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ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE INTERVENTION : A Study of the Rehabilitation Programme for war-displaced children in Nigeria *

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In times of war, as in most disaster situations, people suddenly come to realise that the established patterns of behaviour which hitherto have guided their lives are no longer adequate. This leads to both individual and social disorganisation. One of the primary objectives of social work intervention in such circumstances is to assist the victims to develop effective coping patterns and thereby mitigate personal shock and the degree of individual disorganisation. Although there is still 'a lack of clarity and agreement in the field' concerning not only the 'nature, goals and appropriateness of crisis intervention' but also concerning 'the population that would benefit from a proposed service structure' (Lukton, 1974: 397-8), it is 'a long and well-established tradition' in social work to pay special attention to children and their welfare in disaster situations (Silverman, 1977-170).

In keeping with this 'tradition', during and after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), a massive child welfare intervention programme was carried out for the resettlement and rehabilitation of war-displaced children. This programme consisted of a number of distinct but interrelated operations which we choose to refer to as 'Exercises'. Thus the entire rehabilitation programme has been divided into five major exercises, namely, the evacuation exercise, the in-camp care and treatment exercise; the repatriation exercise; the reunion and placement exercise; and the family assistance exercise. Some of these exercises lasted for specific periods and were intended to achieve certain goals while others overlapped in time and the objectives were not so clearly defined.

Apart from its sheer magnitude, the Nigerian rehabilitation programme is considered important for a number of reasons. For one thing, it is the first, if not the only massive child welfare intervention programme to have been carried out in Black Africa. This has considerable implications for social work theory and practice in general. Specifically, it offers us a singular opportunity for applying some of the well known and generally accepted principles and theories of social work and child welfare to a Black African situation and, at the same time, for empirically testing them.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is two-fold; first to identify as well as examine some of the basic issues raised by the various exercises or operations of the rehabilitation programme, and secondly, to attempt an evaluation of the entire programme from a social work and child welfare perspective.

THE BACKGROUND

During the Nigerian civil war, the 'Biafran' authorities reached an agreement with certain international child welfare organisations and relief agencies to evacuate children from the war zones to some friendly countries for kwashiorkor treatment and safe-keeping. The actual

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number of children involved in this evacuation exercise is not certain since no records of this operation are traceable. However, according to A.R. Williams, 'approximately 4,000 to 4,500 children of East Central State origin remained under care in Ivory Coast and Gabon by March 1970' (1972 : 1). This estimate apparently did not include children evacuated from other war-affected areas such as the former South Eastern, Mid-Western and Rivers States.

As soon as the war ended, the Nigerian Federal Military Government entered negotiations with the foreign governments concerned for the repatriation of these children. The participation of international welfare organisations like the United Nations High Commission for Refugees greatly facilitated the negotiations. The children started arriving by air in November 1970 and, by the completion of the operations in March 1971, a total of 4,454 children had been repatriated to Nigeria from Gabon, Ivory Coast and Europe.

In addition to the repatriated children, there were thousands of other displaced children who were cared for in various orphanages, sick bays and refugee camps throughout the war-affected areas. With the assistance of the International Union for Child Welfare, Geneva, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a two-phased resettlement programme for the children. This lasted from 1971 to 1973.

THE STUDY DATA

The data for this paper are derived from a sample survey of 856 children displaced during the Nigerian Civil War as well as their parents or foster-parents and official guardians for those in institutions. In addition, 37 social workers currently serving in the four Eastern States covered by the study, many of whom participated in the rehabilitation programme, were also interviewed. The study instrument consisted of two separate questionnaires — one for the children and their parents or guardians, and the other for the social workers. Of the 856 children in the study sample, 775 were reunited with their families, 59 were fostered and 22 were institutionalized.

1. EVACUATION EXERCISE

The evacuation of children from the war zones during the Nigerian Civil War has raised a number of issues of both practical and theoretical importance to social policy and social work. First is the issue of cultural acceptability of the evacuation exercise. Granting that interventive evacuation of children in times of disaster is acceptable in standard social work practice, to what extent is the idea of evacuating children outside their national boundaries and cultural milieu consistent with Nigerian customary practice? In other words, did the evacuation exercise violate the customs and tradition of the people concerned? The second issue concerns possible violation of the rights of parents of the evacuated children.

To obtain information on the acceptability of the evacuation exercise in Nigeria, parents (709) of the evacuated children were asked whether they approved or disapproved of the idea of their children being taken out of the country during the civil war. Parents whose children were not taken out of the country (136) were asked if they would have liked their children to be among those evacuated. Thirdly, all parents were asked how they perceived the children evacuated from the country — as fortunate or as unfortunate. This question was based on the assumption that respondents were likely to perceive the children as unfortunate victims of circumstance if they (the children) had been the object of some culturally reprehensible activity. On the other hand, they were likely to see the children as fortunate if evacuation had not violated the cultural norms. (See Table 1).

