



**MEDIA SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
A FOCUS ON THE SOUTH-EAST GEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This conceptual paper examines media security and sustainable development in southeast Nigeria. Insecurity is inimical to sustainable development. The government and the media has a role to play in ensuring the right atmosphere for sustainable development. Peace is important and the government and the people should be educated on the need for peace to enable the process of sustainable development. Peace cannot be sustainable in an atmosphere of insecurity. Peace is the constant in third world countries like Rwanda and Somalia making steady progress in all sphere of development. It is the responsibility of media professionals to work for peace and security and they can do it if they carry out their responsibility without fear or favour.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Media Security, Peace, Sustainable Development,

**Introduction**

The level of insecurity being witnessed in Contemporary Nigeria is very alarming (Oligbo, 2021). Hardly a day passes without media reports of people being abducted; people being killed; different kinds of 6gunmen and different ways of visiting violence on hapless citizens. Nigerians cannot use the highways without having their hearts in their mouths. Schools are stormed and students abducted for ransom. Churches and mosques are raided and citizens get killed or abducted for

ransom. The convoys of eminent personalities are ambushed. Farmers are slaughtered in their farms. Law enforcement agents are killed at their duty posts. Military forts are attacked and personnel abducted. Even a jet fighter had been downed by armed non state actors. Abductors set up quasi governments in some parts of the country and exact taxes from citizens. Nigeria appears to be at war without war being officially declared. The government, no matter how pretentious they want to be, is simply helpless. No meaningful development could be made in



such tension-soaked atmosphere. There are allusions to Nigeria being a failed state (Dobson, 2020) in some quarters. This is not without some justification.

### **Security: An Indicator of Good Governance**

Security is one major reason we have governments. Imagine a world without government (Chater, 2020). Lawlessness would be the norm. Protection of life and property would be compromised. Progress would be stalled. Humanity has always been driven by the quest to make progress. For this reason we have developed mechanisms to help society to function. One of such mechanisms is the institution of government. Why does society need government? Because society needs orderliness and the security of life and property in order to function (Head, 2019). It is the responsibility of government to ensure law and order and the protection of life and property. That is why we have the constitution and the laws. That is why we have law enforcement agencies. That is why we have the armed forces to protect the country from external aggression. A society without a government that is capable of providing the basic functions and responsibilities of a sovereign nation, such as defense, law enforcement, justice, education, or economic stability is regarded as a failed state (Longley, 2020). Insurgency and high crime rates are among the key factors that contribute to state failure. Do we have them in Nigeria? The answer is, yes.

An insurgency has been on since 2009 in the Northeast geopolitical zone. Armed non state actors have been rampaging and ravaging virtually all the states in Nigeria. We seem to have IDP (Internally Displaced people) camps in Northern Nigeria as a permanent feature, owing to disruptive attacks by armed non state actors. The

Nigerian central government seems not to have a handle on the situation. It appears the government is no longer able to guarantee the protection of the lives of the citizens. The insecurity in Nigeria appears to be reflective of what obtains in countries like Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria, which are classified as failed states. Nigeria since 1999 has been a democracy. Democracy is regarded as the best form of government. Why? The benefits it affords – good governance, safe and secure community, equality before the law, freedom to act, speak and think freely, respect for human dignity, peaceful resolution of conflicts, ability to hold elected representatives accountable, inter alia.

Have we had the government providing safe and secure country and the media holding elected representatives accountable to the people? The answer may not be affirmative, going by the present realities in Nigeria. Good governance is apparently elusive.

### **Security and sustainable development**

In 2015, member states of the United Nations adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The 16<sup>th</sup> goal stipulates: to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is the goal that directly has to deal with security (Buttanri, 2017).

Security, lexically speaking, is the quality or state of being secure; freedom from danger; freedom from fear and anxiety; the state of being protected from harm. Societies need security for their functions. It is ideal for the well-being of the citizenry. According to Dehdezi and Sardi (2016 p2091):



Public security is one of the main needs of a nation because dynamism in the path of science and spirituality, development and technology, economics and art is owed to Public Security. When individuals and society are faced with fair behavior; their characters and personalities are protected and respected; and their social rights are maintained, they feel peace and calmness in their hearts. Then, creativity and talents are flourished. Individuals then grow in the shadow of such safety and peace. As a result, the society will be dynamic. On the contrary, if individuals do not feel safe concerning important issues of life such as work, income, reputation, and social relations with society and government, they feel unrest and threatened.

Peace in any society is invariably tied to security. Security implies the presence of peace, safety, protection of human and physical resources, the absence of crisis, threats and violence (Otto & Ukpere, 2012). Security assures a society's wellbeing. Insecurity disrupts a society's well-being. This in a nutshell explains why security is essential to any societal developmental cause.

