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## **Socio-economic Implications of IPOB's sit-at-home Order in South-East, Nigeria: A Preliminary Qualitative Investigation**

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### **Abstract**

*The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have been agitating for their self-determination since 2012. And the arrest and extradition of their supreme leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu from Kenya heightened insecurity in South-East. IPOB initiated sit-at-home order in South-East to create awareness locally and internationally in their bid to securing the release of their leader. The sit-at-home order has adverse socio-economic consequences as it was later hijacked by hoodlums who committed havoc in the region. This study examined the socio-economic implications of IPOB's sit-at-home order in South-East, Nigeria. The study adopted social contract theory as framework, whereas descriptive design was employed. Purposive sampling technique was utilized with a sample of thirty-six interviewees, thirty In-depth interviews and six Key informants selected from market leaders, religious leaders and school principals. Qualitative data were content analyzed with the aid of Nvivo software. IPOB's sit-at-home order in South-East Nigeria has great negative socio-economic implications on the people of the area. South-East economy was highly devastated. Foreign investments were eluded, insecurity, unemployment and underdevelopment became the order of the day as hoodlums hijacked the protest and committed series of atrocities in the region, hence the decline in economic activities, standard of education and high mortality rate. There is great need for dialogue geared towards securing the release of IPOB leader from detention so as to halt further devastating socio-economic effects of the sit-at-home order in South-East region.*

**Keywords:** Agitations, implications, self-determination, sit-at-home, socio-economic

## **Introduction**

Politics globally was meant to resolve conflict and enhance development through the instrumentalities of democracy and good governance. But unfortunately, in Nigeria, it has become a tool in the hands of political elites to disunite and marginalize the Nigerian States. Almost every section of the country is today crying of marginalization. This led to several agitations for self-determination in the last few decades. Sit-at-home concept is a recent ideology used by acclaimed freedom fighters in South-East Nigeria to persuade the Nigerian government to give sovereignty to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The concept also challenges government's authority on the issue of marginalization and at the same time seeks for the release of IPOB's leader who is in the custody of Department of State Services (DSS) (Ezewudo, Ukwuoma and Uroko, 2022).

Sequel to the events that led to the outbreak of Nigeria/Biafra civil war (1967-1970) and the inherent cry for marginalization that followed, various groups have been agitating for the actualization of sovereign state of Biafra (Chima, 2013; Igwebuike, 2020). Popular among them is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which forms the central focus of this study. The current agitations for the actualization of Biafra started with Raph Uwazurike's Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1998, and it gained momentum through Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) following the arrest and detention of her leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu on October 14, 2015.

The proscription of IPOB and invasion of their leader's home in Umuahia by the Nigerian Army sparked off great social upheavals. Many IPOB members were killed in the process (Adonu, 2018). The Military invasion led to Kanu's exit to Britain in his bid for safety. However, his current arrest and extradition from Kenya on June 29, 2021 has heightened insecurity in South-East. As a ploy to draw government's attention to their demands, IPOB declared weekly Monday sit-at-home order as a mechanism to protest against the detention of her leader. This weekly sit-at-home order has crippled the economy of the region. Lives and property worth billions of naira have been lost following the enforcement of the sit-at-home order. Schools, hospitals, churches and banks were forced to remain close every Monday. Hoodlums in the region utilized the sit-at-home order while carrying out their nefarious activities. The sit-at-home order amounted to self destruction of South-East region economically (Edeson, 2021). Transport sector was not left out as buses and goods on transit were set ablaze. Businesses, public and private organizations encountered huge losses. Goods were looted while kidnapping, political and ritual killings became the order of the day. South-East overnight drifted into a state lawlessness.

Previous studies focused on the causes of agitations for self-determination (Omotere, 2011; Chima, 2013; MicCain, 2018; Chukwudi *et al.*, 2019; Muonagorom, 2019; Igwebuike, 2020; Omilus, 2020; Ejemheare, 2021 and

Mbazulike, 2021). However, a negligible attention has been given to the socio-economic implications of its inherent sit-at-home order. This study examined the socio-economic implications of IPOB's sit-at-home order in Southeast, Nigeria.

***The notion of sit-at-home order and its economic implications***

Sit-at-home order was conceived by IPOB as a mechanism to pressurize the federal government of Nigeria to release Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. But little did the organizers know that the concept will backfire into serious insecurity challenges with devastating effects on socio-economic institutions. Hospitals, schools, churches, banks and public organizations were all affected. Economic activities were all paralyzed as a result of sit-at-home order (Okah, 2021; Osita, Anoke and Eze, 2022; Ugwe, 2022).

