

**THE SOCIO- RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA'S (IPOB) SIT AT HOME ORDER IN  
THE SOUTH EAST OF NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

From the world on go, there has always been agitations from group of people that are aspiring for self-governance which have always taken diverse strategies. The recent agitation of the indigenous people of Biafra is a case in point. It is a fact well acknowledged that the government of Nigeria has not really given in for the essence of the agitation which is now taking another dimension, hence the Mondays compulsory sit at home order in all the South Eastern States with its attendant implications. This work therefore is an effort made to analyzing the economic and religious implications of this sit at home order by the Indigenous 'People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South Eastern States in Nigeria. The study made use of secondary data collection and its analysis shows that the sit at home order has adverse effect on the economy of the south easterners of Nigeria. The consequences of these affect the standard of living of the people within the geopolitical zone. It also poses serious threat to their lives and properties. Citizens are now living in fear and uncertainty while those who depend solely in their daily work to feed are the worst hit. This order equally affects productivities as those working in companies, Bank, State and Federal offices within the geopolitical zone are not left out. The study concludes that the sit at home order is drastically affecting the South Eastern zone in particular and the Nigerian nation in general and therefore recommends that Nigeria government should respond to the agitations of the Indigenous People of Biafra since their actions are threatening the peace, security and unity of the nation.

**Keywords:** Socio-Religious, Economic, Implications, Indigenous people of Biafra, Sit at Home, South East

**Introduction**

The indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) have stepped up struggle for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra. They have criticized the activities of Nigerian federal government .for poor investment, political alienation, inequitable resource' distribution, ethnic marginalization and extra - judicial killing in the southeast. According to Ekpo and Agorye (2019) there are evidence .or so it look of unfair treatment of the Igbos in the present political dispensation. As analyst have noted, there are indicators such as lack of economics opportunities, palpable degree of political exclusion, unequal development, lack of federal government presence and others. The group has remained disenchanted with the activities of the Nigeria government. However they have adopted the use of non-violence approach that was characterized by peaceful protest in their struggle. This approach was equally abused by the Nigeria government who employed the services of the security agencies that applied force to quell their protest.

Alumona et.al (2019) avers that a number of agencies have responded to the Biafran challenge with brutal display of force causing casualties in its wake. A lot of Biafra supporters have been killed during their demonstrations, more have been injured and properties of residents destroyed. Another approach used by the IPOB in their struggle is media propaganda and sit at home order. They succeed in establishing an underground Radio Station known as Radio Biafra which they always use to disseminate information to their supporters.

Besides, their sit at home order in the southeast is very strong as people are complying seriously either as a support to their struggle or as a result of fear of being killed. The current Monday sit at home order in the southeast which came up as a result of Nnamdi Kanu's arrest on June 29, 2021 by the Nigeria federal government has hampered the economic activities in the southeast. Our task in this paper is to critically analyze the socio religious and economic implication of the sit at home order in the southeast Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that directed this research work is social inequality theory. This theory states that inequality occurs when there is existence of variation in terms of valued attributes which some members of a society possess more than others. Inequality in Nigeria is not as a result of lack of resources rather it centers on the ill use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. Alumona et.al (2019) opines that Nigeria has a history of problems with data collection. According to them, the result of the first, post-independence census' conducted in 1902 'was withdrawn and the reliability of the 1963 census has been questioned. Yin (2017) asserts that since census figures in Nigeria guide distribution of federal funds to each of country's 36 States and 774 local government areas, as well as civil service hiring deliberate reduction of the population of the Igbo in Nigeria federation is seen to adversely affect the volume of resources that accrue to the region.