Sustainable development is the sustainable condition that allows the individual or population to develop and thrive (Ruggeri and Garcia-Garzon, 2020); it is the improvement in the wellbeing of the population of a state in a sustainable way. Without the people there can be no state. So

the centrality of people to the development of society necessitates that. It would not amount to oversimplification to say, there is no development without security and no security without development (Karov, 2018). Without peace, which stems from security, all the sustainable development we can ever envisage would be impossible to achieve (Bouzar, 2021).

Consider the IDPs in Northern Nigeria. How do families thrive in a less than ideal environment? How do children get educated? What about health care; how is it delivered? How do citizens that are displaced engage in economic activities to sustain livelihoods? In a secure state, they would have fared better. The media and government have roles to play in the pursuit of security for sustainable development. Whereas the government has the responsibility to ensure the protection of life and property the media's responsibility is to hold the government to account where they appear to fail in this responsibility.

### **The relevance of the media in the society**

The mass media has a duty and responsibility towards society and this why it is considered a vital part of any democracy. Our society thirsts for factual information – news that they can use. The mass media disseminates messages rapidly and on a daily basis and in doing so renders informational service in the society (Mpala, 2019).

According to Mashburn and O'Brien (2019), without journalism, the world would be ignorant. Professional journalism benefits society in some ways (Emma, 2019):

- **Surveillance:** The media keeps citizens informed of news and events. During crisis, mass media announcements offer warnings and



instructions. They are used by governments to give important updates to the people.

- **Correlation:** The media interprets the news for the public. This they do through commentaries and by tapping experts for their views.
- **Cultural transmission:** The media serve as transmitters of culture. They let the people know what are considered acceptable forms of behavior. People can embrace the norms that the media reports.
- **Education:** To inform is quite different from educating. The media gives us an array of non-news content like articles, editorials, columns which help us to have a complete idea about a subject.
- **Entertainment:** The mass media are wonderful entertainers. They utilize contents such as short stories, cartoons, films, sports and fashion shows to entertain the audience.

In addition to the aforementioned traditional functions of the media, the role of holding the government of the day to account is about the most powerful function of the media. There is a relationship between a free press and good governance (Deane, 2016).

The citizenry rely on the media to make informed decisions. An elected government official whose corruption is exposed by the media may never win an election where the system works. Why? The electorate would have been helped by the media to form an opinion against him. We now know that millions of doses of the Covid-19 vaccine meant for Nigeria have expired courtesy of the media. It is highly likely that those expired doses could have made their way to innocent Nigerians but for the professional intervention of the media.

Politicians without certificates were made known to us by the media. Without media reports we might never have known.

Most African governments are not afraid of the opinions of the people which they express in their homes and only get to hearing themselves, but they are afraid of the media publishing facts about government activities that may help the people to form unfavourable opinion against the government. This is why you see overzealous government officials clamping down on the media whenever unfavorable facts are out in the public domain courtesy of the media. In a situation where the media is dysfunctional and a government is not made accountable, tyranny might be the order of the day.

### **Insecurity: the Southeast now**

Long before the agitation for self-determination reached a crescendo, the Southeast was relatively peaceful; Anambra State was regarded as the safest state in comparison with other states in the Southeast and Nigeria at large. Fast forward to today and the Southeast geopolitical zone is a sorry picture of volatility. The overall picture of insecurity in the wider Nigerian society also applies in this region now.

The spectre of insecurity became so bad prior to the past gubernatorial elections in Anambra State that citizens had to flee to relatively peaceful neighboring states or got out of the country, altogether. Operatives of the Police, Army, Civil Defense and the Navy lost their lives in mysterious hit-and-run attacks. Similarly, prominent citizens lost their lives in attacks attributed by the government to members of self-determination groups in the Southeast. People's livelihoods were affected in many ways by lockdowns occasioned by orders from non-state actors. The ding-dong tussle between the forces for agitation for self-



determination in the Southeast and the federal and state governments did not help matters. Both the citizens and military personnel drafted to secure life and property got killed by armed non state actors or other shadowy groups whom the media branded unknown gunmen. It has got to the level that the zone had become militarized. Check points manned by menacing military personnel dapple the landscape. The Southeast appears to be the most militarized zone in the country. It would appear that the more the vice-like grip of the military is turned on the region, the more the resistance coming from shadowy groups. Some school of thought in the Southeast believes the zone is marginalized and the spate of insecurity recently witnessed in the region was just orchestrated to find a reason to “invade” it. In other words, give a dog a bad name in order to hang it.