At the early stage of the sit-at-home order, most people in South-East complied with IPOB in solidarity, but as time went on, its economic implications begin to have adverse effects on the people of the area. Goods worth billions of naira were destroyed in the course of enforcing compliance (Ogunode and Chijindu, 2022).

Owoeye, Ezeanya and Obiegbunam (2022) observed that IPOB's Monday sit-at-home order has impacted negatively on the socio-political and economic activities of the people of South-East zone. Their studies recommended equitable distribution of resources among the six geo-political zones, quick judgment on Nnamdi Kanu's case and rotational presidency in the bid to restoring IPOB's Monday sit-at-home order as well as restore sanity in the socio-political and economic activities of the people of South-East region.

Sit-at-home order has caused untold hardship on the people of South-East Nigeria. The weekly closure of the region by IPOB's directives has inflicted more burdens on the people of the area. Nwodo (2021) opined that it would be disastrous for the people of Southeast to lockdown the region again every Monday after what they passed through as a result of Covid-19 lockdown. People who depend on daily income would be adversely affected and the economy of the zone would further be deteriorated.

Government has been using high handedness in the course of handling IPOB's agitations for self-determination. Locking down the entire South-East zone every Monday would affect the region economically (Ogbu, 2021). Ohagwa (2021) maintained that IPOB should not take actions capable of causing more hardships to the people they have been fighting to liberate. Shutting down the entire Igbo land as a result of sit-at-home order would destroy the economy and impoverish the people the more. The idea would cause more hunger in the region as the people are mostly traders (Chukwuma, 2021). The leadership of MASSOB also condemned any activity that is capable of jeopardizing the security and economy of the people of Southeast in Nigeria. Igbo have been subjected to slavery and economic pains. The region cannot afford to inflict more hardships on themselves economically (Edeson, 2021).

Igboke (2020) Maintained that Nigerian government should expedite action on empowerment and investment in youth through education, skill acquisition and implementation of policies that will eliminate various forms of agitation through enthronement of good governance. The study also recommended adoption of regional government and true federalism in the course of nipping problems of national development in the bud. Anele (2021) holds that the current administration's incompetence in handling Nigeria's diversity had greatly increased agitations for self determination in line with the intrinsic sit-at-home order.

The central focus of IPOB's agitations and sit-at-home order hinges on the fact that South-East region has the least number of States and Local Government. The region also has the least number of Senate and House of Representative seats at the National Assembly. These have paved way for the least allocation of Federal Budget and least distribution of constituency projects to South-East region (Ogbonnia, 2021).

### ***Social implications of sit-at-home order***

Sit-at-home was introduced by IPOB on August, 2021 as a ploy to securing the release of her leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who is currently facing trial on treasonable felony and terrorism (Ogunode and Chijindu, 2022). As a result of this, every Monday has become a public holiday in South-East. Aside this, IPOB also declared as public holiday any day their leader is appearing in court.

Ebonine and Akinyetun (2021) observed that the task of nation building in Nigeria is affected by ethnic and religious crises, inter-regional conflicts, civil war and secessionism challenges. These challenges have culminated in the IPOB's agitations and sit-at-home order. Their studies recommended that government should sit in a roundtable discussion with the agitators. Educational Institutions in the South-East Nigeria have been devastated as a result of insecurity orchestrated by IPOB's sit-at-home order (Ogunode and Chijindu, 2022). Their studies recommended that government should expedite action in addressing all forms of insecurity in South-East.

Chukwudi *et al.* (2019) maintained that government's strategy in dealing with agitations and sit-at-home order has been very coercive with police force and full militarization. They argued that these agitations and sit-at-home orders have serious political and economic implications. They recommended affirmative action on the part of government through massive government developmental projects and all-inclusiveness in governance.

Security forces in Nigeria have committed series of human rights violations and crimes under international law in their efforts to controlling violence in South-East Nigeria. They have been carrying out repressive operations since January 2021. These attacks include mass arrests, use of excessive and unlawful force, torture, mass killings and other forms of maltreatment (Amnesty International, 2021).

Government seems to be mild where excessive show of force is required. Bandits shot down Alpha military jet that claimed the life of a serving Chief of

Army Staff on July 19, 2021. They also attacked Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), killing two middle level officers and abducted another (Vanguard Editorial, 2021). Boko Haram has set up instrumentalities of tax collection in communities where they hold sway. They provide securities in some of these villages in Maiduguri and also collect taxes in exchange, thereby providing some semblance of alternative government (Maza, Koldas and Aksit, 2020).

