

Restructuring the Agricultural System and Actualisation of Sustainable Food Security in South East Nigeria

By

Okoli, Rowland C.,^a Nnamani Kevin S.^b & Ugwuozor, Samuel^a

^aDepartment of Political Science & International Relations,
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu
Email: chukwumaroland@yahoo.com **Phone:** 08034304649

^bDepartment of Political Science,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu
Email: idennamani@yahoo.com

Abstract

Existing studies on restructuring in Nigeria have focused on restructuring the political structure while little attention is paid to the material base on which the political structure rests. This study examined the material condition that engender the clamour for restructuring and also undermine the political will to restructure. Specifically two research questions were interrogated, viz: does the 1978 land use decree engender imbalance in Nigeria's agricultural system? how does the imbalance in Nigeria's agricultural system engender inequity among the various geopolitical regions in the country? The study was anchored on the theory of accumulation by dispossession while documentary method of data collection was adopted. The study therefore, argued that the 1978 land use decree dispossessed the states in South East Nigeria the capacity to growth agricultural wealth for the development of the region, while some of the oil producing states of the zone were robbed of lands for agricultural activities. This undermine agriculture in South East Nigeria and threatens sustainable food security in the zone. In the light of the findings, the study recommended that restructuring in Nigeria should begin with the agricultural system which will address the material basis required for eventual political restructuring.

Keywords: Agriculture; Restructuring; Food Security; South East; Political Structure

1.0 Introduction

The history of south east Nigeria is traced to the old Eastern Region which was an administrative region in Nigeria following the division of the colony of Southern Nigeria in 1954 (see figure 1). The first capital of the region was Calabar but was later moved to Enugu with Umuahia as the second capital. The old Eastern Region was divided officially in 1967 into three new states – the East Central State, Rivers State and South Eastern State. These three states were temporary referred to Biafra following the secessionist move and the civil war that broke out between 1967 and 1970. With the end of the civil war and successive military balkanization of Nigeria, what we today call South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria is made of five Igbo dominated states.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing Eastern Region As At 1960/1963



Economically, agriculture and commerce had been the mainstay of South East Nigeria. Trade in palm produce was a major occupation and significant source of revenue in the economy

of Eastern Nigeria. Palm tree provided fronds for roofing of houses in the villages, palm wine for drinking and palm kernels as source of foreign exchange income. The global political economy of the post World War II saw the price of palm oil soar and demand skyrocketed such that by 1954, Palm produce generated an income of 54 million pounds. Employment in farming and agriculture was a significant source of income for many residents engaged in yam farming and fishery. In the 1960s, the government focused on the following cash crops rubber, cocoa and palm in order to increase the output of cash crops and revenue. Accordingly, the government established farm settlements in places like Igbariam, Ulonna, Erei and Uzo-Uwani in the South East so as to encourage agriculture. Generally, in the first decade following Nigeria's independence, there was a kind of division of labour in production of palm products. Thus, oil and kernels were mainly produced in the south, kernels in larger quantities were produced in the west than in the east, the main oil exports, however, used to come from the east (Stokke, 1970).

The South East region was one of the richest regions owing to the rich agricultural activities and commerce in the region. However, the discovery of oil and the promulgation of the Land Use Decree of 1978 turned the tide against the region and marked the large scale commencement of accumulation by dispossession which saw the genesis of poverty in the South East. Available evidence reveal that, between 1985 and 2010 the South East Zone had the lowest level of poverty relative to other geo-political zones in Nigeria (ActionAid, 2015 p. 24), but by 2013, the zone has become the 4th poorest zone in the country after the three northern zones (see World Bank, 2016). This rising incidence of poverty is connected to the dwindling agricultural fortunes in the South East region occasioned by the land use policy that undermines small holder farmers through land dispossession and cattle invasion.

Furthermore, the rising incidence of poverty characterised also by growing food insecurity has contributed to the clamour for restructuring the Nigerian state. Much of the calls for restructuring have focused on restructuring the political system through strategies such as creating additional states in the South East, granting local government autonomy, return to regional autonomy and more recently, resurgence of secessionist agitation. Existing studies have also focused on analysing the practicality or otherwise of this political and fiscal restructuring by advancing various strategies to restructure Nigeria politically and fiscally (see Ibeanu, Orji & Iwuamadi, 2016). Much as these studies are analytically germane, they fail to address the economic base that underpin the political substructure of the Nigerian state.

This study intervenes to make a case for restructuring the agricultural system in Nigeria starting from the land use system with a view to addressing sustainable food security in South East Nigeria. It is the position of this study that achieving sustainable food security in South East Nigeria is key to returning the zone to the path of sustainable development and claiming its first position in wealth creation in Nigeria.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of accumulation by dispossession as developed by Karl Marx but extended and popularized by scholars such as Harvey (2003), Thompson (2014). The theory is a derivative of the Marxian analysis of primitive accumulation which Marx designated as a transitional but necessary stage in the development of capitalism. In elaborating theory of accumulation by dispossession, Harvey (2003, p. 145) noted that:

Accumulation by dispossession involves the commodification and privatisation of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights . . . ; the commodification of labour power and the suppression of

alternative (and indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets . . .

Hence, the basic propositions of the theory including:

- Taking land out of collective or communal production remains central to accumulation
- through dispossession and this process also involves the expropriation of many other means of production.
- Capital can forcefully takes over means of production from the peasants. The process of proletarianization, entails a mix of coercions and of appropriations of precapitalist objects of labour and labour power on the part of those being proletarianized.
- Accumulation by dispossession entails of process of releasing assets (including land) at low cost so as to be predated upon by overaccumulated capital for turning them into profit. As noted by Marx, it this entailed taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation
- The state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes because the transition to capitalist development was and continues to be vitally contingent upon the stance of the state. Thus, Displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat has accelerated in countries.

The theory of accumulation by dispossession therefore adequately explain the rationale and process through which the federal government of Nigeria appropriated lands from old eastern Nigeria, expropriated the peasants and proleterianized them. It explains how all these processes of accumulation by dispossession orchestrated by the Nigerian state has continued to undermine

agriculture in south east which was one of the richest regions prior to this appropriation. The result of this accumulation by dispossession is a generational clamour for restructuring the Nigerian state by the south easterners.

3.0 The 1978 Land Use Decree and Dispossession in South East Nigeria

In Nigeria as in other Africa countries, land takes up importance as a commodity for daily use for many purposes. For several decades, land has continued to influence the lives of Nigerians socially, economically and politically (Famoriyo, undated). The process of using land and land resources by various social forces has continued to shape the contours of the Nigerian state especially as it concerns various groups in the state. Hence, following the discovery of oil and the need by the Nigerian state to ensure adequate control over the oil resources by dispossession the original inhabitants of the land, the federal government of Nigeria in 1978 promulgated the Land Use Decree. The central objectives of the decree are as follows:

- To facilitate rapid economic and social transformation of the country through a rationalization of land use.
- To enable State Governments bring about proper control and administration of land for the benefit of their people,
- To curb the incidence of rising land prices arising from activities of speculators particularly in urban areas,
- To remove a main cause of social and economic inequality,
- To provide an incentive to development by providing easy access to land for the State and the people.

Essentially, the decree vests all land in the urban areas of each state in the Military Governor of that state while rural lands are vested in the Local Governments exercising jurisdiction in the particular areas. In the urban areas, the decree provides for the establishment of a Land Use Allocation Committee to advise the Military Governor generally on matters relating to control and management of urban lands. The Committee is also to advise on issues such as revocation of rights of occupancy, compensation, resettlements, and soon.

In the rural areas, a Land Allocation Advisory Committee advises the local government generally on issues relating to effective management of land. The Governor is empowered to grant statutory rights of occupancy, to any person for ail purposes, and to issue certificates of occupancy, levy rents, impose penalties, extend, curtail or waive conditions pertaining to statutory rights of occupancy in the urban areas.

On the other hand, in the rural areas, local governments are empowered to grant customary rights of occupancy to individuals or organisations for agricultural, residential and other purposes. Customary grants are however limited to 5,000 ha for grazing land. Owners of developed land were to receive certificates of occupancy while owners of land undeveloped before March 29, 1978 were limited to half a hectare of land (1.25 acres) as a maximum. With the Decree in place, lands may be compulsorily acquired in Nigeria by Federal or State Governments, Local Governments, Local Government authorities or statutory bodies vested with the powers of compulsory acquisition. The process of compulsory acquisition has been defined as the coercive taking of private lands (individual or communal) or estates and interests in those lands for public purposes. The Federal Government is empowered to exercise these powers all over the Federation. But the object of acquisition must be for public purpose which was defined to mean land required for rural or urban development generally (Famoriyo, undated).

Essentially, what the Land Use Decree did was to take over land from the peasants and hand over to the wealthy people and companies. The expropriation is usually impossible for the peasants to contest. For example, Section 3(8) of the decree provides that “no court shall have jurisdiction to inquire into any question concerning the amount or adequacy of any compensation paid or to be paid under the decree” (Ibeanu, 2003, p. 131).

4.0 Land Use Decree, Dispossession and Clamour for Restructuring in South East Nigeria

This section examines the impact of the land use decree on the South East region particularly as it concerns dispossession of smallholder farmers of their land resources. The section ends with the various strategies adopted to call for restructuring in South East Nigeria.

