

REPOSITIONING THE SOUTH EAST OF NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: This paper focused on the repositioning of the Southeast zone of Nigeria for sustainable socioeconomic development in the 21st century. Recent discoveries have shown that the area that once flourished economically have been suffering some level of decay and desertion due to a number of security-related factors and infrastructural challenges. The objective of this paper is therefore to investigate the strategic options to be undertaken in order to reposition the South East Zone for socioeconomic development. Adopting the theory of social solidarity, the paper argues that the series of agitations expressed by people of the zone over their alleged marginalization by the federal government has continued to attract national and even international solidarity in their favour. Methodologically, materials for the study were sourced through secondary means of data collection whereas the content method was applied in the analysis. The study discovered that there has been a decline in the pace of economic activities in the South East zone due to a number of factors. The study recommends that the various levels of government in the country should do all within their powers to improve security in the South East zone and provide an enabling environment to enable the zone be repositioned for sustainable socioeconomic development.

Keywords: Socioeconomic, Development, Theory of Social Solidarity, South East, IPOB

INTRODUCTION

The Southeast Zone of Nigeria is located in the southern part of the political entity known as Nigeria. It is among the six geopolitical zones that make up the country. The component states are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo (Alozie, 2018). As a zone or area that is blessed with abundant natural and mineral resources, a large number of people are involved in rural agricultural production, trade, and commerce. A few others are engaged in professional activities, whereas others are self-employed (Achebe, 2012). The quest to reposition Nigeria as a federal state and address series of agitations from some of the ethnic groups that felt marginalized necessitated the further division of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones including the South East before the restoration of democracy in the country on May, 1999. For the South East zone, their quest for survival in view of some unpleasant experiences they have had in Nigeria has made them to be found everywhere humanly possible within Nigeria and across the world in view of their adventurous and survivalist instinct (Ogu, 2009). Uptil 2024, the people of the South East zone of Nigeria have not relented in accusing the federal government of Nigeria of marginalizing the zone in political and socioeconomic considerations. In the contestation of Ogu (2009:101):

the people of the zone have been systematically deprived of the right
or privilege to federal infrastructural presence... Thus, in desperate

search for survival outside their land, the people of the zone now migrate to other parts of the country, especially Lagos, Port Harcourt and other major cities in Nigeria... their mass exit to other parts of the country and beyond has remained intense and extensive as their own land have been left humanly and developmentally fallow...

Throughout the tenure of President Muhammadu Buhari, the South East Zone almost had nothing to celebrate in terms of meaningful federal government presence in the zone in tangible or intangible consideration due to the erroneous impression that the All Progressives Congress (APC), which was the President's party, did not secure many votes from the people of the Southeast Zone even though the party controlled two states (Imo and Ebonyi) out of the five states in the zone. Following the failure of dialogue to draw the attention of the federal government to the agitations of people of the Southeast zone, the people resorted to using their socio-cultural movement, the "Oha na Eze Ndi Igbo" and separatist groups such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) among others to press home their demand.

The MASSOB was formed in 2001 under the leadership of an Imo State indigene from Okwe, and a London trained lawyer, Chief Ralph Uwazuruike. The disintegration the MASSOB once experienced led to the emergence of the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2012. The sect which the federal government of Nigeria later described as a terrorist group and outlawed was led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who had been under the detention of the Department of State Service (DSS) over alleged treasonable felony and sponsorship of terrorist activities. The "Ohaneze Ndi Igbo" has been adopting nonviolent means to press for equality of the geopolitical zones in the country; true federalism; restructuring of Nigeria and ceding the presidential slot to the Southeast zone (Alozie, 2018).

The climax of the federal government on the operations of the separatist groups in the South East zone and their supporters came on September 14, 2017, during which the Operation Python Dance constituted by the Federal government to restore order in the Southeast Zone, among others, devastated and demolished the palace of Nnamdi Kanu's father at Afara and whisked away the traditional ruler and his wife (Anyanwu, 2018). Thereafter, the federal government dispatched its security agencies to various locations in the South East states, which often engage in unethical and unprofessional conduct in enforcing security among the people. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of military check points and police roadblocks in the Southeast Zone. Thus, a series of human rights abuses and violations are perpetrated on a daily basis by some of the unscrupulous security officers.

