

## POLITICS OF MARGINALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH EAST: AGENDA FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

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### **Abstract**

*Marginalization stands out as one of the main culprits blamed for the poor state of development in the South Eastern (S/E) part of Nigeria. This marginalization mantra has continued to serve the interest of deceptive political office holders within the Zone by helping them mask the true picture of governance at the State and the Local Government levels. Among others, this study seeks to interrogate whether the issue of S/E marginalization is real or imaginary; the extent to which marginalization has contributed to the poor level of development in the S/E; and the role good governance can play towards reversing the current developmental deficit being blamed on marginalization. This study is qualitative in nature and sourced data from secondary sources as well as unbiased observations of the researcher. Findings reveal that, in as much as there exist cases of marginalization of the S/E within the Nigerian polity, bad governance at the levels of the State and the Local Government remain a serious factor that generate developmental challenges in the Zone. The implication is that even if the cases of marginalization at the national level are eliminated, the Zone would continue to face developmental challenges due to bad governance existing internally. It is recommended that the South East must enthrone good governance in order to contain the marginalization syndrome and engender development. One sure way of achieving this is for the people to always demand for accountability from all the levels of government.*

**Keywords:** politics, marginalization, development, accountability, South East.

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian political space has been reverberating from time to time with echoes of marginalization emanating from almost all parts of the country and pictured in various shades. For instance, Onimode (2003, p.161) made mention of “the increasing dominance of the federal government” and the corresponding marginalization of the various States and the Local Governments. This is as it concerns the manner the federal government exerts overbearing influence on the lower levels of government in the federation, emasculating them from performing some of their constitutional roles. On the other hand, the issues raised by Nsoedo (2019) picture marginalization from the viewpoint of the manner the federal government denies certain parts of the country or groups their entitlements within the federation.

The South East geopolitical zone, which some people generally classify as Igbo people, is not exempt from this cry about marginalization, as it relates to the claims of unfair treatments the area experiences from the federal government. In fact, South East is among the areas in the country where such cry has remained persistent. Looking through the Nigerian political horizon, one can see that the country operates in a peculiar political terrain. In the struggle for political power and dominance, politicians from the different ethnic groups that fought for the country's independence eventually took a path that raised ethnic consciousness to the forefront and encouraged destructive pattern of competition among the various groups. This situation etched ethnic politics on the country's body polity. Consequently, seeking for votes by whipping up ethnic sentiments or applying other related gimmicks became the order of the day.

It is quite agreeable that the most dominant factor that generates the cries of marginalization within the Nigerian State is traceable to the country's political economy vis-à-vis her distributive character. At independence, Nigeria took off as a federal State of three regions, namely: the Eastern, the Northern, and the Western Regions. After the carving out of Mid-Western Region from the Western Region in 1963, the number of regions in the country rose to four. At that point, splitting a region into smaller political units appeared largely unattractive and somehow disadvantageous to the affected area because the Nigerian State was yet to assume a distributive character. Hence, the carving out of the Mid-Western Region at that point was seen as a political move to weaken the Western region politically at the centre. The account given by Alli (2003) indicates that the Action Group, which represented the Western Region, was not entirely comfortable with the motion for the carving out of the Midwest Region from the Western Region and therefore proposed an amendment, requesting that the exercise be carried out in all the regions. This proposed amendment was however defeated. Apparently, the other regions did not want this exercise to affect them because the exercise was neither politically nor economically beneficial to them. When the country moved from a four regional structure to a twelve state structure in 1967, the Igbo people appeared largely dissatisfied with the move and saw it as victimization. With the passage of time, however, the clamour for state creation mounted higher and higher because it eventually became economically gainful to the extent that having more states creates opportunity for attracting larger share of the centrally allocated revenue. At this point, the different parts of the country, South East inclusive, are demanding for the creation of more states from their zone.

Nigeria went through a civil war that pitched the rest of the country against the Igbo people over the latter's attempt to secede from Nigeria. When the war ended, the Federal government promised to undertake certain measures, which centred on the three Rs (Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation), to erase the ugly memories created by the war. However, there are indications that the federal government not only reneged on some of agreements and promises but also continued to engage in certain actions that appeared punitive against the Igbo people that fought on the side of Biafra.

