

Interrogating Insurgence in the South-East Nigeria: A Political Brouhaha or a Political Solution?

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Abstract

Insecurity is a national challenge and a major implicative factor of varied worrisome issues in Nigeria. It has become the daily reality of most parts of the nation, particularly the southeast region where incessant conflicts and social disorder create severe psychological, political and socio-economic dysfunctions. Southeast inhabitants face terrorization due to the chaos and violence associated with the activities of various non-state actors such as The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the sit-at-home order and its related issues including kidnappings, farmers/herders clashes and other forms of criminality that cripple daily life and interactions in the area; culminating to a state of uncertainty, fear and apprehension and in most cases lead to low morale occasioned by the fierce gun battles and reprisal attacks between government forces, agitators and unknown clandestine groups. This precarious situation significantly paralyzes socio-economic activities in a region characterized by people of renowned economic enterprise, and valued contributors, to Nigeria's economic growth. This paper made use of library research as a methodology to analyse the state of insecurity in the southeast and how it affects the socio-economic development of the region. It analyses the prevailing volatile environment as a strangulator of socio-economic life and activities with untold adverse effects on the productivity of the region and the nation as a whole. The paper recommends effective reformation of the law enforcement agencies, good governance that addresses concerns of IPOB agitators and the zone; and other strategies for southeast stability and sustainable national economic advancement.

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1. Introduction

Years into the twenty-first century, concerted efforts are being made globally to increase economic growth and development in different nations. This is coming on the heels of the 2007 economic recession which slowed the pace of economic growth and development globally. To aggravate the situation, over 100 million people were pushed to extreme poverty globally by COVID-19 pandemic. (World Bank, 2020); the resultant effect is that hardship, criminality and insecurity became the order of the day.

Nigeria being part of the global community, is not isolated from the world's economic growth and development meltdown which inadvertently resulted in hardship and an increase in crime and other security challenges. This resulted in unprecedented insecurity situations across the country. The country's national security threat aggravated and subsequently resulted in an increased national budget allocation on security and the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011. This however, did not improve the level of security in the country as Nigeria has consistently been ranked low in the Global Peace Index (GPI 2012), signifying a worsened state of insecurity in Nigeria (Adagba, Ugwu, and Eme, 2012).

Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones and the southeast being one of the zones is predominantly Igbos and largely Christians comprising five states namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The zone is bounded by the River Niger on the west, the riverine Niger Delta on the south, the flat North Central to the north, and the Cross River on the east. It is divided between the Cross-Niger transition forests Eco regions in the south and the Guinean forest-savanna mosaic in the drier north. Culturally, the vast majority of the zone falls within Igbo land, the indigenous cultural homeland of the Igbo people, a group that makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the southeastern population.

The country has in recent times witnessed an upsurge in the level of insecurity in the southeast geopolitical zone. Crimes such as terrorism, banditry, hostage-taking, kidnapping, armed robbery, and violent attacks by unknown gunmen on government infrastructures and installations, have exacerbated security tensions in the region (Asoya& Obi, 2021). Contributing to the insecurity situation in the southeast geopolitical zone is the revived Biafran secessionist activities which have in recent years resulted in violent confrontations with Nigeria's security agencies and have led to dozens of deaths.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) a group that is known for its firm and strong opposition to the Nigerian government especially on the issue that concerns the southeast region, established its military wing known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in December 2020 to function as its paramilitary force (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). This led to further escalated confrontations between the group and the federal government and subsequently led to heightened security challenges in the region. The escalation in the level of insecurity in the southeast geopolitical zone prompted late Prof. George Obiozor the then President of Ohanaeze while welcoming President Buhari to Imo state on Thursday 9th September 2021 to remark "Regrettably our South East zone has recently become a theatre of conflict, negating the peace-loving nature of our people. This situation has therefore raised the question, what is the root cause of the rise of insecurity especially in the zone? and to what extent has the insecurity situation hampered the

socio-economic development of the region? This study therefore analyzes the root causes of insecurity in the southeast, its impact on the socio-economic development of the region and finally proffer solutions and recommendations.

Security has become a major concern at global, regional and national levels. Our nation has had to grapple with various forms of internal security issues over the past decade in all geo-political zones. The work is aimed at x-raying how security issues have affected sustainable development. The research adopts a qualitative research method through primary sources of data and a documentary approach to data analysis. The theoretical discourse is on relative deprivation theory. The study found that the marginalization of the Igbo region and military high-handedness coupled with police brutality and excessive use of force on civilians are among the drivers of insecurity in the region. Widespread injustice and impunity of the ruling class and the security apparatus, religious intolerance and purposeless leadership are top most dangerous to sustainable development. These challenges have impacted negatively on the socio-economic, infrastructural, and general well-being of the people. The study therefore advocates for realignment of the Nigeria polity as well as strategic, fair and purposeful leadership both within the zone and the state at large to tackle the menace of insecurity.

