

# Regional development in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria

A situational analysis



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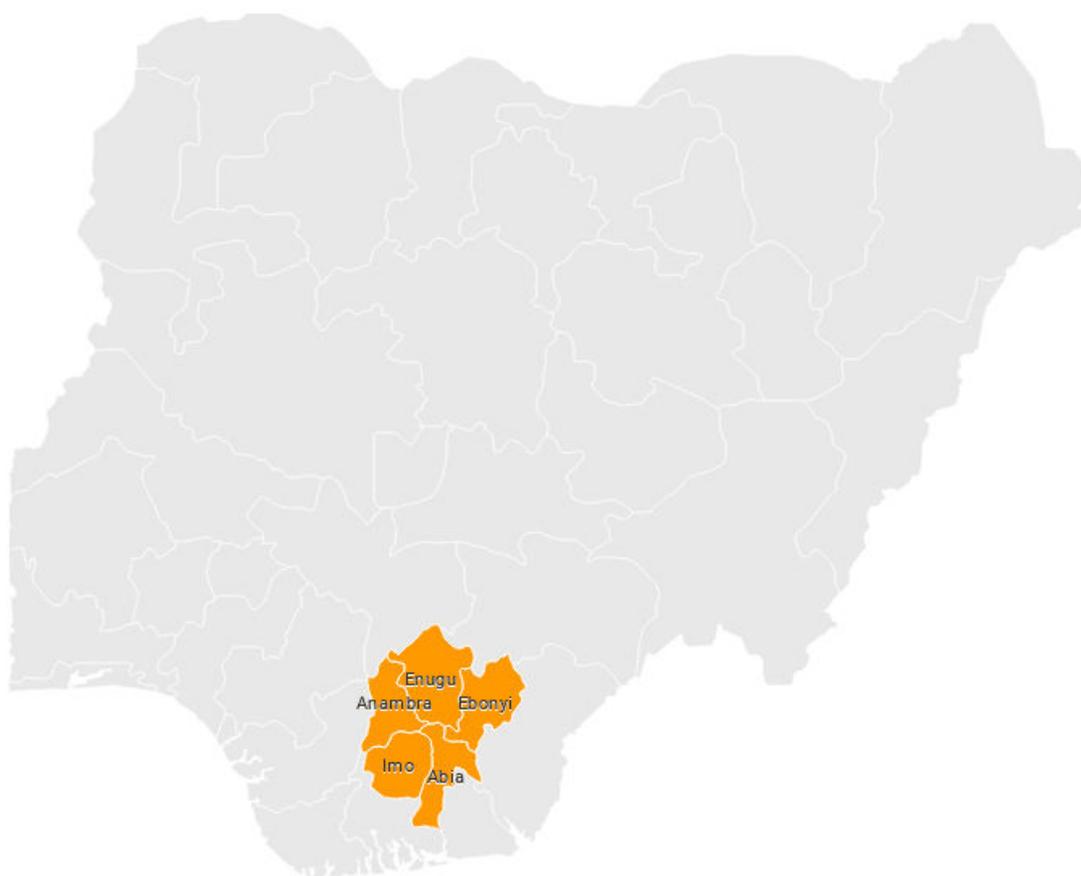
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**Centre LSD**

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## List of Acronyms

<b>BRACED</b>	Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Delta
<b>Centre LSD</b>	African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development
<b>DAWN</b>	Development Agenda for Western Nigeria
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IPOB</b>	Indigenous People of Biafra
<b>LGAs</b>	Local Government Areas
<b>MASSOB</b>	Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra
<b>NBS</b>	National Bureau of Statistics
<b>PVCs</b>	Permanent Voters Cards
<b>RVs</b>	Registered Voters
<b>SENEC</b>	South East Nigeria Economic Commission
<b>SENEDEF</b>	South Eastern Nigeria Economic Development Fund
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium Enterprises

## Executive summary

The Ndigbos are the dominant people of the South East geopolitical zone made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. As one of the old post-independence regions in Nigeria, it was essential to review its level of social change and development in different spheres. The objectives of this study, therefore, were to raise the issues affecting the growth and development of the region and how they affect the focal states, and carry out an overview of the regional economic cooperation platform embedded in the South East of Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEC), as well as proffer solutions to improve on the growth and development of the region.

The study adopted the methodology of desk review of relevant literature, field visits and observations as well as interviews with key informants and stakeholders. The report covered such sub-themes as political governance, economic outlook, infrastructural outlook, educational development, environmental crisis, security situation, regional economic integration and gender development.

The findings indicated that despite the potentials of the region in terms of human and natural resources, the challenges of insecurity, threat of climate change, especially gully erosion, and unemployment were enormous. There is a high deficit of collectivism in economic relations amongst the focal states forcing the SENEK initiative to remain comatose, while the spirit of individualism in industry is in high supply. The obnoxious and dehumanizing widowhood practices disempower a large population of the females with direct consequence on the poverty level of the youths and under-aged.

It is recommended that inclusive good governance by the local leaders in all the focal states could form the foundation for economic progress, infrastructural development, social harmony and youths' interest in the Nigerian statehood project. The focal states should collectively tackle the menacing gully erosion challenge, and seriously endeavour to provide the good environment for security, in order to improve the in-flow of investments from successful indigenes within Nigeria and in the diaspora in order to boost the regional economy and reduce poverty level in the focal states.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

The issues of regional development are multi – disciplinary both in approach and analysis, spreading from the primary focus of politics, economics, sociology, public policy to environment. The concept of a region is usually explained using a wide range of criteria that will involve issues of geographical or spatial elements, and other social or cultural indices which play up the essentiality of identity and attachment to a place or location. Thus, regionalism could be viewed as the political manifestation of regional identity (McCall, 2010<sup>1</sup>). As a sub – national peripheral entity, with strong indicators of an economy as well as political and cultural identity, regions within a national framework are driven by the need to respond to pressures from political dynamics and economic activities in a strong bid to construct comparative advantages. Sorenson<sup>2</sup> (2010) opines that a common thread for regional development concerns that usually focus on economic and social improvement, would most likely encompass such matters as more and better quality of infrastructure, improved political governance and community services, increased volume of economic production, lower unemployment rate and growing number of jobs (in the formal and informal sectors), need for rising purchasing power and improved quality of life.

The debate has always been the parameters of engaging the regional development policies to achieve improved economic and social conditions of living – is it Bottom – Up, that is, to allow the liberal perspective by allowing the market to rule, or Top – Bottom, that is, to ensure government deliberate intervention to moderate the market forces and instigate developmental processes through provision of hard and soft infrastructural facilities to create the enabling environment for growth. The approaches to regional development policies are many, but the traditional ones revolve around the twin theoretical perspectives of neo-classical economics and interventionist development. In the former, governments are encouraged to stay away from active intervention and allow the operations of the market. The latter case is prevalent in developing economies like Nigeria

This study was carried out from a political economy perspective. The essence of the political economy framework is hinged on three major platforms, namely that there is close linkages between political and economic structures in the society in Nigeria; that the political and economic structures of a society affect its general values, cultures and norms as well as the practice of political governance; and that a better understanding of the society, and a region specifically, could be provided by analyzing the synergy between the economy and politics, and their dialectical interrelations with other social institutions (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2005<sup>3</sup>).

### 1.2 Objectives of the study

Nigerian government adopted the regional development framework as a development strategy. The regional development model is tailored to serve as catalysts in the evolution of growth centres in order to reduce spatial inequalities in economic development, and maximize the advantages of economies of scale.

This study, therefore is focused on presenting an overview of the extent of development in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It will identify and address the issues determining, in positive and negative patterns, the growth and development of the South East region, and specifically the five states that comprise the region. It will undertake an overview of the regional economic integration framework – SENEK – and compares its effectiveness with other regional initiatives – BRACED and DAWN. And will attempt to offer useful recommendations on modalities of speeding up development in the region.

