

PROSPECTS OF COMMUNITY POLICING AS MEASURE OF STRENGTHENING NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Insecurity is one of the major problems plaguing contemporary Nigeria for the past two decades. Hardly does a day passes without cases of violent attacks, killings, ransom kidnappings, abduction, armed robbery, forcible rape, (especially of the under-aged), and communal clashes as reported in the social media. Insecurity is a threat to peaceful and harmonious co-existence of a community and sustainable development. Despite the establishment of many security agencies, re-invigoration of existing security system, launching of various security operations in different regions of the country, coupled with partnership and collaboration with international security agencies by the past and present administrations to curtail the level of crimes in the country, the rate of crime and social disorder keeps increasing. The increasing rural-urban migration leads to urbanization and consequential social complexity and opportunity for multiplicity of criminal acts and offences. This paper critically examines the prospects of community policing in strengthening national security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Community policing; security measures; national security; strengthening national security

Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, crime rates in many Western nations continued to rise despite improvements in police technology, training and professionalism. Today, insecurity has become a global scenario that every country is making frantic efforts to find a sustainable solution to. Insecurity is not only capable of collapsing national economy, but also threatens life and property

and destabilizes political and educational systems of a nation. Therefore, security challenges have become a matter of serious concern for government at all levels, security agencies and security experts across the globe, leading many countries to have searched and keep on searching for the best approaches to address security challenges. This has led to the emergence of Community Policing.

According to Wong (2009), Community policing originated from the United States in 1970s and it is a philosophy and tactics of policing to integrate the public into police institution, not as police personnel but as collaborators in the security affairs of the nation for efficiency and responsiveness. Community policing emerged as a result of the quest by the police managers and community leaders to search for more effective ways to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in their neighborhoods (Bureau of Justice Association, 2004; Kasali and Odetola, 2016).

In most countries, many police departments adopted top-down, militaristic, hierarchical management systems that imposed greater accountability on police managers and emphasized police professionalism. Many security experts have argued that advances in policing methods and technologies, such as motorized patrols, radio dispatching, and use of rapid response techniques, created a greater rift between the community and the police (Weiss, 2006: 33). In other words, police officers no longer walked beats, nor did they get to know the neighbourhood residents they were serving (Weiss, 2006). This resulted in the police having less awareness and involvement in the problems of the communities that they served. Police were often assigned patrol areas on a rotating basis, and were instructed to change routes frequently, in an effort to thwart criminals. As such, community members lost their ability to predict when they may be able to interact with local police, and thus, the police came to be viewed as strangers, disengaged from the community and its issues (Bureau of Justice Association, 2006: 6). This has led to diminishing public confidence in the police, particularly, in poor

urban communities. The growing emphasis on rapid response tactics also meant that police were less concerned with community problems than they were with arriving at a crime scene in the least possible amount of time. Rapid response meant the police were acting fast but not necessarily being effective (Bureau of Justice Association, 2006: 6). Therefore, there is a dire need to include community members, non-governmental organizations and security businesses in the affairs of security of life and property.

Community policing involves the use of partnership between the police institution, security agencies, security businesses, individual citizens, non-profit organizations and the media to develop methods and strategies to police the community (Bureau of Justice Association, 2004). Factually speaking, it has been realized that maximum and sustainable security of life and property is not only the responsibility or function of the government and police, but requires collaboration and partnership between the police and community members. It is against this realization that many countries and police managers have seen and begun to adopt community policing as a veritable tool for preserving life and property and strengthening national security.

Despite the improvements in police technology, training and professionalism globally, the rate of crime continues to rise globally, and specifically in Nigeria. Today, insecurity has become a global phenomenon for which every country is making frantic efforts to find a sustainable solution. Security challenges like violent attacks and killings, ransom kidnappings; abduction of children; armed robbery; rape, (especially of the under-aged), terrorism, banditry, human trafficking, vandalism, communal clashes and trans-boarder crimes do not only have

the potential of collapsing national economy and destabilizing the political systems of a nation, but also make life and property of community members unsafe and unsecured. Thus, security challenge has become a matter of serious concern, not only for governments, but also for security agencies and security experts across the globe, leading many countries of the world to have searched and keep searching for the best approaches to address security problems.

