

Research Article

This article is published by Jozac Publishers in the *African Social Science and Humanities Journal (ASSHJ)*. Volume 5, Issue 4, 2024.

ISSN: 2709-1309 (Print)
2709-1317 (Online)

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Article detail

Received: 29 November 2024

Accepted: 22 December 2024

Published: 31 December 2024

Conflict of Interest: The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



Investigating conflict management strategies against insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria since 2014

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 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asshj.v5i4.13>

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Abstract: This research delves into the multifaceted landscape of conflict management strategies employed to address insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria since 2014. Against a backdrop of escalating tensions and security challenges in the region, the study explores the emergence, dynamics, and resolution of conflicts, focusing on their interplay with broader socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. Employing a methodology that integrates a literature review, the research examines the diverse range of strategies adopted by governmental institutions, security agencies, community leaders, and international stakeholders. It assesses the

effectiveness and limitations of these strategies in mitigating insecurity, promoting stability, and restoring trust within the local communities. By analyzing the evolving patterns of insecurity and conflict management responses, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars aiming to address the complex security challenges in South Eastern Nigeria. It also highlights the importance of context-specific approaches and collaborative frameworks in fostering sustainable peace and resilience in the region.

Keywords – South Eastern Nigeria, Insecurity, Conflict management, Security challenges, Governmental institutions, Security agencies

1. INTRODUCTION

The South Eastern region of Nigeria, which was once regarded as the most peaceful part of the country, has recently evolved into a hotbed of violence by armed men. This situation has resulted in the monumental destruction of lives and properties, exposing different parts of the region to the crisis. In the past ten years, the South Eastern part of Nigeria has witnessed intense security challenges which have become a pressing concern among the sociopolitical leadership and stakeholders of the region. The region is plagued with various forms of violence and criminal activities which have immensely crippled social, political, and economic activities in the area. This significant spike in insecurity has increased fear, apprehension, and unrest in the area. Various forms of insecurity including; kidnapping for ransom, killings, and attacks on schools (private and public), destruction of state security institutions and other government facilities, etc on certain flimsy excuses such as flaunting the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) 'sit-at-home' order, or enforcing agitation for the actualization of Biafra, collectively make the region increasingly unsafe for all.

Separatist groups, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOP), the IPOB, and the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), resurged as an agitation against perceived wide socioeconomic inequality and political marginalization experienced by the people of the region. The IPOB, through its foot soldiers, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), has been accused of involving and championing insecurity across the entire region. Other extant criminal groups also identified as engaging in similar criminal activities, are basically faceless and often times referred to as 'unknown gunmen' (John & Olorunsogo, 2024). On several occasions, the attacks on communities and resultant killings, the Fulani herdsmen, also referred to as the 'unknown gunmen', have been fingered as perpetrators of such heinous activities across the breadth of the region.

The despicable and nefarious activities of these debauched groups constitute a high level of insecurity and escalated conflict across the region. This situation underscored the urgent need for effective conflict management strategies. The conflict management strategies against insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria since 2014 have been a subject of intense investigation and discourse. Against this backdrop, this study embarks on a reconnoitering journey to explore the diverse array of conflict management strategies employed to combat insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria.

2.1. Definition of terms

South Eastern Nigeria: This is a region of Nigeria bordered in the east and south by Cameroon and the Atlantic Ocean respectively. There are also the River Niger in the west and flat North Central to the north. Indigenes of this region are predominantly Igbo people who are generally mono-cultural and speak a monolingual language, with slight ascent differentiations, known as the Igbo language. There are five major states in this politically created geopolitical region including – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states.

Insecurity: It means a “state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection.” It denotes a situation of lack or inadequate freedom from threat. The implication is that insecurity is the lack of peace, order, and security.

Conflict: It means the struggle or clash between opposing forces; battle. a state of opposition between ideas, interests, and many more; disagreement or controversy.

Conflict Management: Conflict Management is the use of strategies, tools, and skills to develop innovative and effective means to resolve differences and disputes. It comprises the capacity to collaboratively resolve conflict through effective communication skills.

Security Challenges: Security challenges in any environment constitute a threat to lives and properties, hampered business activities, and discourage local and foreign investors, all of which stifle and retards the development of a country.

Government Institutions: Government ministries, departments, companies, agencies, authorities, training institutions, research institutions, and local government authorities.

