

Community policing and partnership: opportunities and challenges for gombe state nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The role of the public in community policing cannot be over emphasized. Every definition of community policing shares the idea that the police and the community must work together to define and develop solutions to problems. One rationale for public involvement is the belief that police alone can neither create nor maintain safe communities. The public (i.e. local/traditional hunters, the vigilante group etc.) must assist in one way or the other to maintain law and order in the society. This led to the creation of local marshal by the state government in Gombe State through the Youth Rehabilitation and Empowerment Programme (YREP) which recruits almost 1,200 youth as marshals to assist in security, traffic and environmental management. This paper aimed at describing the benefit of community policing in Gombe state in particular and Nigeria in general, while making suggestions of how policing can be developed in communities today. The methodology adopted was the use of secondary data with the aid of content analysis approach. The study recommends amongst others, incorporating the activities of local vigilante groups to work side by side with the police units and other security outfits in the state in order to create synergy in the fight against crime.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of crime prevention in any society cannot be over-emphasized. Traditionally, the maintenance of law and order in any society is usually the exclusive role of conventional police and other law enforcement agents. In Gombe State, Nigeria, the history of crime prevention can be broadly divided into three main categories viz; pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The pre-colonial forms of policing include vigilante group and palace guards (Marenin, 1985). The pre-colonial era in crime prevention in Gombe was characterized by indigenous institutions responsible for crime fighting. Then, the Islamic legal system and the social structure provided the necessary basis for the regulation of the behavior of members of the society. There were various institutions responsible for crime prevention. Gombe being one of the Hausa-Fulani of the Northern Emirate, the function of crime fighting and law enforcement was left to some individuals drawn from palace guards (Rotimi, 2001)

The post-colonial Nigeria Police Force is a carryover from the colonial epoch. This is evident in the style of law enforcement used by the post-colonial police in the daily discharge of their duties. Under the post-colonial epoch in Gombe we have two main segments which comprised of Gombe State under military (1996-1999) and Gombe State under civilian (1999-to date.) Gombe state under the military regime has witnessed peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding between the multi-ethnic and non-indigenes living in the state, who lived and conduct businesses in a peaceful atmosphere but during the civilian regime most especially around 2004-2011 the state was faced with a lot of crisis comprising of religious, ethnic and political thuggery etc., which made the state to be described in different ways such as Gombawa, Yankalare, Goje Boys etc., However with the change of government in 2011, the state has started to witness another era of combating crime as the new governor introduced The *Youth Rehabilitation and Empowerment Programme (YREP)* which recruits almost 3000 youth since 2012 to assist the police and other government agencies in the fight against crime and criminalities in the state.

Community policing is the bedrock of community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment for all and sundry. It is policing whereby the people take active part in their own affairs. With community policing, the police is not seen as a problem or stranger whose presence stands for danger but as partners in development. The unfriendly nature of the relationship between the police and members of the public has enjoyed a wide coverage among scholars. It was in reaction to this development that the concept of community policing was introduced.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper in view of the foregoing, attempt to X-ray the effectiveness/workability of community policing in Gombe State vis- a- vis the ongoing partnership between the Nigerian Police and the Marshals in

Gombe. The concept of community policing may be a novel idea especially in Africa and other third world countries, its practice has been in existence for long although without all the formality of the modern day partnership it is also instructive to the role that several theories which solidify the imperatives of community policing abound. These include the following

Normative Sponsorship Theory (NST):

Normative Sponsorship Theory postulates that most people are of good will and that they will cooperate with others to facilitate the building of consensus (Manning 1984) the more these various groups share common goals, values, and belief, the more likely they will agree on common goals when they interact together for the purpose of improving their neighborhoods.

Critical Social Theory (CST):

Critical Social Theory focuses on how and why people coalesce to correct and overcome the socioeconomic and political obstacle that prevent them from having their needs met (Goldstein 1990).

The three core ideas of critical social theory are:

- a) **Enlightment:** people must become educated about circumstance before they can lobby for change.
- b) **Empowerment:** people must take action to improve their condition.
- c) **Emancipation:** people can achieve liberation through reflection and social action.

