

ENHANCED COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY FOR CURBING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper focuses on enhanced community policing strategy for curbing insecurity in the Nigerian society. Despite large financial allocations and establishment of several police units and divisions in various communities and neighbourhoods, insecurity has persisted. The high level and dimension of insecurity have called for concern from all stakeholders at various levels with the principal objective of ascertaining the best strategy that will curb or reduce insecurity to an insignificant level. This paper, therefore, focuses on community policing as a potent strategy for effective curbing insecurity in the country. The paper starts by examining insecurity in the context of security and community policing, philosophy of community policing and its advent in Nigeria. The paper also established the potential benefits of community policing on curbing insecurity in local communities and concluded that, despite the inherent benefits of this strategy, the objectives cannot be achieved if stakeholders do not play the roles expected of them. Recommendations include amongst others that, the police and community members should be regularly enlightened on the principles, philosophies and practices of community policing as well as the roles and functions expected of each member of the policing group for the achievement of optimal result.

Keywords: *Community policing; insecurity; reduction; strategy*

Introduction

Insecurity is one phenomenon that exists in every society. Its scope and forms may vary from one society to the other (Aminu, 2016). The level of insecurity in any community may be as low as pick pocketing to as high as terrorism. Whatever the form it takes, the disturbing fact is that insecurity makes it difficult for citizens to move about freely, speak, or engage in legitimate activities. In other words, insecurity is an informal way

denying citizens of their rights. Ehindero (2006) posited that on a larger scale, insecurity prevents development because nobody wants to invest in a place with questionable security status.

The realisation of the importance of security in the development of any society has made nations to make efforts at reducing insecurity level by all means. This is evident in the large chunk of annual budget dedicated to addressing insecurity in the country

(Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). In Nigeria, the budgetary allocation for security matters is usually among highest and is meant to cater for the needs of all the law enforcement agencies, including the Nigerian Police Force whose duty is to maintain internal security which, as a matter of fact, is the bedrock of any form of development (Ehinder, 2006).

In the words of Williams (2008), all over the world, the main objectives of the police force is to ensure law and order, protect the lives and properties, protect the innocent against deception; the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to respect constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equity and justice. Hence, all the duties of the police force are principally tied to this creed. The Nigerian police force is also modelled in line with this objective of ensuring safety of citizens regardless of their status (William, 2008). This is to ensure quick response to distress calls from those within the neighbourhood and also to provide unhindered access to the police force for security related complaints and consultations (Ehinder, 2006).

The Police in Nigeria seem to have been overwhelmed by the pattern and rate of insecurity challenges in modern times. Their slow rate of response to distress calls, reactive disposition to crimes as against the proactive nature expected of a competent police force, inability to successfully investigate and resolve crimes as well as the speed at which they implicate presumed innocent citizens, coupled with the unprofessional conduct of some members of the force are pointers to this fact (Adebayo, and Ojo 2009, Otto and Ukpere, 2012). It is also believed that the number of police officers does not align with the increasing

population of the country and the resultant extension of development indices to some formerly less developed areas.

Insecurity now manifests in new dimensions with deviants in the society always devising new strategies in carrying out their nefarious activities and escaping security watch. Unfortunately, the police have on various fora complained of not been adequately equipped in terms of operational utilities and periodic training thereby making it difficult for them to match the powers of the criminals in the neighbourhood. Aminu (2016) reported that in some instances, communities through their illustrious sons and daughters, have come to the aid of the police in their community by providing them with operational vehicles and financial assistance.

While a philanthropic disposition of communities is quite commendable, the financial and material assistance rendered to the police by communities members have not impacted positively on the level of security in various communities. Instead, the rate of insecurity has continued to escalate and people, no longer feel safe. This situation has made it imperative for the adoption of other policing strategies that will increase the relationship between the community and the police and more importantly, get community members involved largely in improving the security of lives and property of their community. This explains the paradigm shift from the traditional police system to community-participatory system, community policing (Aminu 2016).