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

This study is focused on providing an overview of the South East regional development in Nigeria, therefore the scope of the work will be limited to the five constituent states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states

### **1.4 Methodology**

A study of this nature will involve the need to benefit from the mix of qualitative and some levels of primary information. Thus, rigorous desk review of relevant literature was embarked upon. Field study was carried out to achieve two major objectives – direct observation of certain variables and activities peculiar to the region, and to engage in Key Informant Interviews (KII) with relevant stakeholders to elicit data that could be strategic to the issues in focus. This study had the limitation of timeframe specified for the study which was a huge constrain in visiting five states and analyzing data.

## 2.0 Profile of the Southeast region

### 2.1 General outlook

The defining characteristics of the South East geopolitical zone are critical. First, it is the geopolitical zone with the least volume of landmass, and the fewest number of states in composition. The region accounts for 3.2 per cent of Nigeria's land space. Second, it is the geopolitical zone with nearly 95% homogeneous population of Igbo – speaking ethnic persons.

The zone referred to as Ala-Igbo (Igbo land), the inhabitants are usually addressed as Ndigbo with close affinity in language and culture spread across the five states. The population of Ndigbo in the zone is put at 16.381 million persons (2006 census), accounting for about 11.7% of the national population.

But uniquely, the South East region was adjudged the most densely populated area in Nigeria in terms of persons per square kilometres by the National Population Commission. The zone's dense population, seen in terms of persons per square kilometres, exceeds the national average by 400%. Onuoha<sup>4</sup> (2008) notes that the high population density of the region triggered the proclivity of migration activities of the indigenes, with about 20% of Igbo indigenes resident outside their homeland.

On the economic note, the region despite being one of the most attractive in agricultural potentials with rich soil for cash and food crops, as well as year – round cultivation activities, it has a very high unemployment rate of almost 20%, which far exceeds the national average of 13% (NBS, 2016<sup>5</sup>).

The civil war (1967 – 1970) led to huge human and infrastructural consequences in the region. This experience makes the revival of the secessionist interests for a state of Biafra comprising the five states of the South East geo-political zone very worrisome.

### 2.2 Brief profile of states in the region

**Abia State** – The name of the state is derived from the initial four letters of the densely populated areas of Aba, Bende, Isikwato and Afikpo, who are predominantly Igbo – speaking people with a population of 2,833,999 (according to the 2006 Census). Abia State, which has Umuahia as its administrative capital, and nicknamed "God's Own State". It has a population density of 580.7 persons per square kilometres with an estimated population of 4.22 million (as at 2016 by the State Government) and a landmass of 4,900 square kilometers (NBS, 2016), making it the 15th most populous state in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Created 27th August 1991 from part of old Imo State, the state with the popular industrial hub and commercial city of Aba, is bound by Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi States to the north, Imo state to the west, and Cross River and Akwa Ibom States to the south and east. Abia state, positioned in the heart of the South East region of Nigeria, is one of the oil producing states in the country with crude oil and gas production, and has high activity of agricultural cultivation. According to the Abia State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission, the state has over 100 oil wells, three installed flow stations, and an associated natural gas gathering facility jointly owned by the NNPC and the State government. The State, with 17 local government areas, has two power plants - Alaoji and Geometric – and the commercial city of Aba is connected to oil – rich Port Harcourt in Rivers State by rail. The vibrant economy of Abia State notwithstanding, it has an unemployment average of 11.2 percent (NBS, 2016), four universities but no airport.

Anambra State – Anambra is one of the oldest states in the region, having been created in 1976 as one of the two states (the other being old Imo State) carved out of the defunct East Central State. However, in August 1991, Enugu State was carved out of the old Anambra State. The new Anambra State, which dubs itself “Light of the Nation”, is the second most densely populated State in the federation of Nigeria, after Lagos State, with 858.7 persons per square kilometers. It is also the most populated state in the region with 4.17 million (2006 Census) and projected level of 7.82million as at 2015, despite having the least landmass in the South East region of 4,865 square kilometres. The State which derived its name from the Omambala (Anambra) River, a tributary of the popular River Niger, houses the largest market in the West African sub-region in Onitsha (the major gateway to the region), and the manufacturing hub of the geopolitical zone in Nnewi, while the State’s administrative headquarters is located at Awka. The State economy thrives on the high network of commercial and manufacturing activities, and high tonnage of agricultural production due to its rich soil. Anambra State houses the first indigenous vehicle manufacturing company, Innoson Motors Limited, and also the first Nigerian private refinery, Orient Petroleum. Anambra State, with the average unemployment of 12.2 percent, is highly urbanized, and characterized by serious emigration from the rural to urban settlements, with a non-functional inland port. As a corollary, the State, divided administratively into 21 Local Government Areas, has glaring challenges of overcrowding, noise pollution and sanitation. The nightmarish burden of gully erosion has added to the environmental challenges of the state. The State has strong educational foundation with high enrolment of students at primary and secondary levels, five universities, along with other tertiary institutions, and has produced high-profile political and intellectual giants like Late Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, Professor Chinua Achebe, Emeka Anyaoku, Philip Emeagwali, amongst others

Ebonyi State – Ebonyi State which was created in 1996, is the newest in the region, virtually land-locked, with the least population of 2.17 million (2006 Census), density of 340.1 persons per square kilometres over a landmass of 6,400 square kilometres (NBS, 2016). The State created out of parts of Enugu and Abia States, is dubbed “Salt of the Nation”, apparently in strong recognition of the huge salt deposits at the lakes of Okposi and Uburu. The economy of Ebonyi State is driven largely by its rich agricultural activities, especially its high – yielding rice production in and around Edda and Abakaliki, the latter being also the administrative capital of the State. Ebonyi State has the unemployment average of 23.1 percent (NBS, 2016), has 13 Local Government Areas, two universities, and the least outlook of industrialization in the region.

Enugu State -- Enugu State, derived its popularity from the city of Enugu, the oldest administrative and urban location in the South East region, was created in 1991 to give political identity to the Wawa ethnic people in the old Anambra State. The city of Enugu has metamorphosed from being the administrative capital of the defunct Eastern region at independence and the East Central State after the civil war, the old Anambra State, to the present Enugu State. Thus, Enugu State, with 17 Local Government Area, has the most definitive landmark of a Government Reserved Area (GRA) arising from many decades of administrative evolution. Enugu State is the largest in terms of landmass in the South East geopolitical zone with 7,534 square kilometres and population size of 3.26 million (2006 Census) and density of 433 per square kilometres. The economy of Enugu, popularized by the coal mining activities, is struggling with the nose-dived coal industry as well as the epileptic power station at Oji River, with the state now having the second highest unemployment figure of 25.2 percent in the South East region (NBS, 2016). The state, which houses the first indigenous university in the country - University of Nigeria, Nsukka – and other three universities, is the gateway from the South East region to the Northern parts of the federation.

Imo State – Imo State came into existence in 1976, after being carved out from the defunct East Central State, and as its name indicates, is located in the “Eastern Heartland”, and named after the Imo River which flows from the northern parts of Okigwe in the state to the south into the Atlantic Ocean. Imo State, with 27 Local Government Areas, has the second highest population density in the South East region with 742.7 persons per square kilometres with a population size of 3.92 million (2006 Census) in a landmass of 5,288 square kilometres. The State is oil producing with over 150 oil wells and hosts such energy firms like Shell Petroleum Development Company, Chevron, Addax Petroleum, and Agip. However, the economy of the State is driven by low agricultural production and commercial activities dominated by the informal sector. The state has the highest unemployment figure of 26.1 per cent in the South East zone (NBS, 2016), and huge tourism potentials with the Oguta man – made lake and other locations, a new cargo airport, and two universities, amongst other tertiary institutions.

## 3.0 Analysis of findings

### 3.1 Introduction

This section brings into focus the summary of the findings that were elicited from the field observations, primary and secondary data in the course of this study. It will highlight the findings in two ways, by first periscoping the developmental strides that have been prevalent in the region and had given the South East region its comparative edge in the federation; and second, by outlining the challenges that have stalled the growth and development of the region.