Security Agencies: Governmental organization that conducts intelligence activities for the internal security of a nation. They are the domestic cousins of foreign intelligence agencies and typically conduct counterintelligence to thwart other countries' foreign intelligence efforts.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1. Analysis of insecurity challenges in South Eastern Nigeria

Insecurity in the South Eastern part of Nigeria has been a source of concern to various stakeholders in the region. Some of the insecurity issues in South-East Nigeria include recurring security threats such as

violence, kidnappings, killings, and destruction of property (Business Day, 16 July 2023, Punch News Paper 29 July 2023: 1). It also includes domestic terrorism and weak government performance (Oparaku, Nwaneri & Egbe, 2017).

According to Nwangwu (2023: 40) the surge in insecurity carried out by separatist organisations and other faceless elements in the south east is chiefly a reaction to “perceived ethno-national superordinancy as well as the compromised state-building capacity of the Nigerian ruling groups”. To this end, the author tries to trace the origin of the recently experienced unlawful activities in the region the inability of the present democratic to address the grievances that led to the civil war, and how the post-war agreements were abandoned by successive governments.

2.2. Insecurity Trends and Patterns across South Eastern Nigeria from 2014-2024

Abia State

The key insecurity factors in Abia State include but are not limited to kidnapping, militancy and separatist agitations, political tension, criminality, and restive youths among others. In the first and second quarters of 2014, kidnapping was one of the major insecurity threats across most of the senatorial zones of the state (Taft & Haken, 2015). Kidnapping for ransom has become so common and persistent in the state as a result of the increasing activities of criminal gangs which has consistently instilled fear into residents and citizens of the state. It has also disrupted business activities and the economy of the state. For instance, incidences of kidnapping were recorded in some local government areas of the two major Senatorial Districts of the state: Abia Central and Abia South Senatorial Districts. In February 2014, incidences of kidnapping were reported in Osisioma Ngwa, Umuaha North and South, and Obi Ngwa (Nigerian Conflict Bulletin, Abia State, 8 February, 2018).

To buttress the spate of kidnapping in the state, the Abia State government insists that the activities of these hoodlums sustain a dire situation in the state and therefore, frustrate its efforts at developing the state. According to TheCable News online publication on February 12, 2016, the then governor of the state Dr. Ikpeazu indicated, for instance, that kidnapping was one of the greatest challenges of the state under his administration. To this end, the governor further highlighted the indivisible connection between security and economic development of the state. According to him, “security is pivotal to socio-economic advancement. The relationship between economic growth, infrastructure development and security are inextricable” (TheCable News, 12 February, 2016).

Apart from abductions and kidnappings that happened across cities in the state, some prominent individuals have also had a share of the activities of these hoodlums when their communities and villages were invaded. In this regard, the traditional ruler of the Amaoba-Ime community in the Ikwuano local government area of the state, King Otuwa the 1st, accentuated the invasion of his community by kidnapers. This, he stressed, led to the rising cases of kidnapping, rape, armed robbery, and general assault of members of the community (Daily Post, 14 August, 2018). To demonstrate the spate of kidnapping in the state, an online report by the Niger Delta Weekly (9 September, 2020) has it that more than 50 incidents of kidnapping resulting in 25 kidnap related deaths had occurred in Abia State between January 2016 and July 2020.

More recently, there also were reports of increasing abduction of travelers along roads in Abia State. Some recorded accounts included, the abduction of travellers around the Lokpanta axis of the Enugu/Port Harcourt express road (Premium Times, 25 July, 2022). Other notable incidents include the abduction of a Chinese national, Li Peiyin on his way from work on 31 May, 2023 (Premium Times 4 June, 2023), the abduction of 13 travellers along the Ngodo-Isuochi Road in Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State exactly one year from the earlier indicated incident (Premium Times, 25 July, 2023). Happily, they were promptly rescued same day by the men of

the Nigerian soldiers as well as the kidnapping of the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Abia State University Uturu, Professor Godwin Emezue on 7 February, 2024 while driving into a petrol station to refuel his car. He was fortunately released from captivity after 11 days (Punch Newspaper, 27 January, 2024), among numerous others.