While it is agreeable that there are certain action or inactions of the federal government that appear in the form of marginalization, it is worth pointing out that the syndrome of ethnic politics and the etching of ethnic rivalry on the minds of Nigerians succeeded in throwing up a situation where blame game became an impressive tool for explaining away poor leadership and bad governance. Under the circumstance, it became normal for people to tolerate or even defend poor leadership and bad governance because they belong to the same ethnic background with the leader. On the other hand, those from the other ethnic region would continue to see every action (including general failure of leadership) as an ethnically-motivated victimization or marginalization. By operating with this mindset, the tendency remains high for people to focus all attention on the 'outside forces' that caused their developmental woes while overlooking the internal governance challenges that equally contributed to the problems.

Indeed, the act of marginalization is worrisome, but equally worrisome is the seeming politicization of marginalization that serves the selfish interests of politicians. Hence, we talk of politics of marginalization. This trend has posed serious developmental challenge and puts the South East zone at the risk of not being able to address their 'home grown' problems. The zone has gotten to a level where certain actions taken in retaliation of marginalization against the federal government appear to be more hurtful to the zone than the federal government being targeted to be hurt. While not denying that there are certain actions and inactions of the government at the centre that can rightly be classified as marginalization against the south easterners, it has become necessary to interrogate the situation and find out whether the concept of marginalization has been politicized and used as political gimmick for advancing the selfish interests of some individuals. The key argument in this study is that employing good governance at the home level would go a long way in ameliorating the developmental deficits occasioned

by the federal government-driven marginalization or any other factor.

## **Conceptual Issues**

### **South East**

Nigeria came into being through the actions of British colonialism, which fused different ethnic groups together under one political unit. When the northern and the southern protectorates were brought together under one political unit in 1914, the areas that currently fall under the South East were part of the Southern protectorate. As at the time Nigeria adopted a three regional structure (Eastern, Western, and Northern Regions), the Eastern Region comprised of all the present South East geopolitical zone as well as some parts of the present South-South geo political zone, specifically, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, and Rivers States. In clear terms, the old Eastern Region was split into three smaller political units during the state creation exercise that occurred in 1967. The states that emerged out of it include the East Central State, the South-Eastern State, and the Rivers State. In 1976, the military government split the East Central State into two to create the Anambra State and the Imo State. During the 1991 state creation exercise, Anambra State was split into two and while one part retained Anambra as its name, the other was named Enugu State. Imo State was also split into two to create Imo State and Abia State. By merging some sections of Enugu State with some parts of Abia State, Ebonyi State was created during the 1996 state creation exercise.

Though not enshrined in the constitution, the geopolitical zoning arrangement that crept into the Nigerian socio-political lexicon under the military regime of General Sani Abacha has remained a form of political grouping used in identifying states that share certain cultural affinities or political history. This zoning arrangement has been recognised in the sharing of certain federal resources and national and within the country. At the moment, Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones, namely: the South-East, the North-East, the South-West, the North-West, the North-Central, and the South-South.

The South East zone is made up of five Igbo-speaking states. This explains the reason some people use South East and Ndi Igbo (Igbo people) interchangeably. It is worth pointing out, however, that in as much as the States that fall within the Southeast Zone are populated by Igbo-speaking people, there are equally Igbo-speaking people in parts of Rivers and Delta States, which fall under the South-South geo political zone. In order to distinguish between those indigenous of the South East and the others outside the zone, some specify thus: the Igbo of the South East.