Community policing, according to William, (2008), is a law enforcement process that integrates community members into the security system of the society and makes them united in purpose with the police. It

directly engages citizens in the process of tackling insecurity problems and gets them involved in judicial settlements of societal problems, thereby making their community safe for habitation and investment. It is against this background that this paper presents community policing as an effective strategy for curbing insecurity in Nigeria.

Perspectives on Community Policing

Due to the ever changing dimension and patterns of crime in the Nigerian society, security stakeholders have concluded that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the country to surmount its security challenges using only the traditional methods of policing. In this vein, the Nigerian's Security Justice and Growth have made concerted efforts to commence the police-public partnership project of the policing institutions in Nigeria (Department for International Development, 2010). According to Aminu (2016), significant efforts have been made to reform the police organisation in line with the global tenets of bringing about democratic principles into policing in Nigeria. One of these efforts was through the implementation of community policing strategy.

Community policing, therefore, is seen as a complementary approach to the more traditional forms of policing (Williams, 2008). He explained that it aims at bringing the police closer to the people and establishing a bond or partnership between the community people and the police force. Community policing approach aims at erasing the negative perception of the police as brutal, corrupt and unaccountable and restoring trust between civilians and the police and gaining community support for police reform.

The United States' Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (USCOPS) (2005) defines Community Policing as a policing philosophy that promotes and supports organisational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and police/community partnerships. Consequently, the focus of community policing is on delivery of policing services that include all aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem-solving, community engagement, and partnerships. In other words, community policing process is meant to create a balance between reactive-fast responses and proactive problem-solving techniques.

Dickson (1990) cited in Aminu (2016) noted that the official adoption of community policing strategy by the Nigeria police authorities in 2003 was aimed at keeping crime and criminality at very insignificant level. He explained that its goal is on the transformation of the policing style in Nigeria, using the community-based policing and partnership strategy. In fact, the strategy was basically designed to engender excellence in the service delivery system of the Nigerian police in addition to transparency and accountability on the part of individual officers.

Community policing is also viewed from the perspective of assistance or involvement of informal or local indigenous security outfit. In this vein, Lee and Haider (2011) wrote that community policing entails a systematic involvement and inclusion of credible local guards, vigilance groups, able-bodied civilian youths, and traditional rulers and chiefs into the conventional police subsystem for the purpose of achieving a far-

reaching success in crime prevention and control at the grassroots. They explained that neighbourhood watch, also known as community policing in some quarters, describes a system in which the police and community members establish “citizen advisory committees that would open up channels of communication between police officers and the community. Citizen advisory committees are not only composed of police personnel, but also members of the business community, clergy, and some community leaders and members”.

In essence, community policing is a people oriented policing system which accommodates citizens as an integral part of its structure for effective achievement of the pre-identified objectives of the police force (Williams, 2008). In other words, community policing approach is people friendly in nature and capable of improving the speed and quality of services rendered by the main stream police. This implies that the police force needs to be innovative in seeking or the cooperation or inviting the people to take active parts in security matters. This explains why Dirikx and Bulck (2014) reported that the success of law enforcement is heavily dependent on the willingness of the people to report crime or any forms of suspicious activities, to seek for police assistance, and to also serve as informants or witnesses. This is because sufficient information is very relevant in detecting and preventing crime in any society.

The ultimate goal of community policing is the creation of a professional, representative, responsive and accountable institution that partners. To this extent, it requires the involvement of a cooperative effort of the community and the police, in which the

police engage in pro-social activities like Community Security Advisory Committee to enhance the well-being of the community while the community becomes significantly involved in helping the police carry out law enforcement activities. With the establishment of this symbiotic relationship in which there is reciprocal and beneficial interactions, community policing helps to reorganise the poor police-community relations and increase the quality of police services to the communities. This implies that the role of the people in community policing structure is not limited to providing information, but includes active participation in problem identification, planning, implementation and evaluation process. The emphases, therefore, is on a collaboration between the police and the community for increased effectiveness. This collaboration is predicated upon the fact that maintenance of law and order is no longer the singular responsibility of the police force but a collective or shared responsibility of all patriotic citizens.

