

**THE NEXUS BETWEEN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT:  
AN INTERROGATION OF THE MENACE OF UNKNOWN  
GUNMEN (UGM) IN SOUTHEAST OF NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This research looked at the nexus between security and development by interrogating the activities of unknown gunmen. The study reviewed the activities of the unknown gunmen on the economic and social development of the southeastern part of Nigeria. The functionalist theory/perspective was adopted as the framework for analysis. The secondary method of data collection was used to assemble data from documents, which was analysed qualitatively. This finding showed that the menace of unknown gunmen has in diverse ways undermined both economic and social development in the southeast region of Nigeria. This paper found out that the activities of these non-state actors (unknown gunmen) have increased the poverty level, disrupted/closed a number of business/commercial activities, destroyed both public and private infrastructures, and undermined educational and general development in the area. The study recommended more government commitment towards insecurity exploring kinetic and non-kinetic approaches in finding a solution to this problem, adoption of ICT enhanced surveillance equipment, strengthening of security agencies, and encouraging more synergy among security agencies in their joint operations in this area, while leveraging on community policing for intelligence that may lead to the identification of the sympathizers and sponsors of the unknown gunmen.

**Keywords:** Unknown Gunmen, Development, Security, South-east region

**INTRODUCTION**

No society can attain sustainable development in an environment devoid of security and not conducive for human and business activities to thrive. This view has been conversed by several security scholars that no society or state can realize development when there is threat to lives and properties (Austin-Egole et al, 2022; Ikezue, 2023; Ijioma et al, 2022; Okoreaffia & Nwakorobia, 2023). Security and development cannot be separated. In a state or society, where there is evidence of armed robbery attack, kidnapping, terrorism, insurgency etc. the achievement of development will be difficult if not impossible. To Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013 as cited Austin-Egole et al, 2022, p. 2) “security is the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be achieved and sustained.” Stewart (2004 as cited in Austin-Egole et al, 2022, p. 22) viewed that the nexus between security and development can be in three types: (a) immediate impact of security/insecurity on well-being and consequent development achievement (b) the way insecurity influence (non-security) elements of development and economic growth or security instrumental role and (c) the way development affects security or the development instrumental role (p.1). Therefore, insecurity is the antithesis to the development of any security.

Nigeria state is currently grappling with several security challenges like the issue of Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani Herdsmen attacks, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy, Unknown gunmen, and activities of separatist groups like Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). These have posed a challenge to the development of Nigeria (Ikezue, 2023; Austin-Egole et al, 2022).

In the recent past, South-Eastern Nigeria was referred to as the most peaceful region in Nigeria by majority of people (Ogugua & Okoli, 2023). However, in this contemporary time starting from late 2020, the South-Eastern Nigeria is being confronted with a homegrown security challenge of kidnapping, migration issue of Fulani herdsmen their clashes with farmers leading to attacks and most recent the activities of Indigenous People of Biafra ( IPOB) created Eastern Security Network(ESN) that metamorphosed to the unknown gunmen which had led to several clashes with the security agencies. According to a report by Vanguard (cited in Ogunode et al, 2022) “the South-East has come under bombardment with attacks coming from three major prongs: commercial crimes such as kidnapping, ritual killing and yahoo-yahoo; herdsmen attacks which leave entire communities desolate; and now, agitators who seem to acquire “odieshi”-potency-with which they confront military and police formation.”

The security challenge that is giving a lot of concern to citizens in the South-Eastern Nigeria, is the issue of unknown gunmen who had engaged in the destruction of properties, infrastructures and contributed to loss of lives. To Ugwuoke (2023, p.427)

The emergency of unknown gunmen (UGM) has created new nomenclature and a new crime sector within the numerous new crime sectors heating the security systems in Nigeria. The activities of the unknown gunmen encompasses the modus operandi of other armed criminal groups with no identifiable group name hence the tag unknown gunmen by media outfits has become what they are known in the public domain.