Based on the theory of Normative Sponsorship (NST), community policing should be accepted in our society's policing system. The collective effort of both the police and community dwellers can help alleviate the rate of crime in the community as the police see residents as partners in development and vice versa.

III. POLICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA

The history of police reforms in Nigeria has been an interesting one in the sense that since the nation transitioned to democratic rule in 1999, the police have set and reset different number of reforms in what has become a popular parlance among Nigeria's policy makers. However, most of the reforms have been described as representing the interests of the government of the day rather than serving the interests of the public they are meant to protect (Hills, 2008). For instance, Police reforms formed one of the major areas of priority of the Obasanjo-led administration between 1999 and 2007 (Arase and Iwuofor, 2007; Abati, 2008). Smith, the first Inspector General of Police (IGP) under the new democratic dispensation, launched a 6-point agenda aimed at redeeming the "lost glory" of the police as well as improving the welfare of the officers. There was also assistance from other countries like the British and American governments, which assisted in the setting up of the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN).

The police however suffered a major setback during this period as the nation witnessed its first ever police strike with several police officers downing tools in protest against accumulated years of neglect of welfare and material needs. The police also lost many of its officers to high crime wave especially in violent crimes like armed robbery, etc. Tafa Balogun took over from Smith and he immediately came up with his 8-point agenda popularized by the slogan "Fire for Fire" given the casualty figures among policemen who were felled by armed robbers' bullets due to the high rate of insecurity enveloping the country at that time. In 2005, the then Inspector General of Police (Ex-IGP) Mike Ehindero launched his 10-point agenda with prime attention paid to police accountability and capacity building. He changed the more militaristic slogan of "Fire for Fire" to a more democratic one "To serve and protect with integrity". His successor, Mike Okiro came up with a 9-point agenda in 2007, while Onovo (Ex-IGP) declared a 3-point agenda in 2009. Hills (2008), suggested that though reforms could make a normative and organizational difference in the Nigerian Police, the effects of such reforms would be "superficial, localized and temporary" in the absence of fundamental socio-political change. Also, Abati (2008) observed that "...one lesson that we have learnt is that when government talks about police reform or when every new Inspector General waves the banner of reform, they do so merely as an attention-grabbing gesture and as an opportunity to spend more money and award contracts". Needless to say that the problem of police-community relations is not one that will be addressed by *political* declarations but through sincere efforts of all stakeholders in the business of securing a safe environment for all.

IV. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Community Policing

The basic idea behind community policing is that the community must be involved with police to solve security problems. As simple as this may sound, police must accept the fact that the community has to be

involved in the process from the beginning. The goal is to promote police/community partnerships. Community Policing is new way of policing to address not only the causes of crime and the fear of crime but all quality of life issues in the community. The “we’ve always done it this way mentality, is still pervading policing to a large extent, may not only be an ineffective means of organizing and administering a police agency but may also be a costly squandering of valuable human and financial resources. In Nigeria, community policing was introduced in 2003 when some police officers were sent to England courtesy of the British Department for International Development (DFID) to understudy community policing as practised in the UK. Consequently, in 2004, more officers were trained as Community Development Officers (CDP) in Enugu, southeastern Nigeria. These officers were asked to spread the message of community policing to other officers in other states of the federation (Dickson, 2007). It is noteworthy however, that community policing as practised in the UK is definitely not applicable to the Nigerian context without necessary adjustments given the long-standing antagonism between the police and the public. For instance, Dickson (2007) has noted some impediments to the successful implementation of community policing in Nigeria and they include internal resistance by policemen who benefited from the traditional policing and who prefer to maintain the *status quo*; lack of commitment to the project by implementing officers; lack of support from members of the public; inadequate support from the government; and poor welfare package/incentives for policemen. However, one of the biggest impediments to the success of community policing in Nigeria is the hostile relationship between the police and the informal policing machinery usually made up of some factions of ethnic militia groups in the country.

