COMMUNITY POLICING IN DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA: - PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

By

HAMIDU, Abdullahi Abdul
Department of Local Government and Development Studies
Faculty of Administration
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria
Email: - hamiduabdul07@gmail.com
GSM:-08065298660

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Abstract

Since 1999 Nigeria have continue to witness unprecedented violence and growing insecurity to the extent that the police cannot handle successfully. Segments of the society now devise various means of protecting themselves and their property using militias and divest community vigilante groups. This paper anchor on the Broken Window Theory seeks to understand the dynamics of community policing (CP) in Nigeria in terms of problems and prospects, for effective partnership with the formal law enforcement agencies. The methodology use for the study is the content analysis using secondary data. This paper argues that Community policing is embedded in a range of social relations and historical trajectories that differs from one community to the other, yet if well exploited and integrated within the relations of state power, issues of violence and insecurity will be minimize. The findings include the fact that the relationship between the formal law enforcement and the informal community policing organisation is often not cordial. This could be attributed to constitutional issues and modus operandi of these groups. The paper then suggests the use of participatory methodology between the formal law enforcement agencies and the various stake holders in every community.

Key Words: - Community Policing, Governance, Security and Safety.

Introduction

In a modern state, like Nigeria, the police have claim to the monopoly over the means of violence as it relates to the issue of policing the society. That is, seeking compliance with existing laws and conformity within the precepts of social order in society. The above then indicate why the police are considered the official arm of the state that is most proximate, both temporally and procedurally to the occurrence of crime. And it is why the police occupy a leading and strategic role within the criminal justice system of Nigeria (Gyong, 2004; 40).

In a democratic setting, one of the dividends of democracy is the enjoyment of all shades of human rights by the citizenry as entrenched in the Nigeria constitution and all the international conventions entered into by Nigeria in the comity of nations. The above is a problem today, as the Nigeria Police Force that can enforce and guarantee such freedoms is seemingly ineffective, irresponsible and unaccountable to the government and the public. Though during daily operations of the police are in direct contact with the public.

The implications of these ineffectiveness is that, justice is been perverted, peoples' rights denied, innocent souls committed to prison, torture and extra-judicial killings perpetrated and so many people are arbitrarily detained because they cannot afford the illegal bail monies demand. (Abubakar, M.D. 2012)

The above brought to the foreground the problems of wrong policing such that the present Acting Inspector General of police, Abubakar M.D (2012) rightly stated that:-

> *Our Police stations, state CID and Ops offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of squads and teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS) have become killer teams engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collectors. Toll stations in the name of check-points adorn our highways with policemen shamefully collecting money from motorists in the full glare of the public.*

The effect of the above is that there is disparity between what the people expect of the police and what the police are actually doing and such the necessary cooperation of the public to the police seems to be lacking.

As segments of the society now devise various means of protecting themselves and their property using militias and divest community vigilante groups. This paper seeks to understand the dynamics of community policing (CP) in Nigeria in terms of problems and prospects, for effective partnership with the formal law enforcement agencies.

Thus the need for community policing that is founded on democratic principle. As in a democratic society, the police are entrusted to protect and serve the public's fundamental rights to liberty, equality and justice under the law. It is a paradigm shift from reactive policing to people oriented policing.

Problem of the Study

The Nigeria police force have often been unable to meet the safety and security needs of Nigerian and are often overpowered by well-armed and violent criminals. While the above have lead to the loss of public confidence in the effectiveness of the police, it resulted in the emergence of local vigilante groups and private security outfits. Community policing is one of suggested way out of the above doldrums.

The issue then is, with the militarization of the Nigerian society due to long period of military rule and lack of democratic values and ethos, can the police embarrass Community policing and change their daily operational strategies, which are reactive and anti-people oriented to otherwise?.

In seeking to serve democratic and humanitarian ideals which is based on probity, accountability, justice, equality and efficiency, the nature of police service delivery system is an issue that has to be addressed, considering the track record of the police in terms of extra-judicial killing, bribery, corruption etc. The above have made the police to be alienated from the public. The issue is to what extent can Community policing make the public have confidence in the police and even render voluntary support, information and cooperation to them?

Communication is essential in any interaction which seems to be non-existent between the police and the public, and Community Policing is meant to solve the above problem. However, before then what are perceptions of the police personnel and the public to this nature of policing? How is the interaction going to take place? In the course of the interaction will there be "grey areas" that will be reserve for the police alone such as crime investigation and public order management?

Objective of the Study

Community Policing as a kind of Public- Private Partnership, this study seeks to generally understand the nature and dynamics of Nigeria Police Force and Community Policing. In specific terms the study seeks the following:

(a) To understand the nature and dynamics of Community Policing.

