

## CRIME CONTROL AND URBAN COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The community policing strategies varies, depending on the needs and responses of the communities involved. However, certain basic principles and considerations are common to all community policing efforts. Community policing entails community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment for all in which people take active part in their own affairs. Policy toward community policing has gained momentum in recent years as police and community leaders search for more effective ways to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in their neighborhoods. The increased incidence of crime since the end of the military regime has resulted to the proliferation of heavily armed vigilante groups in nearly every corners of Nigeria. Chiefs and other policing officials are currently assessing what changes in orientation, organization, and operations will allow them to benefit the communities they serve by improving the quality of the services they provide. This paper, therefore, discusses urban community policing as it encompasses a variety of philosophical and practical approaches concerning crime control.*

**KeyWords:** Community, Control, Crime, Policing, Urban

### **Introduction**

Community policing is fast becoming a global trend, especially in the 21st century. But the key elements or core component of community policing is not foreign or new in Africa, for example, the pre-colonial Igbo society did not distinguish between policing and 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 specialized institution with specific role or primary purpose to police or fight crime. The age grade and masquerade society were prominent in the role of policing and

the task of policing and fighting crime among other roles or functions, and all adult male citizens belong to both the age grade and masquerade society meaning that the task of policing is that of the entire society (Aniche, 2018).

The colonial police disarticulated and alienated the people from their culture and tradition. The alienation and disarticulation continue even in the post colonial era.

But the advent of European colonialism changed everything, as the colonial police alienated themselves from the people which continued in the post-colonial or post-independence Nigeria. The consequence of this alienation is a serious security challenge in Nigeria resulting to proliferation of vigilante security apparatus. By 2003, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) sent some policemen to Britain to be trained in community policing with the hope of adapting it to the Nigerian context. The poor human development indices (HDI) in Nigeria are likely to pose serious challenges to the prospects of community policing with serious implications for community development in Nigeria.

### **Understanding Community Policing**

Community policing or neighbourhood policing or proximity policing has been variously defined, but they are all mainly different ways of saying the same thing. For example, Ikuteyijo & Rotimi (2012) wrote that community policing entails community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment for all in which people take active part in their own affairs. Consequently, community policing has become a term used by both professionals and scholars alike to replace other terms

such as foot patrol, crime prevention, problem-oriented policing, community-oriented policing, police-community relations and so on. Therefore, community policing is a policing strategy or philosophy based on the notion that community interaction and support can help control crime and reduce fear, with community members helping to identify suspects, detain vandals and bring problems to the attention of police (Friedmann, 1996).

In other words, community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem solving techniques, which proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder and fear of crime. Perhaps, the inference that can be distilled from these definitions is that community policing, unlike the authoritarian and autocratic character and top-down approach of traditional policing, is democratic, participatory and consultative, and bottom-top in approach which is why it is referred to as democracy in action (Aniche, 2018).

However, no matter how community policing is defined, it represents a paradigm shift away from traditional policing or traditional model of policing. The central theme is the collaboration of efforts between the police and the residence in combating crime and fear of crime. Community policing does not imply that the police are no longer in authority or that the primary duty of preserving law and order is subordinated, rather community policing entails community partnership in creating a safe

and secure environment for all (Ikuteyijo & Rotimi, 2012).

From the foregoing, the basic elements or core components of community policing include community partnerships, organizational transformation and problem solving. Community partnership is collaborative. It is partnerships between the law enforcement agency and the individuals and organization they serve, develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police. It involves confidence building measures and capacity building in which the partnerships are forged in conjunction with the other government agencies, community members and groups, human and social service providers, private businesses, and the media. This may involve establishment of ad hoc community liaison, where a community police officers goes out into the community and tries to find responsive people who are on the side of the police to serve as police informants.

Thus, through community partnership, community policing seeks to recontextualise the police, that is to say, community policing involves efforts to better link police and community (Bayley, 2012).

