

Civilian Joint Taskforce and Peace Building: The Role of OSPAC in Rivers State

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DOI:10.56201/jhsp.vol.11.no2.2025.pg1.13

Abstract

The idea of community policing has been at the front-burner of security discourse of late. This study examines Civilian Joint Task-Force and Peace Building: The role of OSPAC in Rivers State. It aims at presenting an alternative as well as harmonizing the operations of the various vigilante groups in Rivers State. The main Objective of the study is to examine the viability of the Civilian Joint Task-Force and Peace building agency called OSPAC as a model for community policing in Rivers State. The study adopted community implant theory propounded by Rosenbaum (1987) to support the use of OSPAC vigilante in crime control. The research method adopted is Qualitative design by the use of historical information through Primary and Secondary data. The presence of the outfit in six Local Government Areas of Rivers State namely; Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (Onelga), Ikwerre, Etche, Obio/Akpor, Emuoha and Khana shows the acceptance of OSPAC by the people in their quest to fight crime. The study found out that the outfit is not only accepted by the people but that crime has indeed been brought to a bearable level in these local Government Areas. The paper therefore recommends the adoption of the OSPAC model of civilian joint task force in peace building as the model for community policing in Rivers State, working in synergy with the Nigeria Police Force and the military. It should be replicated in all local government areas of the state.

Key Words: Civilian Joint Task-Force, Community policing, Peace Building, OSPAC.

Introduction

Crime rate in Nigeria has been on the increase. Efforts made to curb the menace through traditional approaches have proved futile. This study therefore is aimed at searching for alternatives to these methods already in existence under Nigerian Law. The increase in crime rates have assumed terrifying dimensions and are affecting the country's socio-economic and political life. Peace and safety is eluding Nigerians at a geometric rate as she is now joined as one of the countries of the world with the highest rate of crime. Nigeria has a very high crime rate. The Global peace index ranked it the world's 17th least peaceful state. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 134,663 cases of offences were reported in 2017. Offences against property make up the highest number of cases reported. As of March 2022, Nigerians

reported they are worried most about robbery, theft and breaking-in. The level of concern stood at 66.04 points, on a scale from 0 to 100 (where 100 represents the highest concern). Since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian Governments at all levels have experimented with a variety of methods aimed at mitigating the devastation caused by crime and insecurity with little success. In year 2010, a terrorist group known as Boko Haram almost brought the nation to her knees. This was followed by Fulani Herdsmen and farmers clashes, kidnapping and militancy (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013).

According to Adigwe (2013), increased violent crime in Nigeria has prompted citizens to seek alternative security or self-help measures to reduce crime or checkmate the activities of certain unscrupulous elements and hoodlums, and to prosecute them appropriately. In Rivers State, there have been high levels of kidnapping with little or high ransom demanded by the kidnapers. Communities are also experiencing series of other crimes ranging from cult activities, kidnapping, illegal oil theft and many others (Lawan, 2006). Many businesses have collapsed, investors relocating to other areas that are relatively secure. The Nigeria Police appear to be overwhelmed by the high rate of crime in the society. In some cases whole communities have been sacked as a result of cult or chieftaincy related disputes. These leave in their trail a deluge of criminality including Arson, Murders, Looting, Gangsterism and advanced-fee-fraud popularly known as 419. Added to this is the new rave among the youths called Yahoo-Yahoo Scamming. In January 2015, there was a rivalry clash between the Debam and Dewell cult groups, as a result, three cultists were killed. The situations at the Local Government levels have deteriorated so

much so that the Police apparatus is overwhelmed. It has therefore become imperative to source for new common grounds for confronting the enemy called crime in the society. The Onelga vigilante outfit which originally was aimed at curbing the insecurity and rising crime rate in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government areas of Rivers State now serves other LGAs such as Etche, Emuoha, Ikwerre, Obio/Akpor and Khana.

Statement of the Problem

Crime and fear of crime are some of the social problems that are affecting the quality of life of the whole world (Ogadima et al, 2012). According to Jenny (2008) community policing is important in reducing crime or developing the quality of life in the society in general but there are large gaps between policy and actions.