Another huge security challenge facing Abia State is the issue of militancy and separatist agitation. The most famous militancy and separatist agitation in the state revolves around the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). As earlier indicated, they are known separatist group who seek the independence of Biafra, which activities have sometimes occasioned violent clashes and confrontations with the Nigerian security forces precipitating loss of lives and properties, and creating intense tension within the state.

One of most recent of such violent confrontations leading to loss of lives happened on the 30 May, 2024 where five soldiers and six civilians were killed in a shoot-out between the men Nigerian troops and the alleged militant arm (ESN), of the separatist IPOB group who were enforcing their sit-at-home order in the state (Aljazeera New, 31 May, 2024, AP News, 31 May, 2024, & BBC News, 31 May, 2024). In the past years, similar clashes in the state have equally claimed lives and led to loss of properties. For instance, on 31 May, 2024, the BBC News report shows that 14 security agents died as a result their confrontations with the IPOB/ESN groups in the first and second quarter of 2021 alone.

Anambra State

Anambra State has had a share of insecurity currently ravaging the entire South Eastern region of Nigeria. As one of the states in the region, insecurity in Anambra State, like in other states of the South East has continued to witness a consistent rise in the past decade. The spate of insecurity in Anambra State assumed a worrisome dimension from 2014. According to a Daily Post online report on 19 March, 2014, the effect of rising insecurity and fear of being kidnapped forced indigenes and residence of the state to retire to their homes as early as 7pm. The newspaper report further indicated that this development was clearly in sharp contrast to the usual bubbling night life the state, especially the city of Onitsha, was known for.

According to a BBC online news report (31 May, 2024), activities of armed men believed to be members of ESN led to the death of 12 Nigerian security agents between January and May 2021 alone. The news express that this depicts a worrisome increase in the spate of killing of persons especially, members of Nigerian security personnel. Several other attacks on private and public properties by the group have also been reported by numerous media. Fabian, (2022) in his study gave a chronological account of attacks on security personnel and public properties across the state. For instance, Fabian indicated that a police officer was killed when their checkpoint was attacked at Neni, Aniocha Local Government Area (LGA) on 18 March 2021. Also, an officer was killed on 19 March 2021 at Ekwulobia, Nanka, Orumba North LGA when the police state was attacked. The Mgbakwu Police Outpost, Awka North LGA was also attacked on 21 March 2021, while the Zonal Police Headquarters, Ukpok Town, Dunukofia LGA was attacked on 21 April 2021.

In addition, activities of IPOB/ESN and other unknown armed men have also led to the death of many and the destruction of numerous properties in the state. Some of these incidents include the killing of a woman and her four children and six others by suspected members of the outlawed IPOB/ESN on 22nd May 2022. Two lawmakers representing Aguata 2 Constituency and Nnewi South Local Government in Anambra State were beheaded in May and June 2022 respectively, by the Group (Nigeria Sanctions Committee, 2024). According to a Premium Times Newspaper report, five people were shot and killed when unknown gunmen opened fire on them at a beer parlor on 30 April, 2022 (Premium Times 30 April, 2022). Most recently, armed men suspected to be members of ESN killed a military man and injured two others in an attack that happened at Okija, Ihiala LGA (BBC News 31 May, 2024).

Ebonyi State

Ebonyi State has her own share of recorded incidents and consequences of insecurity in the South East. The state, like any other state in the region, has experienced attacks on the lives and properties of both public and private individuals at various times across the state. On 24 July 2014, for instance, the Ebonyi Assembly majority leader was kidnapped by unknown gunmen but was later rescued (Vanguard Newspaper 24 July, 2014). In August same year, the AllAfrica online news on 11 August, 2014 reported the parade of six suspected kidnapers in the state (AllAfrica, 11 August, 2014). The consequence of the incident was the brutal murder of Hon Ihebunandu Okorie.

According to BBC News on 31 May, 2024, nine security agents lost their lives in bloody clashes between them and members of IPOB/ESN in the first five months of 2021. Some of the notable incidents that led to these deaths were the attack on Onueke Police Station in Ezza South LGA on 8 January 2021, where two police officers were killed. Similarly, the Police Headquarters in Isu, Onicha LGA and the Iboko Divisional Police Station Izzi LGA were attacked on February 4 and March 1, 2021, respectively (Udo, 2022). On 16 August, 2023, five people were kidnapped by unknown gunmen, who attacked a passenger bus along the Mile 2 axis of the Ishiagu/Okigwe express road of the state (Punch Newspaper, 16 August, 2023).

