

Policing through the community in Nigeria: The missing link in security architecture

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ABSTRACT

This study examined policing through the community as a strategy of strengthening the security architecture of Nigeria. The study adopted a variety of theories such as citizen participation and the broken window to interrogate the subject matter. The study x-rayed some empirical studies on the perception of the Nigeria police by the public and also contextualized citizens' participation in community policing to situate the effectiveness of policing through the community. The study found out that policing through the community will improve intelligence gathering capacity of the security agencies in its fight against criminality and insurgencies in Nigeria. The study recommends that the present structure of the police should be decentralized

and also take measures to reinvent itself to change the negative perception of the public towards it.

Key words: Citizenship participation; community policing; insecurity; Nigeria Police; policing the community.

Introduction.

This study examined the consideration of policing through the community as a strategy in stemming the increased spate of insecurity in Nigeria occasioned by kidnappings, banditry, terrorism and other violent crimes. Although part 11 section 4 of the Nigeria Police Act (Police Act) summarized the duties of the police as the "prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order and the protection of life and property," it appears the Nigeria Police is overwhelmed in the performance of these duties.

Omenma and Hendricks (2018) explained that the criminal justice mode which finds expression in police methods is a better technique of combating crimes related to terrorism because the mode is driven by intelligence, a major ingredient for crime prevention. Intelligence, an information gathering process has its bedrock for its success on citizens' involvement and participation. Intelligence gathering by

the Nigeria police may be limited because of its poor image profile and perception by the public. It is believed that many Nigerians do not trust their police force. Empirical studies, Obarisiagbon and Omage (2018), Oluwasola (2016), Ajayi and Longe (2015), revealed that the public perception of the Nigeria police is poor with attendant trust deficit. The consequence of poor perception and trust deficit of the Nigeria police by the citizens is the poor harvest of intelligence and inadequate information. It is a truism that inadequate intelligence impacts negatively on crime prevention and detection. Could this be part of the challenges of the Nigeria police in stemming insecurity in Nigeria?

The Nigeria police as presently constituted, with its centralized operational structure, appear overwhelmed in carrying out its statutory duties of crime prevention and mitigation considering the increasing spate of insecurity in the country. Consequently,

the need for the consideration of further options of policing in Nigeria has become imperative. The objective of this study, therefore, is to examine if policing through the community as a strategy, will strengthen the security architecture of Nigeria with a view to stemming her security challenges.

"Policing through the community" is the involvement and participation of the citizens in the security arrangements of their communities by collaborating with the other formal security outfits, to secure their community space as opposed to "policing the community" which is a reactive and military inspired approach to crime fighting by formal security outfits. With the criminal justice mode, driven by police methods, the Nigeria police must necessarily reinvent itself by positive engagements and collaborations with the citizens to build trust and confidence across communities if it must harvest credible intelligence necessary for crime fighting and prevention.

The significance of community participation in policing cannot be over emphasized. Scholars have attested to the overarching importance of citizens' participation as the bedrock of policing through the community with the attendant harvest of credible intelligence

needed for crime prevention and mitigation. Arisukwu, Igbolekwu, Oye, Oyedepo, Asamu, Razak and Oyekola (2020) in their empirical study of community participation in crime prevention and control in rural Nigeria found out that the number of police officers in Nigeria country sides is inadequate to manage the security challenges at the local and rural areas in Nigeria. This finding finds expression in the successes of violent robbery attacks of banks in some rural communities in Nigeria. Akingboye (2021), recounted a successful bank robbery in the rural town of Ilara-Mokin, Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, in which three persons including a broadcast journalist were killed. In another *Guardian* news publication, NAN (2021), stated that a police constable was killed by robbers after attacking two banks in the rural community of Iree, Boripe Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. Akinyemi (2021), reported that over thirty persons were killed by dare devil armed men who carted away millions of Naira in a bank robbery in Offa, Kwara State, on the 5th of April 2018. These aforementioned incidences underscore the imperative of policing through the community.

The successes of policing through the community is predicated on the active

cooperation and involvement of the citizens. Various theories (Normative Sponsorship, Social Resource and Partnership security) are convergent on the primacy of the roles of citizen involvements and participation on the success of community policing (Tiedke et al 1975, Wong 2008 and Yero et al 2012, Rosenbuam 2003), and the broken window theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982), were considered in the study.