The search for IPOB members in parts of the Southeast Zone has led government security forces to devastate and even set up some residential homes, commercial buildings and other establishments suspected to harbour IPOB members. The death scores of some innocent citizens have increased as a result. Thus, social, business, religious and commercial activities in some South East cities have been grossly affected, as some people have been forced to desert their ancestral homes, while others have been internally displaced, and some relatively prominent citizens for fear of the unknown have also relocated to safer places within or outside the Southeast Zone. The South East zone, where business, commercial or economic activities flourished freely, has now been threatened by various forms of insecurity. It has been estimated

that millions of naira are lost in the area on a weekly basis due to the every Monday sit-at-home order declared by the IPOB (Chukwu, 2021).

Repositioning or returning the Southeast zone to its lost glory for sustainable socioeconomic development has continued to attract the attention of many concerned indigenes in the area and elsewhere. For instance, in the course of his speech during the reception organized in honour of the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives (2023) Rt. Hon. Benjamin Kalu, on December 28, 2023, in Umuahia, Abia State, the President of the country, Alhaji Ahmed Tinubu, through his Vice, Kashim Shetima, expressed concern over the economic devastation of the South Zone. Sustainable socio-economic development stands out as a form of development that positively impacts the socio-economic living standards of the present generation and provides for future generations.

The South East zone of Nigeria has been negatively affected by bad governance through some of the leaders of the zone. In other words, undue competition for power and resources by the various classes of the elite in the area has generated high levels of greed, antagonism, hatred, fighting and animosity, resulting in disaffection, bitterness and division between or among the various groups in the area. In short, some unchecked internal and external contradictions have combined to negatively affect the area that was hitherto known as the investment hub of the nation. Therefore, this paper investigated the repositioning of the South East zone of Nigeria for sustainable socioeconomic development in the 21st century.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of social solidarity. The theory was developed by Emile Durkheim in the 17th century. Other scholars have expanded and applied the theory at various times (Mark, et al., 2022). The theory contends that any act of injustice or oppression against a group of people or society will likely be met with condemnation, criticism or agitation by those involved or their sympathizers. In capitalist states, for instance, the less privileged members of the working class and the masses as well as other disadvantaged groups have always risen against oppression and domination from the economically privileged members of society who dominate and control society's politics and law (Marx & Engels, 1988).

Durkheim (1938) argued that a fundamental task needed for societal survival is the unity, cohesiveness and solidarity of individual members of society for the actualization of societal goals. Thus, people's commitment to their society towards the development of a sense of belonging and feeling that the social unit is more important than the individual member is a prerequisite for the realization of the overall goal of society (Haralambos, et al., 2008). The theory of social solidarity essentially contends that diverse groups in society possess common values and beliefs, whereby their human connection or association with one another leads to an unusual bond that binds them together. Thus, group solidarity is motivated by a number of factors, such as affectionately shared values and ideas, self-interest and goal realization. Social solidarity theory has two dimensions. First, mechanical solidarity refers to the social organization of individuals in society who have a common belief system. This normally sparks some unity of purpose to work cooperatively and harmoniously to realize their goals (Durkheim, 1938). Second, organic solidarity manifests due to one's need for another, which would also propel the basis for collective action.

Applying the theory of social solidarity to this study, it should be understood that the majority of the people in the South East region have been agitating against alleged Federal government discriminatory practices against the zone especially non-provision of critical infrastructural facilities as well as an enabling environment for the repositioning of the zone socioeconomically. To draw the point home, a large number of the people of the zone have resorted to the formation of either sociocultural organizations or sectarian groups through which they have been drawing local and international solidarity and support for the pursuit or actualization of their agenda. Therefore, this study on the repositioning of the Southeast Zone of Nigeria for sustainable socioeconomic development in the 21st century can be analysed under the theory of social solidarity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the qualitative method. In other words, the study relied essentially on secondary (library) and primary (interview) sources of data collection. Thus, data for the study were generated from information derived from textbooks, journals, internet sources, magazines and newspapers. The content approach was applied in the analysis.