(b) To understand the problems of the Nigeria police and how such can affect the operations of Community Policing.

(c) To proffer suggestions and recommendations on how best Community Policing can be operated in such a way as to enhance policing in Nigeria within a democratic setting.

Scope of the Paper

The paper then advocates community policing and not Private Military Company (PMC) and Private Security Company (PSC) as an alternative to policing in Nigeria because the activities of the PMC and PSC is also seriously in contention. As in some cases the PMC and PSC do threaten human security, which include the security of the regimes they are serving and that of the citizens of the country in the course of their operation. As Jeffery right stated:

> *This concern is well placed because, although, the mandate of the sector is to supply additional security to the one provided by the state, the companies and their personnel are legally armed and authorized to use such arms which can be and has been misused, and this makes them both a potential and real source of threat to human security. This threat is most ominous in Africa, where human security falls far below the rest of world and where the bargaining strength of the state in relation to the more powerful (Western) corporate security actors is considerably weak.* (Jeffery 2007).

The paper then argues that community policy could be explored as a better alternative, after taking into consideration a more holistic definition and understanding of the concept of peace and security during this period of globalization and technological breakthrough.

Research Methodology

The methodology used in this paper is that of content analysis. It is based on information available from various publications on the subject matter such as journals, articles textbooks, magazines, internet etc. The study further relies on documentary evidence from official records informed opinions of academics and practitioners on the subject matter.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frame Work

In Nigeria, a study on the police and policing is like a study on the nature and dynamics of the state. The police is a social, political and legal entity of the state funded and maintain at the expenses of the state, while policing implies a set of process with specific social functions and measures taken by a variety of institutions and groups (both formal and informal) in society to regulate social relations and practices in order to secure the life and safety of members of community as well as conformity to the norms and values of society. (Alemika and Chukwama 2006).

Therefore, like the state, the character, roles and functions of the police are determined by the socio-political and economic structure of the country. The police and policing therefore are also dictated by the contradictions and conflict of interests among the groups and classes in society.

In line with the above, it then becomes pertinent for the public to be giving the right of input into police policy especially in a democratic setting. This is based on the argument that the key to success in policing lies on the improve relationship between the police and the community and crime control is every body's responsibility.

Crime

Crime control is considered as every body's responsibility. As such crime is society based and society determined. As Mathew rightly stated, Crime is, in an important sense, a social constructed phenomenon. Its meaning is profoundly influenced by considerations of time and space. Its construction is based upon the interaction of four key elements – victims, offenders, the state and the public (Mathew, 1993 in Haralambos & Holborn 2004).

The above presupposes that the criminal justice system is not the main source of crime control policy rather it included the social bricks and mortar of civil society.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning for this study is the Broken Windows Theory (BWT) of James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. This theory states that if the first broken window in a building is not repaired, the people who like breaking windows will assume that no one cares about the building and more windows will be broken, soon the building will be have no windows. (Wilson J.Q & Kelling, G.1982)

The theory then suggests that public offences like vandalism and rowdy behaviour can create a down ward spiral of neighbourhood deterioration and fear of crime that then leads to more deterioration and more serious crimes if left un-checked by the community. This is so because if left, it portrays an impression that nobody cares about it and as such more will then be committed. On the other hand, increased police presence and enforcement of informal rules of conduct and laws can make a community seem less chaotic and safer thereby lowing crime rate.

The BWT can be incorporated into the concept of community policing in the sense that collective effort by both the police and community dwellers can help alleviate the rate of crime in the community as the police are seen as partners in progress of the community

Community Policing

Community policing is not new as the traditional Nigeria society is communal in nature with emphases on respect for elders, reorganization of the extended family system, consciousness of the values attached in the traditional institution and a sense of security within the community. For instance, in the Hausa society traditional ruler settle disputes among families, conflicts among the various groups in the society as well as among communities. In fact, most disputes are settled in the level of the village or district head. It is only brought to the level of the Emir when all else has failed at the lower level.

The movement of people and various business transactions were also adequately monitored. This is done through the keeping records, keeping using "Ajami", the traditional Hausa writing which uses Arabic letters. The scribe to the ward head, village head, district head or emir usually keeps all the records of people and various contentious issues. Through this system, if a stranger comes to the district or the village, he is known and the traditional authorities know potential criminals as well as miscreants. Religious clerics known as "Malami" also play a crucial role in the judicial system due to the influence of Islam in the society.