2. Review of Related Literature

Security

There are different approaches to conceptualizing security which is the antithesis of insecurity. In this paper, an attempt will be made to x-ray the concept of security to have a good understanding of the concept of insecurity. The need for security was the reason for the social contract between the people and the state in which people willingly surrendered their rights to a constituted authority (government) who in turn ensured the survival of all. Therefore, security according to Stan (2004), encompasses all the mechanisms put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-political and economic conditions. For decades, all developmental discourse has been centered on security-related issues. Several attempts have been made since the Cold War ended to redefine security from a state-centric perspective to a broader perspective that places a premium on individuals in which human security that embodies elements of national security, human rights and national development remains a major instrument for explaining the concept. At the heart of this debate is the effort to deepen and widen the understanding of security (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013; Kruhmann, 2003).

Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013), went further to proffer different approaches to the conceptualization of human security and the theoretical literature can be categorized into two major strands. Firstly, the neo-realist theoretical strand defines security as the primary responsibilities of the state, and the second strand, a postmodernist or plural view which on its part defines security as the responsibilities of non-state actors and displaces the state as a major provider of security. Proponents of this approach posit that the concept of security goes beyond a military determination of threats. They are however of the opinion that government should be more concerned with the economic security of individuals than the security of the state because the root causes of insecurity are economic. Some scholars conceptualized security as emphasizing the absence of threats to the peace, stability, national cohesion, and political and socio-economic objectives of a country (Igbuzor, 2011; Oche, 2001; Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). Thus there is

a consensus in the contemporary literature that security is vital for national cohesion, peace, and sustainable development.

It is therefore apparent that national security is a desideratum, sine qua non for the economic growth and development of any country (Oladeji and Folorunso, 2007). In the intelligence community, there is a consensus that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the existence of a robust mechanism to respond proactively to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency, expertise, and in real-time.

Insecurity

The concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety. According to Beland (2005), insecurity is regarded by many scholars as a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. According to Achumba et al (2013), insecurity is defined from two broad perspectives. Firstly, the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury and secondly the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity prove that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but are also vulnerable to threats and dangers when they occur. Therefore, insecurity in the context of this paper is defined as a breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic, or political that contributes to recurring conflicts and leads to the wanton destruction of lives and property.

Socio-economic Development

Socio-economic development is defined as a product of development that encompasses the process of social and economic transformation in a society. Socio-economic development embraces changes taking place in the social sphere mostly of an economic nature. Thus, socio-economic development is made up of processes caused by exogenous and endogenous factors which determine the course and direction of the development. It is measured with indicators, such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Changes in less tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and the extent of participation in civil society. Causes of socio-economic impacts are, for example, new technologies, changes in laws, changes in the physical environment and ecological changes.

Scholars have identified strong links between security and development since the Cold War ended (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013; Chandler, 2007). They argued that development cannot be achieved in any nation where there are conflicts, crises and war. There is a consensus in the literature that security and development are two different and inseparable concepts that affect each other, and this has naturally triggered debates on the security-development nexus (Chandler, 2007; Stan 2004).

Empirical Review

Ani and Onyebukwa, (2016) pried into the issue of security and socio-economic national development. They discover that the issue of security has taken center stage in the contemporary

international system. Continents, regions, states, etc are all battling directly and indirectly to improve their direct domestic and international security status. It, therefore, follows that security requires not only physical protection from existing harm but also the establishment of resilient sociopolitical and economic structures to deal with its complexity. In this era of globalization, growing interdependence because of uncertainties in security has given it a new meaning, scope, perspective and dimension. Consequently, policymakers in different countries around the globe have gradually come to recognize that the protection of states and their citizens requires a fully integrated multidimensional and comprehensive approach to security issues which directly influences civil, social, cultural, political, environmental and economic sectors of the society. Such recognition has precipitated several measures and countermeasures to deal with security. However, the underlying truth is that security is the state of being free from danger or threat. It is the degree of protection to safeguards a nation against danger, damage, crime and loss. It includes the safety of a state against criminal activities. The work is a synoptic account of the dynamics of the different forms of security threats facing the Nigerian State. It showed how several major military and non-military forces of insecurity are weakening the process of national development in the country and made extensive recommendations on the strategies for sustainable national security and development in Nigeria.