As pointed out earlier, the three States created out of the Eastern region in 1967 include the East Central State, the South-Eastern State, and the Rivers State. It is worth highlighting, therefore, that the area that was referred to as the South Eastern State during the 1967 state creation exercise is currently the Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. They are not part of the current South East zone. In this work, the South East geopolitical zone refers to the following: Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State, and Imo State.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Explaining or analysing issues concerning the politicization of marginalisation would appear easier by understanding the dynamics of the Nigerian political economy. There must be driving forces that make individuals or groups behave the way they do within a political system. The main premise of the Marxian Political Economy paradigm is that material production is the livewire of a society. By implication, the material state of life remains the basic ingredient that determines the nature and direction of the different activities within the political system. In 1981, Ake shared the view that the economic factor is the critical element that defines the character of other elements within the society. For instance, it is agreeable that

ethnicity or heterogeneity may or may not generate conflict within a society. The socioeconomic basis of ethnicity is the determining factor as to whether it can generate tension and engender destructive competition or promote peaceful coexistence and healthy competition. It is to this extent that Nnoli (2008) asserts that for one to fully understand the phenomenon of ethnicity, the person must perforce understand its objective socio-economic basis.

Talking about politics of marginalization within the Nigerian context, one cannot disconnect the issue from the ethnic character of the county and the socio economic basis of ethnic problems in Nigeria. What is the effect of the Nigerian economy on the political system and to what extent does the economic factor shape other activities within the society? Rodney (1986) provides some useful answers to these questions by explaining that the economic factor or material production (and by extension, its distribution) plays leading role in determining the character and direction of the society. Using Nigeria as an example, the splitting of a political unit within the federation into smaller parts remained unattractive and was even seen as political victimization at the point when remaining together as a larger unit appeared to be more economically advantageous. This explains the reason the carving out of the Midwestern Region from the Western Region in 1963 was seen as a political move to weaken the latter politically. At that point, the Northern and Eastern regions chose to have their territories intact and rejected the proposal to have the exercise replicated in their respective regions. By that same token, whereas the minority groups within the Eastern region were happy with the 1967 state creation exercise, the dominant Igbo group felt that the splitting of the region into three parts was a punitive action and political move aimed at weakening and frustrating the agitation for Biafra. But years later when States and Local Governments became the basic unit for sharing federally allocated resources, the South East (former East Central State) as well as other zones started demanding for creation of more states from their respective geopolitical zones.

As we set out to study the politics of marginalisation and development in the South East and the desirability of setting agenda for good governance, it makes sense to look at the issues from the Marxian Political Economy paradigmatic perspective. Just as politicians can manipulate ethnic consciousness in order to achieve selfish objectives, they can equally employ the marginalization mantra in pursuit of their personal interests. In fact, they can employ every available means to achieve their selfish desires even when such means appear destructive to the general interest and counterproductive. By anchoring our analysis on this perspective, it becomes understandable that some of those leading the struggle against real or perceived marginalization may not necessarily be interested in getting any problem solved but are rather using the approach as a gimmick to attract selfish gains. In all, analysis based on this perspective will help in understanding that playing politics with the marginalization mantra is driven by Nigeria's distributive character vis-à-vis the propensity of politicians to manipulate the system based on selfish reasons.

### **The South East and the Political Development of Nigeria**

The South East's role in the political development of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is on record that as at the time the world was still battling with the World War II, Nnamdi Azikiwe (from the Eastern Region) had already started making proposals for Nigeria's independence and suggesting that the preliminary stage of this process "should last no more than 10 years, and should start either now or immediately after World War II" (Azikiwe, 1943, p.10). The northern region, on the other hand, did not want to be stampeded into early independence and chose that independence should be delayed or else the region would opt out of the federation. At last, the Eastern and the Western regions agreed to have the independence delayed in order to allow north get ready. Hence, all the regions moved as one team and gained independence in 1960. On the face value, this move would appear as an indication of unity of

purpose among the politicians from the different ethnic backgrounds. However, the political crisis that ensued after independence was granted revealed that the different regions were far from being united.

The political crisis of the First Republic led to first coup d'etat that toppled the civilian regime. This coup was eventually given ethnic interpretation. For the northern elements, it was a coup organised by Igbo people to eliminate leaders from the northern extraction. Hence, the reprisal attack and pogrom that trailed the coup was targeted at Ndi Igbo. Due to the manner the government handled the pogrom by allowing it progress without offering the necessary protection to the victims, the Eastern region threatened to secede from the country. The refusal of the Nigerian government to accede to the request ignited the Nigeria-Biafra war that lasted for about three years. This war was actually fought on the soil of the South East and this explains the reason the area recorded the highest number of casualties.

