

Economic Development: A Panacea to the Insecurity and Militancy in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract

The South-South Geopolitical Zone, located in the southern part of Nigeria, is part of the Niger Delta Region. It is a resource-rich area known for its vast oil reserves. Despite its economic importance, the Region has faced significant security challenges attributed to underdevelopment and unfair distribution of natural wealth. This has led to a complex and protracted conflict situation. The South-South Geopolitical Zone's conflict has been characterized by various forms of violence, including militancy, kidnapping, oil spillage and environmental degradation, which have negatively impacted the region's economic development and the well-being of its inhabitants. In response to these challenges, the Nigerian government has implemented several amnesty programs aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict, promoting peace, and fostering economic development. This paper examines economic development as a potential panacea to the insecurity and militancy challenges in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria by exploring the historical context, evaluating the impact of past economic development initiatives, and analyzing the socio-economic implications. Finding reveals that insecurity and militancy challenges, is as the result of marginalization and lack of resource control of the zone. This paper provides a holistic understanding of the development program's effectiveness and its potential for sustainable peace and economic development in the zone in the light of the social conflict theory.

Keywords: Economic Development, Insecurity and Distributive Justice

Introduction

The South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria is made up of six States: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. It is located on the eastern coast of Nigeria and is part of the Niger Delta Region. It covers 78,612 square kilometers, which is about 8.5% of Nigeria's total land area. The Zone has a population of about 16.4 million people and 125 Local Government Areas. Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones, with the

other five being: North Central (Niger, Nasarawa, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Plateau & FCT); North East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe States); North West (Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa, Kano, Zamfara, Kaduna & Kebbi States); South East (Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, & Imo States); South West (Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo & Lagos States) (Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, 2024:5).

Economic activities in the South-South zone is primarily fishing, trading, and farming, with the main crops grown being cocoa, rubber, rice, sweet potato, maize, yam, palm products, cassava, and different types of vegetables. However, the extraction of oil has negatively impacted local residents, forcing agriculture-dependent residents to relocate for fertile land or employment. This reduces agricultural activity and income and causes a shortage of labor in the Region (Umoh, 2024:4). The South-South geopolitical zone environment is characterized by four ecological zones: coastal barrier islands, mangrove swamp forests, freshwater swamps, and lowland rainforests. These zones support a wide range of flora and fauna, making the Region one of the most biodiverse on the planet. However, the advent of oil production has had a detrimental impact on the environment, leading to unprecedented oil spillage and heavy contamination of the air, land, and water with toxic pollutants (Otto, 2012:665). This ecological destruction has been described as a form of ecocide, with Nigeria recording an alarming number of oil spills compared to the European Union.

Historically, the South-South geopolitical zone has been a region of significant economic importance, with the slave trade playing a crucial role in its early development. The region's city-states thrived on the slave trade; exporting slaves from their immediate surroundings to other parts of Western Africa and beyond. With the abolition of the slave trade, palm oil and other palm products became alternative export, which became its significant commodities during the industrial revolution. The discovery of oil in the South-South geopolitical zone in 1956 marked a turning point in the region's history, leading to significant economic and political changes. The oil industry has been a major source of revenue for Nigeria, providing approximately 90% of the country's revenue and more than 90% of total exports. However, the people of the South-South geopolitical zone have remained poor, marginalized, and restive, with conflicts arising as a means of expressing their grievances. The region has been plagued by kidnapping of oil company workers, bombing of oil facilities, and confrontations with state law enforcement agents, leading to severe implications for the economy (Wangbu, 2005:5). The South-South geopolitical zone developmental challenges are closely intertwined with its turbulent history and recurrent patterns of instability, with extreme deprivation remaining unchanged despite the Region's vast oil wealth. The zone has experienced an uneasy quiet since the Amnesty offered by former President Yar'Adua in 2009. However, the fundamental conditions of extreme

deprivation persist, threatening human security and the national economy (Imongan, 2016:62).

The Concepts of Economic Development

Economic development in the region appears to be in a mode of change since the end of the World War I. In the early 1940s the philosophical differences between the socialist east and the capitalist west seem to have impacted the meaning of and the conceptualization of the term. The challenge of economic development is very divergent. There is no separation between theory and observed facts. The mainsprings of development are well known: increase in the quantity and quality of resources of all kinds. Countries are poor because they lack resources or the willingness and ability to bring them into use. The problems posed by underdevelopment cannot be solved without cost. According to Adofu *et al* (2018:101), development implies change, and this one sense in which the term development is used, that is to describe the process of economic and social transformation within the countries. This process often follows a well ordered sequence and exhibits common characteristics across countries. For Oko and Koko, (2024:106), development is all encompassing and affects positively the entire life of a nation social, economic, cultural, technological and political. A concept of economic development is the one that embraces the major economic and social objectives and values that the societies strive for. One of the best attempt at conceptualizing development is that of (Ifegwu, 2022:23), who opines that:

The three basic components or core values in this wider meaning of development, which he calls: life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. According to him, life-sustenance is concerned with the provision of basic needs, self-esteem is about feeling of self-respect and independence, as no country can be regarded as fully developed if it is exploited by others and does not have the power and influence to conduct relations on equal terms. Freedom which refers to freedom from the three evils of want, ignorance and squalor so that people are able to determine their own destiny.