Other notable security challenges in the state include the kidnapping of a PDP women leader with his son and driver in Igbo-Etiti LGA, alongside along the Enugu/Ugwogo/Opi/Nsukka road on December 21, 2019 and the kidnap of Rev Fr Ugwuanyi, the parish priest of St. Paul Catholic Church, along Ezeagu/Uzo-Uwani road in Ogbosou Umulokpa in Uzo-Uwani LGA on 10 January 2020 by Fulani herdsmen arrested by the Ebonyi State Police Command (Premium Times, 27 January, 2020).

Enugu State

Between 2014 and 2024, there was a notable shift in the level of insecurity in Enugu State, as evidenced by patterns indicating a rise in violent occurrences including kidnappings, killings, and herdsmen assaults. When compared to other parts of Nigeria, the state first had comparatively lower levels of violence. But by the middle of the decade, abduction events started to happen far more often. For instance, there were numerous high-profile kidnappings recorded in 2016, one of which was the kidnapping of a well-known businessman, highlighting the growing organization and impudence of criminal gangs (Vanguard Newspaper, 15 October, 2016; Adebayo, 2016). In keeping with larger national trends of agricultural conflicts, this time also witnessed an increase in violent fights between herders and local residents.

Into the 2020s, the pattern of growing insecurity persisted, with a noteworthy uptick in kidnappings and assaults by herdsmen. The number of violent encounters between herders and farmers increased dramatically in Enugu State by 2020; these encounters frequently resulted in fatalities and property devastation. For example, many attacks in the Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area in February 2020 caused a great deal of property damage and several fatalities (Odalonu, 2020). The incursion of herders into agricultural areas and the ensuing violence against communities turned into a persistent problem that strained local law enforcement resources and increased the state's security concerns.

Despite government efforts to curb this menace, the trend of violence in Enugu State remained persistently alarming between 2021 and 2024. The area has been plagued by kidnappings for ransom, with tales of kidnapers focusing on both ordinary and rich victims. There have also been ongoing attacks on villages throughout the state by alleged Fulani herdsmen (The Sun Newspaper, 14 December, 2022). For instance, residents of rural communities in Awgu to Oji-River, Udi, Igbo-Eze North and South, Isi-Uzo and Uzo-Uwani, lived under perpetual fear of Fulani herdsmen attack through 2022 when such attacks were rampant (The Sun Newspaper, 14 December, 2022). In 2023, the Punch Newspaper of 23 November, 2023 reports that 13 persons died as a result of injuries sustained during

attacks by herdsmen who invaded their communities of Agu-Amede, Mgbuji and Eboh communities, in Eha-Amufu, in the Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State. Similarly, four people were reported to have been killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen in the Nimbo community in the Uzo-Uwani LGA in April, 2024 (The Punch Newspaper, 29 April, 2024).

There were also reports on the activities of separatist groups like the IPOB and their paramilitary wing, the ESN which has resulted in periodic clashes between them and security forces as well as Fulani herdsmen, leading to heightened tensions and sporadic violence (Sahara Reporters, 13 March, 2021, Vanguard Newspaper, 7 November, 2021). These frightening reports further demonstrate the longevity and adaptability of criminal forces in the face of increased instability the state has witnessed occasional but serious conflicts between local vigilantes and criminal gangs. These patterns show how difficult it is to maintain security in Enugu State and how important it is to develop all-encompassing plans that address the root causes as well as the symptoms of violence.

Imo State

In recent times, Imo State has witnessed a rise in the spate of insecurity. As such, the state has been spotlighted with series of assassination of politicians, traditional rulers, traders, as well as security agents by unknown gun men. In fact, the state has also been regarded as an epicenter for targeted killings, kidnapping, abduction, and all manner of public harassment against the residents of the state. Also, security officers at security check points are not left out in this challenge currently ravaging the state.

During the early days of the administration of Owelle Rochas Okorochoa from May 2011, for instance, the state was among the safest states in the south east. However, reports show that from the first quarter of 2014, the state started experiencing rising incidence of insecurity and killings. Haken and Taft (2015) noted that dozens were killed from communal and cult clashes within the first half of 2014. According to a report by Chime in TheCable News online publication on 23 April, 2022, at least 400 were killed in Imo State during attacks by armed groups in three year from January 2019 to December 2022 (Chime, 2022). These are victims of various attacks unleashed by numerous nefarious armed groups within the state. This number also excludes members of these armed groups who were neutralized during direct confrontation with the federal and state apparatus or during raids at their hideouts within the said period.