Philosophy of Community Policing

The purpose of community policing is to enable closer relationship between citizens and the police (Adebayo and Ojo, 2009). It is expected that by this, the two groups will share the responsibility of ensuring safety of everyone within their boundaries. This implies that community members and the police will make collective efforts toward identifying security challenges within their neighbourhood, determine relevant actions that will serve as solutions to such challenges, implement such actions and also evaluate the results in the community.

The features of community policing make it a lot different from the traditional police system where detection and prevention of crime is strictly in the hands of career police

officers. Community policing entails that the police share their authority with community members, not just at the level of providing information to the police, but also participation in critical decision making processes. Similarly, Gbenemene and Adishi, (2017) explained that the goal of community policing is to decentralize police decision making authority. The achievement of this goal, therefore, requires successful implementation of three essential and complementary components or operational strategies namely: community partnership, problem solving, and change management.

Gbenemene and Adishi, (2017) further revealed that the idea behind community policing is to address the causes of crime and reduce the fear of crime in affected communities. In this regard, it adopts innovative strategies that will enable the engagement of relevant community members in the process of proactive problem-solving tactics to minimize the level of insecurity and facilitate law enforcement in the communities. According to Ehindero (2006), the core elements of community policing are as follows:

- i. A broader definition of police work;
- ii. Reordering of police priorities giving greater attention to crime and disorder;
- iii. A focus on problem-solving and prevention, rather than incident driven policing;
- iv. Recognition that the community plays a critical role in solving neighbourhood problems;
- v. Recognition that police organization must be restructured and reorganized to be responsive to the demands of this new approach and to encourage a new pattern of behaviour;

- vi. Recognition that police services, operation and management must be decentralized for effectiveness, so that local police officers can speedily address problems and needs encountered at the local levels;
- vii. Training of police officers must cover the areas of social interactions and problem-solving in addition to traditional policing skills;
- viii. Partnership between the police and the communities in defining or identifying local problems and needs and developing solutions to identified problems; and
- ix. Commitment to development of long-term and proactive policies and programmes to prevent crime and disorder (23)

Advent of Community Policing in Nigeria

In an attempt to redeem the image of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) which has been damaged overtime by ineffective service and unprofessional conducts, the then Inspector General of Police, Mr Tafa Balogun took some very critical steps. For instance, in the year 2003, he established the Police Complaints Bureau and the Human Rights Desks. Ibeanu (2007) reported that through the assistance of the British Government, a pilot Community policing project was introduced in Nigeria with Enugu State being the starting point. The eight point objectives of the community policing programme as outlined by Tafa Balogun include:

1. Massive onslaught against robbers, gruesome murder, assassination and other crimes of violence against the backdrop of which operation "Fire for Fire" was adopted as a methodology.
2. Fast decisive crime/conflict management.

3. Community partnership in policing, the modern approach all over the world.
4. Serious anti-corruption crusade, both within and outside the Force.
5. Comprehensive training programme conducive for qualitative policing.
6. Improved conditions of service and enhanced welfare package for officers, inspectors and rank and file.
7. Inter-service/agency cooperation at all levels down the line.
8. Robust public relations necessary for the vision of people's Police (Ibeanu, 2007:63).

As a follow up to the programme, in 2007 Mike Okiro, the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) introduced a "9-way test" through which the effectiveness of the community policing programme can be ascertained. According to Ibeanu (2007), these 9 points test include war on corruption and crime, crime prevention, upgrading intelligence and crime database, improved training, transparency and accountability, improving human rights record of the police, improving the public image and public relations of the police and interagency cooperation. Since the introduction of the community policing programme in 2004, it has been able to spread across eight other states in the country such as Ogun, Ondo, Kano, Jigawa, Anambra, Sokoto, Cross River and Edo States.

Insecurity in Nigerian Society

Conceptualising insecurity will be extremely difficult if not impossible without a clear understanding of security. In this vein, attempt is made to first create an in-depth understanding of security. According to Adebayo, and Ojo, (2009), security is fluid in nature. This is because; it cuts across several areas of human endeavours and so has attracted several meaning, from different

people and at various points in time. However, one generally accepted meaning of security is that, it is the state of being safe and secure from danger and protection from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression. In this regard, it is seen as a basic condition necessary for living and survival (Chene, 2012).