### 3.2 The strength of development in the region

The South East geopolitical zone has demonstrated obvious developmental strides in certain areas of the economy that will be highlighted in this sub-section.

#### 3.2.1 Increased agricultural activities

The agriculture Sector holds the ace in the economic development of the South East. The region is richly endowed by fertile soil, with tropical rains to complement the rivers and swamps that criss- cross the region. Though highly notable in commercial activities, the entire region is predominantly agrarian in nature, and substantial part of the population are engaged in agricultural production all year round. The region is rich in the production of rice, yam, palm produce, rubber, cassava, maize, cocoyam and rubber. Presently there is an increased production of rice in Ebonyi and Anambra States.

Ebonyi State is one of the most agrarian of the states in Nigeria. Made up predominantly of farmers, with savanna and semi tropical vegetation, humid, sandy and marshy soil, the state is blessed with moisture land for growing of varieties of cash and food crops, such as rice, yam, cassava, cocoyam. Among the agricultural potential, the production of the famous Abakaliki rice has made the state so popular and a beehive of commercial activities. No visitor comes to Abakaliki, the state capital, without testifying of the high quality Abakaliki rice compared with other rice produced locally and internationally. The Abakaliki rice has a lot of nutritional values. It is even better and graded higher for its nutritional values.

Before and after Ebonyi State was created in 1996, agriculture remains the mainstay of the people. The Abakliki Rice Mill which started production in 1967, is adjudged to be the first indigenous company since the creation of the state in 1996. At the creation of the State, at least Abakaliki Rice Mill Industry was the only existing industry in the State. A historian, Stephen Nwajoko told the researcher that in September, 1989, the Rice Mill Association Abakaliki was registered as a company with the incorporation name – Rice Mill Company Nig. Ltd with registration number RC. 136,800. But on January 1, 2000, customary right of occupancy with respect to the entire area of land measuring 1938.464 square metres occupied by the company was issued by the Government of Ebonyi State. Inside the rice mill various workers abound – machine operators, dust carriers, bag stickers, off loaders, barrow pushers, on-loaders, accountants, water suppliers, security men and a host of others.

Chief Sunday Oketa, a businessman in Abakaliki, said he started the rice mill business at the age 18. As a child, Oketa recalled he joined the industry as a “dust carrier” and later trained for one year and six months as a machine operator. “All Ebonyi people were farmers; we never knew any other handwork except farming and when you come here, you see enough rice, food stuff such as cassava, yam and that’s why we are named Ebonyi

State, the Food Basket of the Nation,” Oketa noted. He recalled that way back in the 1980s; people from as far as Lagos, Benin, Port Harcourt usually come to buy Abakaliki rice. “In the 1980s, 15 trailer load of the commodity, 50 to 60 Mercedes Benz 911 lorries, aside others leave the mill every day for Lagos, Port Harcourt and Benin City,” adding that the importation of foreign rice into Nigeria “is killing business here.”

A notable rice farmer and Ebonyi State Commissioner for Information and State Orientation, Dr. Emmanuel Onwe, noted that more than 80 per cent of Abakaliki rice is grown organically because the soil in the state is so fertile that the need for chemical-based fertiliser does not arise and it’s now government policy to prioritise agriculture in absolute terms, and ensuring that everything else gives way to this policy. Onwe noted that the drive and target of the Umahi’s administration was to produce and supply 10 per cent of the over six million metric tons of rice consumed in Nigeria yearly. “The administration borrowed N2 billion to encourage farmers, public and civil servants as well as the youth and women to undertake farming of a number of crops, especially rice. The procurement of agro inputs and equipment such as seeds, herbicides, fertilizer, tractors, plus the necessary mechanical implements have enabled our citizens to put additional 20,000 hectares of land into rice cultivation this season,” he said. The Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Bernard Odoh notes that the state government has procured 40 tractors for rice production. The Ebonyi State Government has earmarked 40,500 hectares of land for rice cultivation this farming season spread across the 13 council areas in the State. Each of the LGAs has 2,500 hectares mapped for the rice production while IFAD has six thousand hectares and FADAMA, 2,000 hectares.

In all communities and local council areas, milling machines are situated for commercial activities, especially for residents outside the capital city that may find it difficult to access the Abakaliki Rice Mill. This large cluster of rice milling industry is owned and managed by private individuals and cooperative societies who have their milling machines, while government only collects royalties/levies from them. The price differs depending on the quality of the rice and specie. Currently, due to the ban on importation of foreign rice, the cost of a bushel of rice is sold for N10,000 and above, depending on the quality, as against N4,000 a year ago.

The State Government also disclosed that it was targeting the production of one million metric tons of rice annually even as it has put in place incentives to make farmers meet the expectations of government in the area of food production. During the flag off of Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN Anchor Borrowers Programme in the State, Prof Odoh who represented Gov. Umahi explained that 20,000 farmers were expected to be part of the programme and disclosed that before the end of the year, 100,000 farmers would have joined the scheme as the State’s current rice production lacked the capacity to feed the people of the State, let alone the country. According to him, the State government had begun a partnership venture with CBN which would not only boost rice production but also motivate farmers to engage in large scale commercial production of rice among other food crops in the state.

In Anambra State, the government is also encouraging investors to embrace farming. The Coscharis Farms, located at Anaku in Anambra West Local Government Area has helped a great deal in producing the now famed Anambra Rice.

In Akili Ozizor, Ogbaru Local Government Area, a silent revolution is also going on, courtesy of the Senator representing Anambra North in the National Assembly, Princess Stella Oduah. covering a landmass of 600 hectares. Equipment worth billions of naira have been installed while others are at the completion stage. Fish ponds are springing up everywhere within the farm while the latest technological inventions in Agriculture are

being used to ensure maximum productivity. For each hectare, 20 people are engaged thereby creating jobs already for 12, 000 people excluding those to be engaged in the processing and storage plants. The project according to Oduah's vision is not only restricted to Akili community but will be replicated in several communities in Anambra North zone. The idea is to reduce unemployment, eradicating poverty and boost the rural economy of the communities

Senator Oduah said that the project was a practical demonstration that agriculture was a veritable platform to boost development of the South East region. "In kick starting this project, we have the largest fish farm here. We also have the largest hatchery that we can raise 2.5 million birds every day. That is huge and that will go a long way to empower the young fishermen and poultry farmers that we want to train professionally to go into fishery. We have more than 15 processing plants in place for pepper, tomatoes, corn, cassava flower, yam starch, maize flower etc. In the South East geopolitical zone, Anambra North produces more yams and cassava than any of the senatorial zones in the five states but what we don't have is the enabling environment to have added value to all these crops. And because we are seasonal farmers, they perish. When you then look at the efforts put in farming, it is not commensurate with the revenue that accrues to the farmers at the end of their toils which is a serious discouragement."

In Imo state, the state government has led the way in trying to revive the expanse palm produce that were dominant in the state, and earned it significant income decades ago. The regeneration of the palm industry in the region has spread across the five states in the region, and the gains of the new drive to increase agricultural activities are unfolding.

### 3.2.2 Manufacturing resilience

The private entrepreneurs in the South East of today have demonstrated their determination to accentuate the economic progress of the South East. In this category, Anambra State tops the chart in boosting the economy of the zone through industrialization and agriculture. Nnewi indigenes who are industrialists ensured the location of various industries in their homestead. Nnewi town has been dubbed the 'Japan of Africa'. From manufacturing of household item, automotive spare parts, wires and cables and food products, the industrialists have contributed a great deal in this aspect.