In addition, Onyema and Princewill (2023, p.267) noted that the appellation unknown gunmen is one element that has mystified this new face of terror”

The phenomenon of unknown gunmen activities can be traced to the year 2021 after the creation of IPOB security outfit known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) (Nwangwu, 2022; Onuoha & Egbo, 2022; Akinyetun, 2023). The creation of ESN was designed according to them to safeguard the people of southeast, Nigeria from the issue of insecurity allegedly caused by Fulani herdsmen attacks. Disturbed by this development, the Federal government of Nigeria mobilized the military to destabilize the IPOB security outfit. This led to several violent conflicts in the region. Months later, the IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu was arrested which further aggravated the conflict and even with illegal sit-at-home orders by the group in the south-east, of Nigeria. Most of the unknown gunmen are not the same with the ESN of IPOB as they claim but are seen as unidentifiable gunmen or violent groups that have terrorized the whole of Southeast and neighbouring states of the Southeast region. (Akinyetun, 2023; Ikezue, 2023; Onyema & Princewill, 2023; Onuoha & Egbo, 2022). Apart from the IPOB creation perspective of Unknown Gunmen, there are other views that see the emergence of the unknown gunmen as caused by the government and politicians (Onuoha & Egbo, 2022). The perspective on the government creation of unknown gunmen sees the emergence of the violent group sponsored by the government to blackmail or implicate the IPOB and ESN. The perspective on

politicians being behind their emergence sees the emergence of the unknown gunmen as a creation by the politician for their desire to gain political power by making the southeast region ungovernable (Onuoha & Egbo, 2022).

The unknown gunmen have dominated or struck virtually all the five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu. It is worried by this, that this research set to assess the security challenges and how it has affected the development of South East Nigeria with focus on the activities of unknown gunmen. Specifically, this study is set to Xray the activities of Unknown Gunmen and its possible consequences on socio-economic development in southeast Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**Security:** In simple terms, the concept of security means the protection of lives and property. It is a situation where citizens are freed from attacks, citizen's lives and properties are protected or secured. According to Nwolise (2006 as cited in Austin-Egole et al, 2022)

Security is a comprehensive condition that focus on the safety of a territory by a network of armed forces, the sovereignty of the state which must be assured by a democratic and nationalistic government and protected by the military, police and the people themselves; safety of the people from not only external attacks but also from catastrophic consequences of domestic description such as hunger, unemployment, starvation, homelessness, ignorance, diseases, environmental degradation, pollution and other socio-economic injustice (p. 43).

According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) (1994 as cited in Ogugua & Okoli, 2023) security involves five dimensions namely: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. Ijioma et al (2022, p.108) defined security as the state of being safe and secure from danger; it could also mean protection from recurring threats such as hunger, disease and repression. Furthermore, the Commission on Human Security (2003 as cited in Ijioma et al, 2022, p.108) defined security as "protection from anything that hinders humans from enjoying their freedom and fulfil their goals." In addition, McGrew (1998 as cited in Austin-Eyole et al, 2022, p. 43) viewed that the security of any state should include two pillars namely: "(1) protection and maintenance of the socio-economic order in the event of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which reduces the threat to basic values and interests, as well as to the domestic order." According to Okolie and Nnamani, (2017, p. 305) objectively security denotes safety from threats, anxiety and danger. It is also subjective and psychological to the extent that it can be measured by the absence of fear that threat, anxiety or danger will occur." Therefore, security is physical, psychological, objective and subjective as well as multi-dimensional, social, economic, political and environmental (Okolie & Nnamani, 2017).

**Development:** Todaro and Smith (2006, cited in Mensah *et al*, 2019) argued that development is a multi-dimensional process that involves changes in social structures, attitudes and institutions. According to Seers:

The questions to ask about a country's development are three; what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all these three have declined from high levels then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned (cited in Okolie, 2016, p. 29).

Ekundayo (2015, cited in Ogidi, 2019, p. 104) defined development as “an encompassing process involving steady and systematic changes in the cultural, economic and political spheres of society in a way that increases production, empowers the people and their communities, protects the environment, strengthens institutions, grows quality of life and promote good governance.” According to Dele and Ukeaja (2019, p. 212)

Development does not only mean capital accumulation and economic growth but also the condition in which citizens have adequate food and job and income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing fundamental and sustainable changes in the society. Development is now more applied to the improvement of the human condition constituted by the alleviation of unemployment, poverty, misery and social inequality. It is providing opportunities, empowerment and security... Development is therefore a complex process. It implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.

Therefore, development involves improvement in access to basic needs of life, employment opportunity, business growth, government revenue, physical environment etc.

