

COMMUNITY BASED SECURITY OUTFITS IN CRIME PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN OGBA/EGBEMA/NDONI AND EMOHUA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Crime, in all ramifications is consequential, as victims of criminal activities be it individual or communities sometimes do not live to tell the tale. When crime is carried out on large scale, it destroys both individual and community development prospects. To curb crime scourge, proactive actions, such as setting up of crime preventive mechanisms are a necessity. This paper presents a review of crime situation in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The causes of insecurity in Nigeria were highlighted. Concepts of crime prevention and control were extensively discussed. The cost benefit analysis of crime prevention and control were also projected. The activities of community-based security outfits in ONELGA and EMOLGA in fighting crime in Rivers State were also discussed. The need for collaboration between the state, local government and communities was emphasized. The paper concludes that the insecurity in parts of the state and nation is not justified, and submits that proactive measures for crime prevention as against control should be the focus of law makers and law enforcement agencies.

Keywords: *Community, Crime, Control, Prevention, Security Outfits*

Introduction

From 2017, East and West area of Rivers State had witnessed terrible crimes, during the reign of Donwani of Omoku. Motorists lost their lives on daily basis. Kidnapping and armed robbery was the order of the day. It is worthy of note that the December 31st night killing which claimed over 10 lives of Christians coming back from cross-over night service can never be

forgotten. In between Ahoada and Emohua bridge, in recent times, is a death trap for road users. All the communities along the east-west road could no longer sleep with their two eyes closed. The rate of killing and kidnapping has gone out of proportion. People hardly venture out for fear of being kidnapped.

In the same location of the East-West road, the Nations newspaper of August 6th 2019 carried a story of the hijack of 18-seater bus with all passengers. The abductors marched their victims to a forest. These activities are not limited to outsiders only. Community members also suffer the same fate. The paramount ruler of Omofe community in Rundele was kidnapped on the 10th of July, 2019. Due to activities of these nefarious people, all business activities are brought to a halt. The criminals who come under the cover of cultism go as far as carrying cooked foods from hoteliers and on market days, they go to the market and carry raw food stuck on gunpoint from sellers. When they run out of money, they go to people and collect illegal levy. In most localities, in the two local government areas, small businesses (retail shops) find it difficult to operate. Where they even manage to exist, from time to time their shops are looted by the hoodlums.

Globally, insecurity and crime seem to top the list of the problems faced by many nations today. It is hard to find any country of the world that is free from insecurity and crime, be it developed, developing or underdeveloped. Nigeria is one of the developing nations of the world that is badly affected by this scourge. Nigeria, though the giant of Africa, has numerous records of insecurity and crime. Insecurity indicators in Nigeria range from social injustice, violence, unemployment, lack of access to basic livelihood resources, organised armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, assassination, rising cost of living, bombing, pipeline vandalization etc. The state of physical

insecurity in the country has adversely affected the country. Business operators, especially in violence prone zones, had relocated to places considered to be secured. Nigerian Pilot Newspaper of August 9, 2019 has on its front page a picture over 35 armed robbers paraded by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) police command in Abuja. In the same paper three police officers were killed in Taraba State. Also in the same paper, Prof. Wole Soyinka called for State of emergency in South west zone due to insecurity. The Nation Newspaper of August 6, 2019 carried reports of different crimes in the country. A priest and a commercial driver were murdered in Enugu State. In the same state, a monarch was kidnapped along Enugu-Port Harcourt express way. In Niger State, gunmen snatched a sum of 9.5 million naira from a chief accountant. The question is “What could be the reasons behind these occurrences? Is there nothing that could be done to reduce or eliminate these vices in the nation?”

Concept of Crime Prevention

The rising rate of different types of crime indicates the need for crime prevention in the nation. The rationale behind the concept of crime prevention is the creation of safety mechanisms that assist in protecting people by making criminals feel unsafe or unwilling to commit crimes because of the fear of been caught or detected due to the mechanism in operation. A good example is the automated traffic control mechanism with camera that captures defaulters.