In this regard, Bayley (2012) noted that some forces require community police officers to handle calls for police, many do not. Almost all community police officers are responsible for community crime prevention one way or the other. Some do foot patrolling, many do not. Some are given responsibility for diagnosing the needs of communities and coming up with solutions, utilising police and non-police resources. Others are simply responsible for delivering traditional police services

but are enjoined to do so in a more responsive and community-oriented way.

Also, Greene (2000) stated that community policing has increased the police service to include issues such as public safety, crime prevention, fear of crime and community quality of life. Thus, communities are seen as participants in shaping police objectives and interventions as well as evaluating them. Capacity building in community policing or community-police partnership is focused on crime prevention and victim assistance. The police strengthen citizens' capacity and resolve to resist crime and recover from it. Therefore, effective community policing depends on optimizing positive contact between patrol officer and community members.

Police departments may supplement automobile patrols with foot, bicycle, scooter and horseback as well as adding "mini-stations" to bring police closer to the community. Officers working long-term assignments on the same shift and beat will become aware of the day-to-day or daily workings of the community. There is need for increased police presence in the community in order to reduce fear of crime among the community members thereby creating a sense of neighbourhood security. Fear must be reduced if community members are to participate actively in policing, because people will not aid if they feel that their actions will jeopardize their safety.

More importantly, people will not partner with the police if they suspect that the police will reveal their identity to the criminal gangs. Police recognize the need for cooperation with the community if they must deserve community supports

when encouraging community members to come forth with relevant information.

Police should realize that trust will enable them to gain greater access to valuable information from the community that could lead to the solution and prevention of crime, engender support for needed crime-control measures, and provide an opportunity for the police officers to establish a working relationship with the community.

The next core component of community policing is organizational transformation which involves transforming or fundamentally changing the organizational culture, leadership and management structure, labour relations, strategic planning processes, performance evaluation technique and operational transparency or *modus operandi*, the geographic assignment of officers, the allotment of fiscal resources, recruitment and hiring practices, training and information gathering systems. This is to create an organization infrastructure that can best support proactive operation intended to prevent crime (Aniche, 2018).

In line with this, Bayley (2012) wrote that in some forces, community policing is a new command often based in headquarters, a new unit of specialization within the police while in others, it is a function that is integrated into the existing command structure, though rarer than the former. Therefore, in terms of personnel, that is, recruitment and training, the major choice is whether community policing is carried out by professionals or by traditional police workers. Community policing personnel may be located at headquarters, at police stations or in disbursed offices created, often with

material or financial contributions from communities.

In the case of volunteers, the question is whether community policing is strictly performed by the police themselves, or whether the community is to be enlisted, especially in form of volunteers, to work with the police.

Finally, the next core component of community policing, that is, problem-solving is the process of adopting the proactive and systematic examination of identifying problems to develop and rigorously evaluate the response.

#### **Nigeria Police Force (NPF)**

The Nigeria Police Force is the statutory organization charged with the responsibility of providing policing services in the country. The Nigeria Police Force is designated by section 194 of the 1979 and 214 of the 1999, and of the 2011(as amended) constitution, as the National Police of Nigeria. Constitutional provisions also exist, however, for the establishment of separate Nigeria Police Service branches forming part of the armed forces of the federation (Nigeria Police Service, 2011). The constitution speaks in section 214 that- There shall be a police service for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Service, and subject to the provisions of this section no other police service shall be established for the federation or any part thereof (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011). In view of the constitutional provisions as stated above, it could be argued that the official policing mechanism in Nigeria is embedded in military culture, with a very long chain of command structure. The police perform conventional functions, and are also

responsible for the provision of supporting services to other internal security institutions such as the prison, immigration and customs services and for the performance of other military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be directed from time to time. Section 4 of the Police Act stipulated the functions of the Nigeria Police Service as: prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order, protection of life and property, enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are charged as well as military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required of them. For the fact that the statutory roles of the police are enormous, the same Act gave the police in Nigeria relatively commensurate powers in carrying out those roles. The police have powers to: take measures to prevent crime, investigate crime, interrogate suspects, prosecute suspects, and to search property and persons in order to prevent crimes, detect or investigate crimes, detect and apprehend offenders and collect evidence for prosecution. Others are to grant bail to suspects pending investigations or arraignment in court, serve summons, and regulate processions and assemblies and to disperse illegal or unlawful procession and assembly. The job of policing in Nigeria, most likely the same way in other parts of the world, is being perceived as an arduous and risky task. It is, therefore, pertinent to assert that in the face of any prevailing circumstances, the police are perennially at work and often at odd times and in places of danger (Amadi, 2004).