The paper highlighted the findings of some empirical studies on the police/public relations in Nigeria and also contextualized citizens' participation in community policing in parts of Nigeria. These include the "Ebube Agu" in the eastern part of Nigeria, "Amotekun" in the west, "Community volunteer guards" in Benue State, north central and the "Civilian Joint Task Force" in the north east of Nigeria.

Theoretical underpinnings

Policing through the community is necessary to strengthen the security architecture of any society. Policing is generally seen as the process and intervention that ensures the maintenance of law and order in the society. However, contemporary thoughts in community policing is premised on three core areas:

citizens' involvement, problem solving and decentralization. Citizens' involvement resonates with Normative Sponsorship Theory of Community Policing (Tiedke et al 1975). This theory posits that cooperation and the people's goodwill are conditions precedent and necessary factor for a harmonious community or society.

A more profound theory of community policing is the Social Resource theory by Wong (2008). The theory is premised on the functions of the police, the relationships between the police and the people and lastly, the reasons the people need the police. The social resource theory exempts and exonerates the State from the incidences of crime and criminality. Crimes and criminalities are acts of individuals that may have been challenged by lack and needs that are not met which may be occasioned by poverty or greed. The theory also posits that crimes and criminalities are aided by police inefficiency (Yero et al 2012). The social resonance theory sees the police as a social resource that ought to bridge some of the challenges of the people.

Another theoretical construct of community policing is that advanced by Wilson and Kelling (1982) in (Oliver 2000). The theory of the broken window. This theory is based on the assumption that if

a broken window is left unattended to, other broken windows may suffer similar fate of neglect. The broken window theory is aptly manifested in the lackadaisical handling of indiscipline and gaps in intelligence gathering among some police personnel by police authorities especially in some Third World countries. Intelligence gathering is a core element in crime prevention. Leaving gaps unattended to in the security circles will obviously lead to catastrophic security consequences in the society.

Omenma and Hendricks (2018) stated in their study that researchers have established a relationship between the issues around unfixed windows, no matter how minute might lead to subsequent occurrence of more serious crimes.

Omenma and Hendricks (2018) while highlighting the role of the police in combating incidences of terrorism on the society, identified two typologies of state counter terrorism strategies: the criminal justice mode and the war mode. While the war mode is generally plotted within the graph of military operations in states counter terrorism, the criminal justice mode is located and finds expression within the prism of the police. According to them, the latter is seen by

criminologists as superior to the former in combating terrorism. They posited that police processes and procedures avail the police system of ample intelligence needed for crime prevention and also in arresting criminals and their collaborators.

The success of community policing or policing through the community strategy for firming a society's security architecture will require citizens' participation as a necessary condition for its attainment. Community security arrangements is also a major factor for any successful effort toward community policing. According to Adefisoye (2017), community participation is the mechanism open to individuals in the community to ventilate or express their opinion and exert influence regarding political and social decisions concerning them. Anore, Martin and Lanmafakpotin (2006) cited in Adefisoye (2017), see citizens' participation as the process in which the generality of the citizens is part of, either on a voluntary or obligatory basis, individually or as a group with a view to influencing the decisions that affect themselves and the community.

Rosenbuam (2003) argued that state security groups need the collaboration of human resources from without to assist

them in solving the complex challenges of crime and disorder. He located this collaboration within the ambit of what he termed partnership security. Partnership security according to Rosenbuam (2003) can be attained through the formation of partnerships between the citizens and state security groups that can bring about clear distinctive but complementary skills and resources that will promote public safety.

Community participation is graphically plotted on the tangents of 'everyday security' by Omenma and Hendricks (2018). They posited that everyday security is situated within the realm of vigilante security formation with the singular objective of protecting and securing the community.

The established theoretical underpinnings of this study aptly demonstrate that policing through the community that is citizen driven will strengthen the security profile of Nigeria. The normative sponsorship theory, social resonance, partnership security and every day security theories established the need for cooperative and collaborative effort of the citizens in the security arrangements of any nation. The Nigeria Police Force that is charged with overseeing the activities of the citizens' security outfits should ensure

that all "broken windows" are fixed and promptly attended to. Consequently, the various theoretical blends of this study aptly capture the need for citizens' participation in their security arrangements and a harmonious relationship between the Police and the public.

