

**EFFECTIVENESS OF VIGILANTE GROUP OF NIGERIA IN PROMOTING
COMMUNITY SECURITY IN ISIALA MBANO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
IMO STATE**

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and

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Imo state vigilante service in promoting community security in Isiala Mbanjo local government area of Imo state. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, five research questions were raised and answered. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of seventy-five (75) members of various groups in Isiala Mbanjo local government area. The multi stage sampling procedure was used to select a total of seventy-five (75) participants from various strata in the local government area under study. A questionnaire titled “Effectiveness of the Vigilante Group in Promoting Community Security” (EVGPCS), focus group discussion guide (FGD) and in-depth interview guide were the instruments for data collection. Validity and reliability of the instruments were ensured. Data were analysed using simple percentage, and mean. The IDIs and FGDs were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Findings revealed among others that Imo State vigilante service and the police force in the state have a professional relationship, the Imo state vigilante service carries out its function of crime control by collaborating with the police, combing hideouts in their environment, ensuring constant presence of Imo State Vigilante Service men in the community and swift reaction to imminent security challenge and that Imo state vigilante service is moderately effective in providing security for communities in the area. Based on the finding, it was recommended that local government authorities and the police force should provide necessary support to the IVS in their area by organizing seminars and workshops on the issue of crime for youths in the area. Local government authorities, non-governmental organizations in the area and well-meaning indigenes should assist the IVS with logistics that will aid their patrol activities. More training and retraining programme should be organized

for the IVS by men of the police force so as to enable them meet up with the demands of combating crime in their locality.

Keywords: *vigilante service, community security, police force, professional relationship*

Introduction

Community security is a very important issue as far as community development is concerned. This is because for any meaningful development to take place in any community, the would-be beneficiaries must be active participants of the process, which cannot be possible in an environment devoid of peace and security. In other words, without security, people will not be willing to participate in any community gathering or activity. Community security, therefore, refers to a process of ensuring safety, peace, harmony and good neighborliness among members of a community. According to the United National Development programme (2009), community security is a pragmatic approach that seeks to operationalize human security, human development and state-building paradigms at the local level. It focuses on ensuring that communities and their members are 'free from fear' whilst also taking action on a wider range of social and economic issues that may impact on physical security to ensure 'freedom from want'. This quest for peace and security within and among communities is one of the reasons behind the idea of community policing. Akinyele (2008) explained that community policing brings together a wide range of state and civil society actors to identify the causes of insecurity and develop a coordinated response to them at the community level, and an enabling environment at the national level.

All over the world, community policing is now been accepted into the security architecture of nations, especially in this 21st century. However, the concept or practice has always been the norm in the African traditional society. For instance, Lubuva (2004) indicated that the pre-colonial Igbo society did not distinguish between policing or fighting crime with the overall role of the society. Consequently, the role of policing in the traditional Igbo society was diffused in that there was no specialised institution whose specific role or primary purpose was to police or fight crime. It was the society as a whole against criminals or immoral activities.

Similarly, according to Martin cited in Lubuva (2004), traditionally, policing was the responsibility of every adult in the community. It was the duty of all adults to contribute towards the prevention and control of crime and disorder. Achebe, cited in Chikwendu, Nwankwo and Oli (2017), observed that prior to colonial rule in Nigeria, orderliness, peace, safety and security were maintained through community institutions like council of elders and masquerade cult.

However, the advent of colonialism brought an end to this informal or community style of policing or fighting crime. Reiner (2000) observed that formal policing structures, a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order is a recent development in human history. The emergence of the state as

an entity with the claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society resulted to the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by other groups (Ritzer, 2012).

The creation of a special group or team saddled with the task of policing the society by the colonial masters introduced a system in which the colonial police alienated themselves from the people and this has continued in this present day Nigeria. The consequence of this formal police setup and subsequent alienation posed serious security challenges in Nigeria as few individuals had the responsibility of securing the lives and properties of the large number of the citizenry in the country as against the former practice of each community devising means of protecting her own people. This inadequacy of men of the police force in terms of police/people ratio, coupled with the proliferation of crimes of various forms and dimensions made communities to think of various ways of protecting and defending themselves from the activities of criminally minded individuals, hence the adoption of the vigilante security system.

The vigilante security apparatus refers to a group of individuals who legally or illegally punishes an alleged law breaker or which metes out extra-legal or extra-judicial punishment to an alleged lawbreaker (Lubuva, 2004). It is mostly made up of volunteers, which are in most cases, young men who come together to provide security for their communities, especially, at night. At other times, it is a product of neighborhood resolution where young men take turns to watch over their environment. There are also instances where a person may choose to belong to a vigilante group as a

result of personal experience as opposed to social demand.