Rosenbaum, (1994) observed that community policing has become the new orthodoxy (The New Police order for Effectiveness, Equity, and Efficiency in Community Policing). Simultaneously ambitious and ambiguous, community policing promises to change radically the relationship between the police and the public, address underlying community problems, and improve the living conditions in neighbourhoods. Community policing developed in response to increase realization that established forms of policing were far less effective, equitable, and efficient than Non-emergency services take on greater importance. There is limited evidence that informal social control processes and collective crime prevention behaviours can be 'implanted' in neighbourhoods characterized by social disorganization and the absence of these behaviours, although comprehensive efforts certainly hold some promise (see Rosenbaum, 1986, 1988; Skogan, 1990). Furthermore, there is concern on the part of both

the police and community leaders about whether police should be in the business of organizing communities, given the complex politics represented by diverse ethnic and racial needs.

Ordu et al, (2017) argues, however, that challenges such as bribery and corruption, human rights abuse, public loss of trust/confidence, meddlesome attitude of political godfathers in police community affairs, lack of visionary schemes, and unnecessary use of coercion and threats to enforce public compliance with rules, have frustrated every effort to improve and stabilize police-public co-operation which is a precondition for effective community policing. It is therefore high time the Nigeria Police and local residents began to imbibe the culture of rectitude, social justice, and total conscience-overhauling so as to reach an understanding and maintain mutual support necessary for proactive community policing in the country, they concluded.

From these, one will agree that there are challenges to the implementation of community policing and procedures that must be addressed. This is the gap the paper seeks to fill. The police force in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular, are trying to deal with it despite the many challenges. It is however hindered by the lack of institutional framework to leverage upon. The challenges include apathy and complaints of police brutality all over the place. Community policing in Nigeria faces many challenges, including lack of trust and corruption. The public distrusts the police, and is reluctant to report crimes or testify in court. Bribery and corruption are common among the police, police misconduct, including brutality, extrajudicial killings, and illegal detention, meddling by Political figures in community relations, underfunding, poor working conditions, uncoordinated vigilante groups and communication gap, among others.

The efforts of various police administrations to curb crime and social order in Nigeria has continued to persist. In fact, Rivers State has become an epicenter of crime and deviance lately. Many lives have been lost and property worth millions of Naira destroyed every year due to the activities of criminals and general insecurity in the state. Insecurity in Rivers State is now alarming as no week passes without a report or news about crime in the cities and rural areas of the state. Some of these crimes are violent crimes. The Police on their part have been accused of several abuses. These abuses range from ordinary arrest and unlawful detention to threats and acts of violence, including sexual assault, torture, and even extrajudicial killings (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The argument has been that the police lack necessary tools to curb crime in the communities (Dawn Newspaper, 2011).

There have been several calls and agitations for state police, including the right for civilians to bear arms. They are always pointing at the breakdown of law and order at the grass root/community level. In explicating this they posit that there is lack of co-operation between the Police and the Community leadership. They are therefore asking that the members of the community at the grass root level be involved in the policing of their neighborhoods. This study on Civilian Joint Task Force and Peace building: The Role of OSPAC Vigilante in Rivers State is aimed at providing a credible alternative to the Nigeria Police community policing strategy.

Conceptual Review

The acronym OSPAC means “Onelga Security Peace and Advisory Committee”. Onelga is the short form for Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area in Rivers State. Although, the name has also been used to mean Official Security Planning and Anti-Crime Control (OSPAC). In this paper the two meanings shall be used interchangeably. The paper

also looks at community policing as a peace building strategy for Nigeria and the need for a joint task-force.

Community Policing and Peace Building in Nigeria

Peace Building is the development of constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. It aims to resolve injustice in non-violent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. Peace building can include conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and transformation, and post conflict reconciliation. Peace building becomes strategic when it connects the community or groups on the ground, grass rooting peace for effective community development. OSPAC model as a vigilante group fighting crime at the community level is a kind of Civilian Joint Task-Force doing community policing in the local government areas so affected. Peace building is a long term process of encouraging people to talk, repair relationships, and reforming institutions. For positive change to last, everyone has to be involved in the process of building peace.