Contextualizing citizen participation

Citizens' participation or citizens' policing as a strategy to enhance security cuts across boundaries and it is gaining traction in Nigeria. According to Njoku and Ogugbuaja (2021), the South East governors of Nigeria recently unveiled a citizens' driven security outfit they code-named "Ebube Agu" which in Igbo Language, literally means the 'fear of the lion'. With operational base in Enugu, South East of Nigeria, the security outfit is charged with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating the activities of vigilante outfits across the five eastern states. The governors explained that the security outfit will be under the direct operational supervision of the Nigeria police. Abiodun (2021), reported that "Ebube Agu" is charged with creating awareness, intelligence gathering, become a source of security alarm, exchange intelligence in seamless manner, checkmate crime in the eastern states,

mitigate attacks on communities and prevent loss of lives and properties.

"Amotekun", the Southwest security outfit was established by the governors of the south west states of Nigeria on the 19th January 2020. The personnel of 'Amotekun' security outfit are largely local hunters from the various communities to combat terrorism, incidences of kidnapping, banditry, farmers-herders clashes and other violent criminal activities in the western region. The *PM News* (2020), reported that the security outfit according to Dr. Kayode Fayemi, the Governor of Ekiti State and the Chairman of Nigeria's Governors Forum (NGF), is nothing but a kind of community policing response to the security challenges and confidence building strategy of the people of the south west. The "Amotekun" corps in each of the south west states, are designed to operate as separate entities but to collaborate with one another in intelligence sharing and; meeting quarterly to compare notes. The corps are also to collaborate with and also assist the Police and other security outfits in intelligence gathering and the maintenance of law and order.

In Benue state, north central of Nigeria, the community volunteer guards, a community security outfit was established

to assist in curbing the continued attacks of Benue people in the state by herdsmen. Tule (2021), quoting the state governor, Samuel Ortom, reported that the volunteer guards will not work at cross purposes with conventional security agencies but operationally collaborate with them.

The emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force was occasioned by the need to offer a counter force to the violent attacks of "boko haram" insurgents in the north east of Nigeria. Bamidele (2017) stated that the Civilian Joint Task Force is made up of a group of youths who are desirous of safe guarding their communities from the violent attacks of insurgents. Their operational methods are geared towards collaborating with conventional security outfits especially by low level interface and provision of intelligence in the war against insurgents. The collaboration is premised on indirect support. Bamidele (2017) contended that the Civilian Joint Task Force cannot be situated within the legal or illegal realm as it fits into the desired local response to mitigating the security challenges of their environments. Hassan (2015) stated that the Civilian Joint Task Force account for sixty percent of counter insurgency mercenaries that are supporting the military in the fight against insurgencies in the north east of Nigeria.

While the states in the East and West and North Central of Nigeria are enacting state laws to domicile the regional outfits in their states, the need for local government involvement in the security architecture of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The local government, being the closest government to the people, is the first responder to emergencies including security challenges. Emulating the China, Hong Kong and Taiwan examples in this regard will strengthen the security architecture of Nigeria. Lin (2021), posited that local governments in China developed various forms of auxiliary police systems that were supervised and monitored by the public security outfits. These security outfits according to the study are driven by citizens' participation. Hong Kong and Taiwan according to the study also have a robust, well developed modern auxiliary police system that are community based. Nigeria should take a cue from the China example to strengthen her security architecture

Police/Public relations in Nigeria: An appraisal

Some empirical studies and relevant literature on the assessment of the perception of the Nigeria Police by Nigerians reveal that Nigerians have a poor and negative perception of their

police force resulting in trust deficit between the police and the public. Trust is a major ingredient for the success of policing through the community. In an empirical study on the image and approval ratings of the Nigeria police by Nigerians, Oluwasola (2016), using a sample size of two hundred comprising respondents from the Lagos command of the Nigeria Police, Public Relation Practitioners, Crime Correspondents and other members of the public, reveals that only 2.7% of the respondents gave the Nigeria Police an approval rating. The study also revealed that 64% of the respondents attributed the poor image of the Nigeria Police to corruption.

In another extensive empirical study on the relationship between the Nigeria police and Nigerians carried out in the south west geographical zone of Nigeria covering the entire six states of the zone, Ajayi and Longe (2015), retrieved 1125 questionnaires from a sample size 1350 with respondents drawn from 15 professional groups. The study found out that the Nigeria Police is antagonistic in their relationship with Nigerians. 85% of the respondents polled agreed that the Nigeria police is unfriendly in their relationship with the public. The study also revealed that the public perception of the

Nigeria police is negative. 65% of the respondents believed that the Nigeria police is very ineffectual in the provision of public safety while 25% believed they are ineffectual in their responses on the Likert scale. Most relevant to this study are the findings concerning the relationship of the Nigeria Police and other community based civil defense groups. The study found out that the Nigeria Police and other community based civil defense groups are incompatible. 77.6% of the respondents agreed that the Nigeria Police and community based civil groups are mostly not compatible. Simply put, community policing or policing through the community cannot be adequately accommodated within the ambits of the Nigeria police as presently constituted.