**Unknown Gunmen (UGM):** There are several interpretations of the concept of unknown gunmen. The term unknown gunmen can be referred to as criminal elements from a particular part of the country and attacks by unknown gunmen is a term used to explain or describe sectional violence that happened in southeast Nigeria (Akinyetun et al, 2023). Umahi the former governor of Ebonyi State (cited in Akinyetun et al, 2023, p.18) see unknown gunmen by stating that: “let our people come out to speak out that the unknown gunmen are not really unknown gunmen, they are young men and women who will defend our land tomorrow. They should stop being killed; they should stop giving themselves to be killed.” Furthermore, the study of Akinyetun et al (2023) identified the modus operandi of unknown gunmen including sporadic shooting, abduction, maiming, arson, jailbreak and extrajudicial killing. The target of the unknown gunmen involves private citizens, business owners, politicians, government institutions and private business organizations (Akinyetun et al, 2023).

Furthermore, the former Governor of Ebonyi, Umahi (2021 as cited in Ikezue, 2023) noted that the unknown gunmen “are people who are brainwashed. They don't even know what they are agitating for. They go to talisman and get all kinds of juju that no gun can kill them and yet guns are killing them...” (p.5). According to Onyema and Princewill (2023, p.268)

the term unknown gunmen could be seen as a form of politicized violence used by ideological groups, political elites and criminal elements in order to achieve their political and social

objectives... The appellation or nomenclature unknown gunmen is an element of psychological terror as people are yet to fathom the ideological learning of these dare-devil in the south-east region.” The term unknown gunmen are not ghost but well-equipped and motivated individuals with well-spelt agenda.

It is based on the above explanations; this research sees unknown gunmen as unidentified violent groups with a good number being an offshoot of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) of the IPOB. This conclusion is arrived from their mode of operation and philosophy originally gleaned from the videos they release after attacks. This group's focus was attacking Nigerian government institutions and security agency buildings and its personnel with the intention of realizing political objectives, this is their way of registering lack of confidence on the Nigerian state and request to release their separatist leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. This violent group uses kidnapping, destruction of government properties, sporadic shooting and mainly attacks on security agencies as tactics towards pressuring the government to achieve their goals/objectives. This initially was not worrisome to some southeast people until their activities degenerated to the kidnapping of south easterners for ransom, burning of notable leaders' houses and in most cases outright killing and roasting of human beings as sacrifices in the shrines (Akinyetun et al, 2023; Ikezue, 2023; Onyema & Princewill, 2023).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is anchored on the functionalist theory as framework for analysis.

### **Functionalist Theory**

The functionalist theory gained prominence in the study of French Sociologists Emile Durkheim at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This theory sees society as a system of interconnected parts that work together to maintain equilibrium or stability and order (Nickerson, 2024). So, to achieve equilibrium or stability, each part in the society must play a functional role for the benefit of the whole society. The failure or dysfunction of one part can adversely affect the survival of the society. In other words, each of the social institutions or parts contributes important functions to society.

The functionalist theory or perspective emphasizes that the interconnectedness of society which looks at how each part influences or is being affected by other parts (Onyekwere & Azubuike, 2021). Therefore, parts or elements of the society are functional if they contribute to social stability or equilibrium and dysfunctional if they undermine social stability or equilibrium (Onyekwere & Azubuike, 2021). This theory also assumes that the survival of society needs a certain degree of order and stability and each part or element in the society must be functional to realize the survival of the society.

### **Relevance/Application of the theory**

This theory is relevant to this study because it will help the study to explain how the dysfunction of the security sector (or part of the elements of the society) has negatively affected other parts or sub-systems in the Southeast region of Nigeria. In application of this theory to this research or study, shows that security or the security sector is one of the sub-systems or parts necessary for the progress of the Southeast region. However, the consistent security breaches arising from

the activities of the Unknown Gunmen in the region show the failure of the security sector. It must however be stated that Nigeria's security system has been overstretched and this now has undermined other sub-systems or parts like education, economy, politics, culture etc in the southeast leading to instability in the region. So, the activities of the Unknown Gunmen in the Southeast region posed a threat to the stability of the region affecting the functionality of all sectors in the region.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on exploratory design, where the researcher intends to explore how the activities of unknown gunmen have affected the development of south-east, Nigeria. Data were collected using documentary methods which include journals, textbooks, newspapers etc. Data were analyzed using qualitative analysis with thematic analysis. This research is restricted to the five states of south-east Nigeria from the period of 2021 to present. In addition, it focused on the effect of unknown gunmen on socio-economic development.

