

# **NWALA AND NYSC: PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION, REHABILITATION AND RECONCILIATION.**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to evaluate Nwala's effort in the formation of ECSYVSC which was a precursor to NYSC and how they offer prospects for national reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. ECSYVSC means East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps while NYSC means National Youth Service Corps. The paper employs the methods of hermeneutics and Turabian documentation. By hermeneutics, it interprets the activities of Nwala in the formation of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) and National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as its national parallel. Also, it interprets the extent to which ECSYVSC and NYSC were/are factors towards realizing the post war maxims of national reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. In the attempt to realize the stated aim, the paper studies the East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) and her reconstruction and rehabilitation activities, NYSC's mandate towards national integration and reconciliation, e.t.c. The findings show that Nwala's East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) was the precursor to the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Also, it shows that National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) gives a more national approach to the activities of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC). Also, the finding shows that the civil war was a pressure cooker for the dehumanization, bastardization and the destruction of lives and properties especially in the Eastern Nigeria as orchestrated by the Nigerian army. The implication of the study is a great credit to Nwala's effort that paid off towards national integration, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation which were the major national concerns after the civil war.

**Key words: Nwala, Nigeria, war, reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation,**

## **Understanding National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)**

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is an annual programme designed to offer opportunities to Nigerian youths to participate actively in nation building and development<sup>1</sup>. It was established in May 22, 1973 by General Yakubu Gowon who was the Military Head of State during and after the civil war. NYSC was established "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity."<sup>2</sup>

This became a necessary condition for graduation in Nigerian Universities and Colleges/Polytechnics for candidates below the age of thirty while exemption and/or special considerations are given the sick, pregnant and nursing mothers. This is only a one-year programme and one is not expected to repeat such programme which a default attracts a penalty of two years imprisonment or/and N4,000 fine<sup>3</sup>. Participation in this programme became a prerequisite for admission into graduate schools, employment and other engagements in Nigeria. Thus it became part of graduation certificate in Nigerian Universities and Colleges/Polytechnics.

This was intended to bring national integration, unity and cohesion which were at the time a necessity following the ravages of the civil war. Decree 51 of 16th June 1993 states the objectives of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)<sup>4</sup> as follows:

1. To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves.
2. To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.

3. To develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
4. To enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self employment.
5. To contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy.
6. To develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration.
7. To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.
8. To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.
9. The equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in area of national needs.
10. That as far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin.
11. That such group of youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible.
12. That the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria.
13. That the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences.
14. That members of the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour.
15. That employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their States of origin<sup>5</sup>.

## **NWALA'S EAST CENTRAL STATE YOUTH VOLUNTEER SERVICES CORPS (ECSYVSC) AS PRECURSOR OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS (NYSC).**

The Nigerian Civil War ended on January 15, 1970. No doubt about records that the main theatre of the Civil War was the East Central State. Thus the region;

emerged from the conflict with a severely battered economy. Battered were her industries, schools and public utilities and even the basic economic infrastructure. In both the public and private sectors, the picture was the same— one of ruin and devastation....the State Administrator, Mr. Ukpabi Asika assured the people of the state that 'the damage done to the economy by thirty months of relentless war' would be repaired and that 'from the ruins of the war, we will, united and dedicated to the course of one Nigeria, pick up the threads of development and progress again'<sup>6</sup>.

Post war survival was a big factor especially to the Easterners after the civil war minding the level of dehumanization, destruction of lives and properties by the Nigerian army<sup>7</sup>. The region was so bastardized and thoroughly defaced. This situation was so pathetic that no one knew how to face life and what to do after the war<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, this devastation and frustration won the attention of some socially active and conscious young men like T.U Nwala and his team who came back to take their destiny in their own hands. Therefore, Nwala with others of like minds mobilized themselves in the task of reconstruction and restoration of hope to the traumatized populace. The war having frustrated the course of Biafra, the big question was how best to reintegrate the Igbo people (Eastern Nigerians) especially the young ones into the Nigerian fold.

The above task led to the formation of the East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) under the leadership of T.U. Nwala. The primary tasks of this association were: salvaging important equipments, documents and other valuables that were buried in the rumbles of war, cleaning of public places, reconstruction of local bridges, markets and other public places, literacy campaign and public enlightenment to

assist the rural folks adjust to the post-war condition, giving orientation and civic education to the youth, teaching in schools and colleges as volunteers, etc.

The East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) was a brain child of T.U. Nwala. It began with the State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC) which T.U. Nwala started immediately after the civil war. In an interview regarding the motivation to the formation of State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC), Nwala stated;

immediately after the war I founded a movement called State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC), under the auspices of the State Rehabilitation Commission, of East Central State. I was formally appointed its Chairman by the Government of Mr. Ukpabi Asika. The SVSC mobilized the unemployed graduates, undergraduates and school leavers throughout the State; they in turn had to mobilize the people in a state-wide programme of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation<sup>9</sup>.