The wave of manufacturing in Nigeria has roots in this region. The entrepreneurs have shown resilience in establishing and sustaining the vehicle parts manufacturing facilities despite the harsh operating environment. In the region, a network of entrepreneurs in Nnewi manufacture and assemble motorcycles and other vehicle engine parts; Niger Auto Industries fabricates vehicle parts; OCE Filters produces oil filters; Edison fabricates brake pads and linings; Coscharis Group is into manufacture of timing and roller chains; Uru Industries produces brake cables; Godwin – Kris Company fabricates vehicle rubber parts; John White produces fan belts; Ebuso produces process equipment; Cutix Plc and Adswitch manufacture electric switchgear and cables. There are many others like Ibeto Industries Ltd, Uru Industries Ltd, Chicason Group, Tummy Tummy Foods, A-Z Industries Ltd that have taken the manufacturing platform to great heights in the region.

The most spectacular has been the entrepreneurial strides of Chief Innocent Chukwuma, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing Company Ltd, who has made history by being the first Nigerian entrepreneur to engage in designing, developing, assembling and manufacturing of vehicles of many brands. In February 2007, Chukwuma incorporated INNOSON Vehicle Manufacturing Company Limited (IVM), to produce

sundry commercial automobiles, utility vehicles and passenger cars, in collaboration with a consortium of Chinese auto manufacturers (Olutayo, 1999<sup>e</sup>). The company is the first (indigenous) auto maker to produce truly Nigerian vehicles that are reliable, The Nigerian Army, Federal Road Safety Corps, transport companies, and various state governments have been patronizing the firm and its products. His Group consists of: Innoson Nigeria Ltd, makers of motorcycles and spare parts; Innoson Tech and Industries Ltd, plastics and household items makers; Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing (IVM), auto makers and General Tyres and Tubes Co. Ltd, Enugu, which is being run by his 26 year-old son, Nonso. The plastic factory is the largest of its type in Africa, and produces not less than 150 different items, from motor and machinery parts to office and household necessities. It takes an average of two whole hours to complete the tour of the factory, which is sited at the headquarters in Enugu.

At the last quarter of 2016, Innoson has attracted various 'heavy weights' to Nnewi the latest being Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo who visited on Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 2016. Former Head of State, Abdusalami Abubakar has also visited while Innoson himself also visited Nigeria's Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai where the company presented its latest rugged vehicles for Army operation. The Vice President re-emphasized that the Federal Government will continue to patronize Innoson Vehicles just as they did recently by approving the purchase of 40 of their Innoson IVM carrier for the Federal Road Safety Corps.

Another important state in the South East is Abia with Capital at Umuahia and Aba as the commercial nerve centre of the State. Greater percentage of the internally generated revenue used in running the state is generated in Aba. Aba is renowned for the ingenuity and the industry of its people in handcrafts, including shoe-making, fashion and design, steel works and fabrications, textiles, pharmaceuticals, plastics, and cosmetics, amongst others. In Aba, goods can be purchased at cheaper rate with unique qualities. Even as Aba-made shoes, bags, belts and garments were making waves in other countries within the West African sub-region and even beyond, successive Nigerian governments are yet to grant the market its pride of place in terms of giving a facelift to the market. Aba has the potential of becoming the industrial hub of Nigeria. Aba therefore must not be left behind in the scheme of development of the country. Aba, the Abia State capital also host the popular Enyimba Football Club.

### **3.2.3 Educational advancement**

The elite and indigenes of the South East Region have realized the importance of education and have fought vigorously to reverse the former trend of low young male enrolment in schools and craze for trading. Net Primary School enrolment in the South East was 81 percent with a completion rate of 98.7 percent as at 2012. Imo State government has led the way with the bold policy of free primary and secondary education for all its citizens. Virtually every community in the five states in the region has at least a public primary school, and relatively a secondary school in most communities, or at least, a cluster of two or three communities that share close proximity. In addition, there are many private nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the region, and with high population of students, despite the high cost of private secondary and tertiary institutions.

The South East region has 17 public and private universities, along with various institutions of higher learning in the South East region. By virtue of the educational policy of the Goodluck Jonathan's administration, there is no state in the South East geopolitical zone that has no federal university. Anambra State can boast of one, the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, although there is National Open University Centre at Abagana. In Enugu State, there is the University of Nigeria, with campuses at Nsukka and Enugu; Imo state has Federal University of

Technology, Owerri; Abia State has Michael Okpara University of Agriculture; while the newly established Federal University in Ebonyi State is located at Ndiufu Alike. Apart from the various states setting up their state owned universities and polytechnics, there are several privately – funded universities in the region to provide more educational opportunities for the citizenry.

The field research conducted indicated that most public schools in the states most especially in primary and secondary schools have been in shambles owing to lack of maintenance culture. Enugu State is faced with serious challenges in facilities for primary and secondary schools. The Commissioner of Education in the Enugu State, Prof Uchenna Ezeh, in an interview noted that in order to provide qualitative education to the citizenry, the government approved the recruitment of about 2000 NCE teachers for the primary schools, to ensure that standard of teaching and learning were improved, and have released funds for the renovation of over 370 classroom blocks across the state.

In Anambra State, there was a serious decline in education that during the administration of Chinwoke Mbadinuju, (1999 to 2003), when primary and secondary schools were shut for over one year. Ex – governor, Dr Chris Ngige (2003 to 2006), concentrated on road infrastructure but the emergence of Peter Obi (2006 to 2013) brought back a new elixir for education in the state. Prior to Obi's administration, most public schools in Anambra State had dilapidated and collapsed building. Modern school technology, equipment and facilities were nonexistent , while pupils and students were studying under pitiable conditions. Today, the story has changed in Anambra State as Obi's administration brought in 35,000 laptops /desktop computers which were distributed to about 500 schools. The same numbers of schools were also equipped with Microsoft Academy, Internet Connectivity and power generators. Over 400 schools were also equipped with functional science laboratories while 750 buses were distributed to schools too. The then commissioner of Education, Dr Uju Okeke said the government erected over 1500 classroom blocks, 40 new buildings at the state university and provided boreholes in 300 schools.

### **3.3 Challenges of development in the region**

The South East geopolitical zone faces certain critical challenges that have affected its development, planning and unity of purpose of the indigenes.

#### **3.3.1 Poor political perception and disconnect with leaders**

Majority of the indigenes of the South East region have the strong perception that the region has not had a fair deal in terms of proportionate political representation in federal institutions and structures of government at the centre, even though there are basic constitutional provisions and other guideposts in those elections and appointments. Although the military dictatorship of Sani Abacha did not state clear-cut criteria nationwide for creating Local Government Areas, the emergence of Nigeria's 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs) spread across the six geopolitical zones, with the South East zone currently having the least number of 95 LGAs, while the North West zone has the highest number of 186 LGAs, followed by South West zone with 138 LGAs. South – South zone has 123 LGAs; North Central zone 115 LGAs; and North East zone 112 LGAs (The Constitution, 1999)<sup>7</sup>. The same structural outlook is manifested in the number of Senatorial and House of Representatives' seats or districts/constituencies among the six geopolitical zones. Out of the country's 109 Senators, the South East zone has the least number of 15, whereas the North West zone is given 21 followed by South West, South-South, North Central and North East zones with 18 each.

The mismanagement of the resources – federal allocated and internally generated revenue – accruable to the region, has accentuated the development crisis, unemployment and frustration of the youths. The indices for such frustration have been the groundswell of acceptance and loyalty by the youths on the new philosophy and agitation for the defunct Biafra, seemingly to chart a new course from the grip of the unfair national political equation and to give power to a new set of leaders.

The mistrust is deep. None of the State governors in the zone, members of the National Assembly and Federal Executive Council and key opinion leaders have spoken in support of the secessionist movement spearheaded by MASSOB and IPOB. The Council of Traditional Rulers in the South East region is also not in support of the agitations, and the Chairman, HRM Eze Eberechi Dick, says that: “On the issue of the agitation by some of our youths like IPOB and others for a Biafra Republic, we have continued to engage and preach to them that every problem of the nation can be best resolved through peaceful dialogue and respect for the rule of law.”

