysis. Indeed, as Professor J.C Anene has pointed out, “the historical experiences of a community is generally written in its geographical features”.⁸ Umu-Owelle is comprised of four communities namely Nimo, Abagana, Abba and Eziowelle. Nimo, Abagana and Abba are located in the western part of Njikoka Local Government Area while Eziowelle is located in Idemilli North Local Government area all in Anambra State. Umu-Owelle shares boundaries with Nawgu and Enugu Agidi on the North, Abatete and Oraukwu on the South. It shares boundaries with Enugu ukwu, Adazi and Neni on the Eastern side and it is bordered on the Western side by Umunachi and Alo. The climate is fairly hot, the hottest period being February and March while the coldest is in raining months of June, July and September. There is usually a little break towards the end of July or the beginning of August. The soil of Umu-Owelle is of fair fertility because of overuse and lack of proper manuring. Emeka Otuabah observed that fair soil fertility is very much pronounced as can be witnessed today in different parts of slopes in Umu-Owelle.⁹

Theoretical Guide

It has become imperative to situate historical research on relevant social theories for a clearer understanding of the phenomenon and dynamics of the events. On this note, theoretical framework provides a particular perspective or lens, through which a topic is examined. This study is anchored on the “Challenge and Response Theory” by Arnold Toynbee. In his view, if any society is to develop into ‘civilization’, it must be challenged. He suggests that challenges are posed by external factors and each successful response strengthens the civilization.¹⁰ By ‘challenge’ Toynbee meant some factors that posed a threat to the ways in which a group of people had made their livelihood

in the past. 'Response' is the action taken by the same group of people to cope with the new situation. Response require vision, leadership and action to overcome the threat and create a basis for survival and hopefully, prosperity.¹¹

Toynbee's 'challenge and response' theory is useful in understanding the crisis and challenges experienced by Umu-Owelle women during the Nigeria-Biafra war and the immediate post-war period. The reaction of Umu-Owelle women demonstrates Toynbee's idea of response to challenge. The commencement of hostilities steered women in the economic activities to sustain their respective families. In the absence of their husbands who were at the war front or in the bushes to avoid conscription, the Umu-Owelle women were left with the burdensome responsibility of taking care of the home especially catering for the children and the elderly. The crisis led to some of the women being displaced. Some of them took refuge with friends and relations in other communities that had not been invaded by the federal troops. Some women took refuge in the bush and in the farm areas.

Both the displaced women and those who were not displaced later engaged in farming although, air raids, fear of molestation, and military ruthlessness prevented the women from going to their farms. It was the grim determination of Umu-Owelle women to survive and ensure food security for their families especially in the absence of the breadwinners that many Umu-Owelle women took part in farming. Through their intensified efforts at farming, they saved the Biafran economy from total collapse. Farming thus became one of the sources of food for the starving population.

Overview of Women and Agriculture before 1966

Pre-Colonial Agriculture

women played not just complementary but indeed very outstanding roles in the success of the traditional Umu-Owelle economy since the pre-colonial period. Under the production sector of the economy, agriculture featured as the mainstay of the economy. Umu-Owelle women had varied

and dynamic economic pursuits prior to British intervention. As in other Igbo communities, agriculture was the bedrock in which the community's economic activity was set. Afigbo alludes to this, according to him, "in pre-colonial Igbo society agriculture was the most important economic activity with regard both to the number of people that engaged in it either on full or part-time basis and to the prestige attached to it."¹² V.C Uchendu has aptly described farming as the Igbo staff of life.¹³ Agriculture was the mainstay of Umu-Owelle economy at the time of discourse. The success of agriculture at the time hinged on the involvement of the entire household in the task. Afigbo observed that one result of this Igbo attitude to agriculture was that every Igbo man and woman was a farmer.¹⁴ Men, women and children were involved in agriculture. The family provided the basic unit of labour for agriculture.¹⁵ The young and the old, male and female, were all engrossed in farm work; thus the western concept of a full-time house-wife devoted to house care was unknown.¹⁶ Thus it was virtually impossible for a man to become a celebrated wealthy farmer without the complementary role of his wife or wives in farming activities, and for the long term motive of procreating children that would provide the needed agricultural labour in the nearest future.