Available data depicts an increase in fierce separatist agitation and criminal insurgency in the State. For instance, it was reported that the divisional police station in Mbieri town, Mbaitoli LGA, was attacked by suspected ESN members with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in April 2022 (Chime, 2022). Similarly, IEDs were also used to attack the local council headquarters of Orsu LGA located at Awo-Idemili town, in the same April 2022. The attack at a voter registration center at Amakohia town in Ihitte Uboma LGA, by separatist militia, resulted in the killing of a staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) who was on duty. A resident of Orlu lost his life during a violent clash between security operatives and ESN members, at Ihioma town in Orlu LGA on April 17, 2022 (Chime, 2022).

According to Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database, a gun battle between alleged IPOB members and security agents in 2021, for example, led to death of six security agents in the state. Also, a joint security patrol team who were members of the Operation Search and Flush was attacked at Umualumaku Ehime Mbanu on 19 May, 2023 by unknown gunmen. Thereafter, bodies of killed officers were burnt by the hoodlums. Similar incident at Awo-Omamma on the 22nd of November, 2024 resulted in the death of Nigerian soldier (BBC News 31 May 2024). The above chronological dispositions is not intended to represent a comprehensive account of events of insecurity across the South East States, rather, it is an attempt to highlight aspects of some of the very significantly critical incidents to buttress subsisting security challenges across the entire region within the study period.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of the research methodology adopted in this study is on a comprehensive examination of conflict management strategies employed to fight insecurity across the South East region of Nigeria since 2014. This paper through the review of extant literature examines the diverse range of strategies adopted by governmental institutions, security agencies, community leaders, and international stakeholders to counter insecurity in the southeastern region of Nigeria. This adopted methodology became necessary in order to engage in deep, robust, and exhaustive discussions as well as nuanced arguments around insecurity concerns and its management strategies in the last ten years. The paper extensively reviewed related literature from existing works including but not limited to academic journals, media analysis, and government reports. The review contextualized the study and identified the gaps in knowledge which this study tries to fill. By so doing, specific and relevant qualitative data were also extracted from existing literature.

The research also conducted a case study analysis which focused on specific incidents of insecurity that happened within the region. Thus, the study reviewed per-state key events of insecurity. As such, specific incidents of violent separatist group's clashes with government security agents, cases of kidnappings, abductions and extrajudicial killings were appraised. The research equally carried out a comparative analysis of insecurity challenges within region to expose the impact of various conflict management strategies adopted to combat insecurity in the region. The data collected for this research were interpretatively analyzed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Some of the conflict management strategies implemented in South East Nigeria

The research conducted by Ani and Onyebukwa (2016) which focused on an inquired into the challenges of security and sustainable national development, clearly discerned the centrality of security challenges and concerns within the contemporary international system. It also among the fundamental issues facing the entire global community, continents, regions, states. These are engulfed in consistent direct and indirect battle towards enhancing domestic and international security standing. Therefore, security encompasses, not just that physical protection from prevailing danger but establishing resilient sociopolitical and economic systems to tackle the complexities of insecurity.

However, due to the difficulties brought on by the violence and crises in the South East, conflict management has drawn attention in Nigeria (Iheriohanma, 2010). With deliberate attempts to increase security in the area, the road to securing the South East has not been simple. Despite these obstacles, evidence indicates that the South East governors have made the region the safest in Nigeria with the assistance of the federal government.

To address the activities of IPOB in the region, for instance, the Nigerian government had adopted a number of strategies in this respect. These activities include utilizing military and police force, performing large-scale raids on hideouts, beginning operations to combat IPOB and ESN, and sending federal troops to battle the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security force, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). In addition, the government has detained individuals it believes to be IPOB/ESN members, broken into places connected to the groups, and deployed security personnel against them. Additionally, the government outlawed IPOB in 2017, but in 2023 a state high court in Enugu declared this outlawry illegal, stating that self-determination is not a crime and directing the government to compensate IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu (Premium Times, 26 October, 2023).