TABLE 1			
OPINION OF PARENTS			
	of evacuated children	of unevacuated children	OPINION OF SOCIAL WORKERS INVOLVED IN THE REHABILITATION PROGRAMME
I. Evacuation :			
in favour	82 %	40 %	80 %
against	14 %	14 %	11 %
no opinion	1 %	44 %	9 %
II. The evacuated children were :			
fortunate	87 %	66 %	
unfortunate	7 %	6 %	
no difference	1 %	—	
no opinion	5 %	2 %	

As can be seen from Table 1, an overwhelming majority of those parents whose children had actually been evacuated saw nothing wrong in evacuating children to foreign countries in time of crisis. As for the parents whose children had not been evacuated, the proportion of those approving the idea of evacuation far exceeded those who disapproved of it. This implies that the evacuated children were not perceived as having been subjected to any traditionally reprehensible activities.

The reasons given by the social workers who were against the evacuation fall into two categories. First, some expressed genuine fears that a number of children might be reunited with wrong parents at the time of repatriation. Secondly, some were concerned about possible emotional upsets that such an operation might cause the children. No one mentioned possible violation of national customs.

All the evidence presented above invariably leads to one conclusion: that interventive evacuation of the type carried out during the Nigerian Civil War is compatible with African tradition and customary practice.

The second issue considered was possible violation of the rights of parents over their children during the evacuation exercise. The data showed that out of 709 parents whose children had been evacuated from the country, 64 percent indicated that they had not been consulted before their children or wards had been evacuated. This means that a majority of the children were evacuated without the prior consent of their parents.

Under normal circumstances, this would constitute a violation of the rights of parents over their children. But an emergency situation such as this provided a sufficiently extenuating circumstance. For instance, a large number of the children were already orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents and were being catered for in sick bays, orphanages and refugee camps from where evacuation was arranged. It may therefore be concluded that although a majority of the parents and guardians were not consulted before the evacuation of their children, it would not be right, in the present circumstances, to consider this a violation of their parental rights.

2. IN-CAMP CARE AND TREATMENT EXERCISE

Activities encompassed by this aspect of the Rehabilitation Programme varied greatly and were carried out by a number of agencies for different groups of children.

The objectives of the in-camp care and treatment exercise fell under three main categories: nutritional treatment, medical treatment and psycho-social treatment. A number of issues involved here are rather technical and will not be considered in this paper. However the non-technical aspects of the children's health and in-camp treatment are considered.

Medical treatment

To obtain information on effects of in-camp medical treatment on the children, parents were asked to describe the health conditions of the children upon reunion or placement.

It was found that the health conditions of 90 percent of the children were described as good at the time of placement. Health conditions of 7 percent were described as fair while 3 percent were said to be in poor state of health. Considering the prevalence of various forms of illness, particularly among children, at the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the data suggest a considerable improvement in the state of health of the displaced children. This, in a way, is indicative of the success of both the nutritional and medical in-camp treatment exercises.

Concerning the types of ailments commonly suffered by the children, the data showed that 59 percent of respondents mentioned fever. Malaria and stomach aches were both mentioned by 16 percent of respondents. Other ailments mentioned were boils, eye and ear troubles. On the whole, these represent very common symptoms of everyday occurrence.

Next to be considered was the question of where the children normally went for treatment when ill. It was found that 66 percent of respondents normally sent their children to hospitals and Government dispensaries for treatment; 26 percent took to self-medication; 7 percent went to the local medicine-man, while 1 percent took the children to prayer houses for treatment. Of particular interest is the finding that foster parents did not take their children to the local medicine-man or to prayer houses for treatment. This is indicative of the quality of care that foster parents give to their wards. The data also revealed that the institutionalized children were generally treated in hospitals and dispensaries. This is understandable since most of the children resided in government-owned institutions.

Psycho-social treatment

It was considered that one way of ascertaining the psychological effects of the in-camp treatment on the children was by asking them what they still remembered of their experiences and how they felt about them. The children were expected to have forgotten a good part of what happened in the camps; however, what they still retained would be indicative of the depth of impressions that such incidents had created.

For purposes of analysis, the list of incidents in the camp which the children particularly remembered may be grouped into three categories: incidents likely to produce negative psychological effects, those likely to produce positive effects and those that were neutral in effect. Psychologically negative incidents included death of inmates, sickness and suffering, air raids and thefts. Psychologically positive incidents included good food and care, facilities for games and recreation, and visits of important personalities to the camp. Psychologically negative incidents were mentioned by 32 percent of the children and the incident remembered most often in this category was death of fellow inmates. On the other hand, incidents of psychologically positive effect were remembered by 53 percent of the children, while the remaining 16 percent mentioned incidents that were of neutral psychological effect. Based on the foregoing analysis, it may be concluded that the children were in-

fluenced more by psychologically positive than negative incidents while in the camps.