A wide range of tubers were cultivated by Umu-Owelle farmers in the pre-colonial period. These included yam, cocoyam, cassava and other crops such as maize, three-leaved yam (*ona*) and vegetable crop of wide varieties. Cocoyam and the rest were termed women crops. The women planted different species of cocoyam. For instance, while Abba women cultivated *ede opoto* and *ede buchi*, *ede eko* and *ede ocha* were cultivated by women in Nimo, Eziowelle and Abagana.¹⁷ Among these crops, yam was the only crop associated with men. Afigbo observes that, "Igbo society is patrilineal, at least for the most part. The relevance of this to our discussion is that yam, the most valued crop in Igbo land, is regarded as male, while cocoyam the next in importance, is considered to be female. This is most dramatically told in the legend on the origin of food crops."¹⁸

Thus in Umu-Owelle, while the men cultivated crops like yam, women grew crops like cocoyam, maize, cassava and vegetables. Onwuka Njoku also notes that “Other crops were regarded and, indeed, treated as inferior or women’s crops, and their cultivation was subjected to the rhythm of yam cultivation”.¹⁹ Nwando Achebe expatiates on the above assertions. According to her,

In the Igbo world, crops were of a gendered nature, and these encouraged categories of crops that were believed to be either male or female. Men principally farmed the male root crop yam, which was also considered to be the “King of crops” while women cultivated female crops like cocoyam, beans, vegetable and later cassava. These so-called female crops, incidentally, made up the staple diet and supported the subsistence need of families.²⁰

Umu-Owelle women planted subsidiary crops to yam such as *fiofio, okwuru, akidi, ogili, onugbu, egwusi, anyu, ukwa, jioko, unelu, arigbe, elimionu* and a host of other crops they required to ensure food security for their families at any given time, particularly during the farming period when the yam planting had been concluded and the farmer was practically left with little or no yams for the family. Some very hard-working and ambitious Umu-Owelle women equally owned their own yam farms. Widows were very prominent in this practice. For instance, Mary Mgbankwo Okafor Ichele from Umuokpalabo kindred and Mgborie Igboanugo from Nneri kindred all in Amabo village of Abba and Mgbafor Igbonekwu from Akpu village in Abagana, among others, owned yam barns during the period under study. In fact, from the oral interview gathered, it was claimed that Mgborie Igboanugo had yam barns measuring about 70 feet by 180 feet.²¹ The variety and size of crops available to the women determined the nature and character of the welfare of their families. By engaging in the production of a variety of crops, the women not only averted the incidence of over dependence on yam crop by family members, but equally ensured the availability of a well-balanced diet made up of tuber and vegetable crops rich in protein, vitamin and other nutrients, besides, it tended to enhance the economic capacity of the women. A woman producer of non-yam crops enjoyed the benefit of making bounteous harvest of some or particular crop at

regular intervals. This simply meant that her family enjoyed variety of food stuffs regularly and had enough of the surplus for sale to make money to run other affairs of the family.

As noted above, the basic unit of labour in Umu-Owelle as in other parts of Igboland was the family. Apart from this there were other sources of labour available to the women. For instance, there were co-operative labor force whereby labour could be provided by relatives of the women, friends and even members of the age grade. Examples of such women age grades includes Udoka age grades, Umu oyibo age grades, Umumma age grades, Echidime age grades and Irugo age grades. By the later part of the 19th century cum the early part of the 20th century migrant labours had commenced. Umu-Owelle women were part of this form of labour.²² A variety of duties were involved in agricultural tasks. These ranged from bush clearing, mound making, crop planting, weeding, yam staking and crop harvesting.