Concept of Community Policing

The concept of community policing has been subjected to different definitions and interpretations by different scholars, security experts and organizations. Consequently, "it is a hard nut to crack" if not impossible, to give a single precise and universally acceptable definition of community policing. According to David (1979) and Morehead & Morehead (1981), the reason for the conceptual problem of community policing can simply be as a result of the philosophical values that underlie the concept, which make it mean different things to different people. However, several attempts have been made to define the concept. Weiss (2006: 33) wrote that "while some law enforcement officials and academics view community policing as a philosophy, to better explain police work, most individuals in the field of policing view community policing as an actual policing technique".

To Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1998: 6), community policing:

"is a philosophical and an organizational strategy that promotes a new partnership between the people and their police. It is based on the premise that both the police and the community must work together as equal partners to identify, prioritize and solve contemporary problems

such as crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder and overall neighborhood decay, with the goal of improving the overall quality of life in an area".

This means that community policing is a philosophical and organizational tactics of policing that encourages concerted efforts, partnership and collaboration between community members and the police in the effort to identify and solve security problems. Wong (2009: 2), viewed community policing is a philosophy and tactics of policing to integrate the public into the job of police institution, not as police personnel but as collaborators in the security affairs of the nation for optimal efficiency and responsiveness. This implies that community policing is a strategy and tactics of involving all and sundry, regardless of individuals' backgrounds in the job of protecting life and property, as well as fighting against criminal acts and offences in the country. According to the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice, community policing focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that includes aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem solving, community engagement, and partnerships.

As a matter of fact, adequate and sustainable security of life and property in any nation, including Nigeria requires partnerships and collaborations between the police and the public. Community members must be involved in the job of protecting their own life and property. Concurring to this fact, Wickizer (2004) submitted that community policing is the first step in engaging individual citizens and organizations to address social and security issues collectively, and to direct actions

towards changing adverse social conditions affecting individuals and communities. Emphasizing the importance of partnership between the police and the public in management of security challenges, Sparrow et. al (1990) declared that:

“ the police must move to empower two groups: the public and the street officers who serve it most closely and regularly. Only when the public has a real voice in setting police priorities will its needs be taken seriously; only when street officers have the operational latitude to take on the problems they encounter with active departmental backing will those needs really be addressed”.

Therefore, community policing is a practical approach of policing to integrate the public into police architecture in a manner that will enhance optimal, cost-effective and sustainable law enforcement service delivery by the police. This means that community policing is problem-solving approach to policing that advocates for inclusion or integration of the public into security structure of the nation to strengthening national security and ensure maximum and sustainable security service delivery in the country. It focuses on tracing and understanding the genesis or root causes of crimes and highlights the role of community members in crime prevention and reduction. According to Cooke-Scott (1998), community policing requires a police culture that recognizes, values and accepts the importance of community participation in neighbourhood problem identification and problem-solving activities. Thus, community policing is, in essence, a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems with the police, no longer the sole guardians of law and order, but with all members of the

community becoming active allies in the efforts to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods (Kasali and Odetola, 2016). The underlying philosophy of community policing is that improving the quality and quantity of contacts between the community and the police can increase the quality of life in the community (ibid). This implies that the central goal of community policing is to establish partnerships, collaborations and build relationships between the police and members of the public through creation of channels of communications and interactions as strategies for reducing criminal acts and social disorders as well as preserving life and property and strengthening national security. Wilson (2008) submitted that integrating the public into police architecture “puts an onus on the police to react quickly to urgent demands and to work towards engaging and empowering communities to deal with their own problems”. He stressed further that the police are charged with collaborating and working actively with communities to address community concerns.

Community policing has remained a problem-solving approach to security management in many countries of the world. For instance, in the United States, community policing approach has nevertheless "gone a long way toward preventing crime" (Holland, 1994: 12). It is no exaggeration that if people are afforded the opportunity to be involved in the policy and decision making process of the police, there may be no need of having large police (Bittner, 1970; Gaskill, 2002). Generally, community policing is marked by a move away from centralized police departments that practice reactive policing, to more decentralized police structures that emphasize a proactive, problem-solving approach where the police work in close

partnership with the communities they serve. The central goal of community policing is to establish partnerships, collaborations and build relationships between the police and members of the public through creation of channels of communications and interactions as strategies for preserving lives and property as well as reducing criminal acts (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2004; Office of Community Oriented Policing, 2007). Community policing involves the use of partnerships between municipal agencies, businesses, individual citizens, non-profit groups and the media in order to develop methods to police the community (Skogan, 2004; Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2004). These organizations work together to address criminal matters and reduce crime. Instead of simply leaving it to the police force, community policing revolves around a philosophy that the entire community can help take measures to prevent crime. According to the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice, community policing focuses on crime and social disorder through police services that include aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem solving, community engagement, and partnerships. The community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive-problem solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder. Community policing requires police and citizens to join together as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing security issues (Office of Community Oriented Policing, 2007).