The data also showed that the children talked most often about camp workers and fellow inmates and that a great majority (91 percent) of them recalled their camp experiences with joy and excitement. This indicated that interpersonal and intergroup relationships within the camps were warm, friendly, intensive and psychologically rewarding. Only a negligible proportion (3 percent) of the children recalled their camp experiences with sadness and remorse. To that extent, the in-camp treatment exercise succeeded in providing the children with an environment conducive to normal social and psychological development.

Next to be considered is the possible effects of camp experience on the behaviour of the children concerned. It is known that early childhood experiences have a great influence on later character formation and personality development. Where such childhood experiences have been unhappy and emotionally unrewarding, the child is likely to develop abnormal or antisocial behaviour traits. This study is also interested in ascertaining if there was a noticeable difference between the repatriated and the instate children as far as conduct or behaviour were concerned.

To this end, parents/foster parents and guardians of the displaced children were asked to compare them with other (non-displaced) children of the same family, compound, neighbourhood or institution in respect to the following four aspects of behaviour: obedience, temper, sociability and truthfulness. Our analysis was based on the premise that if camp experiences had not affected the behaviour of the displaced children, they would be expected to be just the same — that is, equally good or equally bad — as their other non-displaced siblings and peers brought up in the same families, compounds, neighbourhoods or institutions. If, on the other hand, the displaced children had been influenced considerably in their social adjustment and behaviour, the displaced children, as a group, would be found to be behaviourally different from their non-displaced siblings and peers.

With respect to obedience, the data showed that 60.3 percent of the parents considered the displaced children as better than others; 34 percent considered them to be just the same as others while 5.7 percent thought them to be worse than others. The influence of camp experience appeared therefore to be overwhelmingly positive as far as this behaviour trait (obedience) was concerned.

As regards temper, 35 percent of the parents considered the displaced children better (i.e. less short-tempered) than other children; 43.4 percent thought that they were all the same while 21.6 percent considered the displaced children to be worse than others. Here again, the proportion of parents that considered the displaced children better tempered exceeded that of those who considered them worse tempered by 13 percent, implying a more positive than negative effect of camp experience on this behaviour trait.

Turning to truthfulness, the data showed that, as a group, the displaced children were rated higher than their other siblings and peers. Once again, the influence of camp experience was noticeable and, what is more important, positive.

Finally, with regard to sociability, the data showed that the parents considered the displaced children more sociable than all others.

Based on this analysis, it may be concluded that:

- a) camp experience had considerable effects on the behaviour of the displaced children with respect to the four aspects of behaviour considered above;
- b) the influence of camp experience had been overwhelmingly more positive than negative.

Thus we did not find evidence of the 'usual' psychological and behavioural problems often associated with early childhood separation and institutional care, particularly in times of war. On the contrary, our data seemed to show that camp experiences had exerted a

favourable influence on the behaviour of the children concerned.

However, the data also showed that 52 percent of the children had not been as happy in the camps as they were now back in their homes. This implied that the camp conditions might have been less than adequate for their psycho-social development. For this group of children, the degree of emotional deprivation which they might have experienced was likely to reflect in their perception of the world and their place in it. To this end, the children were asked to describe their attitude to the world in general.

Their responses revealed that 26 percent of the children perceived the world as 'a pleasant place with a lot of good things and nice people'. On the other hand, 13 percent of them saw the world as 'a place of hardship and suffering'. This portends some evidence of childhood deprivation which may give rise to social maladjustment. However, a good majority of the children, 61 percent, expressed an emotionally balanced view of the world. They saw it as an admixture of 'good and bad things'.

School performance

One of the goals of the in-camp treatment exercise was the provision of facilities for formal education. To this end, the study wishes to ascertain whether differences in camp experiences resulted in differences in performance at school among the instate and repatriated children. (See Table 2).

TABLE 2			
INCIDENCE OF EVACUATION ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE			
	(comparison between instate children and repatriated children)		
	above average	average	below average
Instate children	62 %/o	26 %/o	12 %/o
Repatriated children	61 %/o	29 %/o	10 %/o

3. THE REPATRIATION EXERCISE

The evacuation exercise was carried out on an expressed understanding that the evacuees were to be returned as soon as conditions returned to normal. Thus the issues raised by the repatriation exercise were two-fold: whether the exercise had succeeded in returning all the children to their home country, and whether the exercise had been well timed or not.

With respect to the first issue, the data revealed that there were two girls from Imo State known to be still living in a neighbouring African country against the wishes of their parents and apparently not out of their own volition. To the extent that this is confirmed, the repatriation exercise did not completely achieve its objective of returning all the evacuated children to their home country.

One important implication of this finding that may be mentioned is a possible violation of the United Nations (1959) Declaration of the Rights of the Child which guarantees every child the right to a 'nationality' at birth.