According to Nwagboso (2012), security is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to the survival of individuals or groups. This implies that security can be equated with freedom from both present and future danger, harm and anxiety. Otto and Ukpere (2012) opined that security relates to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis. This definition has a socio-political connotation because social stability, peace and protection of available resources are very much dependent on the subsisting political climate. In other words, a rough political climate leads to destruction of lives and properties. This explains why William (2008) indicated that security involves the capacity to pursue cherished political and social ambitions and explained that security is socio-political in nature since without security, there can be no political stability and consequently social activities will be in chaos.

McGrew (1991) cited in Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim (2013), asserted that the national security rests on two very important pillars which are the maintenance and protection of the socio-economic order in the face of internal and external threat; and the promotion of a preferred international order, which minimises the threat to core values and interests, as well as to the domestic order. By implication, the government of any nation must strive to ensure a stable socio-economic condition of citizens at every time.

In other words, for citizens to have a sense of security, they must be protected from both internal and external attacks by the military, police and other law enforcement agencies. The people must also be shielded from socio-economic problems such as hunger and starvation, diseases, unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution and injustice (Nwolise, 2006). Secondly, government policies and international relationships should be such that promotes and emphasises the interests and values of the country.

Insecurity on the other hand can be seen as the antithesis of security. It is characterised by uncertainty, danger, hazard, lack of confidence, instability, destruction of lives and properties (Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim 2013). It generally entails a feeling of being unsafe and the desire to leave such an environment as soon as possible. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) stated that insecurity refers to the existence of a vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood. It is a state of not knowing, a lack of control, and the inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable. Similarly, Beland (2005) described insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. In other words, insecurity is a total lack or inadequate freedom from harm or danger, including any attempt to deny people of their rights as individuals or a group.

Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim (2013) conceived insecurity as a situation where human and national security of a state is compromised by internal or external forces or interests, exacerbated by the State's weak or poor economic, military and/or human

resource development conditions. This means that the action or inaction of the State and its actors can result in physical harm and danger for the citizenry which is considered a form of insecurity and has symbiotic relationship with economic and social insecurity.

Community Policing and Curbing Insecurity

This paper is on the stance that community policing can be a veritable strategy for reducing insecurity in communities to the barest minimum. This is based on the key assumption underlying community policing which is that community participation is likely to enhance safety and social order by solving community related crime (Chene, 2012). More specifically, community policing is believed to have impacted positively on various aspects of policing such as:

- Supporting (local) crime prevention and reduction through a problem-solving approach to local policing;
- Strengthening the ability of communities to convey their concerns and find tailored solutions to their problems;
- Improving police/public relationships by strengthening social bonds and informal social control within communities;
- Strengthening community support for police action by building public trust and confidence in police services, and improving police image/citizens perceptions of police performances;
- Reducing police corruption by changing the way the police operates and increasing police accountability to the community it serves;
- Increasing information flows between the community and the police;
- Increasing police job satisfaction.

One of the major challenges of the traditional policing is lack of intelligence. Intelligence gathering is made difficult when people are unwilling to provide information to the police either due to fear that their identities might be revealed or share lack of interest (Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim, 2013). However, institutionalising community policing enables community members see themselves as integral parts of the community security network whose responsibility it is to gather and report whatever security information at their disposal.

According to Mesko and Ziembo-Vogl, (2000), community policing can have a beneficial effect on the quality and quantity of information flowing between the police and the community. Such information can be collated into intelligence which can be used to prioritise and address local crime and disorder problems. Involving the people is also capable of increasing their level of trust and respect for the police, and so can become more inclined to report crimes, provide tips/intelligence and serve as witnesses thereby making crime detection and prevention easier and faster.

