

CITY POLICING STRATEGIES FOR CRIME CONTROL IN SOUTH-SOUTH, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examines city policing strategies for crime control in South-South, Nigeria. It is a qualitative study conducted in two urban areas in Rivers and Bayelsa States. The urban areas are Omoku in Rivers and Yenagoa in Bayelsa States. Three research questions provided direction for the study. A total of 18 individuals were involved in the study. Two members each from six community-based organisations and six experts in city policing from the Nigerian Police Force were the respondents. The main instruments for data collection were the Focus Group Discussion, Key informant interview and observations. All the participants in the study were purposively selected. The content analysis was used to analyse data generated in the study. From the analysis, it was revealed that city policing strategies to control crime involve community education, periodic community meetings and locality security watch among others. The study further indicates the benefits and challenges of city policing in the states. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that there should be a constant engagement between the law enforcement agents and the people to enlighten them on their role in achieving city policing. Also, the justice system should be improved to address the imbalance existing in the punishment of offenders. It will send a strong signal for crime prevention for sustainable peace in Nigeria.

Keywords: City Policing, Strategies and Crime Control

Introduction

The security of lives and properties in any given society is a major driver of development. There can hardly be any meaningful progress or transformation in a state of insecurity and high rate of criminalities. For this reason, there has been an increasing global concern in the 21st century to address the rate of

insecurity in order to ensure peace, development and safety of lives and property. To this end, many studies have equally been conducted on strategies of improving security in Nigeria among which are Olajide (2014), Ijah and Patrick (2019) and Akinyemi (2021). These studies contended for the integration of

various community based approaches to combat crimes in the societies. Olusegun (2016) pointed out that in Nigeria, various security strategies have been used to complement the efforts of the law enforcement agents in fighting criminalities in most communities. Equally, literature has indicated the community-based approach to combating insecurity and criminalities as a long time practice which is grounded on the principle of effective partnership with the local people. It is in this context and as sole constitutional responsibility of the state that the local communities are collaborated with, in order to assist in crime prevention (Manaliyo, 2016). The strategy serves as a strong tool and a driving force for intelligence gathering and arresting of criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry among others. Akinyemi (2021) described the strategy as one in which the government has invested heavily to make sure that lives and properties are secured. Okereke in Akinyemi (2021) also supported that the security of lives and properties are very necessary to the continuous existence of human beings and to attain sustainable development. It is on this note that efforts are made in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria, especially in Rivers and Bayelsa States, using the strategy to ensure peace and security. It is also adopted to improve on the expected symbiotic relationship between the law enforcement agents and the public in crime prevention. Agbo (2016) and Eze (2015) agreed that the adoption of the strategy has helped in ensuring relative peace in respective neighbourhoods. According to Olusegun (2016), the major forms of people's collaboration in protecting the

community/city is through the involvement of Police community relationship committee (PCRC), Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Civilian Joint Task force and Community Development Association (CDA). Therefore, it is believed that the contribution of this study will enable the improvement of the city security strategies adopted for crime control in the zone, since security of lives and properties were meant to be the concern of all and sundry.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine city policing strategies for crime control. Based on this, this study intends to provide some insight to help in curbing the incidences of crimes and insecurity using the following research questions.

1. What are the city policing strategies adopted for crime control in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria?
2. What are the benefits of city policing strategies in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges confronting the city policing strategies in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria?

Besides this introduction, is the theoretical frame work which is anchored on broken windows and social contract theories. This is followed by the situational account of crime rate in the study area. The study area is followed by the methodology for data collection on city policing strategies for crime control. The last part of the study focused on the analysis and discussion of findings from where inference and recommendations were made.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the broken windows theory

(BWT), and the social contract theory (SCT). The broken window theory was propounded by Wilson and Kelling in 1982. The theory strongly states the constraint of police and the criminal justice system alone to address the burden of security situation in the society, hence, the need to collaborate the efforts of alternate or community based approaches to crime control. Moreso, the theory suggested that the moment lawlessness is tolerated among people; it will require conscious and deliberate efforts to arrest such crime for the safety and protection of lives and properties (Akinyemi, 2021). The author further stated that the analogy of the theory is a reflection of how minor crimes such as petty theft, disorderly behaviour, reckless driving, offensive dressing, vandalism and simple assault among others are seen as a broken window in a building which should be addressed to avoid such crime cumulating into a menace. Besides, Rosenbaum (1987) argued that crime is as a result of inadequacy in improving social control among people. Social control will enhance how individual behaviour could be regulated in the society. This approach would also necessitate the citizens assuming the responsibility of crime control through prompt reporting of any perceived deviant behaviour to relevant security agencies as eyewitnesses when crime occurs (Akinyemi, 2021). On the other hand, Thomas Hobbes's Social Contract Theory provides a deeper insight that issue of internal security is driven by citizen's consent and partnership with the relevant security agencies. It is an explication of the dynamics of relationship that are supposed to exist between relevant stakeholders in security issues. However,

the relevance in explaining the rationale behind the broken windows and social contract theories is to assist in providing direction for this study. It could also be understood that Nigeria is clamouring for the official adoption and implementation of community policing to effectively combat crimes.

