

Economic Disaster and Crisis of South East Development in Nigeria: The Challenge of State and Local Government Administrators

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Abstract

The prevailing economic disaster and crisis of the south east regional development have been a serious concern for the people and all advocates of good governance in Nigeria. For a far too long, the south east has been grappling with the issues of economic business failures, crisis of development, marginalization and underdevelopment and now insecurity which is hindering the full integration and full participation of Ndigbo in the Nigeria project. The study aims at finding out what are the major causes of the economic disaster and crisis of development and the best strategic measures to put an end to this unhealthy development. In order to achieve the objective, the researcher has employed a descriptive survey approach and analysis of data generated from both primary and secondary sources. Also, the researcher explored some relevant theories like the charismatic leadership and brain drain theories as his explanatory tools. In the light of these theoretical framework, and analysis of data, the findings revealed that carriage, bloodletting, death and massive destruction of Igbo tribe markets and numerous business outfits abound in devastated states. Pandemonium prevails among the citizens as a result of Monday sit-at-home order by separatist agitators, the government and security agencies are not providing adequate protection of the lives and properties, marginalization and absence of the rule of law and justice are treated with ignominy among others. It was recommended that the south east region should be provided with adequate security against carnage, and massive killings of innocent citizens by separatist agitators, the governors to stop the use of force against the sit-at-home but to employ a collaborative engagement and a peaceful dialogue to restore peace, the government to provide compensation to the residents in the devastated states and the administrators must use their constitutional powers to drive home a meaningful socio-economic development to the region. Above all, the federal government should forthwith allow the democratic system of government to thrive in Nigeria where the rule of law and justice will be respected for a lasting peace and sustainable development in the south east region and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Disaster, Crisis, Development, Administrators, Government, South East

Introduction

Today, in the south eastern Nigeria, carnage, bloodletting, death and destruction of lives and properties is the present reality of the south east geo-political zone. The combatants of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are stuck with their threats of killing whoever defies the order of its factional leader and/or a defacto south east governor operating outside the country. The group has often demanded for a weekly Monday sit-at-home order whereby non-compliance attracts devastating attacks, killings or outright kidnap for money ransome. The region which is made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states have been regarded as a peaceful area before the commencement of a heinous activities by the acclaimed separatist agitators and unknown gunmen. This group in August 2021, introduced a sit-at-home order every Monday of the week as a way to protest against its supreme leader's continuous incarceration. At the start of the order, infringing the fundamental human rights of the people, the governments at both federal

and state levels did little or nothing to halt the development. The federal government apparently expresses non-chalance to evolve a formidable approach, decisive and stringent steps to call for a dialogue between the warring parties. Unfortunately, in the south east, many innocent people have been made emergency widows and widowers as well as orphans, business ruined and others are maimed by the activities of the dreaded group. The Ohaneze Ndigbo Apex Cultural Organization (2023) noted that the most recent terrorist attacks, which was enforced to compel the president Bola Tinubu - led administration to release the leader of the separatist group, had spread terror throughout the south eastern states. The defacto or self-acclaimed representative of the leader of the group governor who operates outside Nigeria had recently given a series of public notices which were characterized with, Monday a 'total lockdown', Tuesday a 'no movement', Wednesday for 'sit-at-home', Thursday for 'opening of markets', Friday, a 'don't come outside' day, Saturday as 'ghost town day' and Sunday as 'stay indoors day'. Despite these notices, the five states governors, the administrators in local government areas, security agencies, traditional rulers and the major stakeholders were unable to stall the sit-at-home order and the incessant murder of innocent citizens. The state governments have continued to describe the sit-at-home as fake news while others have totally turned a blind eye to it despite the number of casualties recorded since the crisis started.