At its formation, the State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC) aimed at the following:

- (1) To foster the spirit of Volunteer services and to popularize and encourage the idea in order to utilize it in carrying out the initial reconstruction tasks in the East Central state.
- (2) To promote inter-state relations and services as one way of achieving national reconciliation.
- (3) To help the East Central State Rehabilitation Commission to successfully achieve its three-fold task of national rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation<sup>10</sup>.

The State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC) metamorphosed into East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) following the authenticity and necessity of their work plans in the Eastern Nigeria. Thus the government of Mr. Ukpabi Asika adopted the group as an official group towards rehabilitation and reconstruction of the region. Thus

the East Central State appointed an eight-man State Volunteer Services Committee to coordinate the SVSC. The eight men were all graduates as at the time of the appointment. They included the following;

1. Mr. T. U. Nwala (Committee Chairman)
2. Mr. Tim Ibezim (Committee Secretary)
3. Mr. Paul Onu (Member)
4. Mr. Udoh, Mbachu (Member)
5. Mr. Tim Ebere (Chairman of the Publicity Sub-committee)
6. Professor E.N. Ukpabi (Chairman of the Advisory and Guidance Committee)
7. Professor E.O. Odokara (Member)
8. Mr. Onyechere (Dean, Students Affairs, UNEC)

T.U. Nwala passionately championed the course of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC). He intended to make this group a national concern; hence on September 30, 1970, he led a delegation of four persons to Lagos and Ibandan to campaign for National Youth Volunteer Service Programme. This was a campaign intended to involve Nigerian youths towards promoting national rehabilitation, reconstruction, reconciliation and integration. These delegates were:

1. Dr. T. U. Nwala, (SVSC founder), University of Nigeria, Nsukka
2. Dr. E. N. Ukpaby, Dean of Students, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
3. Mr Ukwuije, then President of the Students Union, Enugu Campus
4. Mr Abaji, a student of Business Administration, University of Nigeria.

This delegation met with the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon and argued for the establishment of a National Youth Volunteer Programme for the entire country; hence they submitted a memorandum to the Government on this course. On the other hand, while T.U. Nwala led the delegation to the head of state, the secretary of the East Central States Volunteer Service Corps (ECSYVSC), Mr. Tim Ibezim led another delegation to

Kwara State to present the same memorandum to the State Governor, HE Gbamgboye and the Emir of Ilorin, Late Alhaji Sule Gambari. This initiative was highly applauded by Gowon led government minding the condition of Nigeria after the war as there was great need for factors of national integration, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. This applaud attracted great prizes and recommendations:

1. £75, 000 (seventy-five thousand pounds) grant to the Asika Government of East Central State. This grant was to support reconstruction works in the East central states.
2. the government of the federation led by Gowon set up a Committee by the memorandum as submitted which led to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria.

Therefore, Nwala's East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) can be said to be the precursor and forerunner of the National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria.

## **PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION, REHABILITATION AND RECONCILIATION.**

In his own words, Nwala reports:

at the end of the war, we were preoccupied with post-war survival. All roads led to Enugu. Some of us, the socially-conscious young men who were active in the war, went there to take our destiny into our hands. We mobilized ourselves to join in the task of reconstruction and restoration of hope to our traumatized populace. How do we face the realities of common citizenship with those against whom we fought? Now that Biafra was no more, Nigerian citizenship became inevitable. But how do we reintegrate our people, especially the young ones, once more into the Nigerian fold<sup>11</sup>?

Similarly, *Daily Times* reports, “the war had generated much bitterness. And much of the bitterness emanated from misunderstanding, misinformation, destructive propaganda, lack of adequate information and political indoctrination”<sup>12</sup>. There was need for public enlightenment and communication between individuals and the government following the devastation of the civil war<sup>13</sup>. The level of frustration, disintegration and hatred following the war needed urgent attention. This need was strongly confirmed too by the government of Gowon leading to the three maxims of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation as national concerns<sup>14</sup>. It became a strong concern how to rehabilitate the destroyed environment, how to reconstruct the defaced properties, and how to reconcile persons of different tribes minding the harm already done along tribal lines as result of the war.