### Incidence and Nature of Attacks by Unknown Gunmen in the South-east, Nigeria

The understanding of unknown gunmen attacks or violent activities are shown in the table below which shows selected operations or attacks in Southeast Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Selected Attacks by Unknown Gunmen in the South-east, Nigeria

S/N	Date	Fatality/Casualty	Place/Event
1	January 8, 2021	3 police officers killed	Onueke Police Station in Ezza South LGA
2	February 1, 2021	1 police officer killed	Omoba Police Station, Abia
3	February 23, 2021	2 police officers killed	Abaji Police Station, Aba
4	February 24, 2021	1 police officer killed	Ekwulobia, Anambra state
5	February 24, 2021	6 police officers killed	Idundu, Cross River
6	February 24, 2021	1 police officer killed	Osisioma Ngwa, Abia state
7	February 25, 2021	1 police officer was wounded	Aboh Mbaise, Imo state
8	February 26, 2021	A police station was razed down	Aboh Mbaise Divisional Police Station, Imo state
9	March 1, 2021	A police station was attacked	Iboko Police Station, Izei LGA, Ebonyi
10	March 9, 2021	A police station was burnt	Isinweke Police Station, Ihitte/Uboma LGA Imo state.
11	March 18, 2021	1 police officer killed and two police officers injured	Okacha Junction, Neni, Anambra state.
12	March 24, 2021	3 police officers killed & 1 person kidnapped	A town hall meeting in Isuofia, Aguata, Anambra state.
13	March 30, 2021	Commander of the Quick Intervention Unit and two police officers killed	Ikot Akpan, Essien Udem LGA, Akwa Ibom state.

14	April 5, 2021	Imo State Police Command Headquarters was razed down and 1844 inmates from the correctional services were freed.	Attack of correctional facility in Owerri, Imo state & Imo state Police Command.
15	April 19, 2021	Police state was razed down	Uzunkoli Police Station, Bende LGA, Abia State.
16.	April 21, 2021	Two Police officers were killed and a police station was burnt	Adani Police Station, Uzo-Uwani LGA, Enugu State
17.	April 27, 2021	One Naval Officer was killed and two injured	Enamel Ware Junction, Onitisha-Owerri high way
18.	May 1, 2021	One police officer was killed	Abamege police station, Ohaozara LGA Ebonyi State
19	May 25, 2021	Four police officers were killed and a police station ablazed	Iwollo Police Division, Ezeagu LGA, Enugu State.
20	27 Sept , 2021	Attack on APC Campaign	Uruagu, Nnewi, Anambra State
21	23 Sept, 2021	Two police officers were killed	Police checkpoint in Nachi, Oji River LGA, Enugu State
21	12 October, 2021	Attack on Governor Obiano's convey on APGA rally	Ihiala LGA, Anambra State
22	October 19, 2021	Three traditional rulers killed and many injured	Stakeholders meeting at Nnenasa, Njaba LGA, Imo State
23	August 18, 2022	A police officer killed on a checkpoint	Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway, Ebonyi State.
24	August 16, 2022	A commercial motorcyclist was killed	Ogbaku Junction, Mbaitolu LGA, Imo State
25	August 28, 2022	Four guest in a hotel were killed	Galaxy Hotel, Isu community, Onicha LGA of Ebonyi State
26	Sept 11, 2022	Senator Ifeanyi Uba convey was attacked where some were killed and injured	Enugwu-ukwu, Njikoka LGA, Anambra State
27	Sept 27, 2022	Some soldiers and police officers killed	Obeagu-Amodu, Enugu South LGA of Enugu State
28	October 10, 2022	Two police officer killed	Akokwa/Arondizogu/Ikperora/Okigwe road, Imo State

**Source: Onyema and Princewill (2023); Ugwuoke (2023); Nwangwu (2023)**

The above table indicated some selected incidences of attacks by unknown gunmen. It shows that the main target of the unknown gunmen is the security agencies and government facilities

or infrastructures. This led to loss of lives and properties mainly in the five states in south-eastern Nigeria. This changed over time as they started attacking locals later.

### **Impacts of the activities of Unknown Gunmen on the Development of South-East Nigeria**

In this paper examined the effect of unknown gunmen on the socio-economic development of the region. The activities of Unknown Gunmen have undermined commercial and social activities; income/poverty level; educational activities; infrastructural development and state government budget.