On the other hand, the western governors and other state governments in the Northern Nigeria have vigorously embarked in tribal politics soon after the inauguration of the president Bola Tinubu - led administration. For instance, the Lagos state government has made a law which was targeted at destroying the major business outfits of the easterners who operate in certain designated areas of Lagos State. A Social Media Press Report Survey (2023) pointed out that, in a short period of quit notice given to these traders to vacate their business locations, the Lagos state government had almost simultaneously embarked on demolition of the major business markets, plazas and the residents of the people in the suburbs.

The APGA chieftain, Chekwas (2023) observed that what is happening in the south east is a very disturbing trend that has been there for a while, the damage to the state's economy and the social life of the region cannot be quantified. The five states governments and the administrators at the other levels of government have not found the necessity to come together and develop a common approach to navigate the prevailing terrorism and fast-track development in the land.

It is against backdrop that the researcher is set to investigate the major causes of economic disaster and the increasing rate of crisis in the south east region. These flaws dictate that the critical gaps which eluded the previous research studies must be filled.

Statement of the Problem

The thrust of democracy anywhere in the world is determined greatly by the manner and style of leadership by which the system of government is administered. At the end of the south east governor's forum meeting, Ubani (2023) reported that the leaders have started to discuss the challenges facing the region. Unfortunately, over the past decades, the Nigeria's set of objectives being pursued under the democratic governance have not been adequately achieved especially as it affects the south easterners. This has resulted in the number of prevailing economic disaster and crisis in the Eastern Nigeria.

First, the continuous Monday sit-at-home order occasioned by the unlawful detention of the agitator for the declaration of Biafra nation has reached a crescendo. The enforcers of the standing order presumably some hoodlums who hide under the umbrella of the agitators have continued to terrorize innocent citizens, kidnap and massacre those people that dare to come out and do business on these days. The ugly developments have not only crippled the financial and economic activities of both the private and public sector managers and the poor masses but have increased the hardship of many people who depend on these businesses for their daily livelihood.

Furthermore, the impact of sit-at-home on the states revenue and economy has dwindled the earnings and the productive capacity of the government.

The willful demolition and/or destruction of the economic and financial business outfits in the various devastating states has become alarming in recent times. For instance, the newly constituted government of the Lagos state has made law to demolish the business plazas and international markets owned by the south easterners who are the major occupants and/or traders in the city.

ANSG survey report (2023) indicates that the state governors and the administrators of the various south east region seem to play politics with the citizens who elected and/or appointed them to different public offices of governance. These political leaders prefer to pursue their personal interests at the expense of the people whom they represent in all areas of administration. For example, the governors are voted into offices to protect and provide socio-economic services to the people. Unfortunately, most of them are busy pursuing a favourable increased financial allocation from the presidency for their personal aggrandizement rather than for an investment in the critical areas of basic infrastructural development in the states. Also, these administrators have never reacted adequately in encouraging the residents in the devastated states where they are maltreated to come back home and invest for a purposeful development of the region.

The issue of ethnic politics still pervades the system of governance in Nigeria. The unlawful treatment of the south easterners by the promulgation of obnoxious policies aimed at frustrating their business enterprise and marginalization have not received a considerable intervention by the legislators and the judiciary over the past years. The leaders have preferred to play “lip-service”.

Finally, the traditional institutions have been completely insulated from the rightful place in the local governance issues. Today, most traditional rulers are merely selected and appointed as rulers on recognition of the state government based on their expected loyalty, rather than on the general wishes of the communities whom they adjudicate. This generates a lot of conflicts and crisis among the people and the traditional rulers. The negative consequences to the traditional institutions, the community leaders and the state government in general are enormous. These flaws dictate that the critical gaps must be filled in order to bring peace, progress and economic stability in the region and Nigeria at large.

Research Questions

1. What are the major causes of the prevailing economic disaster and crisis ravaging the South-Eastern Nigeria?
2. Why have there not been any strategic options to halt the economic disaster, crisis and potent insecurity challenges in the land?
3. Has the ugly development a linkage to political, economic, religious or ethnic bigotry influence in the region?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the impact of the present economic disaster and crisis of the south east development drive with a view to mitigating the challenges for economic growth and political stability. The study will specifically seek to:

1. Determine the major causes of economic disaster and crisis ravaging the south east region.
2. Determine the best strategic option in tackling the economic disaster, the crisis and other potent insecurity challenges
3. Determine the linkage of the political, economic, religious or ethnic influence on the ugly developments in the south east geo-political zone.