Crime rate in the study area

Crime rate is the systematic presentation of quantitative data about crime committed in a given place at a particular period. Crime rate can be said to have a direct link with the social structures in an area. This assertion strongly correlated with the available evidence stated in Manaliyo and Muzindutsi, (2013) that community organisation determines crime rates. Nevertheless, Varella (2021) reported the increasing rate of crime in Nigeria as a result of political instability, violence and corruption among others. On the other hand, Adekola and Enyiche (2017) asserted that high crime rate in Nigeria has brought with it dire consequences such as:

- i. Displacement of people from their original homes.
- ii. Heightened tensions and intolerance among groups in the community.
- iii. Strained family and community relationships.
- iv. Atmosphere for mutual distrust, fear and agitations.
- v. Different forms of human right abuses.
- vi. Deepening of hunger and poverty.
- vii. Poor style of leadership and people's lack of confidence in the system.
- viii. Unprecedented loss of man hours or closure of businesses due to curfew or state of emergency.

In respect to the dynamics of crime in the society, community policing as

contemporary measure was introduced to assist in the improvement of securing the nation. According to Olusegun (2016), the forms of city policing existing in Nigeria include the following:

1. Police community relationship committee (PCRC)
2. Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN)
3. Civilian Joint Task force
4. Community Development Association (CDA).

Methodology of the study

A qualitative survey was conducted in two urban areas in Rivers and Bayelsa States in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. The choice of these urban areas was purposive and informed by the presence of the informal security architectures to arrest crimes such as kidnapping, cult related violence among others. The urban areas are: Omoku in Rivers State and Yenagoa in Bayelsa State respectively. Thus, these areas provided an appropriate experience for this study.

The main instruments for data collection in this study were the Focus Group Discussion, Key informant interview and observations. Researchers conducted two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) comprising 6 individuals each per group from 6 selected community-based organisations while 6 experts in city policing drawn from the Nigerian Police Force were interviewed in the study area.

The community-based organisations involved in the study are: The Omoku Town Club, Foundation Club of Omoku and Police - Community relation committee in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area in Rivers State. Yenagoa Town Club, Egain Community Initiative and Youth for Peace and Development in Niger-Delta were from

Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. All the participants in the study were purposively selected and in all the survey involved a total of 18 individuals. The themes of the discussion in the Focus Group Discussion were based on the three research questions in the study. The unstructured key informant interviews and observation complemented the Focus Group Discussion. The content analysis was used for the data generated.

Results and Discussion

City policing Strategies adopted for crime control

On city policing strategies adopted for crime control in the region, it was revealed that it takes mainly three dimensions. These dimensions required community enlightenment, education, meeting, collaboration and volunteerism to support intelligent gathering for the timely arrest of crime. The process also requires that the communities should organise themselves security-wise with the effort of the law enforcement agents. The volunteers recruited in the process are expected to be trained and directly managed in the divisional structure by the divisional police officer according to the extant law. On the other hand, residents are also allowed to participate in crime prevention by providing the police and other relevant security agents with information for crime control.

In the FGD, it was observed that city policing strategies for crime control and prevention may use community education, community meeting and locality security watch as key methods to achieve set targets. Accordingly, community education is a process of enlightening the people through regular meetings to share security related information, conduct

surveillance, and ways of addressing security issues when they do arise in the community. In the Focus Group Discussion, several participants testified on how the strategy has assisted their respective communities in intelligence gathering and addressing of potential security threats to the communities. A participant said that “it was based on these strategies that some notorious criminal elements in his community were arrested. This has made the people of the communities to sleep with their two eyes closed”. Furthermore, there is an agreement in the opinions of participants that the strategy is best achieved through periodic capacity building such as workshops, trainings, seminars and symposia for officers, leaders and members of the community on widespread knowledge about the contemporary city policing strategies. From the foregoing, a prominent participant reiterated that the role of training cannot be overemphasized in achieving city policing strategy; as those indigenous people who are recruited in the process must first of all be trained before they are effectively engaged in the process. However, one of the experts in city policing in the Nigerian police force during the interview added that such education is not only to nip crime on the bud rather to provide individuals with the requisite knowledge of maintaining law and order in the communities. On the issue of community meetings as a strategy to control crime, it was observed that there are always regular meetings between the Police and selected community based organisations to discuss issues of security and the way forward. Besides, it is a process that helps the police to build confidence in the community about