**i. Disruption/Reduction of Commercial and Social Activities:** The repeated attacks and forced movement restrictions by unknown gunmen prevents people from going to work on Mondays and have depleted government facilities. It has also crippled security activities in the rural areas and most police stations have been burnt down by extension affecting the entire region (Onuoha et al, 2021; Austin-Egole et al, 2022; Okoroafor et al, 2023; Okoroafor & Nwakoroba, 2023). The study by Onuoha et al (2021) conducted in Imo State indicated that there is significant influence of insecurity on entrepreneurial business in Imo state, Nigeria. They noted that the high extent of insecurity has undermined the entrepreneurship activities in Imo state. Furthermore, the research conducted by Austin-Egole et al (2023) indicated that the issue of insecurity which was evident on destruction of lives and properties has led to no serious commercial and social activities in Orlu area of Imo state Nigeria. According to Okoroafor et al (2023, p. 22)

People intentionally avoid long distance travels or journeys for fear of being attacked or killed. This is a worrisome development with severe economic downturn effects. Large scale organizations like Dangote Group of Companies, ABC Transport Ltd, the Young Shall Grow Transport, God is Good Transport etc. and other business outfits and firms doing business in the south-east have been made to stay off operation on Mondays or risk deadly attacks and burning of their trucks, buses and vehicles with goods inside them.

In addition, Okoroafor and Nwokokorobia (2023) stated that insecurity in the southeast has affected all forms of business activities in area “including all dimensions of socio-economic activities such as transportation, banking, trading, haulage, meetings, farming, markets, exchange of goods and services, industrial activities.” (p.5). The fear of insecurity by unknown gunmen has also crippled inter-city movement and significantly undermined trade, commerce, and human interactions. Also markets are shut-down or destroyed towards enforcing the sit-at-home order (Okoroafor et al, 2023).

**ii. Reduction of Income Level/Increase in Poverty Level:** As a result of the closure or interruption of business or commercial activities caused by the unknown gunmen, a good number of the citizens that engage in such businesses do not have access to large income which promotes the rate of poverty in the southeast region. The study by Austin-Egole et al (2022) looked at the effect of insecurity on the residents of Owerri, Imo state and discovered that the present insecurity situation in Owerri, has significant effect on the poverty level cum pauperization of the people of Owerri. Specifically, the research revealed that the unknown



gunmen's activities negatively affected income earnings of the residents of Owerri. Also, the unknown gunmen operations have led to increase in prices of goods and services, which make people unable to access the basic needs of lives. Another study by Austin-Egole et al (2022) in Orlu revealed that the insecurity situation undermined economic living standard of the residents in Orlu, Imo state. The study observed that insecurity in Imo state has reduced the income earnings of the residents and increase the prices of commodities in Orlu. There is evident in the interview conducted by Austin-Egole et al (2022) which stated that “No market opens on Mondays so we do not earn any kind of income on Mondays. This has affected our business money because we still cater to our needs” (p. 12). Therefore, people’s inability to have access to income and the rise in prices of goods and services because of the security challenge contributes to poverty or low standard of living among people in southeast Nigeria.

**iii. Undermining of Educational Development/Disruption of Educational Activities:** The activities of the unknown gunmen attacks and its involvement in enforcing the sit-at-home order have posed a threat to educational development in southeast Nigeria. The study of Ogunode et al (2022) posits that the insecurity in the southeast has led to adverse effects on the educational sector in areas of school administration, teaching programmes, academic calendar, internal exams, external exams, extra-curricular activities, and educational funding. Even national exams like Senior school certificate exams and Joint Admission and board UTME exams are not left out of these disruptions. Again, Ogbedeagu et al (2022) studied junior secondary students in Owerri Municipal and observed that the sit-at-home order and fear of attack of the unknown gunmen has undermined school activities. This can be observed on the failure to cover syllabus of subjects and poor performance of junior students in examinations in core subjects. Furthermore, Chukwuzuluoke et al (2022) study revealed that there is a significant relationship between school insecurity and academic engagement of students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus. The unknown gunmen had gone to the extent to disrupt both internal and external examinations which negatively affected the academic performance of students. Owuamanam (2021 as cited in Ogunode et al, 2022) reported that “gunmen suspected to be members of IPOB on Monday stormed the Comprehensive Secondary School, Nkume in Njaba local government area of Imo state and stopped students from taking their examination” (p.60). Alozie (2021 as cited in Ogunode et al, 2022) also revealed that in the same Comprehensive Secondary School, Nkume, the unknown gunmen stopped the English examination for West African Examination Council (WAEC) by setting ablaze about 8 motorcycles of teachers and chased both teachers and students from the school premises. Within the period of this menace, most schools especially privately owned ones resorted to online studies to make up for the students.