Many years after the country engaged in a civil war that was brought about by the agitation for secession, some of the issues that gave rise to the war still appear unresolved. At the moment, more groups have emerged to push for the secession agenda and voices from the South East appear to be more consistent and dominant in pushing for this agenda. Indeed, Nigeria has been battling with the South East conundrum, as exemplified by the questions being raised in some quarters thus: What does the Igbo want? (Okoye, 2020); What does the Igbo nation want? (Iniobong, 2022); What does Nigeria want from the Igbo? (Okogbue, 2022), etc.

Despite comments from the other parts of the country that tend to paint the Southeast zone as a thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian State, it is quite instructive that the country is not interested in allowing the zone exit from the country and has continued to resist every attempt made in this direction. Neither does it appear as if the country is interested in a quick resolution of the issues that provoke the zone into her continuing agitations.

### **The South East and the Issue of Marginalization**

Some of the actions or inactions of the Nigerian government that generate ill feelings among the people of the South East zone, and which they view as marginalization, can be traced to the colonial days. As captured by Odum (2016), the structural imbalance that appeared in the country was ostensibly crafted by the British from the outset to make the area designated as the northern region of the country far bigger than the southern part, thereby allowing the former have political advantage over the latter. It is in the light of this that Onimode (2003, p.162) described the country as one “with asymmetrical domination by the former Northern Region”. Bretton (1962) viewed this arrangement that was skewed against the south as a case of gerrymandering. This situation became an issue for the South Easterners because it confers political advantage to the North. Using the outcome of the 1959 Parliamentary elections organised in the country as an example, the results showed that the Northern People's Congress (representing the Northern region) secured 134 seats and they achieved this by polling only 25.20% of the total votes. On the other hand, the Action Group (identified with the Western region) that polled 26.12% of the total votes secured only 73 seats while the NCNC (identified with the Eastern region) that gained 34.01% of the poll secured only 81 seats. Thus, the NPC secured the highest number of seats in the parliament even when the party polled the least number of votes.

As rightly pointed out by Onimode (2003), the federal system in Nigeria from 1945 to 1966 was such that allowed revenue distribution to be based mainly on the principle of derivation. However, things changed when the country began exporting crude oil in commercial quantity and generating huge revenue from the oil sector. Nigeria eventually assumed a distributive character as it shifted from the principle of derivation to such principles that recognise the equality of states, demographic strength, Federal Character, Quota system, and etc. In the circumstance, States and Local Governments became basic units for sharing centrally allocated revenue and it became attractive to have more states. At this stage, the

demand for state creation became stronger.

The manner state creation has been executed is one of the grounds upon which South Easterners complain about marginalization, as they believe that it has never been done to serve their interest. Ogunna (2009) sees the 1967 state-creation exercise, which saw the splitting of the Eastern region into three, as a political strategy to weaken Eastern Nigeria in their struggle for self determination. According to Barrett (2017) the exercise was seen by many as a way of handling the exigencies of the moment vis-a-vis the looming threat of war in the Eastern Region and this move succeeded in carving out the sections of the region that were non-Igbo ( the South-Eastern State and Rivers State) and with oil reserves as well as access to the sea so as to isolate the Igbo areas located in the East-Central State. In effect, the state creation exercise was not undertaken at that moment to favour the people of South East but to weaken and cage them in their quest for self determination. It is quite instructive that, when eventually the political economy of Nigeria changed in such a manner that States and Local Governments became the basic units for sharing the federally allocated revenue, the Nigerian government ensured that the South East remains the geopolitical zone with the least number of states and has continued to reject the demands for more states to be created from the zone so as to be at par with the other zones within the federation.