Background of the Socio-Economic and Political Foundation of the South East Zone

The South East zone is located in the southern part of Nigeria. The area is among the others that were later carved out to strengthen Nigeria's federal structure. The zone is located between latitudes 5 and 7 degrees in the Northern Hemisphere and longitudes 6 and 8 degrees in the Eastern Hemisphere (Uchendu, 1965). Almost all the South East States are located east of Niger. The area is blessed with distinct physical features as well as rivers and belts that distinguish the zone from the others.

The zone has two distinct seasons, with the dry season occurring between November and March and the rainy season occurring between April and October each year. With their vast population and arable farmlands, the major occupation of the South East zone during the precolonial period was agriculture. The people engaged in livestock and crop production, animal husbandry, rice and vegetable cultivation, craft and basket making, fishing and oil palm production and various forms of artefacts.

It was not possible to talk about unemployment in the precolonial economy of the Southeast zone as almost everybody was engaged in one form of traditional occupation or the other. The enterprising instinct of the zone no doubt led to its penetration and key performance in the various sectors of the colonial and present economy of Nigeria (Achebe, 1981). In the early years of Nigeria's political independence, the economy of the Eastern region, where the present Southeast zone is found, was found to be ranked very high. The region was rated as the fastest growing economy, as it excelled in oil palm production and other natural and mineral resources.

Just before the end of the first Republic and up to the beginning of the second Republic, the zone excelled in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. Some were government owned, whereas others were private entrepreneurs. For instance, Aba (Abia State) was host to Aba Textile Mills Ltd., the International Equitable Association, PZ Industries, and Coca-Cola Bottling Company, which also had a branch in a community at the outskirts of Aba known as

Okpuala in the Osisioma Local government area where its products were processed and packaged.

In Umuahia (same Abia State), Golden Guinea Breweries Ltd. and Modern Ceramics, among others, existed. In Imo State, there was the Avutu Modern poultry farm and the ADA Palm. In Anambra State, there were the popular Onitsha Texile Mills Ltd. and Plant Assembly firms. In Enugu, there were the Enugu Coal Mining Company and Nkalagu Cement Factory, among others. Rice and salt processing firms also flourished in the present state of Ebonyi. Several privately owned companies and firms that employed a good number of individuals were also found in the region. Education and related sectors also contributed to boosting socioeconomic activities in the region. Several factors, such as the neo-liberal economy and other reforms later introduced by the federal government, economic mismanagement, corruption, insecurity, and dearth of raw materials, especially the power supply, among others, contributed to the near collapse of the economy of the South East zone as well as industries. Thus, the South East regional economy was left economically prostrate and socially devastated (Ofoeze, 2009).

Generally, the Southeast precolonial history was basically described as egalitarian and acephalous. The system was distinct and in several ways spectacular from what obtained in some other ethnic groups in Nigeria such as the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani (Ndoh, 1997). Uptil date, the leadership especially at the federal level has been unable to find lasting solutions to the entrenched inter-ethnic competition and unhealthy rivalry among the ethnic groups or geopolitical zones; religious bigotry; regional imbalance and other issues that have remained major sources of agitation by some geopolitical zones. Being aware of their circumstance and faith in their political and socio-economic interaction vis-à-vis other ethnic or geopolitical zones in Nigeria, most Southeast people have refused to give up but have remained enterprising, determined and adventurous in the pursuit of their human activities and endeavours (John, 2017).

Repositioning of the South East Zone

In simple terms, repositioning has to do with restoring or putting back what once existed for an expected or better outcome or result to be attained. Thus, repositioning denotes the entire process of bringing back or restoring better conditions that once existed for the attainment of desired goals. For the South East, the zone once excelled as a flourishing commercial or economic zone in Nigeria that was ranked topmost among the commercial areas in Nigeria. For various reasons, the economic glory of the zone has recently become threatened, as it is becoming increasingly difficult for business and socioeconomic activities to flourish again in the area.