In light of above, Nwanegbo *et al* (2013:285) asserts that, the ideology of development itself became a problem for development because of the conflict between its manifest and latent functions. The underlining assumption here is that, infrastructural development that guarantees better living condition of the people is an off-shoot of the fund generated by economic growth for investment infrastructure. International concern over extreme poverty has moved near the top of the world agenda for the first time since the 1970s. The reason for this move is because economic growth in most developing and underdeveloped societies especially in the Latin America and Africa do not provide corresponding social goods. Nwagboso (2012:244) observes that:

Economic growth that could not significantly address the spate of unemployment, poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy and ever-increasing crimes and wars is not economic growth in the right perspective. This seems to have necessitated the new dimension of thought of redefining development from economic growth centred perspective to human centred approach.

This stance informs Wilson (2012:254), position that post development thought has called for a return to the stress on people as both measures and determinants of development. Development has been redefined, taking the emphasis away from traditional economic indicators of Gross Domestic Product and trade and broadening out the concept to take into consideration the psychological and material factors related to the measurement of human well-being (Umemezia *et al*: 2019:104). There are many faces to development and all this is centred on man the ultimate beneficiary. The individual and the society interact with nature for the ultimate aim of transforming the environment for the betterment of the individual and the society at large, which in turn transform humanity in the process. The whole essence of economic development is to improve the potentials and capacities of man to be able to overcome the multi-faceted problems he faces like; insecurity, poverty, inequality, penury, unemployment and to generally enhances the conditions for human existence and self-production.

The Concepts of Insecurity and Militancy

Insecurity is not foreign to societies, as it has existed even in the earliest or most ancient societies of the world. To be able to give an all-inclusive definition of insecurity, it is important we take a brief look at what security is. The social contract in which the people willingly surrender their right to the government who oversees the survival of all is necessitated by the need for security. According to Nwanegbo *et al* (2013), with the end of the cold war, there have been attempt to shift conceptualization of security from a static centric perspective to a broader view that places premium on individuals, in which human security that embodies elements of national security, human rights and national development remain major barometer for explaining the concept. At the heart of this debate is an attempt to deepen and widen the concept of security from the level of the states to societies to individuals, and from military to non-military issues (Nwogwugwu, 2012:23). In the opinion of Inyang (2012:27) he affirms that:

The security of a nation hangs on two important pillars which are (1) the maintenance and protection of the socioeconomic order in the case of internal and external threat and (2) the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimizes the threat to core values and interests, as well as domestic order. Security is an all-encompassing condition which suggests that a territory must be protected

by a network of armed forces; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, which in turn must be protected by the military-police and the people themselves; that the people must not only be secured from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals such as unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution cum socioeconomic injustices.

Ifegwu *et al* (2022:23-24) extended the view expressed above by saying that, Nigeria's security should be based on a holistic view which sees the citizens as the primary beneficiaries of every security and developmental deliverable that the state can offer. In the view of Nwanegbo *et al* (2013:285-287), Nigeria's security will involve efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria so it can advance its interests and objectives to contain internal and external aggression, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth and improve the welfare and quality of life of every citizen. The antithesis of security is insecurity, which can be seen as the absence of security as discussed above. The common description of insecurity is uncertainty, hazard, danger, want of safety, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded and protected, lack of protection and being unsafe, instability to mention but a few. In the words of Adofu (2018:102), the common descriptors outlined above point to a condition where there exists a vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood. To them insecurity is state of not knowing, a lack of control, and the inability to take defensive actions against forces that portend danger or harm to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable. Furthermore, insecurity and violence lead to loss of life, property and the source of livelihood in a society (Olusakin, 2023:65).