The Nigerian State got embroiled in a civil war that was ostensibly undertaken to prevent the people of Biafra from actualising their secession bid. When the war came to an end, the Federal Government made a proclamation encapsulated in the three Rs (Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation) and came up with the slogan: 'No Victor, No Vanquished'. On the face value, these appeared as a sincere move aimed at erasing the memories of the war in order to forge ahead as a truly united country. However, both the slogan and the three Rs proclamation later turned out as deceptive statements because subsequent actions of the government appeared as another phase of the war against those that fought on the Biafran side. The Federal Government came up with the post war policy that anybody intending to exchange the Biafran currency (which ceased to be a legal tender at the end of the war) with the Nigerian currency can only get a maximum of twenty pounds (£20). The implication is that a person with one million Biafran pounds or even more can only receive twenty Nigerian pounds in exchange. This policy, fully implemented by the Nigerian government, was adjudged by the South Easterners to be an act of victimization and economic warfare that continued into the post war period.

The South Easterners have been vocal over their complaint regarding the apex political position in the country and access to it. Apart from Nnamdi Azikiwe who served as a mere ceremonial President and Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi that served as military Head of State for about six months (16<sup>th</sup> January, 1966 – 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1966) before he was overthrown and gruesomely murdered, no other South Easterner has occupied the apex political position in the country. This aspect of marginalization of the South East became obvious in the run up to the 2023 presidential elections. The major political parties betrayed the expectations of the South Easterners by ensuring that politicians from the Zone were schemed out of the presidential primaries so as to ensure that no south easterner emerges as a presidential candidate.

The manner of appointment of the heads of the armed forces in Nigeria serves as another ground upon which the South Easterners complain about marginalization. No South Easterner has ever been appointed as the Chief of Defence Staff (the professional head of the Nigerian Armed Forces). Same goes for the Chief of Air Staff position. From 1970 when the civil war ended till 2010, no south easterner was appointed to serve as the professional head of the Nigerian Army (Chief of Army Staff). It was only in September 2010 that a south easterner, Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika, was appointed into that position and since he left office in January 2014, no other South Easterner has occupied that position. Again, with the exception of Allison Amaechina Madueke that was appointed to serve as the Chief of Naval staff between 1993 and 1994, no other south easterner has been appointed into that position until 2023 when Emmanuel

Ikechukwu Ogalla was raised to the position. For the police, the only South Easterner to have been elevated to the position of the Inspector General (Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo) was appointed in 2009 and since he left office in 2010 no other person from the South East has been appointed to that position.

Buhari's tenure and the manner he went about government business exacerbated the cry of marginalization by South Easterners. The notorious *97% and 5%* comment he made immediately after winning the election, concerning how he would accord a fairer treatment to those that gave him more votes, generated apprehension among the south easterners and some of the actions he took subsequently seemed to be a fulfilment of those comments. Under his watch, South East region remains the only zone that had no slot in the Security Council leadership. Till he left office, he ensured that no South Easterner occupied the topmost position in the security/law enforcement agencies such as Air force, Army, Civil Defence, DSS, EFCC, FRSC, ICPC, Navy, NIA, Police, and National Security Adviser (Ohuabunwa, 2017). The manner the Buhari-led government initially deployed the military to clamp down on Biafran agitators (IPOB) as well as how he hurriedly declared the group as a terrorist organization raised concerns about marginalization, especially when weighed on the same scale with the manner he treated the terrorists operating in the north and the murderous Fulani herdsmen terrorizing various parts of the country.

The census figure stands out as one of the issues that attract the cry of marginalization by South Easterners. As hinted by Odum (2016), census exercise in Nigeria has always been politicized to the extent that it no longer appears as an exercise geared towards ascertaining the true number of people living within a particular geographical location but one aimed at actualising parochial sectional interests. Based on the politicization of census exercise, each headcount conducted in the country generated serious controversies. For instance, the results of the census exercise that took place in 1962 show the South as recording higher figure than the North. The federal government rejected the result eventually and called for another exercise in 1963. The outcome of the 1963 census departed significantly from the results of the 1962 census and this was accepted by the federal government. The result of this rerun exercise was not only rejected by the premier of the Eastern Region but also challenged in court. However, he lost the case on grounds of technicality because the Supreme Court held that it has no jurisdiction to handle the matter. There is no doubt that the ruling did not erase or assuage the feeling of misgiving already entertained over the repeat exercise. Subsequent exercises trailed controversies and till date, the south easterners still believe strongly that the census figures were merely allocated in a manner that had always put the zone in a disadvantaged position.