Suggested Strategies for the Repositioning of the South East Zone, Nigeria, for Sustainable Socioeconomic Development

A number of ideas have been advanced as strategies for restoring or repositioning the South East zone economically for it to regain its position as a socioeconomic base of the nation. This study examined the following:

(i) Creation of a Secure Socioeconomic and Enabling Environment

It is generally said that the primary responsibility of every responsive government is the security of lives and property as well as the socioeconomic well-being of the people (Egobueze, 2020). A State, community, nation or individual is said to be secured when they enjoy an environment devoid of fear, stress, threat, anxiety, or apprehension of losing their lives or property (Akpuru – Aja, 2009). Sustainable socioeconomic development has a strong correlation with the level of socioeconomic activity that exists in a place. Conversely, the level of socioeconomic activity in a place is determined by the level of security of the various actors involved in the activities, as there can hardly be development without an environmentally friendly environment that can instil confidence in investors and businessmen in the safety of their investment. The South East zone was once a zone that attracted numerous investors both from within the zone and from other parts of the country and even beyond. Business was conducted with little or no molestation until the upturn of events in the recent past. The creation of a friendly and peaceful business environment in the South East zone will be one major way of ensuring that the zone bounces back as one of the economic and commercial nerve centres of Nigeria.

(ii) Encouragement of South East People with Special Talent and Skill

Necessity is said to be the mother of invention. During the Nigeria–Biafra War, some talented Igbo people were able to utilize local technologies for the manufacture of middle-range war equipment, especially the one called “Ogbunigwe” (locally made bomb). Leaders and well-meaning individuals of the South East zone could spot out, mobilize and encourage these talented individuals for the full development of their talent. Some of them have left the shores of the South East to either travel abroad or outrightly abandon their talents due to a lack of genuine sponsorship. As a way out, the state, philanthropies or some other concerned persons from the zone can award scholarships or help in some other ways to ensure that individuals with special talents in Southeast zone are encouraged.

(iii) Revitalization and Revamping of Collapsed Industries in the South East Zone

Several factors contributed to the collapse of some government or privately owned industries or factories that once flourished in the South East zone. These establishments contributed so much to the socioeconomic development of the zone, as most South East youths were gainfully employed by them. Their sudden collapse no doubt heightened the level of insecurity in the area and increased the level of unemployment and anti-social vice. A series of investigation panels set up by the state and even the Federal government and White Papers released never saw the light of the day. The leaders of the South East states can make good the situation by revisiting the issues surrounding the collapse of the establishments and putting things right for the overall good of the people of the Southeast in particular and Nigeria in general.

(iv) Reawakening of Neglected but Highly Cherished Cultural Values and Customs of the People of the Southeast Zone

The South East zone once stood out as a zone that cherished her cultural values, practices and customs that encouraged development. These were in the areas of hard work, family hood, the extended family system, care of elderly individuals, respect for elders, being one another’s

keeper, forbidden of witch craft or wizardry practices, and self-contentment, among others. Unfortunately, the infiltration and embracing of foreign cultural practices by some people in the zone, especially young people, has virtually shattered the cultural foundation of the people. The globalization of the 21st century is partly responsible for this (Otobo, 2017; Azikiwe, 1980). Thus, the level of trust, love and cooperation that once existed has almost disappeared. Some South East entrepreneurs are even afraid of bringing their investments home for fear of the unknown. As part of the repositioning agenda, confidence building measures should be put in place to win back some of these entrepreneurs to the Southeast.