### **Vigilante and Neighbourhood Watch**

Although, some vigilante security outfits may have started as neighbourhood watch, they are not exactly the same. Vigilante and neighbourhood watch are both private security organizations primarily made up of volunteers but that is as far as the similarity goes. Vigilante is a private individual who legally watch and guards, or participates in a group, which metes out extra-legal or extra-judicial punishment to an alleged law breaker. Following from this definition, vigilante group, therefore, metes out extra legal or extra-judicial punishment to an alleged lawbreaker. However, not all vigilante activities are illegal, because sometimes vigilante began by apprehending or catching criminals and hand them over to the police (Aniche, 2018).

Vigilante justice is spurred on by the idea that criminal punishment is either non-existent or insufficient for the crime, usually based on the perception that the government is ineffective in enforcing the law and thus, community members need to volunteer to protect the community. In other instances, a person may choose a role of vigilante as a result of personal experience as opposed to social demand. Persons seen as “escaping from the law” or “above the law” are sometimes the targets of vigilantism. It may target persons or organizations involved in illegal activities in general or it may be aimed against a specific group or type of activity, for example, police corruption. Vigilante behaviour may differ in degree of violence, and in some cases vigilantes may assault targets verbally, physically attack them or vandalize their property. Any person who defies the law to further

justice is a vigilante, and thus, violence is not a necessary criterion (Aniche, 2018). Neighbourhood watch, on the other hand, is an organised group of citizens devoted to crime and vandalism prevention within a neighbourhood. Therefore, members of neighbourhood watch and others who use legal means of bringing people to justice are not considered vigilantes. In other words, neighbourhood crime watch is not vigilante security apparatus, because when suspecting criminal activities, members of neighbourhood watch or crime watch are encouraged to contact authorities or police and not to intervene. Neighbourhood watches, therefore, are police informants in that they give police relevant information that helps the police in their investigations and crime preventions (Aniche, 2018). In Nigeria, ethnic militias or militant groups have been erroneously taken to be vigilante groups. Although, some ethnic militias are involved in vigilante service, they are not strictly speaking vigilante security apparatus in that they are engaged in other activities which are not necessarily or primarily vigilante service. The point is that vigilante activities are not the primary activities or roles of the ethnic militant groups like Odua People's Congress (OPC), Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), etc. It so happened that along the line, these radical ethnic organizations began to assume or usurp the responsibilities of vigilante security. The traditional concept of vigilante in Nigeria, however, exclusively refers to an un-armed voluntary citizens or groups created in local communities to help the security agents by arresting suspected criminals or

delinquents and handing them over to the police.

### **Challenge of Community Policing in Nigeria**

Prior to the advent of the Nigeria Police Force in 1889 by the British colonial administration, there were various groups performing the role of policing the communities in what is today known as Nigeria. In some cases like Igbo pre-colonial societies, the role of policing or protecting lives and property of the people was the responsibility of the entire community even though it was facilitated by the age grade and masquerade societies. It was this model of community policing that colonial police supplanted with the colonial police in 1889 to provide quasi-military assistance to the British colonial administration in Nigeria. According to Garba (2012) noted that the idea of the modern Nigerian police is a creation of colonial rule in which its history and function began in serving the interest of the British colonial rule. It was organized as a quasi-military squad by the colonial government as an instrument of riot control, oppression and suppression. In other words, the colonial police was established neither as agent for promoting the rule of law, human rights, community safety nor for delivering social service, rather, the police was used in primitive expedition to further the goal of colonial annexation of territories and to quench protests as well as opposition against colonial exploitation.

