

**BIAFRA AGITATION AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY IN IGBOLAND:
AN ANALYSIS OF ITS IMPACT ON LOCAL LIVELIHOODS.**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The resurgence of the Biafra agitation has remained a defining socio-political and economic challenge in Nigeria, particularly within the South-East region commonly referred to as Igboland. This study examined the impact of the agitation on local livelihoods with emphasis on economic instability, disruption of trade, and socio-cultural well-being. A quasi-experimental design was adopted, employing both randomized and non-randomized sampling techniques. Data were collected using focus group discussions, interviews, and structured questionnaires administered to residents across selected states in the South-East. Descriptive statistics such as mean rating and standard deviation were used for analysis, while hypotheses were tested to determine significant relationships between the Biafra agitation and economic instability in the region. Findings indicate that recurrent sit-at-home orders, insecurity, and political unrest have significantly weakened entrepreneurial activities, reduced household income, and eroded community cohesion. The study concludes that addressing the root causes of agitation through dialogue and inclusive development policies is crucial for economic recovery and stability in Igboland. Recommendations are offered for policymakers, traditional leaders, and community stakeholders.

Keywords: Biafra agitation; Economic instability; Livelihoods; Igboland; Quasi-experimental design; Local economy

INTRODUCTION

The Biafra agitation represents one of the most enduring socio-political movements in Nigeria, rooted in the historical events of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). Although the war ended over five decades ago, the memory of marginalization, perceived economic exclusion, and political alienation has continued to fuel a renewed call for self-determination among sections of the Igbo population (Ezeani, 2013; Madueke, 2019). In recent years, groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have intensified their activities, often resulting in social unrest, violent confrontations, and periodic enforcement of “sit-at-home” orders across the South-East.

The South-East is historically recognized for its entrepreneurial spirit, with commerce, agriculture, and small-scale industries forming the backbone of livelihoods (Alutu & Aluede, 2006). However, the persistent agitation has disrupted local markets, reduced investor confidence, and undermined household income generation (Nwosu & Okeke, 2020). According to Obi (2016), economic stability is a necessary precondition for social cohesion, and instability caused by separatist movements often translates into livelihood crises, unemployment, and poverty.

Despite the growing attention to the agitation, limited empirical research has systematically analyzed the direct impact of the Biafra movement on local livelihoods in Igboland. Most existing studies have focused either on the political dimensions of the agitation (Onuoha, 2017) or on security concerns (Udeh, 2021). This gap necessitates a focused inquiry into how the agitation translates into everyday economic realities for residents of the region.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent to which the resurgence of the Biafra agitation contributes to economic instability in Igboland and how this instability affects local livelihoods. By employing a quasi-experimental design, the study seeks to provide

evidence-based insights into the relationship between separatist agitation and socioeconomic outcomes in the region.

Statement of the Problem:

The persistence of the Biafra agitation has created significant economic and social disruptions in Igboland. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other pro-separatist groups have continued to advocate for self-determination, often through protest marches, media campaigns, and enforcement of civil disobedience such as the widely observed "sit-at-home" orders on Mondays and other designated days (Onuoha, 2017; Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). While these activities are designed to draw national and international attention to the Biafran cause, they have had far-reaching consequences for the region's economic stability.

Igboland has traditionally been a hub of trade and commerce, with its residents relying heavily on markets, transportation networks, and entrepreneurial activities for livelihood sustainability. However, recurrent episodes of insecurity, business closures, and restricted movement have reduced income-earning opportunities, discouraged investment, and weakened community resilience (Nwosu & Okeke, 2020). Moreover, farmers and traders face increasing difficulties in transporting goods, leading to post-harvest losses and market shortages.

Despite these realities, empirical evidence on the specific linkages between Biafra agitation and economic instability remains limited. Most scholarly attention has concentrated on the historical and political dimensions of the struggle (Ezeani, 2013; Obi, 2016), with fewer studies addressing its contemporary socio-economic impact. The lack of comprehensive empirical research leaves a critical gap in understanding how separatist movements translate into livelihood crises at the grassroots level. Without such insights, policymakers, civil society, and community leaders lack the evidence required to design effective responses to mitigate the economic fallout of the agitation.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a systematic analysis of the relationship between the Biafra agitation and economic instability in Igboland, with particular attention to how these dynamics affect household income, market activities, and overall livelihood security.