There is this general feeling among the South Easterners that the federal government has always initiated one policy or the other to hold the zone down. During the civil war, the Biafran side was manufacturing bombs and rockets and calculating their distance, fabricating spare parts for machines, refining crude oil with local technology, producing premium motor spirit and aviation fuel, and generally making technological advances. But the government at the centre crippled those technological feats immediately the war ended. After the war had ended, precisely in 1971, the Eastern Nigerian Government under Ukpabi Asika's leadership established the East Central State Project Development Agency (PRODA), which started designing industrial machinery models and prototypes. However, the federal government took it over in 1976 as a federal Government Research Institute and since then crippled the objectives for which it was set up. Notwithstanding the vast business activities going on in the South East and the fact that a large number of businessmen from the region usually embark of business trips outside the country, the zone was denied an international airport for so many years whereas some other parts of the country with lesser travelling records were provided with such.

The poor state of infrastructure, especially those that fall within the sphere of the federal government to provide, is among the grounds the South Easterners complain about marginalization. A greater part of

federal roads within the zone is in terrible condition. The Railway system, particularly as it affects the zone, has been in a serious state of neglect whereas the federal government undertook to extend railway services from Kano in Nigeria to Maradi in the Niger Republic so as to enable the people of Niger Republic enjoy affordable transportation (Adegboyega, 2021). Admission quota and cut-off points for gaining admission into Federal Government-owned Unity Schools and tertiary institutions are dangerously skewed against the South Easterners. The 2022 Cut-Off marks for Unity schools in the country is an example of the unimaginable disparity existing in the system. Whereas the pupils seeking admission into federal unity school sat for the same examination, candidates from the South East State of Anambra were required to score 139 (one hundred and thirty nine) points while their male counterparts from Zamfara State in the North were required to score just 4 (four) points and the females 2 (two) points (Ogwo, 2022). This trend has been going on for years.

The publication by Edokwe (2021) justifies the claim by south easterners that the federal government is treating the zone as an area under siege. This is with regard to the heavy security presence along the roads and the numerous road blocks they mount, which constitutes more of bribe-collection points than reliable security arrangement. They harass, intimidate, and extort money from motorists and road users with impunity and in a manner peculiar only to the south east. Eze and Uzoaru (2022) made extensive reports on the worries raised by Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, which serves as the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization, as well as residents of South East and various groups concerning this challenge. But despite the numerous complaints raised, the federal government still allows the trend to continue unabated. It is worth mentioning that a human rights lawyer, Olisa Agbakoba, had dragged the Nigerian government to court regarding her marginalization of the south east (Dunia, 2017; Uzodimma, 2017). It is observable that the issues highlighted above as well as others not captured here, which keeps generating the complaints about marginalization, still remain unresolved.

### **Politics of Marginalization and Development in the South East**

There are several grounds to believe that the federal government has undertaken certain discriminatory practices and meted out unfair treatment against the south east when compared to some other zones. However, there are indications that some politicians have tried to take advantage of the situation by advancing the marginalization mantra in their bid to actualise selfish political ends and not necessarily for the purpose of getting the developmental deficit occasioned by the incident of marginalization fixed. To the extent that the cry of marginalization easily appeals to the sentiments of the masses, such politicians always succeed in hoodwinking them by not only using them as veritable tools for achieving selfish ends but also diverting their attention when it comes to demanding for accountability. For instance, it has become common for some serving or former political officeholders and public servants to raise the flag of victimization and marginalization whenever the anti corruption agencies beam searchlights on them. This happens even when it is glaring that the affected person has questions to answer. Trapped in the jaundiced ethnic mindset, some individuals from the same area with the accused will step out to mount defence for the person based on sectional grounds and ask whether the anti-corruption agency has beamed their searchlight on corrupt officials from other areas. It may not matter to those mounting such defences that the money being demanded to be accounted for was actually meant for delivering projects that would serve them directly.