On the question of the timing of the repatriation exercise, the repatriated children were asked whether they would have preferred to return home earlier or later or whether they considered that their repatriation had been well timed.

TABLE 3
CHILDREN'S OPINION ON THE TIMING OF REPATRIATION

	too early	well timed	too late	no opinion
Reunited children (775)	32 %	50 %	12 %	
Fostered children (59)	0 %	32 %		52 %
Children in institutions (22)	85 %	9 %	5 %	
Total	34 %	47 %	12 %	7 %

The fact that virtually all the institutionalized children wished to remain longer abroad seemed to indicate that conditions of living in their institutions left something to be desired.

It is relevant at this point to consider the reasons for which some of the children wished to remain longer abroad. These may be summarized as follows :

- a) Because of better care and treatment 43 %
- b) To continue schooling 37 %
- c) Those countries were more developed and had more social amenities 6 %
- d) Personal preference 12 %
- e) On medical grounds 2 %

Reasons a) and c) above would seem to reflect the poor socio-economic condition of the children's homes. It is possible that some improvements in their home conditions might have affected the children's wish to remain longer abroad.

4. REUNION AND PLACEMENT EXERCISE

This exercise was actually made up of a number of separate operations.

a) Tracing and reunion

This phase of the rehabilitation programme was based on social work and the principle that parental care provides the child with the best opportunity for physical, social and mental development. In keeping with this principle, the various State Governments concerned made it a matter of policy that every child whose parents or near relatives could be traced should be reunited with them.

In assessing the extent to which this policy was achieved, it was necessary to relate the number of non-reunited children to the total (target) population involved in the programme. As already stated, 5,257 children were involved in the rehabilitation programme. Of this number, only 95 children, representing approximately 2 percent of the total, were so far

not yet reunited: This is rather a small proportion and, considering the fact that tracing efforts were still continuing in three of the four States concerned, the conclusion may be drawn that the tracing and reunion exercise was a big success.

Resettling the unclaimed children

Towards the end of the reunion exercise, there remained a number of children whose parents or relatives, no matter how distant, could not be traced. This raised the issue of the best way of resettling such children in keeping with internationally approved principles of child welfare and at the same time not offending the customary practice of the peoples concerned. Three alternative care methods suggested themselves — placing the children in prospective adoption homes; placing them in foster homes under Government supervision; or keeping them in Government orphanages and children's homes.

Following indications from the Federal Government of Nigeria, all the State Governments rejected outright adoption as incompatible with Nigerian customary practice. The Government of the former East Central State (now Anambra and Imo) opted for foster placement as it was deemed most compatible with the Igbo customary practice; institutional placement was considered only for unfosterable or seriously handicapped children. The Government of the then South Eastern State decided on institutional placement while the Rivers State Government applied both methods according to the circumstances of each case.

b) Foster care placement

i. Motivation

Ideally, the need, interest and welfare of the child should be the underlying motivation to foster a child. In the traditional African practice referred to as informal fostering, foster parents usually have some kinship ties with the child. Fostering, in this respect, becomes an extension of kinship obligation.

In introducing formal fostering, where foster parents are in no way related to the foster children, it is very necessary to inquire whether this fundamental motive in the child's own welfare is counterbalanced by purely personal considerations.

To this end, foster parents were asked their reasons for applying to foster a child. All the reasons adduced may be summarized under five headings :

- a) desire for a child of a particular sex;
- b) childlessness;
- c) companionship for a lone child;
- d) out of pity or humanitarian considerations;
- e) love of children.

The first three of these reasons centre around the needs of the foster parents themselves, implying that those foster parents were motivated by personal considerations to foster the children. The last two reasons centre around the needs of the children themselves and depict altruistic motivation on the part of the foster parents. Based on this categorization, 21 percent of the foster parents had child-centered motives while 79 percent were motivated by personal considerations. This means that by far a greater proportion of foster parents were motivated by personal considerations in applying to foster the children.

ii. Facts about the child's true background

The second issue in fostering to be considered is whether and at what age it is proper to let the foster child know the facts about his background. To this end, foster parents were

asked what they would do: to tell or not to tell the children the truth about their background.

The data showed that 58 percent of foster parents would not tell the children the truth about their background; 32 percent were of the opinion that the child should be told later — i.e. when he was older — while 10 percent held that the child should be informed at his present age. The majority of the foster parents were therefore of the view that the truth about the child's background should be withheld from him. Their reasons for this view fell into three categories:

- a) To avoid upsetting the child emotionally since they had made the children believe that they (foster parents) were the natural parents.
- b) It was feared that once the child was told of his true relationship to the family, he would be estranged and would regard himself as an outsider rather than one of the family members.
- c) To avoid the possibility of the child leaving in search of his natural family, as the child's departure would be felt as the death of a lone child.