Secondly, due to poor accountability system in the force, officers in the hierarchy of the police do not make adequate provision for needs of their men to effectively carry out the assignment given to them. The result of this is low job satisfaction and involvement in illegal activities just to make ends meet. Men of the Nigerian police force have been paraded on several occasions for either given information to criminals or assisting them with arms and ammunition. Community policing, therefore, is very significant for improving accountability of the police to the public (Chene, 2012). It is believed that by giving local citizens a voice in the planning

and evaluation of police work, community policing constitutes an accountability shift from the police hierarchy to the community and should result in greater police accountability to the public which is capable of increasing job satisfaction and reducing corruption and other forms of involvement in illegal activities (Mesko, and Ziembo-Vogl, 2000).

Again, community policing is significant for the partnership between the police and the community. Police-community partnership programme is a strategy for making the public a serious partner in policing the community. In this regard, the citizen advisory committee is established to open channels of communication between the police and the public (Mateu-Gelabert and Miller, 2005). In Nigeria, for instance, true representatives of citizen advisory committees are traditional rulers and members of their cabinet, town union and opinion leaders, and youth leaders. The committee meets regularly with the police to discuss their welfare, crime related challenges and then identify possible means of combating crime in the community. This implies that the committee members are equally security agents who collaborate with the conventional police in the fight against crime and criminals. According to Davis, Mateu-Gelabert and Miller, (2005), when this synergy is formed, the general public “may find that officers are more respectful of citizenry; a condition that helps lower the number of complaints and improves community relations”.

Besides, sharing of experience is no doubt, a veritable means of updating knowledge and improving skills. Though it is true that the purpose for which crime is committed differs from place to place, but according to Chene (2012), they share similarity in terms of

pattern and mode of operation. Communities that have successfully curbed or reduced the level of insecurity in their neighbourhood can share their experience with neighbouring communities for outright adoption or adaptation. Similarly, community policing also encourages community members to make resources available for effective operation of the police division in their community.

Furthermore, community policing can also help reduce the problem of selective delivery of police and security services. In a country like Nigeria where the police force seems to have positioned itself to serve the interest of a few privileged members of the society instead of the public, community-police partnership in terms of community policing is capable of ensuring that offenders within the community are exposed and justice served, regardless of the socio-economic status of such a person.

Finally, the police involvement in community affairs is another strong strategy that allows the police to display themselves as both private citizens and State agents of social control. In this vein, community policing presents the police as servants of the society who should enforce law and order in such a manner that does not disturb public peace. Their involvement in community affairs facilitates rapid and timely control of persistent rebellion, whether in outright political processes or anti-social behaviour. Available studies have shown that police involvement in community programme has been fruitful. For instance, Quinney cited in Gbenemene and Adishi, (2017) affirmed that police-community collaboration in maintenance of social order helps the legal system to be increasingly used in criminal justice administration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Community policing is very effective in curbing insecurity in any society. Though insecurity is one phenomenon that cannot be totally wiped out, it becomes an issue of concern when it assumes a disturbing height or level like it is in present day Nigeria. Therefore, it requires an all-encompassing strategy such as community policing. Community policing by its nature creates an avenue for everyone to bear responsibility of securing their community.

The benefits of this strategy lie in its ability to enhance partnership between the police and the community, intelligence gathering, decrease corruption through transparency and accountability, experience sharing, decrease selective service delivery and increased love and trust for the police. In all, community policing creates a proactive police force as against the reactive or incident driven police. However, curbing insecurity through community policing is largely dependent on the ability of all actors playing the roles expected of them. In other words, little or no success will be achieved if the community members and police force are not committed to the task assigned to them. This necessitates the following recommendations:

1. The rank and file of police force should be enlightened on the principles and practices of community policing so as to encourage them to totally embrace it.
2. They should be made to understand that community policing is not meant to deprive them of their jobs but to make their task easier and effective.
3. Community members should also be made to understand their role as integral parts of the police unit in

- their community in order to enlist their cooperation and collaboration.
4. Opportunity for regular training on monitoring, intelligence gathering and sharing among others security skills, should be made available to community members to enable them carry out their functions effectively.
 5. Meetings between the police and community members should be held at regular intervals to serve as an avenue for updating one another with necessary information, re-evaluation of operational techniques, identifying and making strategic decisions concerning security of the community.

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