Sequel to agitations for self-determination in various parts of Nigeria today, it appears that Something is fundamentally wrong with Nigeria's constitution. Aside agitations for Biafra, there are agitations for Oduduwa Republic, Arewa Republic, Niger Delta Republic whereas others that still have confidence in Nigeria project call for restructuring of the country. Most of these groups are having feelings of alienation and often institutionalize seeming sense of inequality (Adibe, 2017). Other areas of marginalization include non-representation in the security architecture of Nigeria, non-representation in grade "A" category of ministers, general unemployment of Igbo youths and conspiracy against Igbo in every sector of the polity, Igbo presidency inclusive (Ogbonnia, 2021). All these led to IPOB's agitations and its inherent sit-at-home order which has crippled socio-economic activities in South East.

### **Theoretical orientation**

The theory of social contract was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 book "Leviathan", postulated the theory of social order following what he expressed as the nature of human (Mc Cleland, 1996). In his deduction about the state of nature, Thomas Hobbes associated man with negative perceptions, the state of nature was a period human existed prior to the formation of planned society. In that state of nature, there were no laws, everything about man was backward. Thomas Hobbes opined that this state of nature would definitely lead to state of lawlessness. As a result, life would be meaningless and brutish (Omoregbe, 1993). In order to break away from this state of nature, man wholeheartedly surrendered to a common supremacy in form of a state to tame this state of anomie so as to fashion some semblance of orderliness (Ninalowo, 2004).

Inherent in the pattern of the state is the notion of social contract, it is obligatory for the citizens to surrender their loyalty to constituted authority, whereas the state in return provides measures to improve standard of living in the society. And non-fulfillment of these reciprocal responsibilities within the confines of social contract shall lead to social disorder, lawlessness and insecurity (Ninalowo, 2010). John Locke in response to Thomas Hobbes argued that his claim of man being naturally immoral was questionable. According to him, a reflection of the birth process indicated that man was born with a clean mind. John Locke maintained that behaviour is learnt, he attributed man's wickedness as a result of his socialization in the society.

Kindersley (1990) also opined that due to insecurity of lives and properties, humans came together to form an ordered society in order to actualize of

security of lives. Consequently, people relinquished their individual rights and surrendered to a supreme power for the sake of fortification, and any abuse of office by this supreme power is considered as the cost of harmony. The degree to which a given political state is able to actualize this universal mandate of enhancing the standard of living of her citizenry, is an indispensable measure as to the level to which that political state is seen to be legitimate. If not, the society will be in a state of anarchy (Ninalowo, 1999).

In the manner of Thomas Hobbs, the Nigerian political elites have failed in their historic mandate of securing lives and property of her citizenry through enthronement of good governance, they have rather used ethnicity, religion, unequal allocation of resources and marginalization to disunite the nation, thereby throwing the entire nation into agitations and various forms of crises leading to sit-at-home order and insecurity.

### **Methodology**

This study employed descriptive design in the course of obtaining in-depth qualitative data. Anambra State was adopted as the study location. The choice of Anambra State hinges on the fact that the State has two major international markets. Onitsha main market and Nnewi spare parts market. The State also has Federal and State Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, aside being a populous State in the region where IPOB activities were predominant. The study population cuts across students, teachers, business people, workers and religious leaders in the State. Sample size of thirty-six interviewees consisted of thirty In-depth interviews (IDI) and six Key informants (two market leaders, two school principals and two religious' leaders) were purposively selected from the State using saturation principles. Secondary data were gathered from online journals, publications and relevant archival materials. Qualitative data were content analyzed with the aid of Nvivo software.

### **Findings**

#### ***Social implications***

Agitations for self-determination in Southeastern Nigeria have far reaching implications. Academic activities have been greatly affected as a result of Monday sit-at-home order institutionalized by IPOB. Students did not go to school on Mondays in Southeast. This has greatly affected the standard of education in the area. Candidates that sat for Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) missed their examinations in 2021 as a result of sit-at-home order. A good number of students seeking for admissions into tertiary institutions may not be admitted due to SSCE examinations they missed as illustrated below:

Last year, I missed writing some of my SSCE examinations as a result of Monday sit-at-home order. This will prevent me from getting admission into the university this year. (*IDI, 16 years, male SSCE candidate, Awka, 2022*)

The above response is in tandem with the works of Ogunode and Chijindu (2022), who found that educational institutions in South-East Nigeria have been devastated as a result of insecurity orchestrated by IPOB's sit-at-home order.