No doubt the success of this triple concern of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation needed massive mobilization of Nigerian youths. This is because the youths suffered the brunt of war as soldiers on both sides of Nigerian and Biafran armies. Also, their youthfulness is highly needed for the projects of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. Thus this urgent need made the efforts of Nwala’s East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) and the NYSC very timely and relevant. The youths had played a “gallant and dominant role” in the war. They fought in the armed forces. Thus, it was reasonable that they were involved in any strategic post-war programme “aimed at healing the wounds of the war and promoting national unity and development.”<sup>15</sup> Good enough, the youths were really out to contribute their quota towards the rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation process as championed by ECSYVSC in the East and subsequently NYSC at the national level.

Thus Nwala’s East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) worked in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Commission to engage in relief and reconstruction projects. According to *Daily Times*, “they guided and assisted displaced persons to resettle into their own communities by helping them to rebuild their shattered



homes, cultivate their fields and re-establish their business enterprises by community labour”.<sup>16</sup> One of the most prominent attempts by this group was June 13, 1970 clear-up campaign and a community reconstruction drive launched in Aba, East Central State. This was targeted at restoring major towns in the state to their pre-war outlook<sup>17</sup>.

The efforts of this group as complemented by the Eastern government were so obvious that by June 23, 1970, about three million, five hundred thousand Pounds (£3.5M)<sup>18</sup> had been spent on rehabilitation programme. Thus this fund assisted in the provision of transport, food, clothing and cash to thousands of people who came out of hiding at the end of the war. More so public servants were granted salary advances as soon as they reported to their offices in order to alleviate their hardship and facilitate resettlement.”<sup>19</sup>

In the attempt to foster reconciliation, the group submitted a communiqué to the State Rehabilitation Commission in Enugu towards achieving the demand of reconciliation and national integrity and identity. The communiqué recommended that publicity missions be undertaken to schools, colleges and other higher learning within and outside the state, so as to speed up reconciliation efforts. This was to be complemented by interstate visits by government officials, traditional rulers, youth organizations and interstate volunteer services<sup>20</sup>.

A success story and confirmation of the success of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) towards reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation was enormous. Thus;

we have accomplished quite a lot in terms of reconstruction. Several hundreds of miles of road have been reconstructed under the programme. Many temporary shelters and several markets have been constructed. Many streams cleared and bridges reconstructed. All these have been accomplished through the mobilization of the self help attitudes and communal efforts of our people, thereby saving thousands of pounds for the Government<sup>21</sup>.

Similarly, the mandate of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) proves that the body is well poised to nationalize that which East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) began in the Eastern Nigeria. To a great extent, the corps members deployed to various states that are not their states of origin make every frantic effort to develop common ties among Nigerian youths, promote national unity, integration, patriotic and loyal service, corporate existence and common destiny of Nigerian people, self reliance through skill acquisition, e.t.c. More so it is obvious that through their Community Development Service (CDS), they invest much in the project of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation both among themselves, their places of primary assignment (PPA) and in their host communities.

The attempt of NYSC scheme towards developing common ties and national unity in matters of culture and religion has a stronghold in the orientation camps. There the corps members are well educated to shun sectionalism, religious bigotry and fanaticism, e.t.c. Orientation camps present a veritable surface for interaction among corps members across cultures and religions so much so as to divest members of prejudices against tribal and religious lines. Little wonder Okere maintained that peace is served in a multi ethnic group by recognition and friendship than suspicion and bigotry<sup>22</sup>. In his address during the National summit of National Association of Catholic Corps (NACC), the Ebonyi State Chapter Chaplain of NACC stated;

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) provides an interactive surface to heal us of religious bigotry as imposed by prejudice and mutual suspicion. Thus the service year must polish us to live beyond religious differences/affinity lines of Christianity, Islamic or African traditional religious practices. Also, it ought to polish us to live beyond denominational ties of Catholicism, Protestantism or Pentecostalism, e.t.c. Everyone should at the end of the service year, boast of making friends beyond one's cultural and religious/denominational inclinations. A lack of this level of friendship amounts to under use of service year opportunity.<sup>23</sup>

Undeniably, the scheme fosters a sense of patriotism among Nigerian youths who see participation in NYSC as opportunity to serve their fatherland since there is no military conscription in Nigeria as in other countries. It aids social integration by providing opportunities for cross cultural interaction that has led to inter-tribal marriages, helping to reduce inter-ethnic suspicions that were prevalent during the period of the war. This scheme has served as employment buffer by offering employments to recently graduated youths as some are retained in their places of primary assignment<sup>24</sup>.