This finding that most foster parents were of the view that children should not be made to know the truth about their background appears to be at variance with the professional opinion on the issue. From the professional social work point of view, any attempt to withhold the truth of a child's background from him is seen as an act of deceit which, when discovered by the child, is likely to lead to mistrust of the foster parents and probably society at large.

One possible explanation for this apparent disparity between the professional standpoint and the study findings lies in differences in socio-cultural organisations. The professional ideal presupposes a child-rearing pattern in which there is a free exchange between the young and the old so that children discuss freely with their parents rather than just exist as members of a separate and distinct world composed of women and children. In other cultures, such as Nigeria, where such free exchange is not usual, the views and feelings of children are taken as inconsequential even in matters that specifically concern them.

iii. Foster fee

The next aspect of fostering to be considered is the payment of a foster fee. One of the key principles in official fostering is that the fostering agency retains both legal and social responsibility for the child. This implies that the agency should contribute materially to the upkeep of the child. In view of this, the objectives of foster fee payment during the Nigerian programme were:

- a) to contribute to the maintenance of foster children;
- b) to establish regular contact between the agency and the foster parents;
- c) to provide some financial assistance to the foster families.

Of the four states covered in this study, two, Anambra and Imo, accepted to pay foster fees, whereas the Rivers State decided not to pay a fee; the matter did not arise in the Cross River State since there were no foster placements.

In this respect, the study set out: firstly, to ascertain the attitude of Nigerians toward the very idea of a foster fee; secondly, to find out whether the initial objectives of introducing a foster fee were achieved in the Nigerian situation.

To this end, foster parents and social workers were asked their opinion about payment of a foster fee. Social workers were also asked to assess the utility of a foster fee as an instrument of social work.

On the first question, 14 percent of parents considered a foster fee worthwhile and necessary. Thirty-five percent felt it was undesirable while 51 percent were indifferent to the idea. That is, it made no difference to over half of the parents whether or not the fee was paid. On the other hand, 78 percent of the social workers considered a foster fee to be very necessary, 9 percent thought it undesirable while 13 percent felt that it did not matter whether or not it was paid. Here we observe a reversal of the trend with a large majority of the staff supporting the payment of a foster fee. This raises the question of why the recipients and administrators of a foster fee held opposing views regarding its necessity. One possible explanation is that the two groups viewed it from two different and perhaps opposing viewpoints. The social workers saw it as a necessary instrument for establishing the government's special relationship to the foster children as well as fulfilling its (government's) obligation toward the upkeep of the child. Foster parents, on the other hand, considered a foster fee as unnecessary government interference in their family affairs. They would prefer not to be reminded occasionally that the child did not belong to them. Secondly, foster parents were selected mainly from families which were considered economically well-off and therefore able to maintain additional member(s). For this reason, a foster fee was not likely to make any impact on the economic condition of the foster parents, hence the overwhelming 'it-does-not-matter' response by them. In conclusion, our data suggest that it was the unintended, latent function of bringing back to foster parents memories which they would prefer to forget, rather than violation of any cultural norms, that made the idea of a foster fee objectionable to a large number of foster parents.

The second question considered was whether or not a foster fee met the objectives for which it was established. The data showed that 72 percent of the social workers were of the opinion that a foster fee fulfilled its original objectives; 3 percent held that the sum paid was too small to serve any meaningful purpose, while 25 percent considered it an unnecessary waste. Based on this evidence, it may be concluded that from the point of view of social workers who administered the programme, a foster fee payment fulfilled the objectives for which it was established.

c) Institutional care placement

Altogether 22 children were placed in child care/welfare institutions. These fell into two broad categories – the handicapped and the healthy children. In Anambra, Imo and Rivers States, only handicapped children were placed in residential institutions. In the Cross River State, all those whose relatives could not be traced were placed in a children's home.

Handicapped children

The objectives of institutional care for handicapped children were: to provide specialized facilities needed for treatment of the handicapped; to provide specially trained staff who could establish a 'therapeutic' relationship with and serve as parent-surrogates to the children; to provide an environment conducive to the normal social and physical development of the children.

Based on the objectives stated above, the issue of concern in this study was the adequacy of facilities to render the type of specialized services required by the children. Consequently, officials in charge of these institutions were asked to indicate what problems they faced in carrying out their programmes.

Insufficient accommodation and lack of teaching aids and specialized equipment were mentioned by officials at the Oji River Special Education Centre. For the Uwani Cheshire Home, the major problem was funds, while at the psychiatric hospital, there was a problem

of wrong placement. The authorities here complained that a number of mentally retarded children had been placed in the hospital meant for psychiatric patients only. Thus in at least two instances, it had not been possible to meet the objectives of institutionalization.

Non-handicapped children

All the non-handicapped (healthy) children, comprising ten boys and seven girls, were placed at Nko Children's Home in the Cross River State. The objective of institutional placement for this group of children was to provide them with personalized care and adequate opportunities for normal social life; in other words, to prepare them for full integration into normal community life later.