Ezemenaka (2021) explored the variable between youth violence and human security in Nigeria. He avers that the failures of governance and statehood in Nigeria breed an anarchical or disruptive system in the state and provide a platform for youth violence and justification for disruptive behaviour against the state systems and structures.

Contributing to the available research, the study shifts its focus to understanding and addressing the linkage of disruptive behaviour by studying and discussing Human Security through the lens of youth violence in Nigeria. In doing so, the study adopts a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative data with Ted Robert Gurr's theory of relative deprivation to investigate, analyze and discuss the issues herein. From the findings, cultism and ethnic factors were identified as major causes of youth violence among others. Thus, effective institutions, quality education, and economic and security reforms both at regional and national are noted as a means to address youth violence in Nigeria.

Udeh, Okoroafor and Ihezue, (2013) studied the variable of insecurity and economic development. They assert that in the past decade or more, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented security challenges occasioned by the activities of militants in the South-South region, kidnappers in the southeast, violent armed robbery in most parts of the country, political assassination, ritual killings and more recently activities of Boko Haram in some parts of the northern region, especially northeast. This social menace, when put together impinges on the security of lives and property of both Nigerian citizens and foreigners living or even trying to invest in the country.

Thus, more particularly, since late last year 2011, suicide bombings in some parts of the northern region have put Nigerians and foreigners on their toes. This has become worrisome in the face of Nigeria's preparedness to be ranked among the twenty (20) developed countries of the world by the year 2020. These social menaces trigger a worrisome sense of insecurity that challenges Nigeria's efforts toward national economic development and consequently its vision 20:20200. It also scares the attraction of foreign investment and their contributions to economic development in Nigeria. This paper recommends effective leadership and good governance as a panacea to solving problems of insecurity, unemployment, poverty, hunger, disease, etc.

Theoretical Framework

Relative Deprivation Theory (RD).

The work is anchored on Relative Deprivation Theory (RD). This theory was first developed by an American sociologist Robert K. Merton as a concept of the explanation and understanding of deviant behaviours, using the concept of anomie by a French sociologist Emile Durkheim as a point of departure. Since then the theory has been expanded and applied for the explanations of other social behaviors by scholars such as Karl Polanyi; Walter Runciman; Ted Robert Gurr; and Jerry D. Rose, among others.

The theory is used to describe feelings or measures of economic, political, or social exclusion or deprivation that are relative rather than absolute (that is about a group and its needs). Proponents of the theory argue that 'relative deprivation' is a potential cause of agitations, social movements and deviance, which most times lead to extreme situations of violence such as rioting, terrorism, civil wars, dissolution and other instances of social deviance such as crime.

The central thesis of this theory is that grievances of people who feel deprived of what they perceive as values to which they are entitled and capable of getting are the source of deviant behaviors in society. To practically demonstrate how deprivation can lead to deviant behaviors, Runciman noted that there are four basic assumptions and/or preconditions of relative deprivation (of object X by person A): Person A does not have X, Person A knows of other persons that have X, Person A wants to have X Person A believes obtaining X is realistic. In a nutshell, scholars of theory assert that the deprivation of people of values and entitlements they strongly believe they can achieve is the major cause of deviant behaviors in society. The theory argues that people or individuals deprived of the values they deserve become aggrieved when they compare their strengths and chances of getting such values to other people who easily achieve such values. The theory is apt for this study because it not only explains the major cause of insecurity in the southeast geopolitical zone which is caused by the feeling of marginalization and deprivation, it further exposes the basis of the agitations for restructuring and quest for self-determination by some Igbos in Nigeria.

Discussions on the rising violence in the South-East Region

It is important to x-ray the spate of escalating violence in the Southeast geopolitical zone. This can be associated with many issues, including the secession calls that followed the Nigeria-Biafra civil war more than fifty-four years ago. Perceived marginalization, structural violence, and lack of inclusion by the federal government form part of the triggers of self-determination calls in the Southeast. For example, after the Biafra and Civil War, the post-conflict stabilization strategy tagged "Reintegration, Reconstruction and Reconciliation (RRR) declared by the then Gen. Yakubu Gowon led administration failed to achieve positive outcomes as cries of marginalization of the southeast grew louder by the day. Many non-state actors have emerged with the strongest being the now-proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), championing the cause in recent years.