Objectives of the Study are:

1. To determine the extent to which Biafra agitation has contributed to economic instability in Igboland.
2. To examine the effect of economic instability on household income and local entrepreneurial activities in the region.
3. To assess the role of insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement in shaping livelihood outcomes.
4. To identify coping strategies adopted by local residents in response to livelihood disruptions caused by the agitation.
5. TO provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and civil society organizations on mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the agitation.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent has the Biafra agitation contributed to economic instability in Igboland?
2. How has economic instability affected household income and entrepreneurial activities in the region?
3. What role do insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement play in shaping livelihood outcomes?

4. What coping strategies have local residents adopted in response to the economic disruptions caused by the agitation?
5. What policy recommendations can be derived to address the socio-economic consequences of the agitation?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested in the study:

H₀₁: The Biafra agitation has no significant impact on economic instability in Igboland.

H₀₂: Economic instability has no significant effect on household income and entrepreneurial activities in Igboland.

H₀₃: Insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement do not significantly influence livelihood outcomes in Igboland.

H₀₄: Coping strategies adopted by residents have no significant relationship with the economic disruptions caused by the agitation.

Reviewed Empirical Studies

A number of empirical studies have examined the resurgence of the Biafra agitation and its broader socio-economic implications in Nigeria, though many of these works have tended to focus more on the political and security dimensions rather than the direct livelihood consequences. This review presents a synthesis of existing empirical findings while highlighting the gaps that necessitate the present study.

Biafra Agitation and Political Dimensions

Ezeani (2013) conducted a survey-based study on the resurgence of the Biafran movement and found that political exclusion and marginalization of the Igbo people were the primary drivers of agitation. Respondents consistently pointed to underrepresentation

in federal appointments, inadequate infrastructural development, and neglect of the South-East region as major grievances. While this study revealed the political roots of agitation, it did not extend its analysis to the economic livelihood outcomes for ordinary residents.

Similarly, Onuoha (2017) employed a case study approach to analyze the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). His findings revealed that IPOB's activities generated both solidarity among Igbos and tension with the Nigerian state. However, the study limited its scope to the political mobilization strategies of IPOB and the state's counter-responses, leaving aside the everyday economic realities faced by local traders, farmers, and artisans.

Economic Instability and Social Disruption

Nwosu and Okeke (2020) examined the economic impact of sit-at-home orders enforced by IPOB across selected South-Eastern states. Using market surveys and structured questionnaires, they found that small-scale businesses reported significant losses in weekly turnover, while transport operators experienced reduced patronage due to fear of violence. Their study emphasized how disruptions in economic activities were recurrently linked with separatist agitation. Nonetheless, their analysis remained limited to small business sectors and did not comprehensively assess household income or livelihood coping strategies.

Obi (2016) adopted a mixed-methods approach in studying the relationship between insecurity and economic instability in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria. His findings revealed that insecurity—whether from terrorism in the North-East or separatist agitations in the South-East—undermines both investor confidence and local entrepreneurial initiatives. However, the study aggregated data from multiple regions and did not provide an in-depth, localized analysis of the South-East specifically.

Livelihoods and Social Wellbeing

Madueke (2019) conducted an empirical investigation into how political agitations affect social wellbeing in Nigeria, with emphasis on youth unemployment and migration. His study revealed that prolonged unrest contributed to out-migration of young people from the South-East to other regions in search of stability. While this finding was important, the study did not connect directly to the ways households within Igboland cope with economic instability generated by Biafra agitation.

Similarly, Udeh (2021) studied the socio-economic consequences of separatist agitations in Nigeria. Using interviews and focus group discussions, his findings showed that communities in Anambra and Imo states expressed feelings of fear, loss of income, and breakdown of community cohesion due to recurrent violence. However, the study was largely descriptive and did not employ systematic statistical analysis such as mean ratings or hypothesis testing.