In this connection, the staff in charge of the Children's Home indicated that the children were given the opportunity to participate in community life. They attended public schools, community churches and took part in sports, games and competitions with other children. Their relationship with the community was said to be warm and cordial.

Knowing that the children would not stay in the institution for ever, the study was concerned with what plans had been made for their future. The data showed that the institution had no individualized plans for each child; rather there was a general approach of sending them to post-primary schools. This indicates that not enough attention was paid to the mechanics of transition from institutional to normal community life. There is therefore, in cases similar to the one under consideration, an urgent need for some form of aptitude testing and personal counselling to discover each child's interests and abilities and to guide him or her accordingly.

d) General issues in placement exercise

i. Alternative child care methods

As indicated earlier, the various State governments involved in the rehabilitation exercise adopted different placement policies. The implicit assumption behind this approach was that the placement system adopted by each State was best suited to the people living in that particular State. This study was interested in verifying this assumption.

In this regard, both the parents, foster parents and social workers were asked to indicate which of the three placement methods – fostering, adoption and institutionalisation – they considered :

- most likely to ensure the child's normal development;
- most in keeping with the customs of their people;
- least in keeping (i.e. at variance) with the customs of their people.

It was found that 34 percent of parents and foster parents chose fostering, 25 percent chose adoption and 41 percent chose institutionalisation methods, as the most likely systems to ensure the overall normal development of the children. On a State basis, it was found that in Anambra State, the majority of the respondents chose adoption as the method most likely to ensure the children's normal development. This was followed by fostering and institutionalisation, respectively. In Rivers and Cross River States, adoption was favoured most, while in Imo State, fostering was the most favoured system, followed by institutionalisation and adoption.

Among social workers, the pattern of response was different. It was found that 50 percent of social workers favoured fostering, while 26 percent and 24 percent favoured adoption and institutionalisation, respectively. This was more or less a reversal of the order of preference registered by the parent/foster parent group.

One possible explanation for this divergence in opinion is that the parents' choice might

have been influenced by their idea that institutional placement involved government catering' which, in their opinion, was better than that provided by an individual or family. On the other hand, it would appear that the social worker's choice was influenced by consideration of the psychological and emotional aspects of institutionalisation, the importance of which a large majority of the parents were not in a position to appreciate.

Turning to the question of the placement alternative most in keeping with local customs, the data showed that a large majority of the respondents considered fostering to be most in agreement with the customs and usages of their people. More specifically, 72 percent of all respondents chose fostering, 22 percent chose adoption, and 6 percent chose institutional care as being most compatible with customary practice. It is very significant to note that institutional placement, which was chosen by 41 percent of the parents' group as the best way to care for orphaned children, was now chosen by only 6 percent of the same group as being most compatible with their customary practice.

Ethnically, it was found that the majority of respondents from five out of the seven major ethnic groups in the study area considered fostering to be most compatible with their traditions. Furthermore, it was found that over 90 percent of all respondents from the Efik-Ibibios and the Anangs, two ethnic groups in the Cross River State (the only State that opted for institutional placement), chose fostering as most compatible with their customary practice. This finding, to say the least, calls to question the basis upon which the Cross River State Government decided to adopt a system of institutional placement.

Among the social workers, the pattern of response was very similar to that of parents and foster/parents. A large majority of social workers (76 percent) chose fostering to be most compatible with their customary practice, followed by adoption and institutionalisation. Here we observe a general agreement in the views of both parents and social workers. This consensus confirms our earlier suggestion that the differences observed in the opinion of the two groups regarding which placement method was most likely to ensure overall normal development of the children, arose out of differences in their understanding of the meaning and implications of institutional placement.

On the question of which placement alternative was considered culturally incompatible, the data showed that, in general, respondents considered adoption to be the least compatible with their customs. The social work practitioners also expressed the same opinion.

From the foregoing analysis, it may be concluded that there were no appreciable differences in the opinions of both parents and social workers from the various States concerning the cultural compatibility of various placement alternatives. Secondly, the majority of respondents from all the States covered considered fostering to be most in keeping with their customs. These findings contain important practical and policy implications for governments, as well as for social work practitioners both in Nigeria and other African countries.

ii. Child's identity and right to a name at birth

This issue pertains to a possible violation of the child's right to a name at birth and self identity, as enunciated in the United Nations 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. To obtain the information on this issue, respondents were asked to supply the full names by which the children were currently known. These were compared with their original names at the time of placement. A child's self-identity and right to a name at birth were deemed violated where the original name was changed to that of the guardian or foster parent.

The data showed that: among the children who had been reunited with their families, name changes had occurred in 19 percent of the cases; among fostered children, changes were reported in 61 percent of cases; while among the institutionalized children, there was

only one case of a change of name. Thus the incidence of name changes was highest among fostered children. This is an indication that most of the foster parents regarded fostering as *de facto* adoption and wanted the foster children to assume the parents' names.