Trooper in Koledoye (2019) presents crime prevention as the anticipation, recognition and appraisal of crime risk and

the initiation of action to remove or reduce it; an active approach utilizing public awareness and preventive measures to reduce crime. Crime prevention is a proactive programme aimed at preventing the occurrence of crimes or criminal acts.

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009), nations should aim at achieving safer communities using proactive crime prevention approaches, as against the reactive approach to crime activities. Crime prevention portrays a situation of self-defence where the police and the community take action before crimes are committed. Crime prevention programmes will reduce crime, stimulate public awareness concerning crime and enhance community safety (United Nations, 2010).

Concept of Crime Control

Crime control refers to methods, ways or measures taken to reduce crime in a society. It focuses on the use of law or penalties as means of deterring people from committing crime. Prevention, they say, is better than cure. Crime control is costly, as it leaves indelible marks and vacuums when lives are wasted, as penalties for offences committed. Crime prevention is usually more beneficial than control. Welsh, Farrington, and Gowar in Holly (2019) report a cost-benefit study of crime, where the benefits of crime prevention programmes exceeded the control and posit that it is more cost-beneficial to invest in crime prevention than in imprisonment which is a control measure.

Often time, individuals and institutions or authorities employ different approaches in

fighting crime. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) observe that policy makers in their attempt to curb crime focus on enforcement and punishment, which is a control measure as against recent trends of prevention which is gaining international awareness. This has to do with policy desired to re-orient, create awareness and discourage crimes.

Causes of insecurity in Nigeria

In a news chat with Nigerian Orient, posted on the 4th of August 2016, Ubong Kings, chairman, American Society for Industrial Security pointed out some of the causes of insecurity in Nigeria:

- (i) The failure of the government to provide basic needs of the people or citizens. The feeling of lack of basic necessities had resulted to frustration and a state of hopelessness, especially, among the youths, hence they become loose to violence and crime.
- (ii) Perceived inequality and disparities: Some parts of the nation had come to realise the marginalisation by a section of the people, coupled with government development policies and political offices which tend to favour certain areas.
- (iii) Claims over scarce resources, power, chieftaincy, council etc, are among the issues identified as been responsible for the insecurity of the nation. In Nigeria, some people hold on to power and leadership, maintaining that they are the only people that have the legitimate right to rule. At the

local level, some communities hold on to power, they are the only people to produce candidates for all the political seats.

- (iv) Inadequate security operations and equipment: The government security has failed in several ways. The lack of adequate training to meet the operational modus of criminals in the 21st century. Lack of modern equipment for contemporary combating of crime and the compromise of security officers as against their living up to the challenges, puts the citizenry in dilemma.
- (v) Neglect of societal values: Due to civilization and modernisation, African values have been compromised and exchanged for western values. All the values that keep the society safe and secure are relegated to the background. In typical African tradition, it is a taboo to be associated with the stigma of a thief. Stealing was considered as an extreme disgrace and degrading act.
- (vi) Unemployment at all levels: It is no long a difficult thing to find unemployed graduates in Nigeria. The failure in our educational system that is more theoretical than pragmatic leads to joblessness. These jobless youths move from rural to urban areas in search of jobs, finding none, they become frustrated. Theory should be merged with practice so as to draw individual potentialities out for self reliance.

Operational activities of Security outfits for Crime Prevention and Control in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State

The failure of the law enforcement agencies in protecting the lives and properties of the citizens, especially in parts of the state where the lives of the members of the communities are being taken without remorse on daily basis is obvious. There have been several crimes in this area.