One of the objectives of policing is the early detection of crime through credible intelligence. According to Ajayi and Longe (2015), this finding is a pointer that systematic partnerships between the Nigeria Police and the efforts of local communities in securing themselves have not been harmonious. The study also established the fact that the Nigeria Police are generally insensitive to the security challenges of the people they are legally assigned to protect. The research also found out that the Nigeria Police are

always at loggerheads with the people. Though the Nigeria Police has an onerous responsibility of crime prevention and crime mitigation, their performance and responsibility from the findings of the study are less than optimal.

Another study of 942 respondents carried out in Benin City, south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, by Obarisiagbon and Omagie (2018), revealed that the public perception of the Nigeria Police is poor. The study further identified obstacles hindering the Nigeria Police in curbing the growing incidences of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. 95% of the respondents agreed that the Police as an institution are unable to stem the growing incidences of kidnapping in the country. The reasons stated for the Nigeria Police inability to curb the incidences of kidnapping are corruption, poor perception of the Police by the public, inadequate training, poor equipment and motivation and lack of synergy between the Nigeria Police and GSM service providers.

According to Kasali and Odetola (2013), the enemy image that adorned the relations between the police and local community in the colonial era has failed to fade away in post-colonial Nigeria as

many decades even after independence, the police are yet to change its orientation to a people oriented police force. In their opinion, Kasali and Odetola (2013), believe that lack of partnership between police and community could be said to be one of the major factors responsible for the inability of the police in the country to address the growing security challenges bedeviling Nigeria such as incessant armed robbery, ethnic and religious violence, political assassinations, arson, kidnapping, among others.

Community policing and policing the community: Locating the missing link.

Like this paper stated elsewhere, Folashade, Okeshola and Mediara (2013), argue that community policing advocates that the police should be highly visible in community through foot patrols and should integrate themselves into communities including cooperating with local vigilante groups to ensure confidence and trust from their hosts. It requires a methodical investment and insertion of credible local guards, hunters, vigilante groups, able-bodied youths, traditional rulers, and religious leaders in the conventional policing system for achieving a far-reaching accomplishment in crime fighting and control at the grassroots or community level. In other

words, as the first responders to crimes and primary victims of insecurity, community people and citizens should be ingrained and made to be part of any problem-solving approach to their security challengers.

Community policing or policing through the community involves establishment and maintenance of shared trust between the inhabitants of a community and police unit/department. Ndudi (2014), maintains that the police have recognized the need for cooperation with the community and have encouraged members of the community to come forward with crime fighting information. Police partnership with the community will involve confidence building measures and capacities in which confidence is achieved in conjunction with other government agencies, community members and groups, human and social service providers, private businesses and the media.

However, Jaja (2005), averred that police-community relations highlight the relationship between the police and communities, as co-producers of police services and partners in community policing, bearers of responsibilities for preventing crime, reducing crime and

improving the quality of life in communities where the police serve. It, therefore, means that if there are strains in the relations between the police and the communities, the desired cordiality that is needed for trust and confidence is lost. Consequently, the citizens will be constrained not to partner with the traditional police in intelligence gathering and sharing, thereby, making the task of policing a more daunting one. Here appears to be the missing link between community policing and policing the community on one hand and crime prevention and crime fighting on the other hand. Ikufeyijo and Rotimi (2010), buttressed this position when they expressed "the no-love lost relationship between the police and the public from the colonial era to post-colonial" as a preconceived notion of repressive, exploitative, and hostile policing of our society from the on-set.

Evidence based reality shows that the police high command in Nigeria pays lip service to the concept and practice of community policing or policing through the community, rather they prefer to police the community. The distinction here is that whereas community policing or policing through the community is not just a policy that requires the police to adopt a

proactive approach to address public safety concerns (Olaolu, 2015), it is equally a strategy which does not only allow the police to proactively act beyond mere crime fighting, but also to partner with the community members in setting the security priorities in the society and devising ways of resolving identifiable problems in the community (Tope, 2016). Policing the community refers to a military inspired approach to fighting crime whilst community policing means forming partnership with constituents (Adams, 1994). The long military rule in Nigeria spanning nearly thirty years put together no doubt affected every facet of her national life. Almost all institutions were militarized including the police. Tendaishe (2020), pointed out that internal factors have a strong influence, particularly on major violent conflicts. Violence and instability locally can impact national stability. Even after the barrack boys were retired to their cocoon in 1999, most civil and paramilitary outfits behave as though they were still under the clutches of the armed forces. The long years of military intervention into the body politics still has a vicious, strong influence on the psyche of every aspect of national life. This could partly explain why the police treat citizens with highhandedness and iron fists.