Among the Tiv people, ***Ya Na Angbian*** translated as 'eat and give your brother' is a social philosophy of the ideal kinship ties, based on fairness, altruism, equity and responsibility towards the individual and the community. This philosophy encourages cohesion, cooperation and mutual aggregation of efforts for the purpose of achieving transparent unity, peace, progress and trust. The adoption of ***Ya Na Angbian*** indicates being your brother's keeper. In all facets of the society through mutual agreement as a Tiv man would say ***Angbian Gbe ga***- 'A brother does not fall' serve as basis for communal life for peace, progress and security. (Anshi M.W & Yakubu A.N, 2011:1033)

In contemporary setting, the concept of community includes the following groupings:

a. Those related to neighbourhood
b. Those focused on social interaction
c. Those that highlighted feelings of belonging and solidarity and
d. Those based on rural or urban experience (Dambazau A. B, 2007).

The above took into cognizance the nature and dynamics of society and have great bearing on crime and policing.

Policing and Community Policing

Policing can be considered as securing compliance with existing laws and conformity within the precepts of social order among other things. Based on the above, community policing can

considered as a philosophy, process, policy and strategy aimed for achieving a more effective and efficient policing. The adoption of which will improve the quality of life of the populace and police services through a proactive reliance on the community. Friedman considered Community Policing as;

> *A policy and strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police services and police legitimacy, through a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime causing conditions. This assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making and greater concern for civil rights (Dambazau: 2007:251)*

Therefore, Community policing is characterized by the notion of *Police Service* rather than *Police Force*, where the most significant benchmarks for performance are public satisfaction, trust and confidence (Police News, 2006:80).

Typology of Community Policing

Thus Rosenbaum and Sederbeng (1974: 548-559) identify three types of vigilatilism or community policing:-

(1) The Crime Control type is those directed against individuals involved in acts proscribed by the formal legal system.

(2) The Social Group Control type are those that are against groups that are competing for, or advocating a redistribution of, values within a system. This is based on the fear or threats of upward mobility by a segment of society or aimed at engendering change in societal hierarchy. It could be used by those groups that fear threat of domination and those that are dominated.

(3)The Regime Control types are those that exist to control administrations. In this case, vigilante groups become so influential that they determine political leadership and often change administrations, should they suspect an irritation. For instance the activities of such groups like the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Oodua People's Congress (OPC).

In the case of Nigeria, Pratten D. (2008a: 8) explains the difference in the community vigilante groups thus:

> *While it is possible to draw distinctions, Nigeria vigilantes are frequently conceived within the same framing as forms of militant youth movements such as militias, campus cults, and street gangs known as 'area boys'. The self – ascriptions of vigilante groups are themselves sometimes blurred. While the shari'a implementation committees (hisba) in Northern states constitute a form of alternative policing, they do not, like night guards, call themselves*

vigilantes. Within history of Yoruba vigilantism, too, there are continuities and discontinuities between vigilantes, forms of hunter and night guard association, and community policing.

The characteristics of community policing.

The following are some vital characteristics that are necessary for community policing.

a. The police are visible and accessible on which will enable the citizens to seek police assistance and help in preventing the occurrence of crime.
b. Policing involves community consultation cooperation and interdependency, which is a kind of partnership of the police and the community through voluntary scheme, initiating neighbourhood support network's and augmenting police patrol activities.
c. Policing involves multi-agency collaboration with other statutory agencies and voluntary organizations in addressing crime and other disturbances to public tranquillity.
d. Policing is made more essentially proactive which entails all police personnel and department are involved in the problem solving process, contributing ideas and designing initiatives for effecting policing.
e. Police is accountable and responsible in its policies, strategies, operations and decisions affecting the community.

The study of Okunola et al (2011) established that both formal and informal security sectors can collaborate effectively in crime management. This manifested in the revelation of the existence of Neighbourhood night watch to ensure excellent security network and to compliment the efforts of the police in crime management within the community. The result of the above is the lower rate of crime in Mamu community of Ogun State.

In rural areas, crime is considered as a community problem as such some crimes are not even reported to the police for necessary action. The above is such because of high cohesiveness within communities which favours the commission of certain crime due to increase tolerance and the development of set of justification which that will allow a neighbour to excuse their neighbour's deviant behaviour.

Community policing is based on the assumption that policing is a collective social and corporate responsibility of all and sundry though spearheaded by the police but it also serve as a check on the excess of the police and other law enforcement agencies. The difference

between Traditional or conventional policing and community policing can be seen in figure 1.00 below.