However, in Umu-Owelle, certain feasts had to be performed before embarking on the planting and harvesting of crops. In Nimo, the feast of *Udo Ora* signified the commencement of the planting season while *Ede Oye* marked the harvesting season. In Abagana the feast of *Eli Okochi* and *Alor Mmuo* marked the planting and harvesting seasons and in Abba and Eziowelle, the planting and harvesting season were marked with the feast of *Uto okochi* and *Ede Eko* respectively. The yams and other food crops were planted and harvested after the feast of *Udo Ora* and *Ede Oye* and *Eli Okochi* and *Alor Mmuo* respectively. Before these feasts, anybody found planting or harvesting his or her crops would be said to be committing an offence against the ancestors and gods.²³

Agriculture was practiced by Umu-Owelle women on subsistence basis and usually, the clearing of farm lands started around the months of November and December and continues to about the months of January and March known in Abba as *onwa ayana* period. During these periods, unwanted trees were cut down. The grasses were then set on fire when dry. As in every other field of human endeavor, there was division of labour. The men did the tedious aspects of the work in the farm like clearing of bushes, planting the yams, staking and harvesting them. Planting starts

with the onset of the first rainfall. The planting of yam starts in the month of April and May. Because of the rapidity of the growth of weeds, the farm was usually weeded two or three times by the women by the time the harvest was made sometimes between late July and August.²⁴ Onwuka Njoku described it thus “In most parts of the forest belt, women weeded the farms, usually not less than twice before the harvest.”²⁵ Afigbo also stated that “the men cut the sticks and tended the yam vines, while the women did the weeding and the planting of cassava.”²⁶

Weeding was among the most tasking forms of labour. Women made use of small hoes for this exercise. Weeding took place a number of times to reduce the chances of farm crops competing and clamoring for available soil nutrients with wild weeds or grasses in the farm land. Women in Okpaliko and Ubulu village in Eziowelle were renowned for farming. These villages were the most populous in the communities. The implements used by Umu-Owelle women included machet for clearing. There were three types of hoes used by the women; the long handle hoe with a narrow blade known as *ogu eji eti ubi* used for digging holes for planting, the short handle hoes called *obele ogu* used for bed making and for cultivating cassava and cocoyam and the much shorter hoe known and called by Eziowelle people as *Ike agwu agadi* used for weeding and tilling of farm land.²⁷ There was also a spade-like stick known as *Mbazu* used by the women for digging out cocoyam in the course of harvest. Closely related to *Mbazu* was *Obii* which was used for holes, and of course, baskets and *Ukpa* which were used by women for carrying harvested crops and food stuffs.²⁸

The prestige given to agriculture and the zeal to uphold the dignity of labour made the land to be very much sought after. Land was recognized as belonging to the people and each person had the right to use it to enable him make a living. Land in Umu-Owelle communities like in other Igbo areas east of the Niger was not owned by an individual but was collectively owned. Land was referred as the ancestors and therefore could not be treated with indemnity. According to P.A Talbolt, throughout the whole of southern Nigeria “Land” is in theory at communal and belong to

the people generally.²⁹ E.A Ayandele, concluded that there is no group that have ownership rights over land or what the people call *Ulo* and during the farming period, the first son of the family known as Okpara had the malleable rights to allocate the farmlands to members of the family. He is the successor, had the rights to farm on it but had no right to sell it without the knowledge and consent of other members of the family.³⁰ Women had no direct access to the land except through their husbands, while the widows got access to the land through their male children.³¹ However, in a situation where the land is not enough, the Umu-owelle men and women migrate to neighboring towns as migrant wage labourers. For instance, Abba women engaged in wage labour but this was not so common with the other communities. Abba women went to places such as Nteje, Ukwulu and Umunya. Umu-Owelle women conveyed harvested crops from the farmstead to the homestead where they were stored and preserved in the barn for the next planting season. It is necessary to mention here that although the women for some obvious reasons undertook the above agricultural duties, these tasks were never exclusive to them. Some men could also be involved in such duties.³²

Crop planting was another form of labour undertaken by the women. Apart from yam planting undertaken by men and sometimes assisted by their wife or wives, planting of other crops were mostly undertaken by the women folk. Apart from the yam crop which was harvested by men, Umu-Owelle women undertook the harvesting of other farm crops. These crops were stored at various corners within and outside the woman's hut, while the men harvested yams and stacked them in the yam barn. Also, in Umu-Owelle as in other areas of Igboland, by custom, the men owned most of the palm trees and it was the men who cut the fruits when they were ripe, the women plucked the fruits of the stalks, pounded these in the mortar and extracted the oil used for family consumption while the surplus was sold in the market to generate revenue. Women in Amabo village in Abba and Okpaliko and Ubulu village in Eziowelle were noted for palm oil production as a result of their vast land.³³