A number of factors may have resulted in the emergence of vigilante groups. Chukwuma (2001) asserted that the inability of the police to protect the lives and properties of members of the society has given rise to community effort at ensuring their own security. Okoro (2007) identified corruption, brutality, oppressive and repressive postures, high level of extortion, high cost of assessment to police services, poverty, non-personal relationships, as some of the factors that made the people lose faith in the police and their consequent preference for informal policing structures. Shaw (2002) was of the view that there is a rise in crime because of the perceived inadequacies of the police in the society to provide safety and security to citizens. This implies that despite the rise in crime, the police seem not able to cope with the demand for protection by the citizens.

Though violent nature and style with which the vigilante groups operate gives the impression that the vigilante groups carry out illegal or extra-judicial punishment to an alleged lawbreaker thereby having the appearance of an illegal organization. This may, however, not generally be the case because some times, the vigilante groups are known to have been endorsed by State authorities to compliment the efforts of the Nigerian Police Force, especially, in rural areas within State (Amnesty International, 2002; Akinyele, 2008). For instance, in Anambra state, Vigilante service groups were established by the Anambra State Vigilante Services Law, 2000. The law was amended in 2004 and is now currently referred to as the Anambra State Vigilante Group Law, 2004. The group is empowered to assist the Nigerian Police to perform its

constitutional duties of protecting lives and properties. They are, however, expected to hand over arrested criminals to the police because they are not empowered to detain. In Abia State, the Bakassi boys who were originally a group of shoe producers patrolling the Ariaria market in Aba 1998, became committed to security matters in their area and were successful in preventing crime. The state government renamed them the Abia State Vigilante Service in 2000, providing them with funds and equipment.

In like manner, the informal security structure in Imo state started under the nomenclature of Bakassi boys. According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2004), the group was later officially renamed Imo State Vigilante Service (IVS). Members of the IVS are primarily Imo state indigenes or inhabitants who are generally young, able-bodied men in their twenties or thirties. They are usually drawn from traders of various commercial markets and are divided into zones "from which six vigilantes are selected". According to Amuka (2008), members of the IVS join the organization voluntarily and receive two months of training prior to participating in the group's operations.

There is a general perception that the vigilante service has been more successful in the south east in terms of crime prevention and other security matters, though not without pockets of challenges. There is still need to ascertain this fact, especially, as it concerns Imo state with a view to properly advising the present government of the State. It is against this background that this study seeks to determine how effective the vigilante service has been in Isiala Mbano local government area of Imo state.

Statement of the Problem

The primary purpose of government is to secure lives and properties of her citizens. This led to the establishment of the Nigerian Police Force to assist government in this regard across the federation. Thus, it was expected that the police will ensure maximum security in all the nooks and crannies of the state and particularly in Isiala Mbano Local government area. However, crime rate has continued to increase in the area. Due to this, various measures have been put in place to ensure reduction of crime in the communities in Isiala Mbano local government area. The measures include town hall meetings, provision of free toll lines to provide police with relevant information, training and retraining of men of the police force working in the area, police/traditional rulers collaboration, among others, yet there seems not to be any improvement in the security situation in area.

The implication of this was that people no longer felt safe in Isiala Mbano local government area. It was so bad that any sudden loud sound was taken to be gun shots and people ran for safety without bordering to know the source of the sound. People from communities within the Isiala Mbano LGA avoided coming out too early and usually hurried to go back home once it began to get dark. Those from the area who live outside the state avoid coming home too often and even when they do, they try to return to their base as quickly as possible. Also, the wealthy indigenes from the area made private arrangements for security men who were always seen with them at all times. The situation prevents foreign investment in Imo state as nobody wants to invest in an unsafe climate. This results in the increase in the rate of unemployment in the state.

It was in a bid to curb this menace that the Imo State Vigilante Service was reorganized and restructured by Imo State Government to assist the police in their duty of securing the people of the state. The major function of the Imo State Vigilante Service include ensuring peace and orderliness, preventing and detecting crime by providing information to police and also arresting alleged criminals and handing them over to the police command in their various locality. Although the vigilante group has been operating for some time in the state, there is no empirical evidence as to their effectiveness in carrying out their prescribed obligations. Hence, the problem of this study is to determine effectiveness of the vigilante groups in promoting community security in Isiala Mbanjo local government area of Imo state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the vigilante group in promoting community security in Isiala Mbanjo local government area of Imo state. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- 1 appraise the kind of relationship existing between the vigilante and the people of Isiala Mbanjo local government area,
- 2 to determine the methods adopted by the Imo State Vigilante Service in crime control in the area,
- 3 to find out how the Imo State Vigilante Service carries out its functions of crime control,
- 4 explore community members opinion of the vigilante service in the area, and
- 5 ascertain how effective the vigilante groups have been in providing security for communities in the area