Figure 1.0 Basic differences between Traditional and community policing

S/N	Traditional Policing	Community policing
1.	The police are a government agency principally responsible for law enforcement.	The police are the public and the public is the police: the police officers are those who are paid to give full-time attention to the duties of every citizen.
2.	In terms of relationship between the police and other public service department, priorities are often in conflict.	The police are just one department among many responsible for improving the quality of life of citizens
3.	Police efficiency is measured by detection and arrest rates.	Police efficiency is measured by the absence of crime and disorder.
4.	The highest priorities are crimes, which are of high value in which the victim is a high profile personality, or those crimes of violence.	The highest priority is given to whatever problems disturbing the community most.
5.	The police specifically deal with incidents.	The police deal with citizens' problem and concerns.
6.	Response time is what determines the effectiveness of the police.	Public cooperation is what determines the effectiveness of the police.
7.	In terms of service calls, the police respond to them only if there is no real police work to do.	Service calls are vital functions and great opportunity of the police.
8.	Police professionalism is determined by swift effective response to serious crimes.	Police professionalism is determined by keeping close to the community.
9.	The most important kind of intelligence is crime intelligence (study of particular crimes or series of crimes)	The most important kind of intelligence is criminal intelligence (information about the activities of individuals or groups).
10.	The essential nature of police accountability is to be highly centralized; governed by rules, regulations and policy directives, accountable to the law.	The emphasis is on local accountability to community needs.
11.	The police regard prosecution as an important goal.	Prosecution is just one tool among many.

Source: Malcolm K. Sparrow, Nov. 1988 "Implementing community policing", P*erspectives on Policing,* No. 9

Based on the above, Community Policing has the following advantages:

a. The emphasis is on local accountability to community needs.

b. The highest priority is given to problems disturbing the Community Most.

c. Public cooperation is what determines the effectiveness of the

Police.

Need For Community Policing

The Community Policing then becomes necessary because today the state ceased to enjoy monopolistic control over the following:

a. Communications: As the Internet is the best following by Radio and Television yet it is use for also criminal purpose.
b. Technological development depends more on the private sector.
c. Financial transactions flow around the world and generate regional and global crisis with little capacity for intervention by the state.
d. Although, states reinsure investment, their ability to control decisions about where to invest and from where to get investments is minimal.
e. International migration and ability to control the movement of people has also diminished.
f. Trade has increasingly opened up, and states have evident problems to establish controls and restrictions. (Aravena, 2001).

Problems and Prospects of Community Policing

A good grasp of the problem and prospects of CP will begin with the police. In Nigeria, police corruption is considered as one of the obstacles to policing. As Dambazau (2007:266) rightly noted this corruption impacts directly on policing

> *Where the police are deemed corrupt and inept by the wider society, people tend to take measures into their hand either to protect themselves or seek revenge. For some, this generally means investment in private security, caged or prison-like residences with high fences as seen in most Nigerian cities, and for others it means either a return to traditional forms of justice or carries out "jungle justice".*

(a)The above give rise to various local vigilante groups and ethnic militias such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, the Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF), and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. (MEND) etc. This groups increase the proliferation of small arms and ammunition, the implication of which is increase crime in society especially with the growing unemployment level of the country.

(b) The use of extra-judicial means such as causing injury and even death to deviant members and non-members by vigilante groups.

(c) Residential stability heightens the likelihood of social ties but in Nigeria today most people don't have stable place due to poverty and unemployment, these affect social ties and security.

(d)Closely related to the above is the issue of Civic engagement. These refer to active participation in social and civic activities by members of the community, including abilities to develop and sustain strong relationships, solve problems and make group decisions, collaborate effectively and get things done.

Conclusion

In order to implement a successful community policing in Nigeria, crime and criminality should be considered as a social phenomenon. Crime prevention and management therefore be done through the management, design and augmentation of the social and physical environment by reducing the opportunity or making it harder to commit crime. This is more attainable within the ambit of community policing.

Also, one accepts the statement of Newman D. J. (1978) that Permanent prevention of crime, if attainable, will require basic modification of cultural values, revision of opportunity structures, reorganization of social class structures, and elimination of economic imbalance.

Furthermore one concurred with the statement of Abubakar, A. (2004) that for the security system to be effective, it must be dynamic, constantly evaluating the situation and adapting to changing threats. The above indicate that Security Sector Reform must be taken as a constant challenge, especially in this area of Globalization, Privatization and technological breakthrough.

Recommendation

From the above, it is recommended that the Police Community Relations Committee should be operational from the ward level and should be entrenched in the constitution and other statutory books so as to make it a permanent feature of policing. While at the same time, institutional checks and balance should be strengthen such as the judiciary, pressure groups, Community Based Organisations (CBOS) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOS) coupled with the respect for rule of law.

Towards strategic partnership for community policing in order to avoid the shortcomings of the conventional police the following is further recommended

1. Identification and registration of groups and associations in a neighborhood for purpose of community policing.
2. Assessment of capacity and capability of each group/association in policing.
3. Signing memoranda of understanding (MOU) and contract with such associations/organizations stating code of conduct and practice.
4. Identifying time and areas of coverage and jurisdiction for such youth groups
5. Outlining grievance/dispute and redress procedure clearly.
6. Stating exit points in case of breakdown in the terms and spirit of MOU. (Momoh A. 2006)

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