Animal husbandry was another aspect of agriculture Umu-Owelle women engaged in. Animals domesticated included dwarf humpless cows, goats, sheep, pigs, dogs and birds. Livestock constituted one of the major sources of protein for the people. They developed considerable skill in animal husbandry. The small poultry huts had wood ash dumped into it to provide warmth and sanitation for the birds. Goats were kept in one corner of the compound and fed with fodder. Livestock was maintained, apart from grazing on the scanty grass of the compounds, by fodder provided by the *ogbu* tree which has heavy moist foliage, and other forest foliage which were collected from the forest, the animals were taken to the forest to graze. The *Ogbu* tree was specially cultivated for the purpose. Some women reared these to increase their revenue by selling the livestock in the market in addition to the benefit of providing their households with a more diverse diet through the consumption of meat and eggs.³⁴

Colonial and Post- Independence Agriculture

As in pre-colonial times, so also in the colonial period, agriculture remained the backbone of Umu-Owelle economy. The Botanical Gardens, and the Department of Agriculture established by the colonial government, concerned themselves with experimentation in the growing of cash crops but no record has yet come to light that the government showed any interest in the improvement of yam, cassava and cocoyam cultivation, either through the introduction of better species, or through designing more efficient tools.³⁵ The continued emphasis on cash crops further relegated food security and subsistence production to the back burners of the government's agrarian development policy. The gender bias in official policy remained as women were left out of the agricultural development schemes. The implicit assumption that the farmer was male led to the exclusion of women from participating in the new improvement schemes and access to the new agricultural technology.³⁶ The testimony of Pius Ezedinachi summarizes the understanding of the obvious neglect which Umu-owelle women faced thus;

*In 1945, Awka Divisional Administration established nurseries for the supply of oil palm, citrus and other economic plants to male farmers, and most of the experiments concluded on the use of chemical fertilizers were on cash crops. However, such inorganic fertilizers were sometimes hardly made available to farmers. For most part, the farmers continued to make use of compost manure.*³⁷

The limiting of women's role in agriculture and agro-commerce cannot be traced to any lack of entrepreneurial skills. Rather it was the result of the structural arrangement introduced by the colonial administration, which denied women access to capital/credit, but offered men opportunities for capital accumulation.³⁸ An informant recalled that all through the first Republic, food cultivation in Umu-Owelle as in other parts of Igbo land was carried out on traditional lines. The traditional method of maintaining soil fertility through long fallow periods was continued. It was only in the schools that attempts were made to adopt the use of compost manure. Hence, compost pits were dug and left for some time after which the contents were used on the farms. By then chemical fertilizer was still not popular. As Umu-Owelle women continued to produce most of the food crops, their reduced returns from agriculture forced many to diversify to non-production sectors such as trade.³⁹

In the post-colonial era, the authorities tried to match their words with action. But the conceptual basis of the government programmes were often doubtful and the results of the programmes often less than sustainable, characterized by ambitious programmes, superfluous projections but minimal deeds, and sectoral neglect.⁴⁰ The continued neglect of women farmers and emphasis on cash crops in the post-independence period is understandable because the indigenous bureaucrats were the products of the colonial system.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it was to the credit of the pre-civil war Eastern Nigeria regional government that the use of chemical fertilizer became popular. The fertilizer campaign was also carried out through the farmers' co-operatives. An informant, Chris Obiefuna from Uruzo kindred in Ifiteani village in Nimo admitted seeing fertilizer first in 1962/63.⁴² Members of the Young Farmer's Club exclusively male were given fertilizers to

distribute to their parents and other farmers in their localities. But the real acceptance of the product, he said came only after the civil war.