South East Zone and Sustainable Socioeconomic Development

Scholars have conceived of sustainable development in various ways. In 1987, the concept became a front burner at the United Nations Global Conference of the World Commission on the Environment and Development. The chair of the commission and the then Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland later published a report commonly referred to as “The Brundtland Report”. In the report, sustainable development was defined as the form of development that attempts to meet the needs of the present generation without undermining those of the generations yet unborn. The report clearly specified that the goal of sustainable development is targeted at environmental sustainability or preservation of the natural environment and socioeconomic and ecological concerns, among others (Nyewusira & Nweke, 2014).

According to the World Bank Report released in 2012, a society or people committed to sustainable development must ensure effective management of resources to strike a balance in sectors such as social, economic and environmental, bearing in mind that today’s decisions must definitely affect the future. Thus, growth must be inclusive and environmentally balanced to reduce human deprivation both in the present and in the future. According to Okoronkwo & Ekekwe (2017), the tripods of sustainable development are economic growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

Drawing from Agenda 21 of the 1992 Earth summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, sustainable development was identified as a mechanism for reversing both poverty and environmental degradation. Specifically, the Agenda advocated for broad public participation in policy making and development as well as greater accountability of what individuals, groups, institutions and organizations need to know about and take part in with respect to the environment, development and other issues affecting their communities. Similarly, a nongovernmental organization and pressure group known as “Environmental Right Action”, founded in 1993, shares the same page as Agenda 21 in the sense that sustainable development provides for citizens’ participation, wealth creation and knowledge of local people. Thus, the group is of the opinion that the empowerment of the local people is the crux of sustainable development.

Over the years, the experience of the South East zone with respect to sustainable socioeconomic development has left much to be desired. Thus, at both the state and local government levels, local communities are rarely involved in the initiation, conception and actual implementation of socioeconomic development programs aimed at uplifting their future. Experience in the zone has revealed that the process has usually followed a top-down approach where a few ruling or governing elites in the zone in the various states and local governments hijack the entire process

to the detriment of people at the grassroot (Ekpu, 1989). Some levels of youth restiveness or community sabotage have often been recorded in several places in the South East zone, as those strategies that are supposed to address their plight are rare.

Major Impediments to Sustainable Socioeconomic Development in the South East Zone

In the 21st century, sustainable socioeconomic development in the South East zone has actually been in a sorry state due to a variety of factors. This study examined the following:

(i) Outbreak of various Dimensions of Insecurity: Insecurity refers to a condition or state devoid of safety. It has to do with a feeling of fear, threat, danger or apprehension of losing one's life or property (Akpuru-Aja, 2009). The 21st century has seen the persistence of insecurity across the South East zone. The increasing challenge of insecurity in the zone has been attributed to various socioeconomic, environmental and political factors. The problem of insecurity in the South East has had incalculable negative consequences, as the pace of business, religious and socioeconomic interactions in the zone has been on the decline for several years (Njoku, et al., 2022). The contemporary triggering of insecurity in the South East Zone has been traced to the following factors:

- (a) Kidnapping for Ransom:** This is a form of criminal activity whereby an innocent citizen is caught either in his house or along his journey, blindfolded and taken to the forest or other obscure places. Thereafter, a series of contacts are made, as well as negotiations on an agreed sum to be paid by the victim's family to secure his release. Often, the unfortunate victim(s) is severely tortured in the bid to secure higher offers in monetary terms. In most cases, the unfortunate victims also have their lives taken away by the kidnappers even after payment of the agreed-upon ransom. Negotiations often take days, weeks, months and even years before victims fulfil their expected condition(s) and finally are released. The experience is usually traumatic and horrifying.
- (b) Menace of unknown Gunmen or Bandits:** These groups of criminal elements have also constituted themselves into a terror group in parts of the South East. They often appear securely uniform, well-armed and masked. Often, they parade along the streets at night hours or during the day, with either a security vehicle or motorbike without being unduly challenged. They have posed a serious challenge to conventional security agencies in the South East. Some of the attacks against policemen or the military at checkpoints and correctional centres are allegedly carried out by unknown gunmen. Their presence in some South East cities is often traumatic, as some residents and shop owners instantly close their businesses and take to their heels. Some of the unknown gunmen collaborate with kidnappers to carry out nefarious activities. In some areas in the South East, they have gone ahead to perform quasi-judicial functions whereby they are hired or consulted for adjudicational purposes.
- (c) Brutality and Recklessness of Some Security Agencies in the South East Zone:** Gross abuse of gun power by some members of the various security agencies drafted to restore order in the Southeast Zone has continued to be recorded. Some of these officers often fragrantly use their guns or other weapons to terrorize, harass and even shoot and kill some innocent citizens in the guise of accidental discharge at the slightest