However, different reasons were given for the name changes. These included marriage, Christian baptism, restoration of real names in the place of nicknames and notions of making the name 'more meaningful'. This shows that there were two types of name changes -- one sanctioned by society in the case of marriage or baptism, and the other not sanctioned by law or tradition. It is changes in the latter category that constitute a violation of a child's basic right. The data showed that, while socially approved name changes occurred among the reunited and institutionalized children, unsanctioned changes occurred mostly among fostered children.

iii. Acceptance and societal integration of the children

The last general issue in placement to be considered is whether the children had any problems being accepted and integrated into their respective families, foster families, institutions and communities. Other studies have shown that non-acceptance by family members is likely to have adverse effects on the emotional security and psycho-social development of the child. This may give rise to various forms of abnormality, marginality, delinquency or hatred for society.

In this connection, all parents, foster parents and the children themselves were asked if there had been any persons or groups who were unhappy about their arrival or return. The children were also asked if there were persons or groups whom they felt did not particularly like them.

Analysis of responses to these questions showed that, on the whole, the children were warmly welcomed into the various communities. Furthermore, 96 percent of the parents reported that no person or group was unhappy about the child's return, while 4 percent indicated that someone was unhappy with their return. However, 37 percent of the reunited children and 46 fostered children believed that someone was unhappy with their return/arrival in the family. The persons mentioned as unhappy were distant relations -- uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces -- rather than parents, foster parents or siblings.

The above data seemed to reveal a pattern of avuncular rivalry or jealousy which is, apparently, a reflection of the traditional avuncular hostility common in many African societies. In this case, the return of the child, or arrival of a potentially adoptive child, is seen as a threat to an opportunity for inheriting an otherwise childless uncle's property.

In sum, the data suggest the absence of serious acceptance problems. The children were generally readily accepted by members of the community as well as the nuclear family members. It was only among distant relations that some evidence of non-acceptance of the children was found. But being 'non-significant' members of the family, any opposition by this group was likely to produce minimal security problems for the children.

iv. Assessment of placement exercise

All the social workers who participated in the exercise were asked to give their individual assessment of the programme.

As a general rule, the social workers considered the exercise to have been a big success. Seventy percent of them saw it as very successful; 7 percent considered it partially successful; 3 percent thought it was poorly executed and 20 percent felt that it was too tedious and drawn out. On our part, we agree with the majority of social workers that the exercise was generally successful.

5. THE FAMILY ASSISTANCE EXERCISE

A follow-up survey, conducted by the International Union for Child Welfare in the war-affected areas of Nigeria early in 1971, revealed that about 10 percent of all the displaced children 'were at severe nutritional/medical risk'. This meant that, at the time, a large number of children required urgent help to ensure their survival. Realising that merely providing the children with food items and drugs could achieve no more than a temporary relief, it was decided that efforts should be directed at improving the economic conditions of their families so that they could provide adequately for their members. This was the rationale behind the Family Assistance Programme.

The Family Assistance Programme started in April 1971 and was carried out in two phases. The first phase, organised by the I.U.C.W., continued up until March 1972, at which time the Christian Council of Nigeria (C.C.N.) took over the operations. The second phase of the programme, known as the long-term assistance programme, was carried on by the CCN in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare in the former East Central and Rivers States. In all cases, the objective of the Family Assistance Programme was to facilitate the economic recovery and independence of the affected families.

A number of issues were involved in the organisation and execution of the Family Assistance exercise in Nigeria. These included: the customary attitude of Nigerians toward receiving 'alms' or 'charity' even in times of disaster; the effectiveness of the Family Assistance exercise as it was operated in Nigeria; and the superiority of one form of assistance over the other.

i. Attitude of Nigerians toward family assistance

Acceptance of charity has its own cultural connotation; hence people of different ethno-cultural background may view it differently. To this end, parents and foster parents were asked what opinions their neighbours held of persons who received family assistance.

The data showed that 93 percent of respondents indicated that those who received assistance were considered as lucky and enviable by their neighbours. Only 1 percent said that recipients were despised by their neighbours, and the remaining 6 percent thought that recipients were neither envied nor despised; they were regarded with indifference.

When the responses were analyzed in the light of whether or not the respondent had himself received assistance, it was found that 91 percent of those who had received and 96 percent who had never received assistance thought that recipients were considered enviable by their neighbours. On the other hand, only 1 percent of both recipients and non-recipients alike thought that recipients were looked down upon by their neighbours. This result was contrary to our expectation that a greater percentage of non-receivers would express adverse opinion against the exercise.

In a follow-up question, non-recipients were further asked if they would, in any case, have accepted the assistance if offered to them. In answer to this question, 94 percent said that they would gladly have accepted it; 4 percent said they would have done so reluctantly while 2 percent said that they would have rejected it.