A school principal asserted as follows:

We were writing SSCE in our school and thirty minutes to the end of the examination, hoodlums came in and dispersed everybody. Teachers' motorcycles and school properties were destroyed. (*KII, 56 years, school principal, Nnobi, 2022*)

A university student who could not attend lectures in some courses that were supposed to be taken on a Monday opined as follows:

We did not receive lectures last semester in some courses as a result of Monday sit-at-home order. Even when IPOB called off the sit-at-home order, hoodlums were still implementing the order. They used it as a ploy to rob people of their valuables on Mondays. (*IDI, 19 years, female student, Awka, 2022*)

Hospitals were also affected as patients could not access hospitals on Mondays, most nurses and doctors were unable to go to work on Mondays as a result of the sit-at-home order as illustrated below:

I was supposed to see my doctor on a Monday, but I could not go to the hospital due to the sit-at-home order. This made me to deliver my baby in a substandard nearby healthcare facility in my neighbourhood. Thank God I survived, many have lost their lives as a result of this. (*IDI, 35 years nursing mother, Onitsha, 2022*)

People were prevented from carrying out church activities on Mondays. Many schools and churches that violated the Monday sit-at-home order were attacked. A woman from Nnewi opined as follows:

I was inside the church on a Monday morning, it was a 6 o'clock morning service and all of a sudden, gunmen started shooting in the air, dispersing people to their various homes. (*IDI, 50 years, catholic woman, Nnewi, 2022*)

Social activities were also affected as a result of Monday sit-at-home order. Clubbing and hangouts have declined drastically, not just on Mondays alone, but also during week days due to the activities of the Unknown gunmen (UGM) in the area as demonstrated below:

Social activities have declined greatly in the State. Before now, we used to attend night clubs, hangouts with friends in the evening, play tennis and visit recreational centres. But all these have reduced due to the level of insecurity in the area. (*IDI, 55 years, businessman, Awka-North, 2022*)

A Catholic priest stated that men of God were being kidnapped for ransom while ritual and political killings had gained ground in South-East. He asserted as follows:

Churches were highly affected as a result of agitations for self-determination and its inherent sit-at-home order. Many men of God have been kidnapped. Ransoms were paid for their release while some have lost their lives in the process. Ritual and political killings are on the increase as cult activities have gained momentum in South-East at present. (*KII, 42 years, male, Catholic priest, Ekwulobia, 2022*)

### ***Economic implications***

The sit-at-home order in South-East Nigeria has impacted negatively on economic activities in the area. Most major markets did not open each day designated as sit-at-home. Onitsha main market and Nnewi spare parts market were always under lock and keys within the period, thereby crippling economic activities. Billions of funds were being lost as a result of this. Business permits and other resources that would have been accrued to the federal and state governments were lost as a result of sit-at-home order. A businessman asserted thus:

I always make the highest sales on Mondays, most of my customers who normally come from various parts of the country during the weekend, usually lodge in nearby hotels and only to transact businesses on Monday morning. I have lost much money since the market does not open on Mondays. State and federal governments have also lost substantial revenues that would have accrued to them during this period. (*IDI, 32 years, businessman, Nnewi, 2022*)

The above response corroborates the works of Owoye, Ezeanya and Obiegbunam (2022), who found that Monday sit-at-home order has impacted negatively to the socio-political and economic activities of the people of South-East Nigeria. The sit-at-home order and insecurity have also affected inter-state transports and business activities. Most goods and services that normally come into South-East from the Northern part of the country were operating at a skeletal level. Goods like cow, yam, tomatoes, onions and others were very expensive as stated bellow:

Most of our business associates from the North are finding it difficult to bring in their goods to Onitsha as a result of sit-at-home order and insecurity. Last time, a trailer load of onions were looted by hoodlums while the goods were on transit. Transporters were not left out, many of their buses were burnt for violating the sit-at-home order. (*KII, 48 years, male, market leader, Onitsha, 2022*)



A bus driver who was travelling to Lagos narrated his ordeal at Onitsha as follows:

I loaded my bus early morning on a Monday. And I got to Upper Iweka Onitsha around 9 o'clock. A group of hoodlums stopped our bus and forced everybody to alight. The boys accused us of flouting IPOB's sit-at-home order. Within some few seconds, they dispossessed passengers of their valuables and ran away. (*IDI, 42 years, male, bus driver, Onitsha, 2022*)