These actors are consistent with the promotion of the Biafra agenda and spreading anti-one Nigeria messages. The group's paramilitary arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was purportedly set up to secure "Igbo lives" from the activities of herdsmen, forms part of its growing

discredit for Nigeria's authority and its monopoly of the instrument of violence and its plan to establish a Biafra nation. This series of events triggered constant violent clashes between IPOB and security agencies and exacerbated the security tension in the Southeast. The consistency of the conflicts has added to security uncertainties in a relatively peaceful southeast region and thus negatively affected its socio-economic development.

Beyond IPOB and Nigeria's security operatives' violent clashes, A new security concern was introduced in December 2020 when a group known as "unknown gunmen" launched a series of on security personnel and infrastructure, especially the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). This opened another frontier to the security challenges in the southeast in particular and Nigeria in general. The indictment of IPOB for the targeted assaults by the federal government through security agencies and subsequent denial by the group leaves the situation in a perplexed state as other criminal actors may have capitalized on this perplexing situation to carry out attacks within the region undetected.

State of the Southeast Economy before the high insecurity situation.

Before this current state of insecurity and uncertainty in the southeast, the economic atmosphere can be described as relatively friendly, calm and conducive for human and social interactions, businesses, and commercial ventures.

The region was open for every Nigerian and international trader, businessman and organization to pursue their individual and corporate legitimate interests without fear, anxiety and a sense of uncertainty (The Leader, 2021). A cursory look at the southeast pre-sit-at-home situation in terms of socio-economic development cannot be comprehensive without dating back to the ugly experience of the Nigerian civil war of 1967 – 1970. The Nigeria civil war devastated the Igbo (Southeast) economy and diminished its growth significantly. The civil war, which the Igbos prosecuted and lost, came on the heels of an end to the colonial experiences with the double blow on the psyche of a people who were still battling to recover from the dislocation of values attendant to war situations. At the end of the civil war, the Igbo people lost cohesion, there was virtually no need to retain an identity that had been eroded by the war and which had become a barrier rather than a tool for survival (Toni-Duruaku and Chukwu, 2012).

From the time after the war, and the losses of their homes and landed properties in Rivers State, the Igbos began to confront the issue of reintegration into the national economic sphere; and this they did with utmost ingenuity, dexterity, and uncanny hard work to the envy of many other ethnic groups in Nigeria (Udensi, 2019). Despite the devastating losses in terms of human lives, properties, and assets, the southeast inhabitants forged ahead with determination and God-given enterprising nature to resuscitate a regional economy that was battered beyond measure by the effects of the civil war. The southeast region is an area inhabited by more than 25 million people and about 10-12% of the total Nigerian population, and therefore a significant population with immense capacities in the Nigerian economy (Ekeopara, 2016). As one of the major regions in the country, the southeast is made up of Igbos who are known to be highly industrious and business oriented; and is a region that has continued to play significant roles in the economic development of Nigeria.

Southeastern Nigerian people regard every part of the federation as home and invest heavily in all parts of Nigeria, whether rural or urban (Onyenechere and Osuji, 2012). Despite the perceived marginalization, subjugation and domination, particularly in the political sphere, the Igbos have

continued to persevere and pursue their economic growth extensively; and continued to contribute immensely to national economic growth and development. From the end of the civil war up to early 2000, the southeast economy remained strong with booming palm oil business, trade and commerce, mercantile endeavours, entrepreneurship capacities, and industrial appeal that added value to national economic productivity and expansion (Okoroafor, 2018). The southeast economy was relatively stable given the Igbos' long industry that is widely recognized and respected in Nigeria and even beyond West Africa.

However, this economic scenario of the region took an ugly turn in terms of its business and social life due to insecurity situations that have become heightened and life-threatening in recent years. Anaba (2010) observes that "by 2010, several entrepreneurs have been gruesomely murdered, and Imo and Anambra are among the states of southeastern Nigeria that top the list of violent crimes in the entire Nigeria according to statistics from Police Headquarters at Abuja." The years between 2010 and 2022 have been a period of tough security issues in the southeast arising from the armed attacks, kidnapping, farmers/herders clashes, and other criminalities that pervade all parts and corners of the southeast, jeopardizing its economy and capacity to contribute to the nation's drive for economic growth.

Southeast Insecurity and National Economic Growth in Nigeria

The security situation in the southeast holds major implications for the state of the national economy in Nigeria. The absence of relative peace, law and order, and a general sense of reasonable level of certainty can influence human productivity and economic activities negatively. Given the challenges of insecurity in the southeast region, the people of this area face numerous obstacles that undermine their efforts towards increased socio-economic activities that can engender high productivity.