Partnership-Building

In general, partnerships assume a higher cooperation and collaboration between the state and law-abiding citizens within a positive-sum relationship. In the public safety realm, partnerships may be built between the police and community and other entities within local jurisdictions for the purposes of crime prevention, crime reduction, and maintenance of order. In other words, through partnerships, the police and the community can develop cooperative and collaborative ties for the purposes of solving problems that may affect them both. The arguments in favor of partnership-building are abundant. Dolling and Feltes (1993) argue that partnerships are “a chance to increase the integration of the citizens who constitute a community and to build or to rebuild social structures in that community”. In similar parlance, Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1990) state that “the police must form a partnership with people in the community, allowing average citizens the opportunity to have input into the police process, in exchange for their support and participation” and that “contemporary community problems require a new decentralized and personalized police approach, one that involves people in the process of policing themselves”. Tilley (2003) asserts that “community policing stresses policing *with* and *for* the community rather than policing *of* the community”. Rawlings (2002) mention that “at the crux of the partnerships is the belief that the prevention and reduction of crime and disorder problems require the coordinated, concentrated effort of individuals and agencies affected by and concerned with the problems. Because crime has multiple causes, solutions must be equally multifaceted and cannot be reached by the police acting alone”. In community policing, partnerships are indispensable. They offer the state and the community a proper *milieu* for the interaction, discussion, negotiation and bargaining that is not readily available in other public safety schemes. In this context, partnerships also bring democratic routines and principles to processes of decision-making in public safety. This differs vastly from other models of public safety that grant no direct voice to the community in their decision-making processes.

Police and Traditional Security Outfit Relationship in Gombe

There are many arms-bearing groups in Nigeria, most of which transformed into various militia groups with ethnic undertones. In the wake of rising crime rates in most parts of the country and the seeming inability of the formal police to arrest the situation, the local vigilante groups comprising mostly members of ethnic militias came to the rescue of most Nigerian communities.

In the North Eastern parts of Nigeria, Gombe in Particular the local vigilante groups (Yan Banga), which has been in existence since before the British Rule in Nigeria and up till now considered by many as a local and notable security outfit. Members of the Yan Banga group, being entrenched in their ancestral tradition, are widely acknowledged to master magical techniques of defense, attack or divination - warranted by oath-taking ceremonies of new recruits. This singular characteristic grants them a substantial comparative advantage in security and crime fighting activities. Additionally, Yan Banga’s services are more affordable than those of formal private security outfits.

Also, there is the local Hunters Group (Maharba) which is part and parcel of the Hausa/Fulani Traditional Administrative system since before the colonial period and these Maharba or local hunters have been very crucial in fighting terror group and or High robbers who are feared because of their magic and evil powers. In 2012, the Governor of Gombe State, Alhaji Ibrahim Hassan Dan Kwambo introduced the Youth

Rehabilitation and Empowerment Programme (YREP) which recruits almost 1,200 Youth as Marshals to assist in Security, Traffic and Environmental management in the state. These youth passed out in May 2012, after three weeks of drills and training in combat and anti-crime fight among other things, In the year 2013 another set of marshals of well over 1500 were recruited as the service of the Marshals are required in different parts of the state.

In other parts of Nigeria the Egbesu Boys, Odu'a People's Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Niger Delta Liberation Force, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and several other groups were formed with the initial aim of protesting the environmental degradation as well as economic and political marginalization taking place in that area. Most of these groups were at various points in time engaged by their respective state governments to assist in the security of lives and property in the area. In fact, at a point in time, Lagos, Oyo, and some other state governments publicly requested for their assistance in fighting crime. The general perception is that the police are corrupt, inefficient, ill-equipped and unreliable while the militias are incorruptible and efficient. In June 2001, the Governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, publicly announced his willingness to invite the OPC to assist the state to combat criminals who seemed to have overwhelmed the Police in Lagos State (Babawale, 2001). Likewise in Anambra state the state House of Assembly enacted the Anambra Vigilance Services Act in 2001.