However, Professor Chukwuemeka Ike, the former Registrar of WAEC, and current traditional ruler of Ndikelionwu, Orumba North LGA, Anambra State, believes that the critical issue of bad governance by the local political elite has worsened the development crisis in the region, and not necessarily the poor treatment of the region by the federal government. Prof Ike says that if the local political leadership in the five states of the region had, over the years, galvanized their citizens and encouraged local industrialization, the South East region would be doing good in employment percentages and the level of frustration of the youths would have been low. The development crisis has strongly indicated that the South East region, in the quest for better life for the citizens domiciled there, would benefit immensely from good governance if their political elite would be accountable, responsive to the yearnings of the people, inclusive in their decision making process, effective and transparent in the best use of public resources.

### **3.3.2 Infrastructural deficit**

Infrastructural deficit tops the chart of all the critical issues affecting or confronting the South East regional development<sup>8</sup>. Infrastructural development holds the panacea for the economic and social wellbeing of the people of any region. If these facilities and services are not in place, development will be very difficult. The South East is wallowing in deep infrastructural deficit. The public utilities are mostly in ruins. The study tour of this project clearly indicated that the South East region has one of the worst road networks and federal infrastructure in the country. There is the sorry state of federal infrastructures in the Southeast zone including the acutely deplorable condition of federal roads in the zone (i.e. Onitsha-Enugu; Enugu-Nsukka-Oturkpo; Enugu-Port Harcourt; Owerri-Port Harcourt; and Aba-Ikot Ekpene). There is also the abandonment of the 2nd Niger Bridge project, the skeletal status of the Akanu Ibiam International Airport in Enugu, the continued moribund status of the railway system in the zone, absence of a standard seaport or wharfs and general abdication of federal responsibilities by the Federal Government in the Southeast zone.

Out of 34, 448 kilometres of federal roads spread across the country's six geopolitical zones as at today, the South-East zone has the least number of kilometres of 3,231; whereas the North-Central zone including the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) has the highest kilometers of 9,756; followed by North-East zone with 6, 787; North-West zone had 6,363; SouthWest zone also had 4,161; and South-South zone with 4, 150. The federal roads in the South-East and the South-South zones are most acutely deplorable, while the few of them that are

asphalted and made usable were done by host States' Governors with their unpaid reimbursement sums running into tens of billions of naira.

### 3.3.3 Insecurity cloud

It is essential to put the security situation in the South East geopolitical zone in proper perspective, as it is a reflection of the prevailing socio – economic conditions in the region in particular, and the country in general. It is imperative to state that the perception of insecurity in the area grew as a result of poor economic well-being and unemployment of the teeming youth population, the downturn of the trading activities and the poor perception of political governance that offered no succour in the face of deprivations.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2016) highlighted that the unemployment levels in the South East geopolitical zone were in excess of the national percentage average, and the economic downturn in the country has also adversely affected the prospects of improved situation. Added to this unemployment scenario is the glaring dichotomy in social status created by the ostentatious display of wealth by the economic, political and traditional elite, and the resultant frustration embedded in the deprived youths who have unleashed their aggression on the wealthy families and their economic structures.

The immediate consequence of this situation has been the over-securitization of the region with plethora of security taskforces comprising police and army personnel by the five state governments', the culture of fear for the wealthy and entrepreneurs, as well as unfavourable business environment for investment.

At various points during this period, the people of the South East have resorted to self-help measures to stem the rising wave of crime, which gravely undermined their survival. For instance, faced by the threats posed to their lives, property and prosperity traders in the commercial city of Aba introduced a vigilante group, "Bakassi Boys" to challenge the criminal networks that terrorized residents and visitors. The famed "Bakassi Boys" recorded successes in checkmating the criminal groups leading to the adoption of similar outfits in other cities in the region. Security threats in the South East include herdsman attacks (invasion of villages at the odd hours of the night , killing, maiming, raping, destroying of farm crops and hard earned property of the natives), kidnapping (both for ransom and murder) and armed robbery. The introduction of Bakassi Boys in Anambra and Abia States between year 2000 to 2002 had its disastrous consequences. While the boys were hailed initially by the mob for their jungle justice system of butchering their arrested armed robbers in broad day light and setting them ablaze, the group later embarked on serious extra judicial killings that human rights groups seriously condemned.

Kidnapping was to assume a frightening dimension that no day passed in different parts of the region without such an incident. Victims parted with huge sums of money as ransom before many states started deploying some security strategies like summary execution of arrested kidnapers and demolition of buildings suspected to have been used for such or owned by kidnapers.

Anambra State with about 177 communities used to be the initial hotbed of kidnapers in the South East. The attraction was the large number of political heavyweights and prominent businessmen, as the state arguably parades the highest number of people with private security guards as escorts. Anambra holds the record of abduction of a sitting governor for political reasons years back. According to a civil society group, Campaign for Democracy, kidnapped persons paid ransoms valued at about N1.2 billion between January 2008 and August 2012. During the period, Anambra State reportedly recorded the kidnapping of 273 persons, the highest in the zone. Often times, relations of the rich are the target.

At least four traditional rulers in Anambra State have been kidnapped. The first was the traditional ruler of Abagana in Njikoka Local Government Area, Igwe Patrick Okeke, who was taken to UzoUwani area of Enugu State where he was rescued. The second was the traditional ruler of Adazi Nnukwu in Anaocha Local Government Area, Igwe Lawrence Oragwu. The third was traditional ruler of Ithemposi in Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Igwe Jerome Udechukwu, who was kidnapped for over one year now, and have not been seen. The fourth was the traditional ruler of Ukpo in Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State, Igwe Robert Eze, who is the younger brother of the billionaire oil magnate and businessman, Prince Arthur Eze.

The negative consequences of the scourge of kidnapping on the image, investment and economy of the State, made the former governor of the state, Mr. Peter Obi to undertake the demolishing of properties used for kidnapping and seizure of the proceeds from the perpetrators. When Obi finally bowed out in 2013, Obiano came in and set up a combined /joint task force codenamed "Operation Kpochapu". The governor's next action was to rid the State of kidnapers and the first port of call was his home town, Aguleri, where three buildings allegedly built by suspected kidnapers were destroyed. As at November 2016, no fewer than 25 of such houses have been demolished.

### **3.3.4 Menace of gully erosion**

The study tour for this project clearly indicated that Gully Erosion in several states was a serious challenge and threat to the infrastructure, housing and economic well-being of the citizens. Gully erosion has worsened over the years, and has little to do with sanitation and rainfall experienced in the rainforest region, as the gullies cave in even during the dry season. Gully erosion menace in the South East region is frightening in rage, no respecter of persons, enormous in scope of coverage at short notices, and destructive of human assets and natural resources. It is the unseen hand in drastic landscape changes – to the detriment of man and his habitat. In the five South East states, erosion poses the greatest challenge to mankind and the environment. It is caused by indiscriminate dumping of waste product, felling of trees and increased run-off due to rapid land use for development.

The former Vice – President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, can no longer enjoy his old age and retirement of service to the nation because his country home at Oko, the sprawling town that hosts the Federal Polytechnic in Anambra State, is under serious threat of collapse and being washed away by the pangs of soil erosion. He is not alone in the gully erosion travail in Orumba North local council area. Even the family house of his younger brother and traditional ruler of the town, Prof (HRH) Laz Ekwueme, is facing same threat. The state-of-the-art facilities which include the Science Laboratory Technology (SLT) and auditorium at the Federal Polytechnic, in the town under construction is under threat. The Polytechnic has sunk over N8billion into these projects now being threatened.

Anambra State Governor, Chief Willie Obiano has noted that the state has up to 1000 erosion sites, and listed some of the erosion - prone communities in the state to include Oko, Ekwulobia, Nanka, Obosi, Igboukwu, Ojoto, Agulu, Alor, Ukpok, Okija and Nkisi waterworks in Onitsha. Abia State also has active erosion sites at NkporoOhafia, Arochukwu, Isingwu, Umuahia, Ubakala, Umunneoché, Isuikwato, NsiriNtigha, among others.