Firstly, the issue of the sit-at-home order stands out as one major issue creating so much fear and anxiety that affects people's psyche, mental stability, and general attitude as well as dispositions towards free engagement and movement from one place to another for business and commercial activities. People in the region are increasingly afraid of moving about as they used to do in the past. There is an extreme fear of being attacked, killed, and having properties destroyed by the enforcers of the sit-at-home order, or even running into crossfires or gun battles between law enforcement agencies and some criminal elements or the so-called unknown gunmen.

Onyema (2021) states that "the situation in the southeast region has so deteriorated to the extent that people fear for their lives and are skeptical about where to go and when to go out because of violent attacks and harassment". Also, Nwigwe (2022) concurs with this view and posits that "businesses and economic ventures in Aba, Onitsha and Nnewi have been badly affected by the sit-at-home order and the general state of poor security in the parts of the southeast". There are enough issues of insecurity in the southeast to demobilize human mobility and interactions given the incessant bloody attacks and destruction that pervade most parts of Igboland (Southeast). Economic activities are driven by human engagements and interactions between one another and require that people in different businesses and enterprises relate with limited stress and obstacles for businesses to flourish in any given area. It also entails that these individuals move freely to various points of business interactions to effectively deal with one another in a more trustworthy, tangible and conclusive way and manner that will engender some degree of stability and sustainability in their businesses, and eventually add value to the economic enterprise of the region.

This is the practical inconvenience and obstacle that the lack of free and limited mobility of both people in business and commodities brings to bear on the capacity of the Southeast economy to grow and be able to continue to contribute to the national economy. Intra-city and inter-city movements of businessmen and women, traders, transporters, artisans, commuters and the general people of the southeast have grossly reduced to the extent that some businesses have either shut down or operate peripherally due to the sit-at-home order and its related ugly incidences. Attacks on shops that open on Mondays, markets burnt, private and government buildings and facilities burnt create palpable fear and trauma that keep some people indoors and many others minimally mobile thereby reducing socio-economic interactions and interdependence necessary for propelling economic productivity and growth.

Secondly, the issue of kidnappings, political assassinations, ritual killings, armed robbery and other related criminal activities have been on the rise for over a decade in the southeast (The Leader, 2022). All these acts of criminality lead to wanton killings of individuals who are breadwinners, entrepreneurs, businessmen, employers, community leaders and industrialists whose contributions to the region's economy are lost due to their death. This is one major way through which the insecurity situation in the area continues to undermine its economy and that of the nation as a whole.

Obinna (2022) avers that "most individuals that are kidnapped or killed in robbery attacks in the southeast are wealthy businessmen and politicians who also have private businesses that employ many people in the area". Kidnapping often ends with the kidnapped individual paying huge sums of money as ransom and in some cases, the victims are killed or die as a result of the stress and rough treatment they encounter. Whichever way, kidnap turns out, it is a criminal practice that results in the take away of someone's hard-earned money or loss of life; and the two scenarios constitute issues that kill businesses because the death of businessmen or loss of huge sums of money can put an end to many businesses and undermine economic growth. Thirdly, the incessant clashes and disputes that occur between farmers and herders in many rural communities in the southeast have continued to lower agricultural output and have led to the loss of life of many rural farmers and herdsman as well as the destruction of many farms, homes and communities.

It has also caused displacement of many communities in Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia and other states (Obinna, 2021). This condition of many rural communities hampers the free movement of goods from these areas to the urban centers, apart from the fact that it has reduced agricultural and other socio-economic activities in these areas. It has also increased the rural-to-urban migration and negatively affected other demographics in the rural areas. All these added to the issues of sit-at-home orders and kidnappings worsened the state of the southeast economy to the detriment of not only the southeasterners but also Nigerians at large. It is noteworthy that some towns and cities in the southeast particularly Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi, Enugu and Abakaliki are industrial hubs and major agricultural products outlets that feed the nation's need for industrial goods and farm products while Nnewi, Onitsha and Aba are known for their business and trading outreach in not only Nigeria but even beyond West Africa; farm products such as Abakaliki rice and yam are exported beyond the southeast region and Nigeria. The southeast remains one of the highest producers of palm oil in West Africa (Udensi, 2019). The insecurity situation in the southeast, no doubt, affects all forms of human activities in the area including all dimensions of socio-economic activities such as transportation, banking, trading, haulage, meetings, farming, markets, exchange of goods and services, industrial activities, etc. In this kind of economic atmosphere, businesses and commercial activities operate partially and with difficult challenges that lower productivity thereby adversely

affecting national economic growth in Nigeria because one of its major productive regions (the southeast) is insecure and underproductive.