According to Ohaneze (2002) it has become a common practice to manipulate census figures in Nigeria to decrease the population of Igbos. Social inequality has caused mistrust among ethnic group in Nigeria. A number of cases have illustrated this fact, in 1993 the annulment of presidential election in which M K O Abiola emerged as a winner triggered the Odua People congress who advocated for an autonomous region. Similarly, militancy in the Niger Delta was a result of social inequality. Vande (2012) asserts that state power has been captured and used to further the interest of an ethnic group or a combination of ethnic groups that dominate the corridors of power. Social inequality is unhealthy in that it creates room for suspicion and unnecessary rivalry. It is worthy to note that of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, southeast has the lowest number of states and local government. The major reason that led to the emergence of IPOB in the southeast is social equality.

### **Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB): A Historical Context**

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist group which emerged in the southeast of Nigeria. The Leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu a Nigeria - British based in London started the movement with the aim of restoring the defunct Biafra. Initially there was a similar group called Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) with the same agenda as IPOB but was weakened as a result of leadership issue that emerged within the group. It was when it became obvious that the dream for the independence of Biafra cannot be achieved

through MASSOB that IPOB emerged. Alumona et, al (2019) opines that MASSOB under Uwazurike however, did not have a mass appeal for number of reasons. As a result, the coming into existence of the IPOB, with mass appeal and huge membership revolutionize the agitation for a sovereign state of Biafra.

Furthermore, it is important to recall that the main secessionist attempt that shackled the entire federation emerged in 1967 when the Eastern region lunched massive attempt to break away from Nigeria. This started when the Igbos in the Northern Nigeria was massacred in cold blood and their bodies were brought back to the eastern Nigeria. Duruji (2021) buttress this fact by saying that the counter coup and the pogrom that followed saw to the massive massacre of Igbos residing in Northern Nigeria. It was as a result of this massacre in the Northern Nigeria that pushed Col Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to declare Republic of Biafra in 1967. He argued that since Nigeria government and law enforcement were not able to protect the Igbos residing in the other regions that it is better for them to return to the eastern region were they will be safe. On this very issue Alumona et.al (2019) avers that the sad event encouraged Igbos to believe that they were unwanted persons in other parts of the country and those who survived the pogrom returned in droves thereby widening the crack in National Unity.

The Igbos feels completely marginalized by the federal government of Nigeria. They claim that they are the victims of an unfair relationship and treatment at the centre. For them a complete independence from Nigeria is the Ideal solution. Owem (2016) writes that group agitating for revival of Biafra reappeared shortly after the return to democracy in 1999 alongside other ethnic nationalistic movement across Nigeria. Igbos are still hammering that the failure of Nigerian government to address the issue of fundamental social difference, political tension, economic competition and ethnic imbalance since the amalgamation is an injustice on the Igbos. In line with this thought Ekpo and Agorya (2019) agrees that the agitation for the restoration of Biafra is a product of the failure of the Nigerian government to create a sustainable transitional justice system after the 30 months of Nigeria - Biafra war (1967 - 1970). Similarly Owem (2016) states that the fundamental issues for which the Igbos went to war in the first place were not addressed in the interregnum.

Consequently, the agitation for Biafra has resurfaced with much vigor and the attitude of the Nigerian government towards the agitators is not commendable. It has rather brought fame and recognition to agitators. The Igbos is still complaining of being relatively deprived economically, politically, religiously and socially. The vintage of horizontal inequality meted against the Igbos by other groups in Nigeria is the force behind the emergence of these secessionist group called IPOB. They are agitating for farness in the distribution of National resources, favourable recognition or total breakaway from the Nigeria state to form an ideal and conducive state of Biafra.

More so, IPOB which started in 2009 had made a smart move by using radio Biafra in its Radio propaganda. Radio Biafra was very symbolic because that was the name of the National Radio station of the defunct Biafra State. Through the power of its media, they were able to criticize the Nigeria government for poor investment, ethnic marginalization and inequitable resource distribution in the southeast Nigeria. The leader of IPOB Nnamdi Kanu became famous through his online broadcast via Radio Biafra, Ekpo and Agorya (2019) confirms that the activities of the IPOB have been superficial and tirade and other media frenzy and were largely ignored by the then President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