When considering the incident of marginalization, one of the most dominant issues that catch people's attention is the sharing of political appointments at the federal level. After elections, people's attention usually centres on sharing of appointive political positions vis-à-vis the ethnic region, geopolitical zone, State, or section of the country the appointees come from. It is on record that one of the reasons Olisa Agbakoba sued the Nigerian Government was for the NNPC appointments that appeared to



be skewed against the South-East (Oluwagbemi, 2017). This explains the insinuation by Oluwagbemi (2017) to the effect that some of the cries of marginalization are basically about seeking for appointive positions.

Inasmuch as it is good to challenge the federal government for abusing constitutional provisions or the federal character principles, it needs be stated that appointing a South Easterner into a Board may not necessarily guarantee that the person so appointed would use the position to pursue developmental goals for the zone. Cases abound where people appointed into political positions use it for self aggrandizement instead of pursuing altruistic ends. It is therefore necessary to strike the difference between when people are raising the issue of marginalization for the mere purpose of fulfilling constitutional requirements or seeking for relevance and when it is being raised for the purpose of arresting developmental deficits. What remains clear is that most people direct their attention only on the demand for inclusiveness in federal appointments and in the process, ignore the issue of good governance and accountability at the local level.

One of the reasons that generated the separatist agitation is traceable to the deplorable state of social infrastructure in the south east and the seeming irresponsible stance of the federal government and her failure to address the challenges, which are largely attributed to victimization and marginalization. However, the attention of the agitators has been focused primarily on the federal government, ignoring the need to look inwards to see how governance at the State and local government level is performing and the extent to which they have contributed to the developmental challenges. For instance, Section 7 of the Nigerian Constitution provides for a system of local government that should be run by democratically elected local government councils. A cursory glance at the political landscape of the South East will reveal that the various State governments within the zone have one way or the other grossly abused the constitutional rights of the Local Governments, marginalized, and rendered them politically impotent. Available records show that Ebonyi and Imo States voted in an outright manner against Local Government autonomy while Abia, Anambra, and Enugu States voted in favour (Baiyewu, 2023). Meanwhile, the states that voted in favour have not demonstrated in practical terms their readiness to allow for the autonomy of the Local Governments under them.

While the heat generated by the accusations of marginalization by the federal government is on, it is clear to discernible eyes that the five South East States and their leaders could not unite to fashion out a sustainable developmental plan that would focus on industrialization, IT, housing, power generation, road network within the zone, and other areas that fall within the concurrent or residual lists. Despite the opportunities available for attracting private sector and diaspora investments towards the development of the zone, the leaders have failed to harness the potentials.

As people are complaining about how the federal government stifled the aspirations of South Easterners towards attaining industrial development and how agencies like PRODA was rendered unproductive after its takeover by the FG, it is worth recalling that companies like AVOP, Nachi; NigerCem, Nkalagu; Orient Bank; Presidential Hotel, Enugu; Ikenga Hotels, Awka/Enugu; and other related companies owned severally or jointly by the States within the South East collapsed under the watch of the respective State governments. Truly, the state of infrastructure that fall under the care of the Federal Government is deplorable. But the state of infrastructure under the care of the various State governments within the zone is not better than the ones being managed by the government at the centre. Most of the State roads are in a worse condition than federal roads. South East State owned universities are not better off than the federal universities within the zone. In most cases, the state universities within the zone depend mainly on federal government for infrastructural development. Monies from Needs Assessment and TETFund are not better managed in the state owned universities within the zone than other areas. Workers within the payroll of the various South East governments are not better off than those working at the federal level. Funds at the disposal of the various state governments are not better shielded

from corrupt influences than the ones under the control of the Federal Government. Oil pipelines, electric cables/transformers, installations for railway services, and other infrastructure belonging to the Federal government face vandalism within the zone in a manner that appears to have defied solution.