The people of the Southeast are known for their industry and commercial prowess. They enjoy living their lives unfettered. In a militarized situation where movement is curtailed for some reasons and they are not able to move from point A to point B without harassment by security operatives or losing their lives for the filmiest reasons, they are bound to suspect the motives of the central government who deployed troops to their region and still maintains such presence, even though there are worse cases of violence and criminality in the northern region of the country. No meaningful development can go on in an atmosphere of uncertainty which seems the reality in the Southeast now. Businesses, especially in commercial cities like Onitsha, are losing revenue due to the uncertainties on the streets. Schools are run unconventionally most times to beat the uncertain security situation in the Southeast. At a point some schools would resume on Tuesday instead of Monday after the weekend because of

threats by non-state actors, who had made Monday a “special holiday”.

Nigeria is a constitutional democracy. The rule of law should be the norm. There is no place for arbitrariness in a government by the people and for the people.

The government needs to rethink the “fire for fire” approach in tackling insecurity in the Southeast. There are criminals and there are innocent citizens in this region and both are made to suffer under the ire of the central government. In a democracy, the government is accountable to the people and not the other way. The destructiveness on the part of criminal elements in the Southeast and the overkill response of the central government cannot give the Southeast a clear path to sustainable development.

#### **Reporting security for sustainable development: what the media can do**

Most journalists are journalists by training and activists by conduct. It’s wrong. You choose to be one. In the face of the insecurity in the Southeast, which largely has to do with the self-determination drive by some non-state actors, journalists, especially those from the region, might be tempted to engage in activism in support of their people. There is nothing wrong in being an activist, but for a professional with a code of conduct, it is unprofessional to report from the standpoint of an activist. It negates objectivity and you might end up aggravating the already bad security situation in the Southeast by your reports. For instance, what CNN do now is not journalism but activism. If you have had the privilege to watch Don Lemon, Chris Cuomo, Jim Acosta or Brian Stelter, you would understand what we mean.

Violence has a selling point. Negative news facts seem to be the Editor’s choice. That is



why it seems the media prioritize reports verging on violence. Bad news is good news for the media; and to some extent good news is no news. The media seems to thrive on scandals, wars and the like. You can see the spate of news on the Covid-19 virus and its variants. The hype is on, daily. The audience take away from negative reports is usually that of hopelessness. In reporting insecurity in the Southeast, the media should learn to leave what sells and go for what helps. The media should report insecurity, but with a sense of responsibility; knowing that you have power through your reports to make a grim situation worse or change a grim situation for the better.

The Southeast is not the Wild West. Decent people live here. The media should be conscious of the sensibilities of the people in reporting insecurity. These are intelligent people who can see through manipulation and reality. Don't tell them their region is on fire when they know it's not. You will lose credibility in their eyes. The media should report the root causes of the perceived insecurity, the solutions proffered by security experts and the people at the receiving end. They can let this dominate their news commentaries and the opinion pieces they publish.

The media should avoid the CNN syndrome – reporting untruth in the face of bare facts. What we call inverse journalism. In August of 2020, CNN reported Kenosha protests with a caption that read: “fiery but mostly peaceful” during a live broadcast that showed a building fully engulfed in flames. This was not just playing on people's intelligence but plain stupidity. Don't get trapped in this kind of journalistic faux pas. The media should not misinform through their choice of words. The choice of words can show on which side of the divide you are, thereby calling your objectivity into question.

The media makes use of “Farmer-Herder” clash. Is there really a farmer-herder clash? Do farmers in Benue state brandish Ak-47 and engage in fire fights with herders? Do we have gun-toting farmers in the Southwest fighting with armed herdsmen? Do we have gun-toting farmers in the Southeast fighting with armed herdsmen?

Are they bandits? Are they terrorists? There is so much fuss around this. There is a struggle in what to call criminals. If the media chooses to report criminal armed non state actors as bandits and unarmed non state actors as terrorists, then the side they are is clear.

The Southeast is militarized and the media describes it as “show of force”. This can clearly be misunderstood as occupation. You hear about unknown gunmen. How unknown? Where are the investigations to ascertain who they really are? If you can't do the investigation, why not report them as gunmen? Why the unknown? It shows that you're not doing investigative journalism enough. The choice of word by the media could pacify some people and alienate some other people. Responsible media reporting of insecurity can help influence minds towards social cohesion instead of disruption. In this context, sustainable development could be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

Insecurity is inimical to sustainable development. Therefore every effort should be made by state actors to ensure the right atmosphere for development. The government has a role to play; likewise the media. It would be detrimental to the society for any party to shirk their responsibilities. The government and the citizens need to be educated on the need for peace to enable the process of sustainable development. Peace is all important. It is the constant in the countries that are making



steady progress in all spheres of development. Rwanda is on a rapid and sustained developmental course because of peace and security. Somalia has flashes of development, especially instituted by enterprising nationals in Diaspora, but this can't be sustainable in an atmosphere of

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insecurity. The same is the Nigerian situation; particularly, the Southeast geopolitical zone.

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