Significance of the Study

The study is justified on the ground that it bridges the gap in the existing knowledge on the issue that the prevailing economic disaster and crisis ravaging the region previously rested on the state governors and administrators alone for addressing the various challenges that adversely affect lives and properties and security of the citizens. This is an area of research that previous studies have not adequately found a lasting solution as seen in the works of Uche (2010), Umeh (2016), among others.

The findings of this study are expected to be useful in recommending more effective strategies through a joint collaboration of the governors, administrators, the stakeholders and in the partnership with the federal government in halting the economic disaster.

Theoretical Foundation of the Research

Conceptual Issues

The Concept of Economic Disaster

According to Wikipedia (2022) the term “economic disaster” refers to various factors that contribute to a financial crisis including systemic failures, unanticipated or uncontrollable human behaviour, incentives to take excessive risks, regulation, absence or failures by governments and political leaders.

For example, in Nigeria, there is evidence of a lack of effective governance. Political leaders appear to be unable to identify and address major problems, such as election fraud, terrorist attacks, conflicts between herders and farmers, armed banditry, and police brutality. The government has not implemented sufficient measures to combat these issues. Currently, leadership seems to be achieved through corrupt practices, coercion, and violence. To solve this problem, some believe that Nigeria should adopt an epistocratic governance system, which would prioritize the qualifications of political leaders and the education of voters (Eze, 2023, Okoi & Iwara 2021). For over two decades now, the political environment has been controlled by a group of political leaders who repeatedly disregard the core values of a liberal democratic system. This includes fair elections supported by specific government bodies, the rule of law, political liberties, and the acknowledgement of human rights. The result of the upcoming 2023 presidential election remains to be seen and has further eroded public trust in the ability of independent electoral commission to continue to conduct future elections which are influenced by the authoritarian ruling class. A continuation of this practice will only accelerate the erosion of public trust and democratic institutions’ ability to address the current economic disaster challenges facing the south east region and the political stability of the nation.

The Concept of Crisis

A SFS Georgetown Survey (2019) explains that crisis refers to a time of intense difficulty or danger. For example, the current economic crisis in Nigeria portends catastrophe, calamity, cataclysm, emergency, disaster, predicament, plight, mess, dilemma, setback, reversal, upheaval, trouble, hard times, hardships, stress among others. On the other hand, the report further indicates that the concept of crisis is a state of feeling; an internal experience of confusion and anxiety to the degree that formerly successful coping mechanisms fail and ineffective decisions and behaviours take their place. As a result, the person in crisis may feel confused, vulnerable, anxious, afraid, angry, guilty, hopeless and helpless. This situation exactly portrays the degree of crisis which the south eastern traders and numerous businessmen are facing in some states of the country when their business organizations and properties are willfully destroyed by the state governors. In the circumstance, the political leaders and their representatives from the south east region apparently keep watching the ugly developments because of their perceived political

interests in the affairs of governance. This necessitates a demand for further reform of Nigeria to reflect a truly democratic nation.

Theoretical Framework

The theories which inform our discussion of economic disaster and crisis ravaging the South-Eastern Nigeria via the challenge of the state and local government administrators are the theories of charismatic leadership and brain drain theory.