Several hundreds of people lost their lives in Onelga and Emolga. When government forces could not curtail the criminals in these areas, the community members took the challenge and formed security outfits. In Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Onelga Security, Peace and Advisory Committee (OSPAC) came into operation in February, 2018. Following the success story of (OSPAC) in ONELGA, the Rundele/Odegu Security, Peace and Advisory Committee (ROSPAC) was formed in Emohua local government area on 5th of August, 2019.

Being empowered, and with the support and co-operation of the community members, they confronted the criminals and changed the security situation in the local government areas. Their mode of operation is like that of Bakasi in Abia State some years back. Before commencement, they will advise all those concern and involved in criminal activities to renounce their acts or leave the community. At the expiration of the time given, it is assumed that anybody who is still willing to carry out criminal activities is their enemy. Since OSPAC started

security operations in Onelga and Emolga, no community had lost any life or property to the hoodlums again. As a matter of fact, they no longer exist in the areas. They are either dead or out of the community.

In the recent past, nobody said anything good about people of these two ethnic groups. People were even ashamed to introduce themselves as members of these communities in the public. The community members, when interviewed on the security situation of the areas said, “The members of these communities now sleep with their eyes closed”.

One of the interviewees in Rundele disclosed that from 5th of August, 2019 when ROSPAC started operations in the village till now, over 60 of the hoodlums have been arrested. The last attempt made by the hoodlums was that of the hijack of 18-seater bus by Rumuodogo junction along East-West road on 6th of August, 2019. According to the Nations newspaper, the community vigilance group, ROSPAC went after them to release the victims. In the process, three of the kidnappers were killed while others escaped.

Some commercial road users interviewed, said they have no fear again plying the road. Thanks to ROSPAC.

If less than one month of operation, they could calm a horrible area like the East-West road of Ahoada-Emohua axis and communities in the area, there is much to gain from the operations of this group or any other of like-minds and operations. They should be encouraged and if possible, other communities ravaged by insecurity whether in the state or beyond

should see the need to key into similar arrangements for their people.

Need for government and community collaboration in the management of community based security outfits

From all indications, it is clear that our regular law enforcement agencies are not able to confront and conquer the perpetrators of crimes in our communities. It becomes needful that all hands must be on deck to support the community based security outfits which have demonstrated some degree of competence in handling these hoodlums. Major issues like security require the concern of all. The state and local government are by law required to provide protection for those within their areas of operation or domain. It is, therefore, expected that they should encourage the communities by providing some logistics and even empowerment to keep the vision of wiping out insecurity in our communities. According to Flint (2013), collaborative partnership helps to improve communities. He maintains that to improve a community, we must all work together. To prevent and control crime in all parts of the state, and especially the East-West axis; Emohua local government to Onelga, the community members need volunteers to put an end to the ugly security trend in the place. The government, local and state, on their part, need to encourage volunteers and assist the communities to overcome the security challenges which had turned the area into a nightmare for both members and strangers in the area. The bold step of these two local government areas in Rivers State is worthy of commendation.

Other local governments and communities should borrow a leaf from them and save their people from the hands of miscreants who for selfish reasons waste the lives of their victims without second thought.

Conclusion

Crime, like cancer, spreads and destroys both culprits and victims. The task of crime prevention and control cannot be adequately handled by individuals or even communities without the support and backing of the government. Government at all levels should consider crime and criminals as enemies of progress and take necessary steps to combat the scourge. Preventive mechanism and measures should be advocated as this will reduce the loss inherent in crime control. The youths who lost their lives as a result of their personal decision and the influence of the environment should have been useful resources to their communities.

Recommendations

- (i) Law makers and enforcement agencies should focus more on measures and mechanism for prevention of crimes than control.
- (ii) Communities should work out ways of sensitizing the youths in the communities to see need to avoid crimes.
- (iii) Community members have a role to organize the communities and make crime unattractive to intended criminals.
- (iv) Community members should be encouraged to participate in matters of common interest, like community security outfits.

- (v) Government should encourage the members of community security volunteers by giving little allowance to those with remarkable achievement in crime prevention and control.

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