The need to maintain order and control conflict has always existed in one form or the other whenever people have to live together (Okiro, 2007). Thus, one of the nine principles of policing as formulated by Sir Robert Peel was that ‘A Test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it’ (Dampsey & Forst, 2005). The police as Peel envisaged then was organized around the ‘Beat System’ in which officers were assigned to become familiar with them and the people residing there, thereby making the officer part of the neighbourhood life. The Royal Irish constabulary was formed in England to check rising crime rate in the 18th and 19th centuries. Australia, India and Canada soon established similar organizations. Other countries, impressed by the success of the plan followed suit until nations throughout the world have adopted police systems based on the British model and Nigeria is no exception. In the United State of America the first full time organized Police Departments were formed in New York City in 1845 and later Boston, not only to respond to crime but also to control unrest (Okiro, 2007). The idea of policing in Nigeria dates as far back as the 19th century, precisely after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914. The three major tribes of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa and the more than two hundred and fifty other ethnic groupings, had variously commissioned individuals and vested on them the powers of protecting lives and property.

Community policing or neighborhood-oriented policing can be defined as a philosophy or way of life and a proactive, decentralized approach designed to reduce crime, disorder and the fear of crime. In Nigeria, the public perception in relation to lack of public confidence and the corresponding cultural gap has assumed a level whereby members of community are not willing to give useful information to the Police in the task of preventing and controlling crime. This situation has been identified as one of the main problems in the implementation of various policing policies and programs. This actually led to the call for the introduction of community policing in Nigeria (Civil society Panel on Police reform in Nigeria Report, 2012). The civil society panel on police reforms in Nigeria report (2012) reflects a range of concern about the divisions in communication between police officers and the public in Nigeria. Community policing emphasizes full partnership between the community and its police in identifying and ameliorating local crime and disorder problems. The Philosophy of community policing is built on the belief that people deserve and have a right to say on how their communities are policed in exchange for their involvement and support.

The Police need information from members of the public to serve them better, for the police cannot effectively prevent and investigate crime without the willing participation of the public. This concept of community policing was largely popularized by the United States of America and the United Kingdom from the 1980s onwards as a principle of co-ordination and consultation between the police and the public on ways and means for effective prevention of crime.

Hills (2014) argued that,

The promotion of police and community partnership in Nigeria had been carried out by a range of politicians, practitioners, criminal justice scholars who firmly believe in facilitating effective policing through partnership strategy. This kind of partnership strategy tends to serve as a means to build trust between the local people and the police. The Federal Government of Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari reiterated the concern of the government of Nigeria to give priority to community policing on the nation's security agenda (Sun Newspaper, 2015).

The Philosophy of community policing is for citizens and public to share responsibility for their community's safety. It means that citizens and the police will work collectively to identify problems, propose solutions, implement actions 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.

The challenges to the effective implementation of community policing in Nigeria has been linked to internal resistance, difficulties in delineating the communities, quality and quantity of implementations, insufficient strategies for planning among major stakeholders, lack of commitment by implementing officers, lack of support from the government and members of the public, and improved welfare packages. Community policing can foster efficiency, promote openness or transparency and accountability; reduce acrimony among members of a group or community, reduce incidences of corruption and reduce conflicts between the Police and the citizenry. Chukwuma (2017), has postulated that community policing is a triangular relationship, involving the Government, the community, and the Police. The purpose of community policing is to have the Police and the communities agree on security problems confronting them and mutually solve them together. Kasali and Otedola (2016) have observed that the many challenges confronting Nigeria is lack of adequate adoption of the community policing philosophy into its practice as officers and men are still found entangled with traditional law enforcement approach, which negates the principle of community policing. There is consensus agreement among scholars to the effect that the traditional method of policing has failed in Nigeria. 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 Haley, 2005:215). Community policing was first introduced in Nigeria in 2004 by T.O.Balogun, the then Inspector General of Police, who through the help of the British government introduced the pilot community policing project in Enugu State (Ibeanu, 2007). It has also been implemented in other States such as Ogun, Ondo, Kano, Jigawa, Anambra, Sokoto, Cross River and Edo State (Ibeanu, 2007:65).