The relationship between the police and the newly established marshals seems to be smooth as Gombe State Government has attached most of the marshals under the watch of police i.e. the ward/security Marshal are attached to the police (securities) and traffic marshals are attached to the motor traffic division (MTD) unit of the police. With this strategy the possibility of having any clash between the marshal and the police in the course of discharging their function has been eliminated or minimized as their function is to assist the police in discharging their duties. However in some parts of the country, there have been frequent clashes between the police and other militia groups. Basically, the operation and constitution of most of those groups put them in confrontation with the police. Besides the crude means of crime detection used by these groups, the instant judgment meted out to their victims also pitches them against the police who are to ensure the maintenance of law and order and enforce the human rights of all citizens irrespective of their offences. Most of the literature on community policing ignore, or rather under estimate, the importance of these groups in crime detection and enforcement. This may be explained by the fact that the UK whose model of community policing Nigeria is trying to adopt does not have such challenge of ethnic militias. This is a major area which must be looked into if the project of community policing is to survive in Nigeria. The conflict of interests between the police and the various groups must be well addressed and put in the right perspective.

V. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

The lack of a concrete definition for community policing and vague measures of success has contributed to the difficulties in determining its effectiveness. In addition, the complex nature of community policing limits the ability to provide sufficient evidence of either success or failure. However, the following are the opportunities and challenges of community policing.

VI. OPPORTUNITIES

Improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police: There is the opportunity to increase public accountability through participation, as number of community policing initiatives illustrates positive results in improving community relationships and perceptions of police. The Community and police work towards shared goals.

Increasing community capacity to deal with issues: Community policing empowers community to respond to community concerns through Positive attitudes in the community to interact, deal with, and solve problems and provide the opportunity for community grass roots support for police.

Changing police officers' attitudes and behaviors: Community policing lead to Police officers increasing interaction with and confidence of the community which made the Police and community to develop positive relationships which linked to increased job satisfaction.

Increasing perceptions of safety and decreasing fear of crime: Evidence suggests that community policing can increase perceptions of safety and decrease the fear of crime and also gives hopes for the hopeless and reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behavior.

VII. CHALLENGES

The police officer: Police officers work independently of the community in identifying and solving problems, the need for training in problem solving and community engagement can be neglected.

Police culture: Some of the police officers directly or indirectly show their resistance to community policing as it is attributed to the perception of moving away from traditional law enforcement practices to a 'softer' style of policing.

Community: The community can be disempowered when offering solutions if Police dominate as the crime and disorder experts and the Police are still reluctant to share information with the community; also there is the historical lack of trust between the Police and the community.

The Local Vigilante Group: These local militia groups are less expensive in their services and often offer free services to traditional/clan elders and leaders of the community but one of their problem is lack of investigation and quick decision in execution of criminals that are found wanting, although the community prefer their services than the police. They also operate independently without any formal constitution or laws to guide them in their day to day activities which made them traditional in nature and with no ambition to advance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

A study on community policing and partnership has been conducted with special focus on Gombe State Nigeria. The paper shows that laudable opportunities can be achieved only when there is cooperation and synergy between the police and the informal security outfits in the state. The state government has a big role to play in this aspect as they can serve as regulators of the activities of local vigilante groups and other informal police groups. The local groups are more familiar with the environment and they are usually more accepted to members of the public as the police are often portrayed in bad light. If this trend is allowed to continue, the members of the public, will completely lose hope and confidence in the Nigerian police hence the need for cooperation and synergy between the police and local militia groups in the fight against crime. The following recommendation will help the state government and the security cooperatives in combating crime thereby facilitating community policing in the state.

- 1) The state government should incorporate the activities of local vigilante groups and also attach them to work side by side with the police units in order to assist the police so as to reduce clash or conflict of interest.
- 2) To create awareness to local dwellers about the significance of providing information to security agencies (police).
- 3) To assist the police in providing necessary materials to confront the modern challenges of sophisticated terror groups.
- 4) To improve the welfare packages of the security personnel; so as to reduce corruption among the police officers.

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