Southeast Security and Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

The state of a national economy is partly a product of the efforts and contributions of its constituent units towards the economic sector. A nation's capacity to produce or its productive capacity is influenced greatly by its resources both human and material. The natural resources and potentials of any economy help to determine its capacity to make significant strides in economic growth, productivity and by extension development (Adegboyega, 2009). Nigeria's economic growth, like in other economies, is influenced by the participation and contribution of the various parts or regions of Nigeria. With each region's unique features and national resources, they can contribute to national productivity and aid the growth of the economy. On this premise, sustainable economic growth in the regions that constitute Nigeria amounts to sustainable economic growth in the entire country. This is why the regional economic situation affects the national economy and development.

The situation in the southeast region is uncondusive and hostile for businesses, industries and productivity to thrive in the past few years as a result of the heightened level of insecurity in the region. The southeast is a major region of Nigeria with fertile land for many cash crops and contains numerous minerals that are largely untapped or underutilized due to the government's failure to explore extractions of minerals for economic growth over many years (Udensi, 2019). This indifference towards the extractive industry has left the region unable to effectively tap its mineral resources for national development; and also limited its capacity to contribute more to Nigeria's economic growth. However, in the other sectors of the national economy, the region has over many years since after independence shown its potential as a contributory stakeholder in the economic sphere of Nigeria.

The southeast exports many agricultural products, particularly cash crops such as yam, cassava, cashew, cocoyam, palm oil, etc., to other parts of the country, and the Igbos are known to be very industrious and enterprising. They engage in various other productive ventures that are critically contributing to the national economy. It is stated that they are the most traveled Nigerians and are found in all the interior communities and towns in Nigeria doing all sorts of business and human pursuits (Agbodike, 2000). Again, insecurity in the southeast takes many different dimensions, ranging from attacks on commuters, travelers, traders and businesses to burning of markets, homes, vehicles, private and public buildings and facilities, etc.

It has taken a dangerous outlook and profound effects that are undermining the southeast economy significantly. For instance, people from Orlu, Orsu and Njaba council areas of Imo State have been terrorized for more than two years with high levels of harassment and intimidation as a result of the activities and clashes between the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the unknown gunmen and the law enforcement agencies, particularly the Nigerian Army and Nigeria Police. The issue of insecurity in Orlu has claimed many lives and properties worth millions of Naira (The Leader, 2022).

Despite random kidnappings in major towns and cities across the southeast, kidnappers have gone further to exclusively operate in some areas unchallenged for many months; the Ihube-Okigwe – Lokpa axis of the Enugu to Port Harcourt Express Way, the Oriagu Market Axis of Mbano, Enugu-

Nsukka Highway, etc., have been fields of operation for kidnappers and armed robbers (The Ambassador Newspaper, 2012). This is the picture of the security challenge in most parts of the southeast region that makes it increasingly in-conducive and unfriendly for businesses and other socio-economic activities to thrive in recent times.

The damage to markets and assets of people, the fear of people traveling and the loss of human lives plus the general state of uncertainty are all issues that are antithetical to the meaningful and productive economic life of any society. The insecurity situation in the southeast not only weakens its economy but also lowers the region's economic outreach and expansion. As an area with high human mobility and trade, insecurity hampers its capacity for growth, and as a player in the national economic sphere. This situation does not aid Nigeria's quest for sustainable economic growth and development. Attaining development itself is not practically feasible in a state of insecurity, let alone sustainable development. In essence, there can be no sustainability or any form of economic transformation in the absence of relative peace, law and order.

The southeast region as of today is not a sustainable society primarily because of the level of insecurity in the area. The issues that generated or led to the insecurity situation in the southeast are opposites of what sustainable economic development objective of any society or economy. According to the TIDE 2008 Report, the fundamental elements of sustainable economic development include interdependence, citizenship and stewardship, needs and rights of future generations, diversity, quality of life, sustainable change, and uncertainty and precaution in action. All these elements seem to have been violated or eroded in the southeast before and during this present insecurity predicament in the region.

Causes of insecurity in the Southeast geopolitical zone

Marginalization of the Igbos and Relative Deprivation.