In a similar vein, on April 12, 2021, the South-East government through the South East Governors Forum (SGF) established the South Eastern Regional Security Unit in response to widespread public outrage about the region's increasing level of instability. The SGF formed a security group known as *Ebube Agu* as part of their strategy to quell the growing instability in the area, which was being caused by an upsurge in criminal activity. The

organization was established to operate as official suppression and crackdowns on the “illegal” actions of evil organizations in the area (Nwangwu, 2022). In addition, Onwunyi and Oguma (2023) assert that increased security in Anambra State is the consequence of extensive grassroots security awareness campaigns as well as ongoing training and equipment provision for community-based vigilante organizations. Another effective method of assisting the public in giving information to security officers is the use of hotlines.

In the weeks preceding the 2023 general elections, Ebonyi State's insecurity problems become more severe. The Ebonyi State Vigilante Corps and Ebonyi State Neighbourhood Watch are two distinct security groups that the state government established in response to the security threats. This is despite the point that Ebonyi State recorded 9% of total killings linked to unknown gunmen within the region. The state also recorded 7% and 2.2% of the 30 nationwide deaths linked to kidnapers and 91 deaths linked to security agencies and other insecurity challenges. Despite the fact that the government and security agencies have made efforts to curb the menace of insecurity in the South East, it remains a significant challenge that is consistently facing the region.

4.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of government strategies against insecurity in the South East

The efforts of government to combat insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria have not always been successful. On the one hand, some of the violent actions of separatist groups like the IPOB and their armed wing, the ESN, have been curbed thanks to the deployment of military and police forces, extensive raids on hideouts, and the creation of regional security outfits like Ebube Agu. These steps, in addition to neighborhood-based programs including community-based security awareness campaigns and the participation of neighborhood vigilante organizations, have improved security in certain regions by lowering the frequency and severity of assaults. Also, the creation of hotlines and increased training and equipment for security personnel have also been positive steps towards enhancing the responsiveness of security forces to emerging threats.

Nevertheless, the core reasons for insecurity in the region have not wholly been addressed by these initiatives. The heavy-handed strategy, which frequently involves making large-scale arrests and using force, has occasionally increased tensions, sparking more unrest and eroding confidence in the relationship between the local community and the government. Although the goal of IPOB's prohibition was to stop their operations, the law was also legally contested, and a state high court upheld the restriction.

Furthermore, the continued occurrence of violent incidents—such as kidnappings, murders, and run-ins with the law—indicates that the precautions taken have not completely eliminated the dangers. The fact that the underlying socio-political and economic concerns that drive separatist agitations and criminal activity are still largely ignored suggests that, despite the government's efforts, long-term stability in the region cannot be achieved.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the persistent insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria, it is imperative to enhance community-based security measures by empowering local vigilante groups and fostering collaboration between them and formal security agencies. They can be trained and re-trained, provided with necessary legal backing and required logistics to function effectively and optimally within the ambits of the law devoid of human rights abuse. It will help build trust between the local populace and local security agencies which encourages more effective intelligence-sharing to pre-empt potential threats.

Another key recommendation is the need for a more inclusive approach in conflict management strategies that addresses the underlying socio-political grievances fueling separatist movements. In this regard, the government can engage in meaningful dialogue with the aggrieved marginalized group. They can also engage in sincere implementation of socio-economic reforms that tackle inequality and political exclusion experienced by the region.

Also, revisiting and renegotiating post-civil war agreements with aggrieved groups in the South East could help in dousing tension and de-escalating violent confrontations in the region. In addition, the government should adopt a multi-faceted approach that combines military efforts with socio-political engagement to work towards restoring peace and stability across the entire region.

6. CONCLUSION

The government has employed numerous diverse and multifaceted conflict management strategies to address the insecurity in South Eastern Nigeria since 2014. These involve the use of governmental institutions, security agencies, and community leaders, to achieve the objectives of their fight against insecurity in the region. Unfortunately, these efforts fail because of government's reactive policy of use of military force, which has mostly exacerbated the tension and deepened mistrust between the aggrieved parties and the government in effectively ending insecurity in the region. To this end, this paper suggests a more inclusive and context-specific approach as respite against persistent insecurity, underpinned by numerous unaddressed or ill-addressed socio-political and economic grievances. Thus, returning sustainable peace in the region will require not only enhanced security measures but also meaningful dialogue and socio-economic reforms that address the root causes of the unrest.

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