A market leader at Nnewi spare parts market asserted thus:

The sit-at-home order has impoverished our people in South-East region greatly. Hoodlums otherwise known as unknown gunmen have destroyed so many police stations and public institutions, thereby causing unemployment, insecurity, foreign investors' exit and underdevelopment in the entire region. (*KII, 34 years, male, market leader, Nnewi*)

### **Discussion**

From the foregoing, one can objectively deduce that sit-at-home order in South-East Nigeria has great negative socio-economic implications on the people of the area. The sit-at-home order initiated by IPOB in South-East Nigeria was meant to protest against the arrest, extradition and detention of their supreme leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. At first, the protest was peacefully executed and observed. But later, hoodlums hijacked the sit-at-home order. Criminal elements in the region were hiding under IPOB to commit various forms of crime. People's goods were looted, many commuters were robbed on their way to work, all in the name of enforcing sit-at-home order. Economic activities were paralyzed, businessmen and women counted their losses as trucks conveying goods from one location to the other were set ablaze.

Standard of education has also declined in Southeast due to series of sit-at-home order. Most schools did not open on the day of sit-at-home, usually every Monday of the week. Students writing SSCE missed their examinations. This has great implications on students' future and careers as the affected students may not gain admission into tertiary institutions next academic session. Healthcare institutions were also affected. Patients were unable to access hospitals during sit-at-home order. This gave rise to poor healthcare delivery services as pregnant women were unable to go to hospitals where they registered for antenatal. This accounted for high mortality rate in the region.

Churches and social activities were also affected because of IPOB and other agitators' activities in South-East region. Night clubs, restaurants and bars were partially closed as they were targets of attacks in most cases. Sporting activities were also reduced due to the level of insecurity in the region. Many people have been kidnapped for ransom while Unknown gunmen (UGM) were killing and attacking government's institutions. The sit-at-home

order no doubt has given rise to insecurity in South-East. Hoodlums have hijacked the agitation struggles, they were using IPOB platform to commit various forms of crimes; kidnapping for ransom has turned out to be a lucrative business for them, ritual and political killings were on the increase as cult groups and Unknown gunmen were unchecked by security forces, thereby turning the entire region into a lawless society. Foreign investments eluded South-East as insecurity, unemployment and underdevelopment were on the increase. This is in alignment with the findings of Ebonine and Akinyetun (2021) who found that the task of nation building is being affected by secessionism challenges. The findings of this study also corroborate the works of Edeson (2021); Nwodo (2021); Ogbu (2021); Ohagwa (2021); Ogunode and Chijindu (2022); Osita, Anoke and Eze (2022); Owoeye, Ezeanya and Obiegbunam (2022) who maintained that the sit-at-home order has cripple South-East socio-economically.

The findings of this study corroborate with the tenets of social contract theory. The people of South-East Nigeria surrendered their sovereignty to the Nigerian government in exchange for good governance and security of lives and property. But government's inability to fulfill her own part of this historic mandate of good governance and security of lives and property gave rise to agitations for self-determination and its inherent sit-at-home order. Killings and destruction of lives and property have become the order of the day, thereby turning South-East into a lawless society as propounded by Thomas Hobbes in his social contract theory.

### **Conclusion**

The sit-at-home order initiated by IPOB was meant to protest against the arrest and extradition of her supreme leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu from Kenya. Initially, the Monday weekly sit-at-home order was peacefully enforced. But later on, hoodlums hijacked the protest. They hid under IPOB's banner and committed heinous crimes like kidnapping for ransom, ritual killings, and armed robbery. Others include killing of security personnel, burning of police stations and destruction of public institutions.

The sit-at-home order no doubt has weakened Southeast's economy, billions of funds were lost due to economic activities that were paralyzed in the region. Lives and properties that worth billions of Naira were destroyed, goods on transit were looted, standard of education also declined due to Mondays' weekly sit-at-home order and students' inability to participate in Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE).

High mortality rates were also recorded as a result of people's inability to access healthcare facilities during sit-at-home order. Doctors were unable to go to work and attend to patients as there were restrictions of movement on the road. Finally, the sit-at-home order led to poverty, insecurity, unemployment, foreign investors' exit and underdevelopment of South-East region following the destruction of public institutions.

### **Recommendation**

The study made the following recommendation:

- Dialogue: South-East traditional, political and religious leaders should endeavour to dialogue with the federal government so as to secure the release of IPOB leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. This will go a long way to douse agitation tension and at the same time put an end to insecurity and sit-at-home order in South-East, Nigeria.

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