The South East was regarded by many as the most peaceful Zone in Nigeria, especially with the rise of terrorism in the North West that spread to other parts of the Northern regions. However, this narrative has recently changed as the region grapples with serious security challenges. This situation crippled all social and economic activities in the zone. The heightened insecurity situation prompted late Prof. George Obiozor the then President of Ohanaeze while welcoming President Buhari to Imo state on Thursday, September 9, to remark "Regrettably our South East zone has recently become a theatre of conflict, negating the peace-loving nature of our people. This situation is believed by many to be a result of the perceived marginalization of the southeast geopolitical zone by the federal government. Contributing to the issue, Dilichukwu (2019) further avers that: "Since the end of the civil war, the alleged marginalization has become dynastic in the Igbo-dominated area of the southeast in particular and the southern part of the country in general.

The marginalization trend manifests in lopsided appointment, promotion and admission into federal establishments and institutions of learning through the instrumentality of the quota system and federal character that favour mediocrity at the expense of merit. More so, in the area of geopolitical boundary, the southeast is made up of only five states while their counterparts are composed of six states and seven states even. The number one seat in Nigeria either by omission or commission has eluded the zone since after the civil war till date. The feeling of marginalization especially when compared to the privileges and opportunities enjoyed by other parts of the country causes feelings of frustration and restiveness especially among the youth in the zone.

Military/ Police Excessive use of force against the pro-IPOB.

There have been many accusations of the use of excessive force against protesters especially the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) by the Nigerian security agencies which has resulted in several deaths. According to Duerksen, (2021) In Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the Nigerian security forces and ESN clashed in a series of skirmishes in 2021 that resulted in the deaths of several civilians in what has become known as the Orlu crisis. This clamp down on the pro-Biafra agitators, instead of de-escalating tension in the zone rather exacerbated the situation. This further resulted in the formation of a paramilitary wing of IPOB known as Eastern Security Network ESN and also the emergence of other non-state actors such as the Unknown Gunmen who inflamed tensions by killing police officers at checkpoints in several locations in the South East. These back-and-forth raids and attacks risk plunging the region into a crisis.

Arrest, Extradition and Detention IPOB leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu

The arrest, extradition and detention of the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu in 2021 was seen by many observers as one of the major factors that exacerbated the already charged security situation in the southeast geopolitical zone. After his arrest and subsequent failure of the federal government to release him on bail, the region was thrown into another round of security challenge when the IPOB announced Monday's sit-at-home order which was enforced through the use of brutality which in most times resulted in the death of defiant. This order threw the entire region into turmoil and negatively affected its economic activities as most business places, schools, companies and in most cases government establishments complied with the order for fear of attack.

The Effects of Insecurity on the Socio-economic Development of South-Eastern Region

It is important to evaluate the general effects of insecurity on the economic development of the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. In the wake of heightened insecurity in the zone, many companies in the region began to wind up or scale down operations for instance it was reported via the official website of the First Bank of Nigeria PLC that eighty-one branches of the bank suspended operations within the region thereby making banking transactions impossible (Usman, 2017). Also, industrial activities in the zone were most times placed on hold in places like Nnewi Local Government Area of Anambra state and Aba in Abia state.

The suspension of industrial activities within those areas led to the loss of funds, as some of the businesses thrive on loans or daily cash remittances based on daily sales. The suspension also impacted negatively on the living standards of the people as factory staff who depend on wages or salary to take care of their needs and those of their loved ones were denied access to such benefits (Kingsley & Jan, 2016). Furthermore, the heightened insecurity in the region occasioned by the activities of non-state actors such as The unknown Gunmen and the Eastern Security Network (ECN) whose activities involve the destruction of government properties, killing of security agents, issuance and enforcement of Monday sit-at-home order impacted negatively on all business activities in the zone by paralyzing commercial activities in the zone. Also, the nightlife and hospitality sector in a state like Imo where hotels, clubs, lounges, and bars could be described as the major sources of occupation aside from the state government being the major employer of labor in the state gradually grounded to a halt (Imaobong 2023).

Although, the nightlife and hospitality sector might come back to life, its usual high tempo of activities might take time to return. It is also important to state that the traditional beliefs, norms, and culture of the Igbo ethnic group also witnessed low patronage as a result of the militarization of the region because of the secessionist agitation (Usman, 2017). Thus the current situation in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria is believed to be unsuitable for investment as no investor will be willing to invest in a volatile environment.

