

Community Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Community policing is a concept that is fast gaining ground in Nigeria especially among the police. Its model emphasizes proactive rather than reactive policing. It is also principled on partnership and decentralization of powers for effective crime fighting. The involvement of the community in crime fighting is a very essential element of community policing. While the Nigeria Police Force is used to the traditional model of policing where authorities are centralized and police only respond to call for service, in contrast, community policing believes that powers and responsibility of policing the neighborhood should be shared between the police and the community. It is a paradigm shift from the traditional policing of receiving orders from above to that of making decisions as situations arises in the community. The slow development of community policing in Nigeria is due largely to the police history that is built on a semi-military command structure, and where the police are used to the use of force and brutality. However, as community policing begins to gain acceptance by the police, it will reduce crime rate because the public will assist the police in crime fighting by becoming the eye of the police in the community.

INTRODUCTION

Community policing is a concept that is new to the Nigeria police Force. It was not until the early 2000 that the concept started becoming popular in Nigeria. The Nigeria Police Force before the advent of community policing operated on a traditional British semi-military structure of policing that stresses the centralization of powers. This principle of centralization of power is antithesis to the philosophy of community policing that emphasizes decentralization of power. Although, community policing is new in Nigeria, however in the Western world, particularly the United States, the principle has already gained popularity since the late 1970s. Its philosophy emphasizes partnership, proactive policing and decentralization of power. Community Policing stresses that by working together the police and the community can accomplish what neither can accomplish alone. Community policing is a philosophy that emphasizes working proactively with citizens in order to prevent crime and to solve crime-related problems. Partnership is a key element of Community Policing because the police and the public must partner together in order to adequately fight crime. This will involve the police relinquishing some of their powers to the community so that they can become the eye of the police in the neighborhoods. This can only be achieved if the police earn the trust of the community. However, where there is distrust between the police and the public such a vision becomes unrealistic. Since its introduction, community

policing has achieved very little result in Nigeria, especially in the area of partnership between the police and the community due to public distrust of the police and the inability of the police to share some powers with the public. The Nigeria Police who have been used to receiving orders from their superiors find it extremely difficult to share such powers with the community who are very distrustful of police officers. The failure of community policing in Nigeria is also due to the fact that the police are not willing to move away from their traditional policing model which they have been used to for a very long time. This paper therefore examines community policing in Nigeria, its challenges and prospects. It takes a critical look at the history of Nigeria policing, problems of Nigeria police, origin of community policing, philosophy of community police, advent of community policing in Nigeria, as well as the theoretical explanation to Nigeria community policing.

CONCEPTUAL CLERIFICATION

Community Policing

According to Wroblewski and Hess (2003: 134), Community Policing is an organization- wide philosophy and management approach that promotes community government, and police partnership; proactive problem solving and community engagement to address the causes of crime and other community issues. They also noted that: “ the essence of community policing is to return to the day when safety and security are participatory in nature and everyone assumes responsibility for the general health of the community- not just a select few, not just the local government administration, not just the safety forces, but absolutely everyone in the community” (Ibid. 134).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist or consensus approach is a model upheld tenaciously by orthodox western social scientists. It posits that behavior in society is structured. This means that relationships between members of society are organized in terms of rules. Social relationships are therefore patterned and recurrent (Harlambos and Holborn, 2005: 10).

Functionalists believe that there is value consensus in every social reality. They believe that there is general agreement by members of a society on what is desirable, *worthwhile*, and worthless. People share consensus on the values, norms, and beliefs of a society. A high degree of consensus in a society whether it is democratic or communist, binds members together to form an integrated and cohesive unit. Functionalists also assume that societies and phenomena are pervaded by stability. The theory assumes that a certain degree of order and stability is necessary for the survival of social system. Functionalists downplay the conflict in society between classes and believe that once norms and values are maintained, the society would be conflict free.

Emile Durkheim is the most influential of the early functionalists and is viewed as the originator of functionalism. The theory was developed by Talcott Parsons in the twentieth century. Durkheim's concept looks at society as a set of interrelated parts which together form a whole. It considers society as a structural system made up of interrelated parts. The social system has certain basic needs that must be met if it is to survive. These needs are known as functional prerequisites. This means that each part, will in some way, affect every other part and the system as a whole. It also follows that the survival of the system depends on the compatibility of the various parts. Since the Nigeria Police is an integral part of the Nigeria social system, its ineffectiveness and poor job performance has implication on the overall security of the society.

Other agencies that provide security become impacted as a result of the inability of the police to perform their function effectively. The inability of the police to perform their duties effectively has affected the overall security of the nation because people feel very unsafe to go about their regular businesses. Thus, the inability of the police to perform their duties effectively affects the economy, polity, and the family.