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- 1 What kind of relationship exists between the vigilante and the people of Isiala Mbanjo local government area?
- 2 What are the methods adopted by the Imo State Vigilante Service in crime control in the area?
- 3 How does the Imo State vigilante service carry out its function of crime control?
- 4 What are community members' opinions of the vigilante service in the area?
- 5 How effective is the vigilante service in providing security for communities in the area?

Methodology

The following research methods were employed in the course of carrying out this study.

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed design.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of a total of seventy-five (75) members of various groups in Isiala Mbanjo local government area. These groups are associations of religious leaders, town union, landlords, community youth association, the police force and Imo Vigilante Service.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study comprised of a total of seventy-five (75) participants selected from the local government area under study. This was done using multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, stratified sampling was used to divide the local government into various groups/strata such as association of religious leaders, town union, landlords' association, community

youth association, the police force and Imo Vigilante Service, while in the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select the leaders of these strata to form the sample for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative instruments. For quantitative data, a four point rating scale questionnaire titled “Effectiveness of the Vigilante Group in Promoting Community Security” (EVGPCS) was the instrument used to collect data from the respondents, while Focus Group Discussion guide (FGD) and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide were used for the qualitative data.

Validity of Instrument

Thematic analyses was used to determine validity of the issues for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and questions for the In-depth interview (IDI), while the face and content validity of the questionnaire was ascertained by two experts in Department of Adult and Formal Education, Faculty of Education, and one expert in Department of Measurement and Evaluation, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

Reliability of the Instrument

The split half technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The two sets of scores obtained were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) and it yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.71 which means that the instrument was reliable.

Administration of Instrument

The researchers together with two other trained research assistants administered the

instrument. During the Focus Group Discussion, one of the research assistants was assigned the duty of writing down verbal and non-verbal responses while the other was in charge of operating the tape recorder. Similarly, during the In-Depth Interview (IDI) the two research assistants were made to write down the responses of the study participants independently after which notes were compared. The In-Depth Interview (IDI) comprised of four interviewees, this include two police officers and two men of the Imo Vigilante Service. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with participants purposely drawn from the various communities in the area under study. A total of 4 FGD sessions were conducted. The researchers ensured that both genders were properly represented and FGDs were conducted for males and females separately. This means the 4 FGD sessions comprised of three males and three females in each session.

Method of data Analyses

Simple percentage and Mean (\bar{X}) were used to analyse data gotten from the respondents. The IDIs and FGDs were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Adequate interpretation of the respondents’ statements was ensured, and statements were found to have contextual importance or connotations were extracted and used as excerpts to support statistical data. 2.50 was used as the criterion mean. Hence items scoring 2.50 and above were accepted while scores below that were not accepted.

Results

Results of data analyses are presented below

Research Question 1: What kind of relationship exists between the vigilante and the people of Isiala Mbano local government area?

Table 1: Distribution of responses on the kind of relationship existing between the vigilante and the people of Isiala Mbano local government area

Level of Response	Frequency	Percentage
Professional	37	49.3
Cordial	5	6.7
Interpersonal	23	30.7
Not existent	10	13.3
Total	75	100%

Analyses of data in Table 1 show that 37 or 49.3 of the sampled respondents indicated that the relationship between Imo State vigilante service and the police force in the state is professional, 5 or 6.7% of them opined that there was a cordial relationship between the two security groups, 23 of them

stated that the relationship was interpersonal while 10 of the participants in the study responded that there was no relationship between the two security outfits. This means that Imo State vigilante service and the police force in the state have a professional relationship.

To further establish this response, the replies of four IDI participants are reported

As much as I can think of, we provide the vigilante with all forms of support including logistics (Male, 46 years, police officer)
The relationship between the police and the Imo state vigilante service is a very professional one. Whenever, they call upon us we respond as fast as we can, except there

are no men on ground at that particular time (Male, 32 years Police officer)
The police help us with training, when we catch anybody, we hand them over to the police. They do answer us when we call them (Male, 27 years IVS)
We and the police are like colleagues, there is no doubt about that (Female, 29 years IVS)

Research Question 2: What are the methods adopted by the Imo State vigilante service in crime control in the area?