In Imo State, there are active erosion sites at Akwakuma, Urualla, AmaifekeOrlu, Okigwe, Nekede, Njaba, Owerri Municipal, AmuzieAhiazuMbaise, Ideato North and Umuhuorie. Erosion sites in Enugu State include Obinagu Udi, Abia- Udi, Akpulu, Ozalla and ObeNkanu. In Ebonyi State the erosion sites are Okposi, Ohaozara, Nguzu Eddah, Abialwerre, Ebia River side, amongst others.

Lawrence Njoku, of the Guardian Newspaper, who undertook a survey of some erosion sites captured the situation this way :“Everybody, including the owner of the six-flat storey-building in Abagana, Anambra State knew the beautiful structure may not last till the next rainy season and in the next few weeks, could cave in into the cavernous gully only a few metres away. Recently in Njaba, Imo State , Mr. Festus Okoro's heart was filled with sadness as he surveyed what was left of his three hectares of farmland on which he had planted young cashew seedlings. The retired port worker had invested part of his retirement benefits on the farm only to discover that two days of heavy rainfall had left a large gully through which his seedlings had been washed into the Njaba River. All across the South East, from Enugu to Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi and Abia States, gully erosion has cut up or washed away roads, destroyed farmlands, pulled down houses and sent residents fleeing their homes.”

The administrative headquarters of Afikpo South Council at Nguzu-Edda, was relocated due to the threat by erosion even as a few buildings still sit perilously on the edges of gullies. The 23-kilometre Arochukwu-Ohafia federal road which runs from Ehem in Ohafia to Amuvi Village in Arochukwu Local Council of Abia State is also being ravaged by erosion. Although a long segment of the road, which was cut off when it caved in some years ago had been sand- filled, there are noticeable threats of new gullies on the road. In Imo, the Akwakuma erosion has narrowed the road to Onitsha and other adjoining areas. For Enugu, parts of Udi and Ezeagu along the Enugu- Onitsha road are seriously ravaged by erosion. The road, a dual carriage way, has been reduced to one lane with various parts of the road washed off.

The Federal Government through the Nigeria Erosion and Watershed Management Project (NEWMAP) is intervening in Amachalla gully in Awka South, Uruokpala-Umudunu erosion in Abagana Njikoka, St. Thomas Aquinas/Nero Plaza in Awka, and the New Heritage erosion site at Omagba, Onitsha. Former Vice Chancellor, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka, and environmental hydrogeologist, Professor Boniface Egboka, has canvassed for the establishment of a South East Alaigbo Environmental Protection Council (AEPC). He explained that the AEPC, with appropriate legal powers, should serve as a body for continuous monitoring, advocacy and provide advice on issues and problems of floods, soil and gully erosion and landslides by way of identification, evaluation, sourcing for funds for the control and management of the menace all over Igbo land and its environs. Egboka<sup>9</sup> (2016) also argued that gully erosion and landslides have caused massive loss of lands, infrastructure (buildings, homes, roads, rural pathways and other communications routes), forests, agricultural/farm lands, loss of wetlands, humans, animals and plants, churches, shrines, graves and pollution/contamination of surface waters, industries, commercial centres/markets. He noted that human, animal and plant lives and trillions of Naira are lost annually in terms of lands, building, farms, waters, forests, and other infrastructure by Ndigbo as well as inestimable losses in human, animal/fishes and plant lives all over Ala-Igbo. These indescribable calamities must be stopped or at least controlled or minimized by:

- Adopting improved farming practices to reduce the gully erosion menace to the barest minimum.
- Refuse dump along the river courses impede the flow of water leading to flooding especially during heavy rainfall. Therefore, dumping of refuse on the river channels and valleys should be prohibited. Governments of the South East region should enact and enforce laws to deter such activities.
- Planting of plantain and banana on the flood plains or valleys can be adopted as possible option of reversing the trend.
- Enlightenment campaign on the effects of human activities (especially indiscriminate felling of trees) being catalyst for erosion should be embarked upon.

### 3.3.5 Widowhood disempowerment practices

In the South – East region, gender roles assigned to spouses of bereaved couples are antithetical to development and dignity of the female folk. The plight of the growing population of widows in the region is unsavory. This is made worse by the challenge of patriarchy, which overtime leads to social exclusion, with the resultant consequence(s) on their immediate children and a multiplier effect on the youths of the region.

The widow is an endangered specie in the South East area, and she is that properly married woman who lost her husband through death, and had to be subjected to untoward socio – economic deprivation, physical torture and psychological stress by the combined onslaught of the in-laws, the older women (Umuada) and the elders in the community. The widows some areas are threatened with traditional curses, their fundamental rights are culturally violated through widowhood practices – compulsory skin-cut hair shaving; period of exclusion extending between three to 12 months; denied bath for certain days and weeks; eat prescribed meal from disused plates and no cutlery; forced to drink from the germs-infested water used to clean the corpse; in-laws take-over of her husband liquid and solid assets; denial of access to late husband's wealth; widows with only female children are treated as sub – humans; and the illiterate widow are left with no family help for her children.

The level of gender insensitivity to the economic development of the women folk who happened to be widows is alarming. Dr. Ihuoma Asiabaka, Director of the Centre for Women, Gender and Development Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, says that “the most vulnerable widows in the region were the illiterate, financially – dependent who were very ignorant of their basic human rights, and were marginalized, intimidated, discriminated against, oppressed by the in-laws and her right to inheritance denied”. She believes that greed was the driving force behind the in-laws inheriting the property of their deceased brother. In the South East region, there is no law passed by the States House of Assembly protecting the rights of widows from oppressive practices by in-laws and community leaders except in Anambra State. Rev Fr. Anthony Onyeocha, St. Kevin Catholic Church, Ogbaku, in Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State, explains that the widowhood practices have adverse effects on the women as the sole provider for her children's needs of food and education, which could lead to the children being denied formal education; while the unhygienic practices expose the widows to serious health hazards that make her unhealthy in the future.

In Ebonyi State , the womenfolk constitute the bulk of the manual laborer's in the construction and agriculture industries. The burden of widowhood further accentuated the plight of women in the state. Mrs Rachel Umahi, wife of the Governor of the State, laments that widows' poverty has deprived their children of their aspiration, education and future employment, as a high number of the widows live in extreme poverty. Mr. Nwodu Ikenna, a public commentator in Abakaliki, was of the strong opinion that the South East region must address the widowhood practices and deliver the womenfolk from frustration and poverty. Reviewing the practices, would improve the socio- economic conditions of the women and children in terms of welfare and education. For Mrs. Patience Nwosu, wife of the Archbishop of the Bishop of the Anglican Communion, Umuahia, Abia State, says “Christianity has been waging war on the obnoxious widowhood practices. The Church has strived to assist widows with funds as forms of livelihood support, and for some desperate cases, the Church went ahead to build residential accommodation for them”.

Rev. Fr. Onyeocha states that the practices were rooted in traditions and cultures of the Ndigbo people, and suggested drastic action such as a revolt like the Aba Women's riot of 1929 to force social change in this direction. The Catholic priest, who has authored a book on the plight of widows in the African culture, argued that

the South East region cannot attain its full potential in development when a sizeable population of its womenfolk continues to wallow in economic misery and psychological trauma imposed on them by the different communities. Dr. Cosmas Ndukwe, Deputy Speaker of Abia State House of Assembly, says he has compassion for the widows, and that he would explore the possibility of initiating a Bill aimed at protecting widows in the state, and lobby other lawmakers to support it. The possibility of such a Bill being introduced and passed in the other state of Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo remains a dream. The Non – Governmental Organizations and the Civil Society groups need to assist these widows out of their misery with advocacy programmes to the State Governments to review and change the entrenched socio-cultural widowhood practices disempowering womenfolk and retarding development in the region.