HISTORY OF THE NIGERIA POLICE

The Nigerian police was established by the British colonial administration in 1861 to *enforce sanitary regulations in Lagos*. The British colonial administration, who was responsible for the administration of Lagos, realized that its assignment included the maintenance of law and order. In 1861, the British were granted permission from London to create the Consular Guard, which comprised of 30 men. In 1863, the Consular Guard became known as the “Hausa Guard”. The Hausa Guard was regularized in 1979 by an Ordinance creating a Constabulary for the Colony of Lagos. The force was mainly paramilitary in nature, but performed some civil police functions (Kupolati, 2007: 8). The Hausa Guard, which consists of Hausa-speaking ex-slaves was established to undertake semi-military duties of pacifying the indigenous *population and ensuring colonial political domination* (Igbo, 1999: 120). In 1896, the *Lagos Police Force was created and armed like the Hausa Constabulary*.

In 1894, the Niger Coast Constabulary was formed for areas now known as Delta, Rivers and Cross-Rivers states, following the proclamation of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893. In 1888, the Royal Niger Constabulary was established in Northern Nigeria which was later split into Northern Nigeria Police Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment. (Iwarimie-jaja, 2003: 396). In 1914, the Northern and Southern police forces were united and in 1930, the present Nigeria Police Force, with headquarters in Lagos, was fully established (Igbo, 1999: 120). An Inspector General of Police was appointed as the Commander that was replaced with Commissioner in 1937, but reverted to its original title of Commissioner in 1951 after the introduction of a new Constitution. The title ‘Commissioner’ was assigned to the officers in charge of the Regions (Kupolati, 2007:8).

The amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Police Forces in 1914 also saw the establishment and formation of special police branches such as the Criminal Investigation Department, the Immigration and Passport Control, the Central Motor Registry, the Police Colleges, the Force Communication, the Police Band etc. (IwarimieJaja, 2003: 397). The unification of the forces also made it imperative to fight the alarming increase in such crimes as murder, manslaughter, counterfeiting, theft, house-breaking, child stealing, illegal distillation of gin and illegal mining (Igbo, 1999: 122). The force was reconstituted and a Police Council vested with powers in respect of policy, organization, finance, establishments and condition of service was created.

PROBLEMS FACING THE NIGERIA POLICE

The Nigeria police is faced with several problems some of which include, nepotism, ethnicism, corruption, institutional weaknesses such as inadequate manpower (both in strength and expertise), insufficient education and training, inadequate equipment and poor conditions of service of the average policeman, poor public relations between *subordinate and superior officers*, lack of public cooperation, Constitutional problem that put the whole country’s police under the Presidency, and most recently, the poor perception of police by both police officers

and the public (Ibeanu,2007: 59-60; Iwarimie-Jaja, 2003: 410; Igbo, 1999: 130). These problems have hindered, to a very large extent, the ability of the Nigeria police to perform their functions effectively. However, in the 1990s and 2000 to 2003 several efforts have been made to reform the police and to address some of these problems especially in areas of staff recruitment, purchase of equipment and provision of logistics particularly transportation and remuneration. Despite all efforts by the government, the Nigeria Police Force still struggles in its ability to perform their primary responsibility of fighting. There is alarming increase in crime rate and corruption within the force is still endemic, thereby leading to public distrust of police officers. The public looks at police officers with scorn, distrust and suspicion. They do not consider them as friends and allies in the fight against crime but rather as enemies on the side of the criminals. (Igbo, 1999: 130).

Due to this poor perception of the police, the public are reluctant to provide any form of support or cooperation to the police. This lack of trust in the police often leads to a resolve by the public not to cooperate with them in crime fighting, and sometimes resort to lynching of suspects by angry mobs (Igbo, 1999: 130). In fact, the relationship between the police and the public is very often characterized by brutality, confrontation, and exploitation (Ibeanu, 2007: 58).

ORIGIN OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The central tenets of community policing that stresses involvement and *responsiveness to the community are similar to the principle set forth by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 when he opined that the police are the public and the public are the police.* However, as the police evolved in the United States, they grew further apart *from* the public they served. This social distance by the police away from the public was enhanced due to the advent of patrol cars which replaced the traditional foot patrol.

Traditional police departments are insular organizations that response to calls for service from their offices. This insular professional approach began to change in many agencies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this period, there was a paradigm shift in America from the traditional, professional model of policing to a more community partnership and proactive model of policing (Wroblewski and Hess, 2003:134-135).

Thus, Community policing started in the United States as a way of shifting police from its traditional reactionary way of policing to a more proactive policing. For decades, the U.S. police followed professional model, which rested on three foundations: preventive patrol, quick response time, and follow-up investigation. Sensing that the professional model did not always operate as efficiently and effectively as it could, Criminal justice researchers set out to review current procedures and evaluate alternative programme. One of the first known of these studies was the Kansas City, Missouri, Preventive Patrol Experiment. The study found that preventive patrol did not necessarily prevent crime or reassure citizens. Following the study, many police departments assigned police units to proactive patrol. Another of such significant study was that done by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. They introduced the theory of “broken windows”. The theory assumes that a community will be free of major crime if minor crimes are gotten rid of. They concluded that in order to solve both minor and major problems in a neighborhood and to reduce crime and fear of crime, police must be in close, regular contact with citizens. That is police and citizens should work cooperatively to build a strong sense of community and should share responsibility in the neighborhood to improve the overall quality of life within the community (Bohm and Halen, 2005; 214- 215).

PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The philosophy of community policing is for citizens and police to share responsibility for their *community's* safety. It means that citizens and the police will work collectively to identify problems, propose solutions, implement action and evaluate the results in the community. The idea of Community policing is quite different from traditional policing that emphasizes strict police authority on crime prevention. In community policing, the police must share power with residents of a community, and critical decisions need to be made at the community level, rather than at police stations (Bohm and Halen, 2005: 215). The goal of community policing is to decentralize police decision making authority. To achieve this goal, it requires the successful implementation of three essential and complementary components or operational strategies namely community partnership, problem solving, and change management (Ibid, 2005: 215). Community policing was intended to address the causes of crime and reduce the fear of crime in affected communities. It employs creative management styles so as to engage responsible members of the public in proactive problem-solving tactics to minimize the level of criminal activities and facilitate law enforcement in the communities. The core elements of community policing are as follows:

- A broader definition of police work;
- A reordering of police priorities giving greater attention to crime and disorder;
- A focus on problem-solving and prevention, rather than incident driven policing;
- A recognition that the 'community', however defined, plays a critical role in solving neighborhood problems, and
- A recognition that police organization must be restructured and reorganized to be responsive to the demands of this new approach and to encourage a new pattern of behavior;
- A recognition that police services, operation and management must be decentralized for effectiveness, so that local police officers can speedily address problems and needs encountered at the local levels;
- That the training of police officers must cover the areas of social interactions and problem-solving in addition to traditional policing skills;
- There must be a partnership between the police and the communities in defining or identifying, local problems and needs and developing solutions to identified problems;
- Commitment to development of long-term and proactive policies and programmes to prevent crime and disorder(Law and Justice in Emerging Democracies 2006:13)

ADVENT OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

As a result of the public distrust of the police, the former TO, Balogun, in 2003 undertook a number of measures to improve the police and citizen relationship. He established in all state commands the Police Complaints Bureau and the Human Rights Desks, and with the help of the British government, he introduced a pilot community policing project in Enugu State (Ibeanu, 2007) Tafa Balogun's eight point's agenda state in nutshell as follows:

1. Massive onslaught against robbers, gruesome murder, assassination and other crimes of violence against the backdrop of which operation 'Pire for Fire' was adopted as a methodology.
2. Fast decisive crime/ conflict management.
3. Community partnership in policing, the modern approach all over the world.
4. Serious anti-corruption crusade, both within and outside the Force.

5. Comprehensive training programme conducive for qualitative policing.
6. Improved conditions of service and enhanced welfare package for officers, inspectors and rank and file.
7. Inter-service/agency cooperation at all levels down the line.
8. Robust public relations necessary for the vision of people's Police (Ibeanu, 2007:63).

When Mike Okiro became JO in 2007, he introduced a "9-way test". The high points of these programme are: transparency and accountability, war on corruption and crime, crime prevention, upgrading intelligence and crime database, improved training, improving the public image and public relations of the police, improving human rights *record* of the police and interagency cooperation. Since 2004, when the Community Policing pilot project was introduced in Enugu State, it has also been implemented in other states such as Ogun, Ondo, Kano, Jigawa, Anambra, Sokoto, Cross River and Edo States (Ibeanu, 2007: 65).

THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

Despite its introduction, Community Policing has failed to achieve any meaningful success in Nigeria. The public perception of the police is worse than ever. The public still view the police as corrupt and people never to trust. The police do sometimes aid and abet criminals and have been described as one of the most corrupt institution in Nigeria. The philosophy of community policing emphasizes partnership, decentralization of authority, and proactiveness. The structure of the Nigeria police is very central and their approach to crime fighting is still reactionary rather than proactive. The partnership between the public and police in crime fighting is still unrealistic because of the poor public perception of the police. More importantly, the Nigeria police force is built on the traditional culture of force which is used to brutalize the same people that they are expected to protect. This culture of brutality and use of force makes it difficult for the Nigeria police to embrace community policing.

FUTURE OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

For community policing to have an inroad in Nigeria, the Nigeria police force must have a complete paradigm shift *from* its traditional model of policing to a more community oriented policing that stresses community partnership, decentralization of powers, and proactive policing. The policing model should be that of partnership with less emphasis on regulatory powers and sanctions with greater reliance upon compromise and cooperation that would serve the public better rather than the traditional model of policing (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2006: 16). More importantly, the police must improve its public image so that they can earn public trust. This can only be achieved when they show a caring attitude towards the public rather than use of brutal force on them and demanding for money before services are delivered.

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