However, effective community policing depends on optimizing positive contact between patrol officers and community members. Regular community

meetings and forums will afford police and community members an opportunity to air concerns and find ways to address them. The role of the police personnel in community policing is to act as a relatively visible and available watcher, based normally in an area, representing differentiated social control. The officers strive to manage disorder, control crime, and produce some level of order maintenance. The community members as collaborators are expected to provide problem concerns, information, support, and feedback. In some sense, they should provide the filter and screening of problems to focus police actions. The police are expected to respond to citizens' concerns whether expressed at meetings, rallies, in person, or by phone (Manning, 2003: 185).

Community policing encompasses a variety of philosophical and practical approaches and is still evolving rapidly. Community policing strategies depend on the needs and responses of the communities involved; however, certain basic principles and considerations are common to all community policing efforts.

Security System and Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

According to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013), the concept of 'security' is a crosscutting, and multi-dimensional concept which has, over the last century, been the subject of great debate. Aliyu (2012) viewed security as a state of reduced threats and tension in which the stability of a state is not in an imminent danger of disruption from within and without. To some security experts, the concept of security has always been associated with the safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats (Mukhtar, 2012).

In Nigeria, national security delivery is the constitutional responsibility of the government and security agencies – the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force, Nigeria Police and Nigerian Civil and Security Defense Corps. Securing the state from external threats is principally the responsibility of the Armed Forces, while the internal security responsibilities are vested in the Nigeria Police and Nigerian Civil and Security Defense Corps. However, non-formal security organizations also respond to the security needs of communities – for example Vigilante Groups. Like in many other nations, Nigeria adopts top-down, militaristic, hierarchical management systems that imposes greater accountability on police managers and emphasizes police professionalism. However, national security delivery by the police and military has been confronted by different challenges for both the society and these principal security agencies themselves. For example, many security agents have been convicted of aiding and abetting such criminalities as oil theft, armed robbery, kidnapping, and even terrorism (Marenin, 1987; Osumah and Aghedo, 2010; Hills, 2012).

Despite all the improvements in security technology, training and professionalism in Nigeria; establishment of security operations in various regions of the country and partnerships and collaborations with international security agencies to curtail insecurity and get rid of its criminalities, campaigns against terrorism and social disorders keep gathering momentum. Very little has been achieved in the fight against insecurity in the country. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that security has become commoditized, commercialized and made ordinarily inaccessible to the masses.

However, some of the major security problems currently confronting the nation have been identified to include: political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organized crimes. Aliyu (2012) critically outlined three important variables that define the nexus of the causes and problems militating against national security issues in Nigeria. He cited poverty, inequality and mass unemployment. Unlike, in advanced societies where economic power offers political leverage, in Nigeria, the reverse obtains with one dominant social class determining who gets what, when and how. Therefore, economic problems including poverty, unemployment and inequality, structural politics of exclusion, and a discriminating social system in which an individual will never realize his potentials without a “godfather” providing the cannon fodder of radicalization, social tension, conflict, violence, and the ultimate break down of law and order as we are presently witnessing in Nigeria today (Aliyu, 2012).

Community Policing and Prospects for Strengthening National Security in Nigeria

According to Kasali (2010), in recent times, many countries have realized that they can no longer monopolize the business of security in local domains as well as the world at large. In addition, many security experts and police managers have also realized that "modern" policing methods, strategies and approaches were not as effective as they had originally envisioned. Therefore, there are a number of compelling reasons why community policing is a veritable tool for preserving life and property and strengthening national security in Nigeria. These include:

- **The community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive-problem solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder**

Community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive-problem solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder. It requires police and citizens to join together as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing security issues (Office of Community Oriented Policing, 2007). It focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that include aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem solving, community engagement, and partnership. It requires police and citizens to collaborate as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing security challenges facing the community (Office of Community Oriented Policing, 2007).