### 3.4 Assessment of regional economic framework

#### 3.4.1 South-east Nigeria economic commission (SENEC)

The idea of a South East regional economic platform a decade ago did not originate from any of the State governments or from the political elite. It was an idea from the private sector to harness the economic potentials in the South East region, and speed up the development pace in the geopolitical zone<sup>10</sup>. The lofty idea of South-East Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEC) emanated from a Stakeholders Forum on Industrial Clusters in South-Eastern Nigeria, organized by the African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE), on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006 in Enugu. According to the information on the official website of the AIAE, the Forum observed that the poor state of industrial development in the south-east zone reflects the underlying lack of coordinated economic, institutional and infrastructural development, and recommended a holistic perspective that will take into consideration the overall economic context of the South-East zone. The cardinal goal of SENEK was the promotion of economic competitiveness and sustainable development of the south-east geopolitical zone within the national and global economies. The milestones set for SENEK to achieve were as follows:

- Creation of world-class investment facilities;
- Development of large physical infrastructural schemes;
- Implementation of programmes for sustainable institutions;
- Creation of centres for human capacity development; and
- Development of coordinated framework for the formulation and implementation of public policies and plans.

Specifically, the Commission was to carry out the following tasks:

- Determine shared zonal development policy goals and strategies;
- Articulate and advance zonal interests within the national framework;
- Facilitate inter-governmental cooperation, policy coordination/synergy and joint programming;
- Advocate for, facilitate and implement strategic zonal investments; and
- Coordinate infrastructural development within the zone

The driving force for SENEK was to foster and champion the developmental interests of the South East geopolitical zone. The proposed South East Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEK) was billed to play vital roles in uniting the interests of the States of the zone and in encouraging cooperation and collaboration amongst the governments of the States, and be well positioned to advise individual State governments.

SENEK was conceived to be a Statutory Body established by law by the five South East States, acting through the state legislatures. The body was to be known as the South East Nigeria Economic Commission (SENEK).

The Commission will operate as a joint agency of the five cooperating states, the private sector and the entire people of the zone, and structured to represent and reflect the interests of both public and private organizations. It was to be incorporated under the relevant provisions of the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA), and operate as an autonomous private sector driven institution. The Commission shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal and may be sued in its corporate name. One of the main tools of implementation was to be the South East Nigeria Development Fund (SENDEF), which will mobilize and manage funds for the collective development of the zone. The AIAE believes that obtaining adequate funding for SENE, particularly for its core operations, will be predicated on the significance the State Governments and wealthy private stakeholders attaches to the objectives and operations of the commission as a private sector - driven organization

The Chairman of the Steering committee, Engr. Chris Okoye, explained that SENE was for economic renaissance of the South-East States, and that while the AIAE acts as “midwife”, the ownership of SENE resided in the five states’ governments and people of the South-East region. He puts the situation in perspective thus: “Through mobilisation, we have elicited great interest of many groups. But, much remains to be done because of the non-committal of the state governments and other stakeholders. We appeal to all concerned groups across the South-East States, especially the governments of the five states, town unions, community development associations, civic organisations, business organisations, corporate groups and private sector enterprises, educational institutions, religious organisations, market unions, trade unions, traditional rulers, professional associations and the Diaspora to join hands with us to make SENE a reality.” In a nutshell, the concept of a regional economic platform has been “all motion, no movement”. Many government officials and business people said they do not understand what SENE was about, and that no concrete actions were taken in that direction (Okoye, 2012<sup>11</sup>)

Despite all the promises SENE mooted in 2008, it was supposed to take shape from 2012 with the inauguration of several committees and sub-committees but four years down the road, it has remained a mirage. Engr. Okoye in an interview noted that the major constraint facing the operations of SENE has to do with the uncooperative attitude of the governors of the five South East States and Igbo businessmen and industrialists who have paid lip service to the workings of SENE. He was optimistic that SENE still hold out lots of promises for the economic revival of the South East and that they are still pushing hard towards its realization.

An entrepreneur based in Onitsha, Sir Okechukwu Iloduba in an interview said that “the major reason why SENE could not fly has to do with the individualism of the Igbo man. The Igbo man would prefer to do very well as an individual in almost all spheres of life but would find it very difficult to pursue a collective agenda”.

### **3.4.2 Other regional platforms in Southern Nigeria: BRACED and DAWN**

The other two regions in the Southern part of Nigeria – the South South and the South West – also have regional economic platforms that have same purpose: to midwife the regional economic development agenda for the different zones.

The South South geopolitical zone has the BRACED Commission, a name derived from the names of the constituent States – Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Delta State. The BRACED Commission set up in 2010, was a fall – out from the first ever South South Economic Summit of the Governors of the six states held in Calabar in 2009. The central objective of the Commission was to speed up economic cooperation of

the States, and has a headquarters set up in Port Harcourt. The Commission had a Director – General with each state contributing a Commissioner. The Commission had certain major issues as its mission for the oil-rich region including; leverage for a review of the revenue allocation formula for the oil producing States; completion of the East – West Road; Coastal Rail Line from Calabar to Lagos; Niger Delta energy corridor; Deep Water Seaport in Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Delta states; as well as dredging and rehabilitation of the Port Harcourt and Calabar Ports.

Unlike the SENECA that is private sector driven, BRACED economic platform was the idea of the then serving governors of the six states in the South South. It had no trace of any backward integration, and was seen as a political tool that had no linkages with other stakeholders in the region. BRACED completely ostracized the corporate sector, especially the oil firms, the local leaders and professionals from the idea of regional economic integration. Indeed, residents in the Niger Delta area largely saw BRACED Commission as another platform of political jamboree and jaw – jaw of the governors of the region. Besides, BRACED faced a credibility crisis so early as few months after inauguration, three of the founding governors were found guilty by the law courts of financial impropriety, smacking off insinuation of financial recklessness. The BRACED Commission only exists in name so far, as it has no functional website, and its headquarters in Port Harcourt existed only by the name on the signpost. The selection of former Governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo State as its Chairman further put the Commission into coma with the glaring political differences and negative exchanges that existed between his All Progressive Congress (APC) political platform and the other States in the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Like SENECA, neither the governments nor the private stakeholders took the Commission seriously.

The Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission has not fared better in terms of proper funding and interests of governments and the private sector. DAWN Commission established in July 2013 is the brainchild of governments of the six States in the South West geopolitical zone - Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. The Commission has a functional headquarters in Cocoa House, Ibadan, run by a Director – General, and focused on issues of economic and infrastructural development, building inclusive institutions, social and human development, and homeland affairs. It identified agriculture, technology and tourism as focal areas. However, the DAWN Commission is struggling to remain relevant to the regional development of the South West because it has taken the back seat in the attention of governments of the focal states, and shunned by the corporate bodies, private entrepreneurs, as another government white elephant idea.

It has become obvious that the successive governors in the three regions have not followed up on the ideas of their predecessors, making the regional economic platforms – SENECA, BRACED and DAWN – victims of poor continuity in policies by governments. The private sector have also not keyed into the idea, as the major development partner – state governments – are missing in action.

## **4.0 Conclusion and recommendations**

### **4.1 Southeast regional development in perspective**

This sub-section is to summarize the critical issues, beyond the political rhetorics and grandstanding of the elite and youths, that have impacted on the regional development processes of the region.

#### **4.1.1 Deficit of collectivism in harnessing potentials**

The South East region is uniquely made up of homogeneous people and holds great promise for a collective road map to systematic development. From all indications and interviews, the elements of disunity amongst the people are stronger than the essential forces of integration. No doubt, the collective spirit to develop is in deficit from the various spheres of elite in the region, rather the spirit of individualism has been in high supply. The indigenes of the South East, either as a cultural input of republicanism in their traditional system, or high competitive nature of the citizens as a mode of socialization, have elevated individualism to an art on the platform of leadership and elitism. The cultural homogeneity of the inhabitants in the region takes the back seat on the altar of political differences and identity of states when regional developmental issues come into focus. The abysmal failure of the regional economic integration framework – SENEK – is a glaring example of how the political leadership in the five States of the region deeply distrust themselves, entrench individualism, disparage the private sector which drove the initiative, and play down on issues of collective concern.