Table 2: Distribution of responses on the methods adopted by the Imo State vigilante service in crime control in the area

Items	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1. Deterrence	75	2.67	1.1	Accepted
2. Retribution	75	2.11	1.1	Not Accepted
3. Rehabilitation	75	2.49	1.2	Not Accepted
4. Incapacitation	75	2.28	1.0	Not Accepted
5. Restoration	75	2.59	1.0	Accepted

Data in Table 2 shows items 1 and 5 were accepted for meeting the mean score of 2.50 and were accepted. Though item 3 did not meet the criterion mean, it had a high mean score which meant that the vigilante group in the state sometime adopts corrective or rehabilitative measures for crime control. Items 2 and 4 did not also meet the criterion mean and so were not accepted. This means that the methods adopted by the Imo State vigilante service in crime control in the area are deterrence, restoration and rehabilitation. Some FGD participants supported this finding with the following statement:
There was a person who borrowed money from me, for a long time he refused to pay back but vigilante helped me to collect my money back (Member of Land lord Association, 62, female)

You can see my shop, it is very close to the community field. Vigilante assisted me to force some men to pay for my goods after they damaged them when they were playing football (Ass Secretary Youth Association, Female, 30 Years)
Seminars have been organised for youths on several occasions to advise them to stop doing bad things so that they will not enter into problems (President, Youth association Male, 35 Years)
Well, the vigilante group in this area always patrols at night and as long as they are around, you can hardly hear of theft. No matter what, or how late at night, like those returning from vigil, once they are around, you can move safely (Male, 52 years, community elder)

Research Question 3: How does the Imo State Vigilante Service carry out its function of crime control?

Table 3: Distribution of responses on how the Imo State Vigilante Service carries out its function of crime control

Items	Weighted	Mean	Decision
Mean Score			
1. Collaborating with the police	210	2.8	Accepted
2. Combing hideouts in their environment	215	2.87	Accepted
3. Ensuring constant presence of IVS men in the community	218	2.9	Accepted
4. Swift reaction to imminent security challenge	210	2.8	Accepted

Analyses of data in Table 3 reveal that all items met the mean score standard of 2.50 and so were accepted. This means that the Imo State Vigilante Service carries out its function of crime control by collaborating with the police, combing hideouts in their environment, ensuring constant presence of Imo State Vigilante Service men in the community and swift reaction to imminent security challenge.

Responses from FGD participants indicated that:

From my point of view, I think there is a relationship between the vigilante and the

police. If not the police I know would have arrested all of them. I also see them sometimes moving about even with police vehicles (Secretary, community youth association Female, 27 years)

The vigilante people are always moving from street to street and village to village at different times of the day (Provost, Town Union, Male, 45 years)

The men of the vigilante groups are quick to respond when you call them. I can even say they are faster than the police (Ass Provost Town Union, Male 43 Years)

Research Question 4: What are community members’ opinions of the vigilante service in the area?

Table 4: Distribution of responses on community members’ opinions of the vigilante service in the area

Items	Weighted	Mean	Decision
Mean Score			
1. Imo state vigilante service is very accessible	27 5	3.67	Accepted
2. Imo state vigilante Service handle cases professionally	1 90	2.53	Accepted
3. The vigilante service engages in unlawful arrest and detention of citizens	10	1.44	Not Accepted
4. They lack of professionalism in the use of arms	1 88	2.51	Accepted
5. The vigilante service intimidates people	1 90	2.53	Accepted
6. Women are not adequately represented in the group	1 95	2.60	Accepted

Result in Table 4 shows that items 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 met the criterion mean of 2.50 and were thus accepted while items 3 was not accepted for failing to meet the standard mean. This means that community members in Isiala-Mbano local government area were of the opinion that the Imo state vigilante service is very accessible and handles cases professionally. However, the service still lacks professionalism in the use of arms, engages in acts of intimidation and lacks adequate representation of women.

Responses from FGD participants corroborated this finding:

The people are very gentle when handling cases. They are not rough like the police (President, Town Union, 58 years, Male)

I so much like their behaviour when they are doing their work. I feel government should

be using them instead of the police (Secretary, Town Union 52 years, Male)

You see, you can even meet the people and give your complaint without stress or bring this and that (Ass Provost Town Union, Male 43 Years)

Sometimes some of them try to force you to do what you don't want to do. I think those one should be sacked from the group (President, Town Union, women's wing, 52 Years)

My only problem with the group is that females are not really given the opportunity to join them. I say this because they place the same condition for both male and female, which you and I know might not be possible especially for females (Secretary, Town Union, women's wing, 43 Years)

Research Question 5: How effective is the vigilante service in providing security for communities in the area?