- **Community policing builds trust between the police and the community which enables community members to provide information to the police and to promptly report crimes when they occur**

According to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (1994), the first common feature of community policing is community engagement. Community engagement requires a policing perspective that goes beyond the standard of law enforcement emphasis. This widened outlook recognizes the value of police activities that contribute to order and well-being in a community. Such activities could include working with residents to improve neighbourhood conditions, providing emergency services to those at risk, conducting door-to-door visits to residences in order to increase perceptions of personal safety, or simply working the

beat. These types of activities serve to help develop trust between the police and the community. This in turn, allows the police to gain access to important information from the community which can lead to the prevention of crimes, increase support for crime control measures, and provide avenue through which the police can develop working relationships with the community. In addition, within a community-policing framework, the foot patrol officer is assigned to a designated beat for an extended period of time. The more noticeable presence of a long-term officer itself may encourage community response and build trust as citizens become more comfortable with the familiar face of their local officer (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994)

- **Community policing is a tool for active engagement of community members in efforts to enhance community safety**

Community policing reinvigorates communities to be actively involved in fight against criminal acts and social disorders which can deter crime and create more vital neighborhoods. Wickizer (2004) submitted that community policing is the first step in engaging individual citizens and organizations to address social and security issues collectively, and to direct actions towards changing adverse social conditions affecting individuals and communities. Emphasizing the importance of partnership between the police and the public in management of security challenges, Sparrow et. al (1990) declared that “ the police must move to empower two groups: the public and the street officers who serve it most closely and regularly. Only when the public has a real voice in setting police priorities will its needs be taken seriously”. Community engagement requires the active participation of members of the community; they must be

actively engaged in efforts to enhance community safety themselves. This implies that community policing is a strategy and tactics of involving all and sundry, regardless of individuals' backgrounds, in the job of protecting life and property, as well as fight against criminal acts and offences, not only in their immediate community, but in the country as a whole. This requires residents to be forthcoming in providing information to the police and to promptly report crimes when they occur (Skogan, 2006).

- **Community policing brings police and citizens together to prevent crime and solve neighborhood security problems**

With community policing, the emphasis is on stopping crime before it happens, not responding to calls for service after the crime occurs. Community policing is an effective way to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in a community. This is because everyone becomes responsible for safeguarding the welfare of the neighborhood. Unlike traditional policing methods, the goals of policing are expanded and the perception of community is changed. By integrating the community into police institution, the police have more resources available to them to help in crime prevention. According to Adisa (1999), lack of partnership between police and community could be said to be one major factor responsible for the inability of the police in Nigeria to effectively and efficiently handle the security challenges plaguing the country. By familiarizing themselves with the members of the community, officers are more likely to obtain valuable information about criminals and their activities. Community policing allows the community to come up with solutions that will work

within their own neighborhood and to change or eliminate those that do not work.

Conclusion

Since independence, Nigeria has been plagued by various security challenges. Today, hardly does a day pass without cases of violent attacks and killings, ransom kidnappings; abduction of children; armed robbery; forcible rape, communal clashes and different forms of social disorder being published in the dailies, or read on the social media. Despite all the efforts by the past and present administrations to curtail insecurity and terrorism in the country, the problems keep multiplying. This study shows that adequate security of life and property requires involving community members in the job of police. Therefore, the paper reviews the concept of community policing, security system and causes of insecurity in Nigeria and prospects of community policing as measure of strengthening national security in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The prospects of community policing as measure of strengthening national security in Nigeria cannot be exaggerated. However, for effective community policing, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be regular foot patrol by officers assigned to designated beats for an extended period of time. The more noticeable presence of long-term officers in designated beats, the more community members develop confidence, courage and build trust as citizens and become more comfortable with the familiar face of their local officer. Regular foot patrol will allow the officers to gain knowledge about the problems or issues plaguing a neighbourhood.
2. There should be regular community meetings between the police and the community members in order to increase

the contact between the police and the community. These community meetings will provide an opportunity for members of the public to voice their concerns and a forum for the police and the public to develop problem-solving strategies to identify security issues.

3. There should be door-to-door visits by the patrol officers to neighbourhood residences during the day. According to Rosenbaum and Lurigio (1994) and Sherman and Eck (2002), these visits can serve many purposes. They can be used to introduce patrol officers to local residents, to obtain information about local crime

problems or about who is committing crime in an area, and also to provide information to local residents on how to reduce their chances of victimization. The visits will also prompt changes in residents' perceptions of crime and disorders.

4. There should be regular training and retraining for community members on security watch and consciousness, crime prevention and report of criminal cases. This will equip them with knowledge and skills in security management and process of handling security issues.

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