An Overview of the Nigerian Economy

The Nigerian economy in general and Niger Delta region in particular is the largest in Africa, with a GDP of over £400 billion in 2021, making it the 26th largest economy in the world. Nigeria has a mixed economy structured around capitalism, with private businesses seeking revenue to generate personal wealth. The country has a labor force of over 200 million people, allowing it to maintain numerous different economic sectors. Nigeria's economy increasingly revolves around importing and exporting, with petroleum being its largest export, accounting for around 90% of its export profits. The agricultural sector is also significant, employing nearly 70% of the population and comprising nearly 22% of GDP in Q1 of 2022. Nigeria is also a big importer, primarily of food, industrial supplies and machinery, chemicals, minerals, and petroleum-based products. China is Nigeria's largest import partner, but several European countries like Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands also export products to Nigeria (United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP), (2022). The Nigerian economy is broadly classified into formal and informal sectors. Business analysts estimate that the informal sector accounts for as much as 65% of the total economy, although it is not included in GDP calculations due to lack of credible data on the mostly cash-based activities. Under President Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria has prioritized self-sufficiency as key to economic growth and national security, promoting backward integration, import substitution, and local content laws. In addition to oil and gas, Nigeria's formal sector economic activities are conducted across several sectors including the agricultural, services, and industrial sectors. The services sector is the largest sector in Nigeria and accounted for 52% of GDP in the third quarter of 2022. The information and communications technology (ICT) sector contributed 16.2% to GDP in Q1 2022. The agricultural and respectively, during the same period, the services sector grew by 7%, while agriculture and industry grew by 1.3% and 8%, respectively. Nigeria ranks 58th among the United States' trade partners. In 2022, trade between both countries was valued at \$4.45 billion (World Bank, 2024).

Nigeria's economy has grown substantially since independence, but its politics have been marred by infighting and corruption. The country's economy is typically classified as an emerging economy, transitioning toward modernization. Nigeria's economic growth has been driven by its large labor force, abundant natural resources, and strategic location in West Africa. However, the country's heavy dependence on oil has decreased somewhat in recent years, with oil accounting for 5.6% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) in the third quarter of 2022, down from 7.5% recorded in the third quarter of 2021. Oil revenue remains a crucial source of government revenue, constituting 29% of total government revenues in the first half of 2022 (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2022). Nigeria has experienced significant economic losses and decreased oil output due to oil theft, aging infrastructure, and a lack of investment in the oil sector. The country's oil production quota was raised from 1.77 mbpd to 1.83 mbpd for September 2022, but Nigeria has struggled to meet this quota due to these challenges. The Nigerian government has increased borrowings from the international capital market to offset its budget crunch caused by stagnant revenue and lower oil prices. Nigeria's economy recorded positive growth (0.6 percent year-on-year) in the second quarter of 2017, after contracting for 5 consecutive quarters, and growth is expected to reach 1 percent in 2017, contingent on sustained recovery of oil production. However, Nigeria experienced its first recession in over two decades in 2016, when the economy contracted by 1.6 percent due to negative oil price and oil production shocks, which spilled over to the non-oil GDP. Oil exports plummeted by 25 percent in 2016 (in US dollar terms); however, imports contracted even faster (33 percent) due to constraints on foreign exchange, resulting in a positive current

account (United Nations 2023). The World Bank's Nigeria Development Update (NDU) (2024:5) observes that:

The World Bank's view on Nigeria's economic outlook growth will remain fragile, with the non-oil economy expected to recover slowly and oil production projected to remain at low levels. The bank recommends that Nigeria implement policies to improve access to reliable power supply, adjust trade policies to promote productivity growth, and improve the business environment to attract investment and promote economic diversification.

The World Bank's Nigeria Development Update (NDU) (2024) provides an overview of recent developments in the Nigerian economy, including low oil revenues, lack of major tax policy reforms, and the impact of oil price shocks on the economy. The report highlights the need for sustained fiscal reforms to support economic growth and development in Nigeria. In reality, the Nigerian economy is a complex and dynamic system, with a large and growing labor force, abundant natural resources, and a strategic location in West Africa. However, the country's heavy dependence on oil and the challenges facing the oil sector pose significant risks to its economic growth and development. To address these challenges, Nigeria needs to implement policies to diversify its economy, improve access to reliable power supply, adjust trade policies to promote productivity growth, and improve the business environment to attract investment and promote economic diversification. The World Bank's Nigeria Development Update (NDU) provides valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to support Nigeria's economic growth and development.

Niger Delta's Economic Contribution

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria contributes significantly to the national economy by producing the vast majority of the country's oil and gas, accounting for over 95% of Nigeria's export earnings and a substantial portion of government revenue. Interestingly, the Niger Delta region is where almost all of Nigeria's crude oil is extracted, making it the primary driver of the national economy. A greater percentage of the Nigerian government's revenue is derived from oil taxes and royalties generated in the Niger Delta (Ashiomanedu, 2008:155-156). Other economic activities in the Niger Delta, though less significant than oil, include:

Agriculture: Fishing and farming are important sources of income for local communities, they are central to the livelihoods of many Niger Delta communities. Oil spills contaminate water sources and farmlands, severely affecting fishing and agricultural activities.