Policing the community is reactive; the Nigeria Police Force only comes to the scene of crimes after the crime has been perpetrated. Upon arrival, they arrest citizens indiscriminately, hound suspects into cells without pressing any valid charges against them. In this process, the rich and politically connected detainees get freed and the less privileged languish in police custody. Policing the community relies on brute force, torture and intimidation of the members of the public. Policing the community does not make use of intelligence gathering and information sharing from the citizens. Under this system, officers do not see themselves as members of the same community. Because they are empowered by the law to wield arms and bear ammunition, they have a sense of superiority over "bloody civilians". While policing the community, officers thrive in taking bribes and extorting the weak and vulnerable members of the society. They are not really interested in preventing crimes, rather; they stay aloof and turn to the other way until there is breakdown of law and order. This will increase the incidence of arrest and will invariably put more money into the pockets of both officers, rank and file of the police hierarchy.

In policing the community, opportunities for partnership, cooperation and synergy between the (formal) police and the informal security outfits in the fight against crime are denied (Mahmoud and Usman, 2014). The reason is not difficult to discern. Policing the community tends to be repressive, exploitative, and hostile to the society; this is unlike community policing which strategy, if it is adopted in Nigeria, could help to eradicate most of the challenges attributed to traditional reactive police culture, (Dung, 2005). The success of community police is driven by intelligence sourced from members of the community: citizens providing intelligence to the community police. But this cannot be the case with policing the community because the police are hostile and uncooperative with the public, therefore, it will be anachronistic to elicit any form of voluntary assistance from the community.

By and large, the end product of policing the community is manifested in police brutality, corruption and human rights abuse. In fact, when the ordinary people recount their odious and harrowing encounters with the Nigeria police, one is bound to come to a conclusion that the Nigeria Police have become a terror group of sorts. Today, it is possible for citizens to be hounded into police detention on

trumped up allegations and kept incommunicado for days and weeks without being pressed with any valid charges or presented to any court of competent jurisdiction for trial. Most observers are bewildered as to the egregious level of police hostility to the Nigerian populace.

These hostilities manifest in varying dimensions ranging from mounting of unauthorized check points, roadblocks and toll gates to extort money from road users, eliciting payments before and during investigation of cases reported to them, taking bribes for bail, active connivance with criminal elements to commit heinous offences, stuffing and snatching of ballot boxes, misrepresentation of illiterate complainants, brazen display of indiscipline in form of rejection of lawful posting, soliciting for sex and raping of female detainees. These irregularities among the officers and men of the Nigerian Police Force have in no small measure, affected the perception of the citizens.

Conclusion and recommendations:

It is the view of this paper that for effective policing, the Police command should be decentralized and made to be closer to the community by embracing

policing through the community. Decentralization of the Nigeria police will allow for seamless deployment in the communities which will make for effective collaboration with the citizens in policing through the community. Decentralization will also improve the response time to security alerts and enhances the network of relations with citizens. It is corollary to recommend that it is time Nigeria adopted the local police model as practiced in some far eastern countries that have been able to reduce crimes in those climes. Nigeria is a behemoth, therefore, having one centralized police command cannot adequately address the ubiquitous contemporary security concerns of the country.

Recruitment of police personnel should be community-oriented and mediation centered-officers should be mobilized. Citizen driven community police outfits should be a veritable source of recruiting personnel into the regular police force and are posted or deployed accordingly within the locality. It is operationally cumbersome when total strangers are recruited and posted to strange lands without any idea of the terrain and topography of their operational base. Officers and men of Nigeria Police should be trained and motivated to be proactive,

preventive and service/mediation-centered and also to adopt very friendly disposition to citizen driven community police outfits. The thrust of policing through the community is not for crime prone residents to commit offenses and then be arrested. The focus is to be proactive through credible intelligence gathering and making relevant

information that are capable of nipping crimes and criminalities in the bud available. The study, therefore, recommends a reorganization of the Nigeria Police with a view to making it have a closer collaboration with the Nigeria public. This is a necessary ingredient for the enhancement of crime prevention and control in Nigeria.

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