According to the charismatic theory, Robert (1970) states that leaders will be most effective when moral purpose and commitment are given meaning by leaders who exercise a charismatic influence over their followers. This influence is based around the extent to which individual leaders (official or otherwise) can inspire the followers with a willingness to cooperate. The more the follower 'likes' the leader, the more they will follow. Leaders who have charismatic effects are more likely to have followers willing to follow beyond the usual call of duty. In essence, the followers will show their royalty in more positive attitudes to their work and greater enthusiasm to cooperate. The cooperation of the supporters will translate into greater productivity under the leader. The type of leadership will also include a basic for egalitarian behaviour and collective interests rather than the leader's self-interest (Miner, 2005:341). By developing a more collaborative and team-based of charismatic leadership skills, the leader in an organization may express a high degree of loyalty and commitment to the causes espoused by him. In this regard, the leader will express a very considerable power to lead and achieve. This explaining how most of the south east state governors, chairmen of councils, traditional rulers, legislators, stakeholders and other agencies of government who are duly elected and/or appointed by the people to protect their various interests often compromise on issues for personal aggrandizement. These administrators lack the moral commitment, loyalty and vision for the future of the citizens they are leading, hence the endless trajectory of the economic disaster and crisis pervading the businesses and livelihood of the people.

On the other hand, the brain drain theory which was propounded by Obi (2021) states that Nigeria's "brain drain" today will be our gain tomorrow. He maintains that Nigerians leaving the country may look like a loss today, but when we start doing the right things and taking the governance of our country more seriously, the knowledge and resources from them will be critical in the building of the new Nigeria of our dream, as was the case in China, India, Ireland and other developing countries of the world. According to the Neo Africana Centre on Public Affairs (A public policy think tank) by Bill Gate (2023) pointed out that Obi's brain drain theory position which many Nigerians received with cynical reservations is now receiving global acclaim. The present economic and social problems facing the country have compelled the youths especially the professionals and non-professionals to migrate to different countries of the world in search of better opportunities in life. According to the theory, in a short-term period, the brain drain might be viewed as loss of human resource personnel but in a foreseeable future, the knowledge and experiences garnered by these classes of Nigerians as a result of their interactions with the developed nations will be brought down by them and utilized to fast track our national development.

An Overview of Challenges of South East Governors and Other Administrators in Halting the High Incidence of Economic Disaster and Crisis in the South East Region:

The Channels TV Media Group (2023) pointed out in a group discussion that the south east state governors, the local government administrators, the media practitioners, and the traditional rulers and other major stakeholders have failed to effectively halt the sit-at-home order imposed on the region by the defacto governor of the south east operating outside Nigeria. It further noted that the Igbo political leaders have continued to keep mute over the information of militia group threatening to cause violence in the region. According to the Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper, July 2023, it was reported that the Monday sit-at-home which are known to have already crippled

most of the business and public sector services in the region led to the painful killing and loss of lives of some innocent traders in Enugu. The state governor closed all the market shops of traders who failed to comply with his counter order on the Monday sit-at-home. Following a peaceful protest march by people on the development, the enforcing state governor and his police agents attempting to resist the protesters inhumanly shot and killed some armless innocent citizens.

Ohanaeze Ndigbo Apex Organization (2023) observed that the Igbo leaders rather than resolving the Monday sit-at-home which has been contributing to the south east economic disaster and violence preferred to relocate to Abuja for meeting in order to resolve their regional challenges. He further stated that the leaders were merely pursuing shadows urging them to retrace their steps and come back home to resolve the issue hence Ndigbo is yet to see where AREWA, AFENIFERE, PANDEF and the middle BELT sociocultural organizations overruled that their stand and local issues must be resolved at home.

Obi (2023) pointed out that the rising insecurity in the country leading to mindless bloodletting, particularly in the North Central Zone of the country and the continued disruption of business and social activities in the south east are all becoming very worrisome. He further maintained that the violent attacks in the North Central States of Benue and Plateau recently, took a new twist with high records of kidnapping, arson, and loss of human lives. Accordingly, the 1st Quarter Mass Atrocities Casualty Tracking (2023) reported that over 1230 Nigerians were killed and the south east region was not left out of this malaise.