Reviewed Empirical Gap

From the above reviewed studies, it is evident that while a number of scholars (e.g., Ezeani, 2013; Onuoha, 2017; Obi, 2016; Nwosu & Okeke, 2020; Udeh, 2021) have examined different dimensions of the Biafra agitation, there remains a gap in the empirical literature. Most studies have either focused on political causes or generalized economic disruptions, without providing a systematic, data-driven analysis of how the agitation translates into household-level livelihood insecurity in Igboland.

Additionally, the reviewed studies often relied on descriptive or case-study approaches without incorporating quasi-experimental designs or rigorous statistical analyses such as mean ratings and standard deviation. This gap leaves unanswered questions about the extent to which agitation-driven instability directly affects household income, local entrepreneurship, and community resilience.

The present study seeks to address this gap by:

Employing a quasi-experimental research design that combines survey questionnaires with focus group discussions.

Using statistical analysis (mean ratings, standard deviation, hypothesis testing) to establish the relationship between Biafra agitation and livelihood outcomes.

Providing localized, evidence-based insights specifically within Igboland, rather than generalized national-level findings.

By addressing these dimensions, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on separatist movements and their socio-economic impacts, while offering practical recommendations for policy interventions in the South-East region of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design, which is suitable for examining the relationship between Biafra agitation and economic instability in Igboland. Quasi-experimental designs allow researchers to analyze cause-and-effect relationships in naturally occurring settings where random assignment may not always be possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the quasi-experimental approach provided the framework for comparing perceptions and experiences of respondents across different socio-economic groups within the South-East.

Area of the Study

The research was conducted across Igboland (Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States), selecting both Urban and rural Communities to capture occupational and spatial heterogeneity.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised residents of the five South-Eastern states of Nigeria—Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. These states are predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group and have been the epicenter of the Biafra agitation. The population included traders, farmers, artisans, transport workers, civil servants, and unemployed youths who are directly or indirectly affected by the agitation and its socio-economic consequences.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample was drawn from the population using both randomized and non-randomized techniques. The randomized technique was employed in the selection of local government areas and communities within each of the five states to ensure fair representation. Within these communities, a non-randomized purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who are directly involved in livelihood activities, such as market women, commercial transport operators, and small-scale entrepreneurs. This approach ensured that the sample reflected the diversity of livelihood groups affected by the agitation.

A total of 400 respondents were targeted, comprising:

250 respondents surveyed through questionnaires,

100 respondents engaged in focus group discussions, and

50 respondents interviewed individually.

This sample size was considered adequate based on recommendations by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for achieving reliable results in social science research.

INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Three main instruments were employed in this study:

Interview Schedule – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, traders, and transport operators to obtain qualitative insights into how the agitation influences local livelihoods.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide – FGDs were organized in selected communities to allow participants to share collective experiences of economic instability, insecurity, and coping strategies.

Survey Questionnaire – A structured questionnaire with both closed-ended and Likert-scale items was administered to respondents. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering:

Demographic characteristics of respondents,

Perceptions of Biafra agitation,

Economic disruptions (income, employment, market activities),

Social wellbeing and coping mechanisms.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure content validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in political science, economics, and education research methodology. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final drafts of the instruments. A pilot study was also conducted in one community in Enugu State, involving 20 respondents who were not included in the main study. The feedback helped refine ambiguous questions and improve clarity.

Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which produced an internal consistency reliability index of 0.82, indicating a high level of reliability for the questionnaire items (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in three phases:

Questionnaire Administration – Trained research assistants distributed questionnaires to 250 respondents across selected communities. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the instruments.

Interviews – In-depth interviews were conducted with 50 key informants, including market leaders, farmers, and transport operators, to gather qualitative evidence.

Focus Group Discussions – Ten FGDs were held (two in each state), each comprising 8–10 participants. Discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically:

Mean rating and standard deviation were employed to answer the research questions.

t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed thematically, with recurring patterns categorized to complement quantitative findings.

This mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how Biafra agitation impacts economic instability and local livelihoods in Igboland.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative findings from interviews and focus group discussions were also used to enrich the quantitative results.