It was in October 19, 2015 when Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB was arrested in Nigeria by Buhari's Government that his members started protesting for his release. His arrest had pushed IPOB supporters into gaining further fraction as their mobilization grew. Ekpo and Agorye (2019) underscore the fact that his arrest marked the beginning of the escalation of the conflict between IPOB and Buhari's administration. The clash between the IPOB and security operatives has led to the killing of innocent people and destruction of properties worth billions of naira. Alumona et.al (2019) concurs

Apart from the arrest and continued detention of some of its headers, it has also met the agitators with brutal force, using the security agencies not only to disrupt their rallies, but also to shoot them. In the process, many were killed and many more got maimed. This is even as the agitators were always unarmed. This has attracted the attention of the international communities as well as some interested parties who have beginning to question the human right implication of government response.

On September 18, 2017, the IPOB has been labeled a terrorist organization by the Federal High court in Abuja. Their effort to fight this proscription and reverse the court decision has been proved abortive. Besides, this proscription has not yield any result with regards to terming the activities of the IPOB. It has rather intensified their quest for separation. It is obvious that instead of seeking for a lasting solution for this quest for separation, the Nigeria government has opted for the use of force. As observed by Obasi (2017) the use of force by President Mohammadu Buhari in responding to the IPOB's agitation has not been productive as it inflames passion and increase peoples sentiments on separation that may eventually' led to political instability. It is worthy to note that the recent arrest of Nnamdi Kanu on June 29, 2021 has created serious tension in the southeast region of Nigeria. It was this arrest that brought about the ongoing Monday sit at home order by IPOB.

### **Economic and Socio Religious Implication of IPOB Sit at Home Order: An Analysis.**

It is an obvious truth that for the past few years, heightened social insecurity in Nigeria has escalated the crime rate leaving unpleasant consequences for the nation's economy and its growth. The activities of the IPOB in the southeast have led to a prevalent massive loss of lives and properties worth billions of naira. Ibeanu et.al (2016) have argued that the recurring agitation for Biafra has specific regional and national security implication, including the chances that mobilization of potential protesters could escalate armed violence and worsen the existing level of insecurity. The recent sit at home order by the IPOB has in no doubt poses a serious threat to future of the private sector investment volume, agricultural productivity, real sector level and overall economic development in the southeast Nigeria. As noted by Ndubisi - Okolo and Anigbogu (2019) in the absence of security, economic growth and development cannot be sustained as it destroys economic human and social capital. It is good to note that majority of the citizens in the southeast are self-employed and they are complying with the ongoing sit at home order. In other words their businesses are lock down any time IPOB announces sit at home. It is obvious that the compliance is not at will but as a result of fear.

Insecurity is a global issue and it is a threat to sustainable development. It is a bane to economic growth and development and simultaneously frustrated and undermines the dreams and aspiration of great dynamites owing to its negative consequences. It is a transparent truth that

insecurity is detrimental to general wellbeing of people with its resultant effect in area of illness, low life expectancy, quality of life and even death.

With the incessant security challenges and the inability of the security agents to guarantee safety and security in the Southeast, many businesses are closed down and investors are on their heels. Chukwudi et.al (2019) confirms from their findings that the larger number of IPOB members responded strongly agree that their activities have attracted internal and external condemnation on the Nigeria government, discouraged local and foreign investment while their members enjoy peaceful coexistence with the IPOB sympathetic public. The commercial sector in the southeast which was once booming are now witnessing a dwindling fortune because of the constant sit at home order by the IPOB. The commercial subsector which covers small and medium scale enterprises, local markets, road side shops and stores are seriously affected by the evil wind. The government is equally affected since the money generated at those major commercial cities in the southeast are no longer as it was.