In summing up, it can be said that the Family Assistance Programme enjoyed overwhelming support from peoples of the former Eastern Nigeria; that both recipients and non-recipients saw nothing wrong in receiving such assistance; and that the various cultural groups in the area of study expressed very similar views on the propriety or otherwise of receiving family assistance.

ii. Effectiveness of the family assistance exercise

In order to assess the effectiveness of the family assistance exercise, the study compared the economic position of the recipients with that of non-recipients. Among those who received some assistance, 57 percent reported that they were economically better-off than before, 9 percent reported no change in their economic situation, while 34 percent said that they were economically worse-off than before. The corresponding figures for those who did not receive any assistance were : 52 percent, 10 percent and 38 percent, respectively. This shows that the economic situation of recipient families showed little improvement over those of non-recipient families. This implied that the family assistance exercise had not been very effective. Two possible reasons have been suggested for this situation : either that the amount of aid given was too meagre to make any impact, or that it was given mainly to those families which had no need for it.

iii. Type and form of assistance

There were two types of assistance in operation : monetary or cash assistance and assistance in kind such as yam seedlings, chicken, farming or work tools. There was no consensus among experts or social work practitioners as to which of these methods was preferable. Thus the study was interested in ascertaining which method proved more effective in Nigeria. To this end, families which received assistance in cash were compared with those who received assistance in kind, with respect to their present economic situation. Of those who received only cash assistance, 55 percent reported improved economic conditions; 34 percent reported that their conditions had worsened, while 11 percent reported no change in their conditions. Among those who received both assistance in kind and in cash, 57 percent reported improved conditions, 38 percent reported worsened conditions and 5 percent reported no change at all. Of those who received assistance in kind only, 49 percent reported improved conditions, 31 percent reported worsened conditions and 20 percent indicated no change in their economic situation.

The conclusion may therefore be drawn that, from the data presented above, none of the three forms of assistance applied in Nigeria proved to be more effective than the others in ensuring the economic recovery of the recipient families.

iv. Short-term I.U.C.W. (1971-1972) and long term (C.C.N.) assistance

Of interest to this study also is whether there was a significant difference in the economic recovery of short-term and long term family assistance recipients.

The data showed that among short-term recipients, 52 percent indicated improved economic conditions, 11 percent reported no change and 37 percent reported worsened economic conditions. Among long-term recipients, on the other hand, 96 percent reported improved economic conditions whereas 4 percent reported their economic situation to be worse. Thus the data have shown considerable differences in the rate of economic recovery of the two groups of recipients. More specifically, prolonged or long-term family assistance has resulted in better economic recovery for the recipient families.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

Having considered specific issues involved in the various 'Exercises', a general assessment or evaluation of the entire programme from a social work and child welfare point of view may now be attempted. Viewed from this standpoint, the rehabilitation programme may be

conceived as a big exercise in social work intervention. It was, in fact, an attempt at applying known basic principles of social work and child welfare to the resettlement and rehabilitation of thousands of war-displaced children and their families.

Any project evaluation normally begins with a clear statement of the objectives; for, as Rosemary Lukton has observed, 'evaluative research as to the effectiveness of crisis intervention cannot be done until it is possible to specify which forms of intervention are to be used with what clients, over what period of time, and with what treatment goals' (1974 : 398). Unfortunately, the organizers of the Nigerian programme did not provide any such clearly formulated set of objectives. Nevertheless, while appreciating that 'there is as yet no well developed treatment methodology in crisis brief treatment' nor in social work intervention (Rapport 1965 : 292), we will attempt a reconstruction of the overall objectives of this rehabilitation programme from general social work literature, together with documents left by some of the programme officials.

According to Lukton (1974), there are two levels of crisis intervention – primary intervention and secondary intervention levels.

The primary intervention level

This level of intervention consists of the 'provision of physical and social supplies for populations at risk' (1974 : 395). This intervention stage generally applies at the group level. In the Nigerian situation, the objectives of the programme at this level were :

- a) To remove victims from physical risk; this was achieved by the evacuation exercise.
- b) To assist victims develop effective coping patterns and thereby mitigate personal disorganisation; this was achieved through the in-camp care and treatment exercise.
- c) To assist victims achieve or regain autonomous functioning within the shortest possible time; the reunion, placement and family assistance exercises were aimed at this goal. However the uncertainty about the fate of the children in institutions and the indeterminacy of the ultimate position of those in foster homes detracts much from a full realisation of this objective.
- d) To safeguard and protect basic human rights and individual dignity of the victims while pursuing the above objectives; instances of violation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the child to a name and a nationality at birth cited earlier detract from a full realisation of this goal.

The secondary intervention level

This is subsequent to the first level and operates primarily at the individual rather than group level.

It consists of case-work identification and clinical treatment of individuals with special adjustment and other psycho-social problems. This is an area where the rehabilitation programme, probably due to lack of qualified personnel and lack of transport facilities, did not achieve much success.

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