In the same vein, Ikuteyijo and Rotimi (2012) described policing in the colonial era as anti-people. In fact the establishment of the colonial police was more to serve and protect the commercial

interest of the colonial masters. This pitched the police against the people they were meant to protect and there were series of clashes between both parties. Right from the beginning, the purpose of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was to protect government functionaries sometimes against “natives”. The post-colonial Nigerian Police is a carryover from the colonial epoch. In this respect the character of the NPF has not changed. Military rule only emboldened the military character of the Nigerian Police. As in the colonial period, the Police has deliberately been designed to appear tough and intimidating before the civilians, thus, alienating or disconnecting the people from the police more (Ekeh, 2002).

The history of community-police relation in Nigeria, thus, has been described as frosty as the idea of policing imposed on the country by the colonial master was calculated to foster an antagonism between the policed and the police. To make matters worse, the corruption perception of the Nigerian police by the Nigerian people over the years heightened consequently the Nigerian police is perceived as the most corrupt government institution both locally and internationally worsening community-police relation. Under this state of affairs, the Nigerian police have been unable to fight crime let alone prevent it (Ikuteyijo and Rotimi, 2012).

In Nigeria, night guards and vigilante groups have emerged in response to theft and armed robbery. Vigilante groups existed in Nigeria for decades, not only under civilian rule, but also during the previous military regimes of General Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar.

Thus, the traditional concept of vigilante in Nigeria exclusively refers to un-armed voluntary citizen or group created in local communities to help the security forces confront common criminality and social violence by arresting suspected delinquents and handing them over to the police. The Nigerian policing presently recognizes the vigilante groups arresting suspected criminals provided that they are unarmed and that the suspect is immediately handed over to the police (Aniche, 2018).

But with the corruption in the police, the suspected criminal easily find their ways back in the streets terrorising people and even in extreme cases unleashing vengeance on those people that handed them over to the police or masterminded their arrest by the police. The police are also accused of revealing the identity of their informants to the suspected criminals after being released by the police in questionable circumstances who later go after the informants. Also, the police have on many occasions failed to redeem the price tag it puts on suspected criminals at large. The police has been accused of bribery and corruption, extortion of motorists, illegal road blocks, extra-judicial killings, intimidation and the use of excessive force on innocent citizens, giving arms to armed robbers, involvement in the armed robbery, mass and illegal arrest, unable to confront the armed robbers, etc. The police officers are sometimes use as private body guards and thugs by rich politicians and play an ignoble role in election violence. All these perceptions of the people of the police disconnected them from the police.

The perception of the people of the police worsened to the extent that community members perceived as police informants are derided. Under this state of affairs, many Nigerian communities no longer looked to the Police Force for their protection from violent criminals or from other sources of danger. Instead they have resorted to other means like self-defence or mob action for their own protection including unregulated and often violent reprisals against suspected sources of their collective endangerment (Ekeh, 2002).

The increased incidence of crime since the end of the military regime has resulted to the proliferation of heavily armed vigilante groups in nearly every corners of Nigeria. Owing to erosion of confidence of the police by the people and mutual mistrust or distrust between the police and emerging vigilante security apparatus, the vigilante stopped handing over suspected criminals to the police and instead began to carry out extra judicial executions and killings of suspected criminals. The point being made is that it was this disconnect between the police and the community that resulted to the emergence of the vigilante security in Nigeria. As a result of the failure or inability of the Police to tackle the security challenges confronting the country, some state governments began to help form, endorse and sponsor vigilante groups.

### **Conclusion**

Community policing refers to policing strategy with the notion that community interaction and support can help control crime and reduce fear, with community members helping to identify suspects, detaining vandals and bringing problems to the attention of police.

This paper, therefore, concludes that component of community policing is organizational transformation which involves transforming or fundamentally changing the organizational culture, leadership and management structure, labour relations, strategic planning processes, performance evaluation technique and operational transparency or modus operandi, the geographic assignment of officers, the allotment of fiscal resources, recruitment and hiring practices, training and information gathering systems.

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