Transportation: Maritime transport due to the region's extensive waterways, this boost the government revenue of Nigeria. But in recent time, the militancy has affected this noble trade and causes inventors to relocate to other peaceful regions. The lucrative oil and gas production in the Niger Delta has transformed the political economy of the nation that commands high international recognition. All these resources that generate these benefits to Nigeria came exclusively from the Niger Delta region (Ashiomanedu, 2008:156-157). Despite its significant oil wealth, the Niger Delta region itself often experiencing significant poverty, inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation resulting from oil extraction activities and underdevelopment due to poor distribution of these wealth benefits; essentially, the Niger Delta is the primary source of Nigeria's oil wealth, making it crucial to the national economy, but with limited direct economic benefits for its residents.

Unemployment and Poverty in the South-South Zone

The South-South Region of Nigeria is rich in natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which are the main sources of revenue for the country. However, the region is plagued by high levels of unemployment and poverty, which have been exacerbated by the negative impact of oil exploration on the environment and the local economy (Wangbu, 2005). The unemployment rate in the South-South zone is higher than the national average, and the situation is particularly critical in rural areas where most of the population lives. The Region is also characterized by a high level of inequality, with a small elite controlling most of the wealth and resources. The high levels of unemployment and poverty in the Zone have been attributed to various factors, including the dominance of the oil industry, which has led to the neglect of other sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and manufacturing. The Region's reliance on oil has also led to the degradation of the environment, which has affected the livelihoods of the local population, particularly farmers and fishermen. The lack of job opportunities, coupled with the environmental degradation, has resulted in social unrest, including militancy, kidnapping, and other forms of violence (Aboh, 2024). Unemployment is the most basic issue demanding special attention on the economic life of the Nigeria person (Oko, 2020:108). In the words of (Umoh, 2023:185), declares that:

The Nigerian government has initiated various programs and policies aimed at addressing the issue of unemployment and poverty in the zone. However, these efforts have not been successful in addressing the root causes of the problem. The Region requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the structural issues that have led to the current situation. This approach should include the development of other sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, to create job opportunities and reduce the Region's dependence on oil. It should also include

measures to address the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and to promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

The study reveals that, the South-South Region of Nigeria is rich in natural resources, but it is plagued by high levels of unemployment and poverty (Wangbu, 2005:5). The issue of high and constant unemployment in our Nation Nigeria in general and Niger Delta region in particular has brought about major changes in her economy (Oko, 2020:102). The Region requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the structural issues that have led to the current situation. This approach should include the development of other sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, to create job opportunities and reduce the Region's dependence on oil. It should also include measures to address the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. The Nigerian government and international development partners should work together to implement this approach and to promote sustainable development in the zone.

Causes of Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region

The causes of insecurity in the South-South zone are multifaceted and interrelated (Adebakin, 2012:1-3). They include:

1. *Marginalization and Political Exclusion:* The South-South zone has been politically marginalized, leading to a sense of exclusion and alienation among the local population. This has contributed to the emergence of militant groups who see themselves as fighting for the rights of their people (Olusakin and Sibani, 2023:59).

2. *Environmental Degradation:* The oil industry has caused significant environmental damage in the South-South zone, leading to the destruction of farmlands, fishponds, and rivers. This has radically altered the economic life of the once self-reliant and productive Region for the worst (Umoh, 2024:4).

3. *Corruption:* Corruption is a significant factor in the South-South zone, with oil revenues being siphoned off by corrupt officials and multinational corporations. This has led to a lack of investment in the Region and a failure to address the underlying issues contributing to insecurity. Corruption is another stumbling block for peace in Nigeria (Oko, 2022:205).

4. *Unemployment and Poverty:* High levels of unemployment and poverty in the South-South zone have contributed to a sense of hopelessness and desperation among the local population. This has made them vulnerable to recruitment by militant groups who offer them a sense of purpose and financial reward (Wangbu, 2005). Poverty has also been identified as one of the factors that engenders religious conflicts in Nigeria, here poverty is

seen as that of the mind and of economic depression leading to serious socio-economic problems, which have aggravated unemployment brought in sense of frustration and abandonment among the people (Oko, 2015)

5. Criminality and Organized Crime: Organized crime, including cultism, piracy, and land struggles, is a significant factor in the South-South zone. These activities are often driven by issues such as drug abuse, poverty, and unemployment. They have contributed to a culture of violence and insecurity in the region.