The effects of compulsory acquisition on smallholders are:

- It dislocates their production programmes on the land.
- It is disruptive on the social life of farmers' families.
- The farmer may have to be moved to less-fertile lands thus affecting the level of productivity per acre/hectare.
- Delay in payment of compensation money is detrimental to the welfare of farmers.
- Even when compensation has been paid, its inadequacy constitutes a major income problem for the farmer.

Apart from these effects, lands acquired from farmers in the oil-producing areas and given to oil companies have had the following effect on smallholder farmers:

- Unemployment of aged farmers.
- Destroys soil fertility in some rural areas.
- Resultant high cost of living for farmers.

- Inadequate maintenance of lands carrying pipelines (Famoriyo, undated).

Generally, due to the decree, the South East region experienced massive land expropriation by the government at federal and state level. For example, in old Anambra state, the Anambra River Basin Authority alone expropriated about 10,000 hectares of land from peasants in 1986. The World Bank, elites and other private companies equally expropriated vast lands from the local farmers (Ibeanu, 2003, p. 132).

4.1 The clamour for restructuring in South East

Although, the clamour for restructuring by Ndi-Igbo is not new, recent years have seen resurgence of this clamour taking various forms. These various forms of call for restructuring is categorized into two as analyzed below.

4.1.1 Clamour through the Ohanaeze Socio cultural body

Since its formation in 1976, Ohanaeze has continued to serve as a tool for mobilization of the Igbo people not just for political purposes but for creating awareness and pursuit of economic and cultural interest of the people. For instance, the group brought a petition before the Oputa Panel of inquiry on human rights violations in which they elaborated how the government of Nigeria attempted to exterminate the Igbo nation during the civil war, the continued marginalization of the Igbo people even after the war and also requested for compensation from the government for the pogrom orchestrated by the government of Nigeria. Even though, no compensation was obtained after presenting the petition to the Panel, the group was able to create awareness and further heightened since nationalism among the Igbo people.

Despite the republican nature of the Igbo society as demonstrated by the organization and activities of the Ohanaeze, it is also important to note that prominent among the agitations and

contention by the group are: (a) the call for return to regionalism where all the South East and South South states would return to the old Eastern region; (b) the contention by some Igbo elites that most ethnic minorities in the South-East and South-South (especially Rivers and Delta States) which today attempt to claim different identity were originally Igbo and should regard themselves as such. These agitations and contentions are all indicative of intention of the Ohanaeze to create a monolithic Igbo nation where everyone is seen as ‘Igbo citizen’, appropriate the old Eastern region including most of the oil rich states in the Niger Delta where the hegemony of Igbo citizens over other minority ethnic groups would be maintained as was in the pre-independence era (Mbaeze, Okoli & Okonkwo, 2016).

4.1.2 Radical Clamour through youth dominated groups

In 1999, Ralph Uwazuruike formed the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) with the objective of actualizing the secession of the Igbo from Nigeria. By September 2010, a faction of MASSOB formed the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) which later metamorphosed to Biafran Zionist Front (BZF). The activities of BZF were stalled following the arrest and detention of its leaders including Benjamin Igwe Onwuka in March 2014 (Ibeanu, Orji & Iwuamadi, 2016).

IPOB emerged in 2012 and adopted the strategy of reaching out to people through its London-based Radio Biafra station with a campaign for an independent state of Biafra (Amnesty International, 2016). The movement gained popularity and international attention following the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of IPOB and Director of Radio Biafra on 19th October 2015. Since the formation of IPOB, the success of the movement in attracting much supporters and

adherents to its fold could by adopting more aggressive strategies like demonstrations (Okoli, 2018).

5.0 Strategies for restructuring the agricultural system for sustainable food security in South East, Nigeria

A well structured agricultural system provides opportunities to turn rural poverty and stagnation into development

- **Tripartite Partnership Between Government, Communities and Private Sectors in South East Nigeria:** The governors of south eastern states under the South East Governors' Forum (SEGF) should partner with the communities and private sectors to engage in large scale agriculture in the zone.
- **Strengthening Cooperative Farming through Mechanization and Funding:** Nigeria has about 79 million hectares of arable land, of which 32 million hectares are cultivated. Over 90% of agricultural production is rain-fed. Smallholders, mostly subsistence producers account for 80% of all farm holdings. Both crop and livestock production remain below potentials.
- **Securitization of Farmlands:** The federal government together with the state governments should set up agriculture security task force to security farmlands across the zone against the increasing activities of herdsmen.

Conclusion

The study examined the clamour for restructuring in Nigeria particularly by the Ndi-Igbo of South East and noted that the call for restructuring is connected to the deterioration of the material base in the zone. Specifically, the increasing neglect agriculture in the zone has contributed to the

increasing poverty in the zone and has aroused deep sense of dissatisfaction with the current political structure. The study notes that while the call for political restructuring is commendable, emphasis should be on restructuring the agricultural system to improve productivity and ensure sustainable food security in the zone.

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