provocation. The data shown in Figure 1 are evidence of police brutality in the Southeast zone between 2020 and 2022:

Table 1: Killing in the South East Zone, 2020 and 2022 by the Nigeria Police

States of the South East	Number of deaths in 2020	Number of deaths in 2021	Number of deaths in 2022
Abia	15	70	76
Anambra	21	187	206
Ebonyi	35	103	112
Enugu	09	68	76
Imo	17	208	230
Total	97	636	700

Sources: The Cable News, June 27, 2022; Sahara Reporters, January 7, 2023

Table 1 above reveals that a total of 97 citizens in the Southeast Zone lost their lives to police brutality in the five states of the Southeast Zone in 2020. The number jumped to 636 in 2021, and in 2022, it increased to 700.

- (d) **Proliferation of Police Road Blocks and Military Check Points in the Southeast Zone:** It has been estimated that there are more than forty thousand police road blocks and military check points across the Southeast Zone alone. Among others, this was revealed in a study carried out by Nnaeto (2019). It is disheartening that despite the high number of police road blocks and military check points and others mounted by related security outfits in the South East zone, the security of the zone has remained worrisome, as the security men have turned these check points to centres of extortion of motorists and other road users. It is also disappointing to note that these security men at the sight of armed criminals or bandits with more sophisticated weapons abandon their duty posts and flee for their dear lives.
- (e) **Fulani-Herdsmen Attacks and Related Heinous Crimes:** The unwarranted attacks by Fulani herdsmen against farmers and other vulnerable residents in the South East zone; their alleged involvement in cases of kidnapping; and reported cases of rape of women and girls have remained a serious night mare among the residents of the zone. Food production in the zone has drastically decreased as farmers have been forced to abandon their farms for fear of being attacked and killed by Fulani herdsmen. In 2022, the revelation made by a former Prelate of Methodist Church, Nigeria, who became a victim of the kidnapers, revealed that Fulani herdsmen were responsible for many of the kidnapping cases that occurred around the Isuikwuato, Lokpanta and Umunneochi areas (Abia State) in 2022.
- (ii) **Climate Change and Unwarranted Bush Burning:** The absence of mechanization of agriculture in the Southeast Zone and the absence of irrigation farming normally throw Southeast farmers off their means of livelihood from November to March each year. Unfortunately, there are almost no storage facilities available for South East farmers. Currently, climate change has also created another tragedy whereby unscrupulous elements, even among the South East people, in the guise of hunting for bush animals and setting farms and bushes

on fire, result in large losses of unharvested farm crops, plantations and even residential buildings and shops located close to farms.

(iii) Continued Detention of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu: The continued detention of the leader of the proscribed group (IPOB) Mazi Nnamdi Kanu by the Federal government despite the Abuja Appeal court ruling in his favour and national and international appeals has undoubtedly remained a serious regional security issue that has continued to affect the security of the zone and socioeconomic and other activities (Owoye, et al., 2022). Various studies have revealed that the IPOB's enforcement order or declaration of every Monday as sit-at-home across the South East states has no doubt weakened the productive capacity of the zone and has posed an economic threat to the daily income earners in the zone. According to Allison (2022:10),

Since the pronouncement of the Monday sit-at-home order, the majority of South Easterners whose livelihoods are dependent on their daily activities have gone from bad to worse... without equivocation, which indicates that the IPOB's Monday sit-at-home order has continued to "fuel" people's misery by preventing them from engaging in their usual economic and social activities on Mondays.