Recently, there has been clamour to scrap off the scheme minding obvious abuses such as mismanagement of annual federal government allocation of N70million to the scheme, numerous cases of death of “corpers” especially during and after elections, kidnapping, sectarian war, medical negligence<sup>25</sup>, e.t.c. No doubt, these situations need emergency attention and higher sense of responsibility from both the management and federal government. However, the abuse ought not to dismiss the use of NYSC towards national reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

The effort towards addressing the aim of this research can be said to be a success. Thus with the method of hermeneutics and turabian documentation, the paper has shown that Nwala and NYSC have to a great extent contributed to the realization of post war maxims of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. The paper made it obvious that the civil war saw to the death of about three million people<sup>26</sup> especially the Eastern Nigerians. The same war left the nation in mutual suspicion, brokenness, stagnation and state of strands; hence how do we move on as one people after such malicious killings?

These concerns moved T.U Nwala and like minds to the formation of State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC) which gained state recognition and metamorphosed into East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC). This group engaged in

thorough reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation process in the Eastern Nigeria and recorded huge success to this regard. Nwala and his team dreamt of making the agenda of the East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) national. This nationalization agenda was the reason for the delegation to the federal government when General Yakubu Gowon was the military head of state. The memorandum as submitted to the federal government contributed to the subsequent formation of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The NYSC was saddled with the mandate of providing opportunities for cross cultural interaction, promoting common ties among Nigerian youths, national unity, integration, patriotic and loyal service, corporate existence and common destiny of Nigerian people, self reliance through skill acquisition, e.t.c. Thus Nwala's effort towards the formation of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) and the mandates of NYSC can be said to have contributed in no small measure towards the realization of the post war maxims of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

## End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), “Scheme” <https://www.nysc.gov.ng/aboutscheme.html> accessed on 22/04/21.

<sup>3</sup> National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) ACT, Section 13(b).

<sup>4</sup> National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), “Objectives” <https://www.nysc.gov.ng/objectives.html> accessed on 22/04/21.

<sup>5</sup> Owosina M.M. *et al.* (eds.), (1983) *A Compendium of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: Ten Years of Service to the Nation*. (Lagos: NYSC Directorate Headquarters). Pg 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Information and Home Affairs, Information Division, *Progress in Reconstruction*. (Enugu: Government Printer, 1973), pg. 1.

<sup>7</sup> T. U. Nwala , “The Igbos in Nigeria: Leadership, Society and Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Keynote address presented at the International Conference on Igbo Studies organized by the Igbo Studies Association and the Howard University School of Social Work, E. Franklin Frazer Centre for Social Work, Held at the Howard University, Washington D.C. April 2-3, 2004, (Nsukka: Codes Publishers, 2008), 2.

<sup>8</sup> T. U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*, (New York: Triatlantic Books, 2010), pg. 68

<sup>9</sup> An Interview with Prof. T. Nwala on the Motivation and role in the formation of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), <https://uzodinmanwala.com/> accessed on 20/03/21.

<sup>10</sup> State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC), “Goodwill Message from the Youths and People of East Central State under the Auspices of the State Volunteer Services Corps, East Central State Rehabilitation Commission, Enugu”, an address delivered during the National Reconciliation Tour, 1970, pg 1-2.

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<sup>11</sup> T. U. Nwala, “Destiny in our Hands”, an interview with T.U. Nwala on June 7, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Times*, Friday, June 26, P.3.

<sup>13</sup> Al J. Venter, *Biafra’s War 1967-1970*, (New York: Helion Company, 2016), pg 17

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Fury Childs, *A History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime, and the Nigerian Civil War*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2020), pg 31.

<sup>15</sup> Olorunnisomo, J.O. *et al.* (1998). “Background to the establishment of NYSC”, NYSC YEAR Book (Silver Jubilee Edition), P.17.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Times*, Friday, May 22, P.7.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Times* (1970). “Youths with Spirit to Help”, Saturday, June 13, P.8.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Times* (1970). “£3.5m Spent on Rehabilitation”, Tuesday, June 23, P.20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>21</sup> State Volunteer Service Corps (SVSC), “Goodwill Message from the Youths and People of East Central State under the Auspices of the State Volunteer Services Corps, East Central State Rehabilitation Commission, Enugu”, an address delivered during the National Reconciliation Tour, 1970, pg 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Theophilus Okere, *Philosophy Culture and Society in Africa*. (Enugu: Afro-Orbis Publication, 2005). Pg 54

<sup>23</sup> Anacletus Ogbunkwu, “National Youth Service Members beyond Service Year”, An address presented at the National Summit of National Association of Catholic Corps (NACC) as Ebonyi State chapter Chaplain of National Association of Catholic Corps (NACC), July 2021.

<sup>24</sup> John Campbell, “The National Youth Service Corps: A bridge to Nationalism” <https://www.cfr.org/blog/national-youth-service-corps-bridge-nationalism-nigeria> accessed on March 04, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> Michael Orodare, “How Nigerian Civil War led to the Establishment of NYSC” <https://neusroom.com/how-nigerian-civil-war-led-to-the-establishment-of-nysc/>

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