Women and Agriculture in a Challenging War-Time Economy, 1966-1975

The political crisis in 1966 created an economic crisis for the Igbo as many migrants returned to Igboland. The civil war disrupted the production and supply mechanisms on which the food security of the whole of Igboland depended. The crisis resulted in higher food prices in 1966. Nonetheless, farming has always been an important activity of women in pre-war years. With the outbreak of the war however, farming activities became intensified as farming was dominated by women. Not surprising, the cream of the communities' labour force had been conscripted to either fight in the Biafran army or dig trenches. Those who evaded conscription found it even more risky farming. Consequently, farming became the responsibility of women and faced with the stark reality of famine and starvation, women took up the challenge of farming in full force.⁴³

Prior to the war, men cultivated crops like yam while the women cultivated crops like cocoyam and vegetables. However, as the war progressed, able bodied young men joined the army and those who remained went into hiding for fear of conscription. Women had to clear the bush, made mounds, planted yam seedlings, staked, weeded and harvested the yam. Some women even had yam barns during this period. Women coped with this heavy task by engaging the labour of their children who were not up to the age of conscription and every available land was cultivated. Sometimes, they engaged the services of war refugees and in return for their troubles, the refugees were given food items or second hand clothes.⁴⁴

Also, before the outbreak of the war in 1967, it was a solely responsibility of men to harvest palm fruits not only in Umu-owelle but also in Igboland in general. By custom most of the palm trees belonged to the men who also cut the fruits when they were ripe.⁴⁵ However, as the war progressed and men were at the front fighting or hiding to avoid conscription, the women had no

option left for them than to harvest the palm fruits especially from the short stem species. For instance, Cecilia Ezedinachi from Ifiteani village and Ezinne Okoye from Etiti village both in Nimo who were then teenage girls harvested palm fruits during the period under study.⁴⁶ Cassava was practically the most cultivated crop because its stem was cheap to acquire and required less tending to be productive, unlike yam and coco yam. An informant alluded to this thus, “We did not know dry or wet season. When we harvested Cassava, the stem was replanted immediately.”⁴⁷

It was during the war that a type of cassava disease known as ota-akpu (cassava eater) was known.³⁹ Women in order to prevent their crops from being destroyed by this disease resorted to harvesting their cassava even when it was not matured. Fear of their crops being stolen also made the women harvest their crops prematurely.⁴⁹ Farming was hazardous, as insecurity made it difficult to farm. Time and again, farmers took cover to avoid air raid, bombing and shelling from the federal army while in the farm. The near ubiquity of the fear of air raid was largely an anathema to farming as the output was adversely affected.⁵⁰ Food scarcity was caused by the fact that women were afraid and so could not concentrate to plant and tend crops. This was because being afraid of Federal troops they kept moving from one hideout to the other. Those who attempted to farm in their hiding places were forced to abandon the project due to insecurity and other problems.⁵¹ Many women began to tend to their farms early in the morning or late in the evening when the possibility of air raids was reduced.⁵²

Umu-owelle women supplemented the intake of protein by fishing from the streams. The fact that Umu-owelle had a good number of streams such as *Ogilisi*, *Mkpukpa*, *Ogbujilekwe* was an advantage. However, it is instructive to note that this source of protein proved insufficient as the population increased mainly as a result of increased number of refugees.⁵³

The war brought economic strangulation as agriculture the mainstay of Umu-owelle economy indulged in by mostly women was abandoned in Umu-owelle communities of Abagana and Abba as the war shifted to these communities. In addition to that, was the soil infertility as a result of land mines planted in the course of the war.⁵⁴ This led to scarcity of food as hunger and impoverishment reigned. Even in Umu-owelle communities of Nimo and Eziowelle which did not come under federal invasion, subsistence farming was no longer sufficient to sustain the teeming population. The volatile food situation in Umu-owelle was largely responsible for several cases of immune-compromising sicknesses like kwashiorkor, anaemia and marasmus.⁵⁵ The reasons are not far-fetched. Prior to the civil war, though Umu-owelle communities reared a number of livestock like goat, sheep and poultry, and was self-sufficient in tubers, it was not self-sufficient in certain other food, much of the beans, groundnut, onions, rice and beef consumed came from outside the communities from the northern Nigeria.⁵⁶

The reduction in supplies, especially from the North as a result of the crisis resulted in shortages of meat and onions.⁵⁷ The situation was not peculiar to Umu-owelle as it was true of the whole of Biafra. Nigerian government realized this and therefore adopted a predatory strategy of economic blockade and starvation.⁵⁷ Had the population of Umu-owelle remained 'stable' or at most increased a little, it would have been able to live through the war without losing many lives to malnutrition. But that was not to be as the influx of refugees contributed to unleash food crisis. In essence, the women were unexpectedly and unpreparedly challenged with the burden of providing food for its citizens both resident and returnees, and refugees. To survive this challenges, women began to prepare food with consumable eclecticism. Where the 'conventional' foodstuffs were lacking they improvised. Presumably inedible vegetables, once they were soft and tender, became increasingly a source of vegetable vitamin.