The above scenario is indeed a far cry from what is expected from a development-minded society. It is expected that while the people of South East are complaining about marginalization emanating from the side of Federal Government, they should seize every opportunity at their disposal to push the area up the rungs of the developmental ladder instead of embarking on self-destructive steps that contribute in worsening the poor state of development being blamed on the federal government.

### **Conclusion: Agenda for Good Governance**

From the preceding discussion, evidence exists to show that the Government at the centre has subjected the South East zone to marginalization in some respects. It is equally true that the Nigerian State does not appear to be lucky with the quality of leadership at its disposal. Bad governance runs deep in the system and affects the various tiers of government within the country, as evidenced by the poor state of infrastructure and high level of hardship across the land. It is a truism that bad governance at the federal level or acts of marginalization originating from that source would be deepened at the state level if the State governments are equally trapped in the same web of bad governance. Contrarily, institutionalizing good governance at the State level would go a long way in filling some of the gaps created by marginalization. Alive to this fact, it stands to reason that the surest way the people of South East can ameliorate the effects of marginalization is to enthrone good governance at the State level and Local Government level. As the Igbo saying goes, *Onye a julu anaghi aju onwe ya* (A person rejected by others should not reject himself).

It is worth reemphasizing that some of the issues interpreted as victimization or marginalization are simply outcomes of poor leadership and bad governance. For instance, the level of poverty is higher in the north compared to the Eastern or Western part of the country. Yet the same north has produced more Presidents/Heads of State than the other parts of the country. Assuming the poverty rate had been higher in the South East compared to the North, the former would have listed the institutionalization of poverty as an 'evidence' of marginalization by the north-controlled federal government.

The point here is that good governance at the zonal level can heal some of their wounds inflicted by marginalization from the federal government. As the South East is complaining over marginalization by the federal government, let the leaders within the zone raise governance and leadership to enviable heights so that the other zones would nurse the desire to have similar standard replicated in their areas. By looking up to the South East as the standard for qualitative leadership and in a bid to witness development, the other zones are most likely to aspire to have a South Easterner as the Chief Executive of the country and, in the circumstance, the issue of marginalization as it relates to allowing a South Easterner take up the country's mantle of leadership would be resolved seamlessly. In order for the South East to achieve positive results in the direction of enthroning good governance and promoting development, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. The various state governments within the zone must do away with corruption, mismanagement of funds, and other practices that contribute to failure of governance. The masses have a role to play in this direction. They must make positive contributions towards governance by electing good leaders and demanding for accountability of political office holders. They should understand that the quality of governance at the State level and Local Government level is as important as the quality of governance at the centre and that instituting good governance at the lower levels has the capacity to cushion the effects of poor governance at the federal level. In all, a regime of accountability and transparency should be operational within the zone.

2. The various State governments in the South East must endeavour to open up the Local government to democratic currents and desist from unnecessarily interfering with the affairs of that tier of government. As a way of proving that they detest marginalization in all its ramifications, they should stop marginalizing the third tier of government under them.
3. The various state governments within the zone should embark on aggressive infrastructural development based on the funds available to them. This again requires the watchfulness of the masses and their readiness to make electoral choices based on character and track records of contestants.
4. There is need for the various States in the zone to pursue South East integration. Speaking with one voice would serve the developmental agenda of the government better. Whether in terms of raising a strong voice to make demands from the government or in terms of collective planning, integration of the South East offers greater prospects than remaining in a divided state. To this end, the South East Governors forum must be reenergized and made functionally relevant in actualizing the developmental dreams of the zone.
5. The main purpose of integration is to make collective efforts towards enthroning mega developmental projects. Thus, there is need to come up with a feasible developmental plan and devise means of actualizing the plan through private sector partnership.
6. There is need to engage the youths positively by sensitizing and socializing them in line with positive values. Exemplary leadership and exhibition of good character by the leaders and older members of the society is a practical way of achieving this.
7. There is need to cover the space being occupied by non state actors that have been constituting security threat within the zone. The governors must come together and face the security challenges within the zone as a team.

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