A Human Resource Index Survey report (2023) indicated that between October 2020 and June 2021, the armed separatists killed 175 security personnel, while several other Nigerians, especially in the south east, have been killed by Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and Eastern Security Network (ESN). Furthermore, the group in February 2016 also claimed to have lost over 1000 members since the IPOB leader was arrested. This is a clear indication of the high rate of violence and the resultant economic hardship the poor masses are facing over the years. The private and public sector businesses have virtually collapsed as their revenue earning capacities are dwindling. Also, the citizens are constantly dying of hunger and diseases while the crime wave remain on the increase daily.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey method based on observations and data generated from the primary and secondary sources like books, government publications, journals, conference papers and reports from the print and electronic and social media reports for content analysis against the existing literature. Also, the wealth of experiences garnered from the public opinion interactions over the years form the major thrust of the research report.

Discussion of Findings

Accordingly, besides the carnage, bloodletting, death and destruction of properties and major markets and shops of the business men and women in the South East, the pandemonium caused by the enforces of the Monday sit-at-home order is heart breaking.

A social media analysts Chimaobi (2023) noted that the enforces of the sit-at-home order on July 7, 2023 caused a pandemonium at some markets and places in Onitsha and Nnewi the commercial and industrial towns of Anambra State which disrupted the commercial and business activities following gunshots by unknown gunmen. The development caused the market traders in the communities including Onitsha main market Ochanja Central Market, Relief Market and Head Bridge Markets to close shops while banks hurriedly shut their office doors against their customers for fear of attacks and destruction of bank properties. Similarly, the development made most of the schools across the metropolitan cities to call parents to rush and pick their children. The general public especially the residents and the traders faulted the presumed government and

security agents' assurances of securing them on the grounds that the Police, Army, Navy, DSS and the NSCDEC were never found on guard on Mondays in Anambra state and even on other days people are made to observe a sit-at-home order.

Further, in a face-to-face interview, a trader in Onitsha Main Market whose name was Okechukwu pointed out that "we have Police, Army, Navy with their various check points where they extort money and delay traffic movement and we also have the DSS operatives". The residents maintain that the government issues the statements of assurances of protection of lives and properties in principle without any feasible protective devices in place.

In case of the willful destruction of the economic and financial business outfit of the South Easterners in the various states of the country, the state governors, the council chairmen, the community leaders and other representative members of the states and National Assembly have not effectively shown their abilities to dialogue and halt the ugly incidences hampering the socio-economic development of the Igbos. NANS reporter (2023) stated that in the early days of Colonialism, the Igbos did not yield easily to control from those operating from formal political office who derived imposed power. This is deeply rooted in their culture and historical experiences. Unfortunately, the governors and the various administrators prefer to play politics with the citizens who elected them into various positions of governance. In the midst of the traders' intimidation, harassment, forceful closure of markets and unlawful destruction of their businesses, the administrators have not deemed it necessary to take urgent action to address the problem.

ANSG survey report True Federalism (2023) observed that the politics of marginalization is practiced in Nigerian polity. It further noted that the Igbo citizens are constantly marginalized among the three major tribes in Nigeria as exemplified in the National Presidential Election of 2023 whereby the ministerial appointments and other past decades that ensured the return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999. At the end of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, the new Nigerian Government introduced a system of administration that would ensure effective accommodation of South East war victims and survivors through harmonization, reconstruction, rehabilitation and integration of the Igbos in the national scheme of things. This objective was never achieved. The ethnic politics that discriminate the Igbo tribe still pervade the system of governance in Nigeria.

The Apex Igbo socio-cultural organization further maintains that the democratic rule in Nigeria is merely in principle and not in practical terms. It further noted that where the rule of law, equity, justice and fair play are to be upheld as it relates to South East region, the constitutional provisions are thwarted.

The Trentonline survey report (2023) started those tensions in Enugu; protests against government 'sit-at-home' shutdowns turn deadly; spontaneous protests broke out across parts of Enugu on July 26, 2023 leading to the deaths of three civilians. The protesters who were mainly traders protested against the state governor closure of business in the Enugu as a move aimed at countering the sit-at-home order imposed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The directive resulted in the dispatch of police force that rather than protect the innocent civilians but used live ammunition to disperse the crowd. The incident started at Ogbete main market the largest market in the South East and spread to other parts of the city. The closure of these businesses badly affected the livelihood of the youths and residents whose daily earnings are derived from the market services. The issue further coincided with a resurgence in violent crime, kidnapping and killings across the state and the South East in general.