In harnessing the huge potentials in economic development, leadership and prospects of being the food basket of Southern Nigeria, as well as in addressing the various challenges of erosion, unemployment and insecurity that confront the region, there has been the yawning gap of collectivism and unity of purpose amongst the Igbo elite. The direct consequence of this lack of synergy in purpose and interest in the collective well – being of the Ndigbo by their leaders is the high pitch insecurity and agitations by the youths, who rather see the Federal structure and leadership as the driver of the problems of the region. Despite the merits in the arguments of marginalization of the region by the federal government, this mental attitude is escapist and suits the narrative and selfish mode of the political, economic, traditional and professional elite who have benefitted from patronages at various times from the same federal system, without adequate backward integration.

#### **4.1.2 Preference for investments outside the region**

No doubt, the Igbos have huge investments across the country and off-shore. The position of Lagos as the commercial hub of Nigeria is incomplete without the massive contributions of the Igbos in the economy of the former capital of Nigeria. Besides, the dexterity of managing the largest market in the West African sub-region has not impacted on the region with home-based investments and developments. Dr Ifedi Okwenna, the Director General of the World Igbo Summit held in October 2016, opines that there was a progressive disconnect between the region's political leadership, the business class, levels of community leadership, on the political economy of the Igbo nation, as the people of the South East invest more outside than in her homeland, and the foreign direct investments from the Igbos in diaspora attracted by the local leadership and intelligentsia are not located in the eastern heartland. What is not in short supply are ostentatious display of massive mansions and country homes and huge sums of money spent on public ceremonies, especially funerals and marriages.

This scenario has been blamed on the poor public governance ratings on critical issues of security of lives, property and investments in the region, driven by such serious factors of unemployment and value system of get rich quick mentality by the youths. The rising unemployment scenario in the region has led many youthful of Igbo to emigrate from their homeland and the country to seek better conditions of living. However, their remittances to the region have been unsafe, as their lives and investment in communities have been attacked and the investments destroyed by frustrated youths at the slightest disagreement over issues within their communities.

### 4.1.3 Youth population time bomb

The South East region is one of the most densely populated area, in terms of land mass and persons per square kilometres, in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It showcases very vibrant demographics of youths within the age bracket of 15 – 40 years, who constitute 43 per cent of the population of the region, according to the 2006 Census. This number of youths laced with the burden of unemployment worsened by the strains of economic recession and the rhetorics of marginalization constitute a time bomb against developmental strides if the five state governments do not quickly work with the private sector to enunciate short and long term plans on dousing the frustration amongst this age bracket. The youths in the region distrust the political class and traditional elite, and feel government exists as a corrupt repressive tool that caters for only certain political appointees and their families. The frustration drives the aggression in crimes, and other anti-social activities. The initiative to harness the huge youth energies into productive ventures is a call to duty for the development of the region, if not, the negative consequences could be serious for the peace and stability of the geopolitical zone.

## 4.2 Policy recommendations

### 4.2.1 Political Governance

- There has to be deliberate confidence building mechanisms between the political and traditional leaders and the youths to narrow the gap of suspicion and discontent from the people.
- Transparency and accountability in political governance at state and local government levels are essential to whittle down the corrupt practices in government, and build trust between the leaders and the electorates.

### 4.2.2 Economic Outlook

- The five state governments should deploy policy tools to create friendly environment to promote entrepreneurship and investments
- New tax policies to encourage Small and Medium scale Enterprises (SMEs) to survive the harsh economic and fiscal conditions prevalent in the country, arising from the economic recession.
- Operationalize the Onitsha Port to boost economic activities in the region and lower costs of goods
- Need for improved security in the region to encourage investors and businessmen to repatriate their capital back to Nigeria.

### 4.2.3 Infrastructural Development

- The Federal Government to release funds in the 2017 Budget for the rehabilitation of the many federal highways in the region.
- The need to prioritize the Second Niger bridge by the federal Government which is critical to the socio-economic well-being of the people in the region.
- The need for the state governments in the region to re-awaken the industrial invention and adaptation skills of the people, as exemplified during the Civil War period. The government should take the lead in harnessing the huge professional, academic and manufacturing talents of the Ndigbos and systematically change the focus of development in the region.

#### 4.2.4 Gully Erosion

- The magnitude and fury of the gully erosion demand Federal Government urgent intervention, along with international institutions
- Soil scientists and geologists need to conduct researches on how to prevent the sweeping erosion and guide the local communities

#### 4.2.5 Security

- There is urgent need to design government policies, in partnership with the private sector, to provide employment to the youths in the region, and encourage SMEs.
- The five states' governments must find a common strategy, and use the platform of the Office of the Zonal Police command as the clearing house of intelligence gathering and sharing for better security cover for the area.
- The states and the police should build confidence for community policing, and vigilante groups in communities for credible information and intelligence gathering.

#### 4.2.6 Regional Economic Platform

- The state government must show more interest in the venture through funding and high level contacts to build collective programmes and actions. There is urgent need to develop a road map for industrial growth and agricultural boom in the region.
- The private sector - driven regional economic initiative need more local and state sensitization to generate interest and cooperation

#### 4.2.7 Gender Development

- Obnoxious widowhood practices should be abrogated through the intervention and networking of government agencies, religious and civil society groups.
- Imposition of heavy penalties on families that continue to punish widows and deny them their human rights

#### 4.2.8 50 – Year “Marshal Plan”

Dubbed “Vision 2066 for the South East Region,” it is a comprehensive guidepost that has the potential of changing the socio-economic and technological face of the South East, if all stakeholders would cooperate sincerely. The 50 – year “Marshal Plan” drawn by the World Igbo Summit stated as follows:

- The South East develop their system and evolve them to the envy of others and become the most developed part of Africa with the highest GDP and Human Development Index;
- Greater majority of Igbo youths should chose to reside in their homeland gainfully employed and happy;
- Majority of their people must have invested in their homeland making it an important business , industrial and tourism hub in Africa;
- The South East should have the capacity to attract highest amount of foreign direct investment in agriculture, manufacturing and in the service industries;
- The people should believe in themselves, their enterprise, business, their products and services and their money allowed to circulate amongst themselves for up to ten levels thereby giving them the needed self empowerment;
- Their scientists , technologist, and engineers should look forward with hope believing that their discoveries and inventions shall not only be appreciated and rewarded , but also patented , developed and adapted by their own brothers for the development of Ala Igbo and mankind in general;
- A period when the political class in the zone should seek power not for the trappings of office but for service to the people and will do so honestly, transparently and without blemish;
- A period the children will have the courage, resources, networks and contacts both local and international to aspire and achieve their maximum potentials and ingrain their names in business , politics, governance and professional attainment including winning Nobel prize in science and engineering;

- A period when the people's history, culture and language shall be documented, preserved and spoken by all their children and the efforts of their heroes past and present remembered, cherished and appreciated; and
- A period when they shall achieve peace with their neighbours not from the barrel of gun, but out of their respect for what the people contribute to their own development and well-being.

## End notes

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our website [voicetothepeople.org](http://voicetothepeople.org)  
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### About Us

Voice to the People (V2P) is a project supporting vulnerable communities in Kaduna State and the Southeast region of Nigeria to hold service providers, local authorities and state government to account, take part in the decision-making that affects their lives and raise their voices to demand the rights and services to which they are entitled.

It is delivered by a consortium of national and state organisations, led by international development agency, Christian Aid. The programme began in 2013 in 12 of Anambra's 21 local government areas. It was extended in 2016 to cover Kaduna and the rest of the Southeast region, including the whole of Anambra.

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