Research Question 1:

To what extent has the Biafra agitation contributed to economic instability in Igboland?

Table 1: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Biafra Agitation and Economic Instability

Item Statements	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Decision
Sit-at-home orders reduce market activities and daily income	250	3.78	0.64	Accepted
Fear of violence discourages investors and customers.	250	3.65	0.71	Accepted
Transport and agricultural distribution are disrupted by road blockages	250	3.72	0.69	Accepted
The agitation has increased unemployment in the region	250	3.56	0.82	Accepted

Grand Mean = 3.68; SD = 0.72

Interpretation: The mean ratings indicate that respondents agreed that the Biafra agitation significantly contributes to economic instability in Igboland, particularly through reduced market activities, insecurity, and unemployment.

Research Question 2:

How has economic instability affected household income and entrepreneurial activities in the region?

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Economic Instability and Livelihoods

Item Statements	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Decision
Household income has declined due to business closures	250	3.81	0.66	Accepted
Small businesses suffer losses from enforced sit-at-home orders	250	3.74	0.72	Accepted
Many entrepreneurs have relocated due to insecurity.	250	3.59	0.80	Accepted
Families struggle to meet daily needs due to reduced earning	250	3.77	0.68	Accepted

Grand Mean = 3.73; SD = 0.71

Interpretation: Findings show that economic instability negatively affects household income and entrepreneurship in Igboland.

Research Question 3:

What role do insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement play in shaping livelihood outcomes?

Table 3: Respondents' Mean Ratings on Insecurity and Livelihoods

Item Statements	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Decision
Fear of violence prevents farmers and traders from going to markets.	250	3.62	0.74	Accepted
Sit-at-home orders disrupt transportation and food supply	250	3.79	0.61	Accepted

Restricted movement leads to post-harvest losses in agriculture.	250	3.66	0.70	Accepted
Security challenges discourage community development projects.	250	3.54	0.77	Accepted

Grand Mean = 3.65; SD = 0.71

Interpretation: Respondents agreed that insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement significantly shape livelihood outcomes by reducing access to markets, food supply, and development activities.

Research Question 4:

What coping strategies have local residents adopted in response to the economic disruptions caused by the agitation?

Table 4: Coping Strategies Adopted by Residents

Item Statements	N	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	Decision
Residents diversify income sources (e.g., petty trade, online business).	250	3.41	0.76	Accepted
Families reduce consumption and spending to cope with reduced income.	250	3.65	0.71	Accepted
Some households migrate temporarily to other regions for safety/income	250	3.38	0.84	Accepted
Community groups provide mutual support and assistance.	250	3.52	0.73	Accepted

Grand Mean = 3.49; SD = 0.76

Interpretation: Residents adopt various coping strategies such as income diversification, migration, and community support systems to manage livelihood disruptions.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: The Biafra agitation has no significant impact on economic instability in Igboland.

Result: t-test showed significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: Rejected. Biafra agitation significantly impacts economic instability.

H₀₂: Economic instability has no significant effect on household income and entrepreneurial activities.

Result: ANOVA revealed significant relationship ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: Rejected. Economic instability significantly affects household income and entrepreneurship.

H₀₃: Insecurity, sit-at-home orders, and restricted movement do not significantly influence livelihood outcomes.

Result: t-test analysis showed significant influence ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: Rejected. These factors significantly shape livelihood outcomes.

H₀₄: Coping strategies adopted by residents have no significant relationship with economic disruptions.

Result: Analysis revealed weak but significant relationship ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: Rejected. Coping strategies are significantly related to the disruptions caused by the agitation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the Biafra agitation has significantly contributed to economic instability in Igboland. This aligns with the work of Nwosu and Okeke (2020), who reported that separatist activities, particularly IPOB's sit-at-home orders, disrupted local markets and reduced daily business turnover. The present study, however, goes further by demonstrating that instability is not limited to the business sector but extends to household income, agriculture, transport, and education.