The southeast economy is at the edge of crumbling and-government has nothing serious to do about it. Some local market women are now trading on Sundays. Our religious leaders have not done any meaningful thing to establish peace between the combating enemies. Obilor (2005) avers that religion has the capacity to heal the wounds of all human sins if men and woman of all religions covert to God and follow the tenets of their respective religions. This is in line with Ehusani (2002) when he says that religion indeed can be an instrument of reconciliation, integration, unity .and peace in any country. When freed of destructive politics, religion at its best. can constitute the underlying moral force behind society's just and peaceful ordering. Religious leaders should sit up and act together to salvage the situation.

Before now, Human resource for business and production including professionals in different service sectors are migrating from the north because of insecurity over there. Ugwu and Ene (2019) writes that foreign students are relocating down the south, many doctors have transferred to other peaceful states, hotels and parks now record low turn - out of visitors. The point is that very soon business owners in the southeast will similarly start looking for a better conducive environment for their businesses.

Recently, the Anambra State has adopted and approved Saturdays as school days in place of Monday. This is as a result of IPOB's Monday sit at home order. This decision of Anambra as unveiled by Christian outlook (31 October 2021) implies that the state government cannot provide adequate security to her citizens. More so, banks, government offices are not left out as motorist were nowhere to be found. President Mohammodu Buhari's government has not addressed the agitation of the IPOB as he continues with impunity to marginalize the southeasterners. Respect to human dignity which should be part of agenda of any government is ignored. It is obvious that the present administration has chosen the option of force but from every indication the use of force have not yield any positive result. The more they apply force the more resolute the agitators became. The recent arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu has put the whole of the southeast into serious tension. That is what triggered the current Monday sit at home order by the IPOB. Adibe (2017) agrees to this fact when he says that the typical response of Nigeria government over the years to separatist agitations is to brand the agitators "trouble maker" and send law enforcement agencies to use force to quell their agitations.

Similarly, corrupt political leaders in the southeast have immensely contributed to the problem at hand. The rising level of infrastructural deficit, disempowerment and social decay in

the southeast which often exploited by them also contributed to the rising force of the separatist agitators. According to Alimona et.al (2019) the trend in social decay and disempowerment in the southeast appears not to have abated, despite the changing slogan of the ruling party, since three of the southeastern states, Abia, Ebonyi and Imo are among the ten states that own workers despite the Paris club loan refund. Igbo's are very industrious and hardworking people. They had over the years demonstrated their strong will to develop their society and economy. The manners the Igbos worked and controlled their economy over the centuries have attracted many foreign investors to the southeast. The sit at home order if not check might pull down the economic activities in the southeast Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Form the secondary data collected, the study have identified that the major reason for the IPOB agitation is centered on marginalization of the Igbos in the southeast. There is strong feeling of social inequality and deprivation among the Igbos. There are appears to have been social disempowerment of the Igbo through denial of employment in the Federal sector, discrimination and attacks in various parts of the country at every slightest provocation. There is this feeling of unwantedness among the Igbos in Nigeria. The sit at home order by the IPOB however is one of the approaches they adopted in pursuing their cause. The sit at home orders if not properly check might lead to economic crumbling in the southeast and in Nigeria at large.

### **Recommendations**

1. Both the federal government and the IPOB should suspend the use of force in tackling the issue in the south east'. Both parties should employ non-violence approach.
2. The federal government should seek for advice from those countries that have witnessed such agitations.
3. South Eastern elites, religious, academic and political leaders including the traditional leaders should as a matter of urgency engage the Nigerian government into a meaningful negotiation and reconciliation.
4. Government should address the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. The percentage of unemployed youths in Nigeria is quite alarming and majority of the separatist groups are youths. Of a truth an idle mind is the devils workshop.
5. Since agitation for Biafra by the IPOB is basically centered on inequalities and injustice in the distribution of power in the country, government should correct those imbalances.
6. There is need for genuine reconciliation. It is obvious that the wounds of the civil war are not yet healed. The federal government should urgently establish a true .reconciliation commission whose members should be drawn from religious leaders, traditional institutions and the academia.
7. The agitation has sent a signal to Nigerian authorities that unless an urgent tinkering is done to the Nigeria project, dismemberment might be a possible outcome.

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