Domestic animals were killed and eaten by the occupation soldiers and civilians that remained with them after the communities had been invaded and the livestock that remained were scattered and identification of their owners became a big problem. Meat was scarce as goats and fowls were stolen and killed by both Biafran and Nigerian soldiers and refugees and families who had livestock and planned to use it as a source of income and food were deprived of them. Refugees harvested crops that were not ready. This was the beginning of serious de-agrarian economy for many peasant farmers. Many never recovered from their losses.⁵⁹ This had a devastating effect on household food security which threatened both livelihood and socio-economic stability. Umu-owelle women like their counterparts in other areas in Biafran enclave organized food production campaigns and supported the land army scheme. The land army scheme during the war era was aimed at producing more food within Biafran territories that were not directly affected by the war.⁶⁰ The women were employed in land army to work on government farms.

At the end of the war in 1970, the women were not discouraged from expanding their farms as they availed themselves of the peaceful opportunity of the post-war period which is a clear testimony of the value of agriculture to the farming population. Hence a number of positive impacts were recorded. Some of these impacts included a remarkable increase in the quantity of basic food stuff such as yam, cassava, corn produced per annum, availability of food stuff and for the first time the rural citizenry, especially the farmers were made to imbibe the culture of self-reliance.⁶¹ According to Adaeze Otiji, “I resorted to farming at Abba during the war when my husband was conscripted by the Biafra soldiers. At the end of the war, I worked hard to raise it to medium scale farming”.⁶²

Conclusion

In the agricultural sector of the economy, Umu-owelle women have made impact in food crop production, processing, distribution and animal husbandry. In the post-civil war, greater number of Umu-Owelle women ventured into agriculture. There were enough hands to work especially

in the field of agriculture. Agriculture became a medium and to an extent large scale and money yielding venture as the soil fertility improved in the process.

The dynamics in food security as shown by Umu-Owelle women clearly shows the noble and indispensable roles of the women in the growth of the Umu-Owelle economy and the Igbo economy in general. In virtually every aspect of the agricultural sector, Umu-Owelle women played some dynamic roles in nurturing and developing the resources and economic potentials of Umu-Owelle to enviable heights. The production process of the economy witnessed steady and remarkable growth under the pivotal strength of the women folk. They displayed enormous organizational expertise which ensured food security for their households by devising strategies of survival via engagement in agriculture,

Notwithstanding the tragic consequences of the war, it is instructive to note that the war revealed the innate abilities of women in challenging situations. It offered an opportunity for women to prove their ability and proficiency to adapt to difficult conditions. In fact, it was the war which exposed the proficiency and ingenuity in the women. It made people to realize that women were capable of changing the society and such changes can be seen as reflected in the empowerment of women. They took place, however, in the context of challenging economy all of which strongly impacted on women's lives as well as on the whole communities. The women were challenged by the circumstances of the war-time and immediate post-war period and they responded to them by engaging in agriculture to ensure food security for their families even in the face of the aftermath of devastation, deprivation and poverty that pre-dominated the period.

Thus, measures that will enlighten women's burden such as cooperative groups/associations should be re-organized and targeted in ensuring that necessary inputs such as fertilizer, labour saving devices such as tractor hiring services, credit facilities, good seeds, weed and pest control facilities are channeled to the women farmers directly through their associations. This will go a

long way in enhancing women participation in agricultural productivity not only in Umu-Owelle but also in other parts of Igbo land and beyond.

In conclusion, this premise is hinged on the fact that there shall be no meaningful development of any society where development indices are gender stereo-typed. This is because for genuine overall development to be attained, there is need for both men and women to complement each other as each has specific role to play.

Endnotes

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