themselves and way of improving security. The opinions of participants on locality security watch indicated that it is complementary efforts by members of the community working as security agents to assist the conventional security agencies, maintain peace and order in the society. The locality security watchmen in turn are deeply involved in security surveillance and reporting back any form of security breach to their key leaders in the community before considering the next option with the law enforcement agents. This, according to the participants, has not only enabled skills or knowledge acquisitions about internal security matter but has served as a source of empowerment to people involved. However, our further interviews with other police officers revealed that the strategy can best be attained through effective partnership, provision of quality services, prioritisation of security matters, respect and protection of human rights, openness, transparent policing approach and commitment among others. The findings are in line with Inengibo (2011) who asserted that the rationale for adopting policing strategy is for more proactive approach inherent in the community/city policing system. The system is both philosophical and pragmatic. This implies that the policing organisation must seek to be transparent and accountable enough, open and fair enough to the people, respect for human rights, apolitical and very much alive to its responsibility. On the other hand, evidence indicated that the conventional approach to crime control and prevention has the tendency to be reactive and mutually exclusive on the part of the police relation with the general public which is not

healthy for crime control. Olusegun (2016) supported that in Nigeria, various security strategies have been used to complement the efforts of the law enforcement agents in fighting criminalities in most communities.

Benefits of city policing strategies

On the benefits of city policing strategies, participants noted that informal social control of crimes has been very effective as a complementary measure to policing efforts. It was stated by participants that the benefits of city policing have assisted in reducing street justice, refocused police strategy and promoted effective partnership with the problem solving ability involving police efforts to deal with various crimes headlong. In line with this discussion, some participants affirmed that there are incidences when the timely reportage of perceived criminal activities led to bursting of crime and arrest of culprits. It was, therefore, observed that intelligence gathering is only made possible where residents have developed confidence in the security activities of the police. One of the participants described the Nigerian Police as one in dire need of secret informants in order to reduce crime rate in most cities and towns. However, most participants in the discussion offered that the Nigerian Police Force is required to rebuild her public image in order to regain respect and information volunteering for effective crime control.

This view is in agreement with Agbo (2016) and Eze (2015) who upheld that the advantage of adopting city policing strategies is in order to ensure relative peace in respective neighbourhoods. It is also believed that these strategies, if well collaborated, will boost safety and security of the community/city, enhance peaceful

co-existence and participation in community development programmes (Olusegun, 2016 and Ijah and Patrick, 2019).

Challenges confronting the city policing strategies

The participants raised some germane concerns that the criminal justice system in the state is practically very weak in punishing offenders. This has led to the proliferations of local security outfits in various names. One of the police officers interviewed insisted that allowing and encouraging proliferation of informal security agents poses danger to security handling as they are likely to take law into their own hands. The interviewee further stated that in most cases, innocent persons are lynched to death. The approach promotes the punishments or even the killing of prime criminal suspects before the arrival of the police officers whose primary obligation it is to arrest suspected criminals. It was also gathered during the interview that in some cases, the local vigilantes execute and dispose off the corpse of the victim secretly. Another participant added that the poor attitude towards reporting crime to law enforcement agents is as a result of inability to keep reported security matters confidentially, police brutality, weak handling of criminal issues and the issues of using antiquated instruments to fight contemporary criminal activities, are some of the challenges confronting the community policing. It was equally observed that improper training about the idea of city policing, use of excessive force, bribery and corruption in the police system also compounded their daily relationship with the people. Moreover, the issues of bad roads networks, poor

communication system, inappropriate urban planning system, poor housing and enumeration among others also contributed to the daunting challenges of city policing. These, according to the participants, have contributed to the daunting challenges to effectively policing most of our cities in Nigeria. The findings negate some of the enumerated benefits of city policing strategies. Patrick (2010) adjudged the past performance of the strategy as poor having produced very little result to issues at stake. This corroborated Ugwu's (2015) assertion that there are numbers of challenges confronting most community-based approaches to issues.

Conclusion

City policing in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria is a measure to reduce criminal activities in most of the cities and towns in the region. The idea of policing the cities for effective crime control is a good omen, but this can only be made possible when there is a changed strategy on the part of the law enforcement agents to effectively collaborate with the local communities for crime control. The people cannot make any effort to build a resilient city policing if law enforcement agents continue to be very brutal to them. There is also lack of automated and sophisticated crime fighting equipment on the part of law enforcement agents to nip crime in the bud in the region.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. There should be a constant engagement between the law enforcement agents and the people to enlighten the community on their role in achieving effective city policing strategies.

2. There should be improved people's confidence and teamwork with the law enforcement agents to achieve set security goals.
3. The law enforcement agents should be properly trained to be friendly to the people and be corrupt free for effective crime control.
4. The justice system should be improved to address the imbalance existing in the punishment of offenders. It will send a strong signal towards crime prevention for sustainable peace in Nigeria.

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