The apex Igbo socio-cultural organization (2023) pointed out that the state governors need to address the present challenges of various crisis of violence ravaging the South East region. It further posits that its crucial for the administrators to separate criminals such as kidnapers, cultists, armed robbers and killer herdsmen from genuine Biafra agitators. Furthermore, the street

urchins and criminals have hijacked the enforcement of the sit-at-home order and they are using it to unleash violence on the innocent people.

Conclusion

The south east region has been a peaceful land over the decades and its citizens are enterprising in nature. In Nigeria, the Igbos have the greatest potentials endowed to them by God. In trade, commerce, industry and trade among others, they are distinguished in various aspects of endeavours hence they have contributed tremendously in developing the different parts of the country and the global communities.

The leaders are expected to play good politics that will promote and encourage harmony between tribes and governments. Above all, the government and other tiers of governments should holistically encourage development, growth and adequate security of lives and properties in the south east region for a truly national integration and democratic polity.

Recommendations

In the light of the theoretical foundation of charismatic leadership and brain drain theories and analysis of the findings above, the following recommendations are made for a lasting security, harmony and peaceful co-existence among the tribes, dedicated leaders with vision and true political will for the pursuit of economic development and sustainability of growth in the region and Nigeria in general.

The south east governors should not use force to stop the Monday or other days' sit-at-home order imposed by the Biafra agitators. The use of a peaceful dialogue with the agitators, consultations with the federal government in partnership, the residents and/or the traders in the devastated states are imperative in order to address their grievances passionately and bring resilience to the warring parties.

The state governors, the various local governor chairmen, community leaders, traditional institutions and all major stakeholders should encourage the south easterners to come back home and invest in the region for a rapid development of their industrial and technological driven potentials. This can be effectively achieved by creating adequate awareness for better opportunities, engaging the youths and empowering the residents in the devastated states. Further, the states governors should map out some areas of land with an appreciable landmass and allocate to the deserving citizens at affordable prices for an aggressive development of the region.

The state governors should use their constitutional powers to drive the regional development to their rural communities without any fear or favour in case of possible politicization of legitimate demands from the ruling authorities.

The federal government and south east governors should demonstrate a holistic approach in addressing the issue of insecurity ravaging the economy of the states. Further, the administrators must resolve to fight insecurity decisively, individually, collectively in partnership with the federal government where necessary and other stakeholders.

The perpetrators of insecurity, the sponsors of the disdainful acts are criminals. Any security personnel who abuse the constitutional laws in the discharge of his/her official duties should be prosecuted and punished and/or charged to court for trial and if proved guilty, must to be sanctioned accordingly to serve as deterrent to others.

The state governors and their political office holders who derive power from the people that elected them into the various positions of authority should avoid any dangerous politics of divide-and-rule. In a situation of unlawful intimidation, harassment, and forceful closure of business of

traders and other residents in devastated states, the administrators should urgently call for a collaborative engagement, and peaceful dialogue to forestall further destruction of the people businesses and relationships built over the years.

The protracted negotiations over the issue of Ndigbo marginalization in the scheme of things in a democratic polity has actually reached a crescendo and calls for an urgent attention of the state governors and other federal and states legislators. The south east legislators should demand for a joint meeting of the National Executive Council, the National and States Assemblies for a collaborative resolution of this unhealthy discrimination of the Igbo tribe for a lasting peace and sustainable development in the region.

Finally, the federal government should allow the democratic system of government to thrive in Nigeria. When this is done, all the democratic principles and norms which embody the rule of law, equity, justice and fair play will be applied in all areas of administration without further marginalization of the Igbo tribe in a democratic society.

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