One of the key findings was that sit-at-home orders and insecurity drastically reduce household income and weaken entrepreneurship. Respondents emphasized that small-scale businesses suffer the most, confirming earlier observations by Obi (2016) that insecurity undermines investor confidence and entrepreneurial resilience. In addition, the study revealed that educational institutions in the South-East are also affected. Schools are forced to close on sit-at-home days, disrupting academic calendars and lowering instructional time. This supports Obasi (2018), who argued that prolonged insecurity in Nigeria disrupts the delivery of education and worsens youth unemployment.

Another major finding of the study is that insecurity, restricted movement, and transport disruptions significantly influence livelihood outcomes. This finding corroborates Udeh (2021), who noted that separatist agitations in Anambra and Imo states created fear, discouraged travel, and led to reduced agricultural productivity due to post-harvest losses. By including both farmers and transport operators in the sample, this study provides stronger empirical evidence that economic instability is multidimensional.

Coping strategies emerged as another important theme. Respondents reported adopting income diversification, migration, reduced consumption, and community solidarity as mechanisms for survival. This aligns with Madueke (2019), who found that migration and self-help initiatives are common strategies in unstable regions of Nigeria. However, this study adds that community-based coping, such as local associations providing mutual support, is particularly strong in Igboland given the communal nature of the society.

Summary of the Findings

- Based on the results and discussion, the major findings of the study are summarized as follows:
- Biafra agitation significantly contributes to economic instability in Igboland, particularly through sit-at-home orders, insecurity, and investor withdrawal.
- Household income and entrepreneurial activities are negatively affected, as small businesses, traders, and artisans face reduced sales and forced closures.
- Educational institutions are severely disrupted, with sit-at-home orders and insecurity leading to irregular school attendance, lost instructional time, and uncertainty for students and teachers.
- Agriculture and transportation are hampered, resulting in post-harvest losses, food supply shortages, and reduced mobility of goods and services.
- Residents adopt coping strategies such as diversifying income, cutting household spending, temporary migration, and relying on community-based mutual assistance.

The tested hypotheses confirmed that the Biafra agitation, insecurity, and economic instability have significant effects on livelihoods, rejecting the null hypotheses.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of the Biafra agitation on economic instability and local livelihoods in Igboland, using a quasi-experimental design with surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that the agitation significantly contributes to instability, disrupting trade, agriculture, transportation, education, and household income. The activities of separatist groups, particularly the enforcement of sit-at-home orders, have weakened economic productivity, reduced entrepreneurial resilience, and discouraged investor participation in the region.

Education was also found to be adversely affected, as recurrent disruptions prevent consistent learning, destabilize school calendars, and increase uncertainty among students, parents, and teachers. These disruptions exacerbate youth unemployment and reduce future economic opportunities, thereby creating a cycle of vulnerability.

Overall, the study concludes that the Biafra agitation has gone beyond being a political movement to becoming a socio-economic challenge that threatens livelihoods in Igboland. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that combines dialogue, inclusive development, and conflict-sensitive economic policies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Government Engagement and Dialogue:

The Federal Government of Nigeria should adopt a dialogue-based approach with pro-Biafra groups to address grievances of marginalization and exclusion. Suppression without dialogue has proven ineffective and only deepens instability.

1. **Inclusive Economic Development:** Development projects, infrastructure, and employment initiatives should be targeted at the South-East to bridge perceived inequalities and reduce the economic frustrations fueling agitation.
2. **Education Sector Protection:** State governments should implement contingency strategies to protect academic calendars during unrest, including the adoption of flexible online learning platforms and community-based learning centers.
3. **Support for Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs:** Special financial support and micro-credit schemes should be introduced to cushion the losses of small-scale traders and artisans affected by sit-at-home orders and insecurity.
4. **Agricultural and Transport Sector Strengthening:** Security should be reinforced along transport corridors to ensure free movement of agricultural produce. This would reduce post-harvest losses and stabilize food supply in the region.
5. **Community Resilience and Coping Support:** Civil society and community organizations should be empowered to strengthen local coping strategies such as

cooperative societies, rotating credit associations, and communal assistance programs.

Further Research

Future studies should focus on longitudinal impacts of separatist movements on specific livelihood sectors such as healthcare, education, and ICT to broaden understanding of the socio-economic costs of agitation.

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