(iv) High Cost of Governance and Recycling of the Same Brand of Politicians in Southeast Zone Politics

In modern day politics in the South East zone, one issue that has continued to generate social disharmony, acrimony, tension, bitterness and a disconnect between the people and the political class has been the high cost of governance and the recycling of the same brand of politicians while making political appointments. This has been spurred by the tendency for successful South East politicians after elections to devise various ways of settling or compensating only those who worked to ensure their electoral victory. Aside from the hand-picking of their preferred supporters to constitute their normal cabinet, several other offices with questionable portfolios are also created just to accommodate as much interest as possible without considering the financial implications such would entail on the state treasury. This culture of recycling politicians of the same brand has remained a threat to participatory democracy in the South East zone. Fresh hands are hardly brought in. For instance, the dissolution of the State Executive Council or Local Government Council would just be a mere re-assignment of portfolios or even a retention of those who were already there. In addition, the activities or influence of the so-called god-fathers or founding fathers of political parties, especially the dominant ones from which election winners usually emerge, have remained a threat to democratic consolidation in the Southeast zone. In most cases, they hijack internal party democracy and structure and, on their own, decide on those who will run for elections on behalf of the political party(ies) without following due process. This they often do to frustrate the chances of candidates who may actually be the choice of the people. Accusations and counter-accusations, unprovoked cases of litigation and defection from one political party to the other have been major consequences of this.

(v) Persistent Cases of Land and Communal Conflicts

Land disputes and communal conflicts have remained among the major sources of conflict among the people of the South East. There is hardly any family, village or community in Igbo Land or the South East Zone that does not have one form of land dispute or communal conflict or the other. Some of these conflicts have lasted for several years in formal courts or other traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (Alozie, 2020). Among the people of the South East zone, land or boundary disputes or conflicts have shattered close family ties, bonds and cordial relationships that should exist even among neighbours. This has resulted in a lack of trust and harmony due to mutual suspicion. This sorry development has continued to derail societal, individual or community development among the people. In Ebonyi State, for instance, there was a prolonged communal conflict between the Ezza and Ezillo communities. The conflict lasted between 2008 and 2011. Enormous losses were recorded in the conflict, and more than 150 lives were lost, with property worth millions of naira destroyed on both sides (Alozie, 2019). The Aguleri-Umuleri Communal dispute in Anambra State also lasted several decades, with considerable losses in the lives of people and property incurred (Akpuru-Aja, 2007). The protracted communal conflict between the People of Oruku and Umuode in the Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State over Indigene – settler issues – has also resulted in catastrophic losses. Adenyi (2014) reported that approximately nine violent confrontations in which clashes resumed in 1995 between the two groups resulted in the loss of approximately 30 human lives, while more than 200 houses were destroyed. Similarly, socioeconomic losses have continued to be recorded. The education of children in these communities has been disrupted. In addition, the popular Eke Oruku market in the area has been left shattered and desolate as social progress and development have continued to elude the communities.

(vi) Menace of Motor Park and Road Side Touts

Among other factors, youth unemployment among South East youths has been partly responsible for the increasing number of young men engaged in the unwholesome activity of touting for survival. The violence, intimidation and use of force or actual fighting with which the touts in their numbers compel drivers to “settle” or compensate them has become a serious threat to the transport business in the South East zone. The nature of their activity makes it difficult for them to provide genuine dialogue with drivers. In the course of their regular fracas with drivers or their bus conductors, they either beat them up or break the vehicle windscreen, destroy side mirrors or outrightly confiscate the vehicle of those who fail to settle them fully. In most cases, they end up creating and operating illegal motor parks. Sometimes, they determine the fare passengers are to pay for them to collect exorbitant charges from drivers. The embarrassment and nuisance that their activities have generated for state and road users have led some State Governors, such as Dr Alex Oti of Abia State, to come up with ways of checking or banning the activities of these touts.