**iv. Destruction of Infrastructure:** The activities of the unknown gunmen did not only pose a threat to citizens’ lives, but it has also significantly destroyed infrastructures in the southeast regions (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022; Nwangwu, 2023). To Ugwu (2022 as cited in Ozibo & Okorie 2022) “nefarious activities of unscrupulous elements under the guise of IPOB and several other criminal elements across the southeastern Nigeria have continuously attacked social infrastructure, hence cascading negative effects in economic growth and development of the region” (p.192). Furthermore, it has been reported that unknown gunmen have destroyed 18 INEC offices and a hundred and sixty-four security facilities in the southeast region of Nigeria (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022). In addition, Nwangwu (2023) revealed that from February 2019 to May 2021, at least 41 offices of INEC has been attacked by non-state actors. He noted that apart from attacks credited to arsonists that disrupted the 2020 EndSARS protest, subsequent attacks on INEC facilities by unknown gunmen since December 2020 have been focused in the

southeast region of Nigeria. Finally, the study of Ozibo and Okorie (2022) revealed that the sit-at-home order and attacks of the unknown gunmen has negative influence on the social infrastructure in southeastern Nigeria. This is because; it has led to reduction of quality of services of educational facilities and medical facilities, reduction of sanitation and increased pressure in water facilities and power infrastructure.

**V. Budget Deficit for the states in the region:** This problem has affected the revenue projection of the states in the southeast. This is because business is operation at a loss and resulting to near nonpayment of taxes. The allocation that came from federation account that would be used for development of infrastructures is being to fund security operations and purchase of equipment to support the security agencies operating in the area.

### **Conclusion**

There is a relationship between security and national development in any society. No state or country can achieve and sustain its development without adequate security in all ramifications. Nigeria and the Southeastern region is not an exception. This paper had earlier stated that Nigeria has been grappling with several security challenges like kidnapping, herdsmen attacks, clashes between IPOB and security agencies and most especially the activities of unknown gunmen. The menace of unknown gunmen has been a key security concern to the people of southeast today, which requires urgent actions by all stakeholders. It has been observed that the activities of unknown gunmen had contributed to the underdevelopment of southeast region. The threat and loss of lives and properties and enforcement of sit-at-home order has contributed to reduction of business and commercial activities, reduction of income of residents and increased level of poverty. Also, the unknown gunmen attacks have frustrated educational development and destroyed social infrastructures needed for economic growth and national development. Therefore, the government and stakeholders should adopt adequate measures to bring the activities of unknown gunmen to halt in order to achieve development in the region.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, this study made the following recommendations:

- i. Effective adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) by the security agencies is necessary for effective combat of unknown gunmen activities. The purchase and deployment of drones for surveillance and attack of identified cells of this criminal elements will be a step in the right direction and recommended for both federal and state governments in the southeast by this study.
- ii. Community based intelligence is crucial. There is need to strengthen the community policing strategy which need empowerment of vigilante group and collaboration or cooperation with security agencies towards combating unknown gunmen activities. This requires confidence building between security agencies with traditional institutions, churches, youth, and woman organizations. This will encourage them to volunteer credible and actionable intelligence for the security agencies to act on
- iii. Adequate effort and commitment should be made to identify and punish the sponsor and leaders of the unknown gunmen. This will go a long way to reduce the activities of the unknown gunmen. Dealing with the sponsor will reduce the source of financing their operations.

- iv. The security agencies should be strengthened in area of provision of manpower/personnel, modern facilities or equipments and modern weapons and ammunitions. They must have superior fire power to subdue these criminal elements. Without sophisticated equipment and weapons, eliminating or combating the unknown gunmen will remain a dream. The current acquisitions and deployment of artillery guns, MRAP etc. by Nigeria Army in the southeast is a step in the right direction that must be sustained. The efforts like the current operation “UDOKA” by defense headquarters in the southeast should be sustained
- v. The government and stakeholders should promote and implement policies that will address the basic needs of the citizens and be geared towards the development of the society.
- vi. A non-kinetic approach may be explored by Governors of the southeast extraction with a view to addressing the disorientations and sundry agitations that gave rise to this menace of unknown gunmen in the region. A conscious effort must be made by the Federal government of Nigeria to show Southeast some sense of inclusion. This will help douse the tension and reduce the cry for marginalization by the people of the area. The current appointment of Chief of Naval Staff from south-east by President Bola Tinubu is a welcome development and more of such moves will help erase that marginalization notion unlike in the past under President Buhari when no Southeastern person held such a position. This will help to resolve the issue of agitation by the separatist group like IPOB and reduce to the barest minimum their number of sympathizers within the region.

When these measures and some others are put in place, the southeast economy will bounce back, investments will start flowing once more and development will return to this once-booming region of Nigeria.

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