6. Political Rivalries and Communal Disputes: Political rivalries and communal disputes are also significant factors in the South-South zone. These disputes often revolve around issues such as land, water, and cattle, and are exacerbated by ethnic and religious differences. They have contributed to a breakdown in social cohesion and an increase in violence in the region.

7. Dependence on Oil Revenue: The Nigerian economy's dependence on oil revenue has contributed to conflicts, accusations, and counter-accusations over the sharing of derivation revenue. This has led to a proliferation of militia groups in the region, who see themselves as fighting for a fairer share of the region's oil wealth. This was re-echoed by Oko (2020:188) when he said that Nigeria nation is entangled in the web of atrocities and maladies such as corruption, gross under development, army robbery, banditry, hooliganism, political violence, political discord and other crime of different magnitude including injustice which is the order of the day. The study reveals cause of insecurity in the South-South zone has complex and interrelated. They include political marginalization, environmental degradation, corruption, unemployment and poverty, criminality and organized crime, political rivalries and communal disputes, and dependence on oil revenue. Addressing these underlying issues will require a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of insecurity in the region.

Appraisal

Economic development is proposed as a panacea to insecurity and militancy based on the understanding that security challenges in Nigeria are intricately linked to economic factors. The relationship between economic development and insecurity is highlighted in the study, emphasizing that the pace of development needs to be accelerated to address insecurity effectively (Adofuet al, 2018:101). The study affirms that security and development are interrelated, with security being a public good that competes with other public goods like education and infrastructure for resources. In the absence of real security threats, resources allocated to security can be reduced, allowing for more investment in other areas that enhance the quality of life and economic empowerment of individuals. Furthermore, the

study emphasizes the importance of good governance as a panacea for insecurity challenges in Nigeria, stating that security engagement cannot be separated from good governance. Effective leadership and good governance are seen as crucial elements in addressing security issues and fostering economic development (Ikenga, 2022:251). The study also stress that economic development is essential for security, and without development, there can be no security. The concept of security is expanded to include economic well-being, industrialization, and business expansion, all of which are closely tied to economic development.

Strategies for Economic Development in the South-South Zone

To promote economic development in the South-South zone, several strategies can be implemented (Wilson, 2012:254-256).

1. Establishing industries that add value to the abundant oil and gas deposits in the zone can lead to industrialization. Processing natural resources within the region can create jobs, add value to the resources, and integrate the oil economy into the local economy.
2. Granting the South-South zone limited autonomy, also known as "resource control," can help manage ethnic tensions. This approach involves allowing the region to retain a portion of the surplus value from processing industries, which can contribute to the local economy.
3. Political leaders should educate their followers about the realities of economic development and avoid promises that raise unrealistic expectations. Annual budget proposals should reflect the realities and constraints of resources and demands for them. The implementation of budgets should be guided by transparency and accountability.
4. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) should focus on sustainable development projects, such as infrastructure development, rural development, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and economic empowerment without compromising future needs in the region.
5. A balanced development strategy that considers both rural and urban areas, as well as environment and economic development, is essential for the South-South zone.
6. Incorporating community-driven development approaches by private companies in Nigeria can help increase economic opportunity for residents in the South-South zone. This approach can also help tackle corruption in all levels of the Nigerian government.

By implementing these strategies, the South-South zone can experience economic development, reduce insecurity tensions, and improve the living standards of its residents.

Conclusion

Economic development as a panacea to insecurity and militancy challenges in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria and beyond requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses economic, social, and environmental challenges. Tackling corruption in government is essential for creating a conducive environment for sustainable development. Strategies like promoting transparency, building strong institutions, engaging civil society, and leveraging technology can help combat insecurity, promote good governance and economic development. To achieve sustainable economic development, countries must diversify their economies, address inequalities, make finance sustainable, improve institutions, integrate economic growth with sustainable planning, and collaborate across sectors. Investing in green infrastructure, promoting inclusive growth, and fostering sustainable urbanization are also crucial for long-term economic prosperity. Environmental sustainability is vital for preserving natural resources, protecting ecosystems, and ensuring a healthy planet for future generations. Strategies such as conservation, renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, green infrastructure, and environmental education can help promote environmental sustainability. The Nigerian government and oil companies play crucial roles in the oil industry and must work together to ensure that the industry benefits the South-South zone and its people. Transparent governance, investment in infrastructure and social services, responsible business practices, and community engagement are keys to fostering sustainable development in the region. By implementing these recommendations and working collaboratively, governments, businesses, and communities can pave the way for sustainable economic development that benefits all stakeholders and ensures a prosperous and resilient future for generations to come.

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