3. Findings and Conclusion

Insecurity is a major challenge to Nigeria's economic development because of its negative effects and implications on different ramifications, including her efforts towards sustainable national development. The southeast insecurity challenges which has lingered for many years without concrete measures to curtail it or even address its causal issues is a regional problem that has national implications with untold adverse effects on Nigeria's quest for economic growth and stability. The southeast is one region that is of immense economic value with human and material resources and enterprises that have, and can continue to be a significant player and contributor in the national economic sphere.

The insecurity crises in the southeast leave the area uncondusive and hostile to socio-economic activities and strangulate business, commercial and productivity ventures thereby limiting the capacity of the region to continue to play its roles and contribute to national economic growth.

The paper notes that insecurity in the southeast geopolitical zone undermines its improved economic productivity, growth and by extension the national drive towards sustainable economic development which is now a global benchmark for development with the 2030 deadline. Nigeria as one of the least developed countries is in dire need of all her natural endowments including her regional assets and resources to work effectively towards this laudable benchmark.

Recommendations

The trend of southeast violence, the unknown gunmen era, extant issues around perceived marginalization, self-rule calls and the creation of parallel security frameworks call for multi-layered and locally-driven efforts to renew peace and stability. For this particular reason, some sustainable measures can help navigate out of the slippery slope.

Dialogue Alternative

Over the years, the repression of self-rule agitations has not ended it. There have been other vistas of self-determination in the country. Clear and recent examples are the Oduduwa nation movement currently sweeping through the Southwest and the relatively docile Biafra Customary Government (BCG). Dialogue alternatives will provide platforms to communicate grievances before the escalation of violence and impact on public safety. It will also trigger commitments on the part of the government and agitating groups instrumental to peace and stability. Also, there are existing security threats in the nation competing for the government's limited budget and the attention of the overwhelmed security agencies. The dialogue will allow the government to reduce security spending needed in the emerging theatres of violence and redeploy it to the existing crisis hotspots. In addition, it is a sustainable way of

Initiation of robust Security Reforms

Considering current security dynamics, Nigeria needs security sector reform (SSR). Such reforms include repositioning Nigeria's security agencies, improving their service delivery, addressing remuneration, providing adequate security gadgets, and reviewing accountability frameworks to monitor personnel conduct.

The benefits of these activities will seek to reduce gross human rights abuses, inefficient security personnel and lapses in security frameworks, and extra-judicial killings by security operatives. In essence, the SSR will feed into the need to bridge the gaps between society and security organizations. The SSR will also pave the way for the de-militarization of the public space and the re-establishment of police officers into the business of efficiently maintaining law and order and securing lives and properties.

Rebuilding Public Trust and Counteracting Collective Victimhood

Public perception impacts on governance delivery and stability of any society. The distrust between some southeasterners, mainly pro-Biafra hopefuls, has been traced as far back as the civil war and perceived recent concerns about marginalization and exclusion. There is a need to revisit conversations on reconciliation and foster social cohesion. Also, the government must ensure fairness in the distribution of public goods and allocation of value. Genuine grassroots-level conversations and stakeholder engagements are necessary to recapture people's minds beyond improving governance delivery and fostering development. The stakeholder engagement must be wide-reaching to fit into the Igbo egalitarian nature and ensure that no group is excluded in the quest for sustainable solutions. In essence, the government must effectively communicate its efforts in the region and equally walk the talk.

Improving Governance and Sustainable Development

Generally, in Nigeria, fostering good governance and promoting sustainable development will help manage and prevent some existing social issues. For example, unemployment problems, lack of equal opportunities, and structural violence predispose people, especially young people, to criminality and membership in elaborate criminal networks. This is in line with the greed and grievance theory by Paul Collier that connects such trends of unrest as being driven by grievance. This recommendation feeds into the need for the government to be proactive rather than reactive in managing social issues before they lead to the wanton ruin of the country's social fabric.

Introduction of Effective Reforms

The federal and southeast state governments should rejig the security architecture in the region by undertaking policies and actions that can bring about effective reforms in the operations and management of law enforcement agencies including the Nigerian Army, Nigeria police, Air Force, navy, etc. They should demilitarize the region as quickly as possible and ensure that these government forces carry out their duty with care and respect for fundamental human rights and

within the limits of their rules of engagement and the constitution of Nigeria. Concrete efforts should be made by governments (federal and state) to address the remote causes of the separationist agitations by IPOB and endeavor to resolve the issue of marginalization of the southeast region and other regions in Nigeria as a whole. Delivery of good governance embedded in the rule of law should be the priority of the governments at the federal and state levels. The provision of infrastructure, amenities and enabling environment for economic productivity is a pre-requisite for sustainable economic development in the southeast region and Nigeria.

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