Other notable impediments to the realization of sustainable socioeconomic development in the South East zone in the 21st century include the collapse of social infrastructure or amenities in the zone, youth unemployment, alleged politics of marginalization against the zone by the Federal government and various forms of human rights abuse and violations, (Ofoeze, 2009, Alozie, 2019; Alozie, 2020).

Summary of Findings

Arising from this study, the following are the major findings of the study:

- i. Meaningful socioeconomic development has been hampered in the Southeast zone in recent times due to the persistence of insecurity in the zone.
- ii. Dearth of necessary infrastructural facilities and enabling environment has constituted major impediments to socioeconomic development in South East, Nigeria.
- iii. Some entrepreneurs, businessmen and well to do individuals have been forced to relocate from the Southeast zone due to heightened insecurity in the area.
- iv. The alleged marginalization of the Southeast zone by the federal government has created a feeling of alienation on the people of the zone.

Conclusion

The Southeastern zone of Nigeria has been a major geopolitical entity in Nigeria. The zone is a food basket that serves not only the people of the zone but also the nation at large. The zone contains abundant human, natural and mineral resources, some of which are yet to be properly harnessed. The economy of the zone, for instance, was at the top of the other zones in the country way back to the first republic. A few years ago, the zone was a beehive of socioeconomic and business activities. Most people found economic solace through the activities of private and public companies, enterprises, industries and factories that provided employment opportunities to youth in particular. Before the turn off of events in the area, the zone was indeed a fertile ground for socioeconomic activities both for the indigenes and their visitors, who earned their means of livelihood without much hindrance or intimidation. Repositioning the South East zone for sustainable socioeconomic development would be a long way from restoring the economic status of the zone. Environmental sustainability, consistent social policy and community or grass root involvement are critical factors needed to drive sustainable socioeconomic development. Numerous impediments hindering the attainment of sustainable socioeconomic development in the South East zone would actually require the collaborative effort of the various stakeholders and leaders as well as grassroots involvement. Through these efforts, some individuals and entrepreneurs that once deserted the zone and transferred their businesses to safer areas would likely return or bring their businesses back to the zone.

Recommendations

This study hereby recommends the following:

- i. Members of the National Assembly from the South East Zone as well as the other critical stakeholders from the Zone should intensify their efforts to ensure the realization of the Southeast Zone peace effort initiated by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives. Proper synergy by all Southeast leaders is therefore highly needed in this regard.
- ii. The federal government and other concerned parties should listen to the clarion call of the majority of the South East people and have Mazi Nnamdi Kanu released from detention as a major way of restoring peace in the Southeast Zone and making the zone feel that it is a member of the Federation called Nigeria. Among others benefits, his

- release would likely go a long way to the restoration of some level of security in the zone and ending the every Monday sit-at-home being observed in some Southeast cities and communities which has been hindering socio-economic activities in the zone.
- iii. Both the leaders and the led in the South East zone should embrace a renewed mindset and commitment towards the restoration of the economic glory of the South East by ensuring that all triggers of insecurity in the zone are comprehensively addressed. This will once again make the zone a safe haven for the triumphing of socio-economic activities.
 - iv. The Federal government and the powers that are outside the South East zone should not continue to play politics about the signing of the South East Development Commission Bill, which has been approved by the National Assembly. Implementing the bill will go a long way to addressing the alleged marginalization of the zone by the federal government and give the people some sense of belonging.
 - v. The enviable spirit of “self-help initiative”, which the South East zone was once known for, should be revived. Through such inwards-looking and voluntary efforts, some community projects were built in the zone. Such efforts should be replicated in modern times like this in order to drive the much-expected development of the zone.
 - vi. The people of the South East zone should discard all alien or strange practices and lifestyles that have continued to mar the efforts being made towards sustainable socio-economic development in the zone. In other words, those activities or practices that are anti-thetical to the development of the zone in particular should be discarded.
 - vii. In particular, South-East youths should resolve to embrace the virtues of hard work, personal commitment and the drive for achievement orientation, which were enviable virtues seen in the lives of the founding fathers of the Southeast Zone. This will enable them to be real vanguards of development in the zone.

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