Table 5: Distribution of responses on the effectiveness of the vigilante service in providing security for communities in the area

Level of Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	11	14.7
Partially effective	18	24.
Moderately effective	36	48
Not effective	10	13.3
Total	75	100%

It can be seen in Table 5 that 14.7 % of the participants in the study indicated that the Imo state Vigilante Service is very effective, 24% responded that the group is partially effective while 48% of the respondents stated that the security group is moderately effective. On the other hand, 13.3% of the participants were of the view that the IVS was not effective in the state. This means that Imo State Vigilante Service is moderately effective in providing security for communities in the area.

Responses from FGD participants on this issue:

They are working hard, a lot of improvement is still required of them (Religious Leader, Male 45 years)

I can't blame them so much, they are really trying. I believe they will soon get there (Religious leader, Male, 42 years)

Sometimes some of them try to force you to do what you don't want to do. I think those ones should be sacked from the group (Religious Leader, Male. 50 years)

I know we are not perfect, all the same, we are better than we used to be. All we need now is more support (Male, 27 years IVS)

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study have been quite revealing. Answers to the research questions showed that Imo State Vigilante Service has been helpful in crime control. Specifically, findings revealed that Imo State Vigilante Service and the police force in the state have a professional relationship. This finding negates that of Aniche (2018) who posited that there is an unfriendly relationship between the police and vigilante groups because vigilante groups are perceived by the police as unwanted competitors.

Secondly, finding from the study revealed that the methods adopted by the Imo State Vigilante Service in crime control in the area are deterrence, restoration and rehabilitation. This finding is corroborated by that of Akinyele (2008) who reported that vigilante groups have been found to be useful in areas of crime prevention. They have also assisted people in recovering stolen items and ensuring peace in the neighborhood. Similarly, Adegbusi (2009) observed that vigilante service groups partner with the police in every community they operate in and this partnership have gone ahead to see to reduction in crime rate.

Again, findings also indicated that the Imo State Vigilante Service carries out its function of crime control by collaborating with the police, combing hideouts in their environment, ensuring constant presence of Imo State Vigilante Service men in the community and swift reaction to imminent security challenge. This finding is supported by that Chikwendu, Nwankwo and Oli (2017) who reported that among the roles vigilante service groups can play in crime control as identified in the study are: partnering with the police, covering and combing the nocks and crannies of the community/streets which the formal police have been unable to do effectively, maintaining constant presence in the community/street to prevent criminals from operating and repaid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order.

Furthermore, community members in Isiala-Mbano local government area reported that the Imo State Vigilante Service is very accessible and handles cases professionally. However, the service still lacks professionalism in the use of arms, engages in acts of intimidation and lacks adequate representation of women. Corroborating this finding, Akinyele (2008) reported that vigilante groups are closer and friendlier to the community people than members of the Nigerian Police. He, however, observed the near absence of women from the group and recommended constant training in specific aspects of the job.

Finally, it was seen that Imo State Vigilante Service is moderately effective in providing security for communities in the area. Aniche (2018) in a similar study found that vigilante security outfits were not meeting up to demands of their host communities. In like manner, Bayley (2012)

recommended that members of the vigilante groups should be adequately trained and empowered to meet up with security challenges in their localities.

Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of the Imo Vigilante Service in promoting community security in Isiala Mbano local government area. It was generally seen that despite the fact the vigilante has not been very effective in combating crime in the area, the group has consistently made efforts to create a more secured community. These efforts have made indigenes of Isiala Mbano local government regain confidence in the security architecture of the area and consequently feeling safer and freer to go about their daily duties.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following:

1. This kind of relationship existing between the police and the Imo State vigilante service should be encouraged and sustained by the all stakeholders in the state in a bid to reduce crime to the barest minimum in the local government area and the state at large.
2. The local government authorities and the police force should provide necessary support to the Imo State Vigilante Service in their area by organizing seminars and workshops on the issue of crime for youths and through provision of resource persons when the need arises.
3. The local government authorities, non-governmental organizations and well-meaning indigenes in the area should assist the Imo State Vigilante Service with logistics that will aid their patrol activities.
4. The Imo state vigilante service should provide opportunities for females to belong

to the group. All barriers preventing them from joining the group should be identified and dismantled.

5. More training and retraining programme should be organized for the Imo State Vigilante Service by men of the police force so as to enable them to meet up with

the demands of combating crime in their locality. Also motivation of vigilante members should be taken seriously as it will enable them get dedicated to service. Outstanding members should, therefore, be recognized to boost the morale of other officers.

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