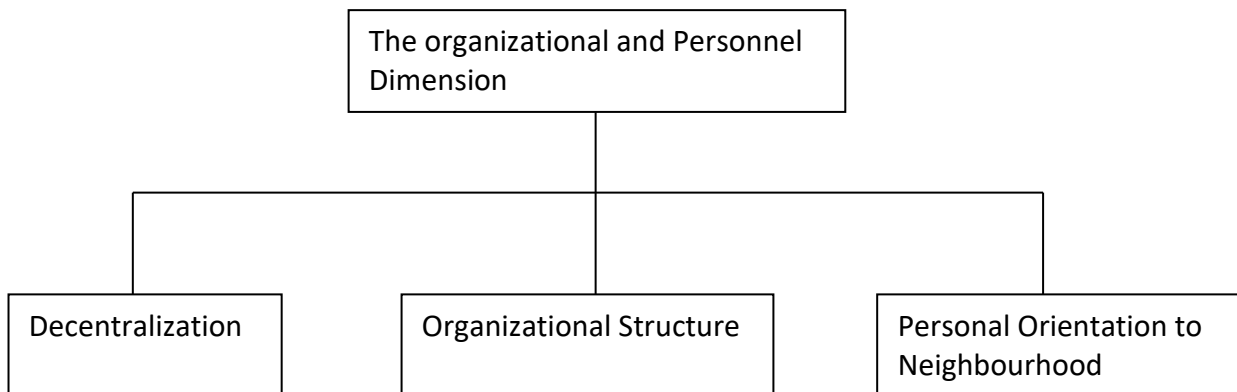
Civilian Joint Taskforce in Peace Initiative

A joint task force (JTF) is the primary organization for joint operations. This connotes exchange of operational ideas and the pooling of resources to combat crime, including

Terrorism by the military. The civilian Joint Task Force in like manner brings together elements from various communities who share common values, all-be-it civilians, to foster an agenda for confronting crime and deviance in society. The members of this force must, first of all, seek and obtain the consent of the government to bear arms before engaging in their assignment. This is what makes it a force and the procedure for their components, command and control structure, and type(s) of mission. They must have a clear objective and operational base which makes their mandate mission specific. Civilian Joint Task Force must be tailored to accomplish a specific mission; it is unlikely that any two will ever be the same. A joint task force in peace initiative is security based and so in addition to being combatant could have combined operations such as fighting crime, including drugs and terrorism, with welfare and rehabilitation. The organization of a joint task force staff must include -

- a) Manpower and Personnel
- b) Intelligence
- c) Operations units
- d) Logistics
- e) Plans and policy, and
- f) Command, Control and Communications (C3) Systems.

Figure 1: The Organizational and Personnel Dimension of Community Policing.



Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2024

All these make civilian Joint Task Force often ill equipped to manage the process, especially as huge capital is required to run such an outfit. Their major strength however, is in area of intelligence gathering. This is made possible by the fact that members are drawn from the communities or grassroots.

Non State armed groups (NSAGs) are a prominent phenomenon in the discourse on security in Africa. They serve as either anti-state agents orchestrating violence or fill security void by complementing state security. This paper analyzes the role of OSPAC civilian Joint Task Force in peace initiative in Rivers State.

Statement of Objectives

The main Objective of this paper is to examine the viability of the Joint Civilian Task-Force and Peace building agency called OSPAC as a model for community policing in Nigeria. Other objectives are;

- i) To identify the need for a civilian joint task-force and Peace building as community policing strategy for Rivers State.
- ii) To examine the role of OSPAC in Peace Building in Rivers State.
- iii) To evaluate the socio-economic impact of OSPAC as a model of community policing in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on community implant theory as propounded by Rosenbaum (1987). In his essay titled “Theory and Research behind Neighbourhood watch”, Rosenbaum advanced the argument that the primary reason for high crime rates is a lack of informal social control in neighbourhood areas. Sociologists also argue that informal social control can be introduced into a community through collective citizen action in areas where social control is naturally weak or none existent (Rosenbaum 1987). Social control, in its broadest sense, refers to a group’s or community’s capacity to regulate its members. It entails the administration of rewards and sanction thus, while formal social control is always based on written rules and laws and is enforced by courts and police, informal social control is always based on customs and norms and is enforced by citizens themselves through surveillance, reprimand, warning, rejection, and other emotional pressures to ensure conformity. In general, the community implant hypothesis argues that crime and social disorder can be better controlled by both formal and informal arrangements, such as the police and community participation, working together towards that end. It is believed that this integration will help ensure crime control to a certain extent. In relating the theory to civilian Joint Taskforce in Peace initiative using the OSPAC vigilante outfit, the community participation element is pronounced. This is pertinent to the study as it explains the community’s role in establishing the vigilante organization as a model for community policing in Nigeria. The paper further highlights the role played by OSPAC in six Local Government Areas of Rivers State namely: Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (Onelga), IKwerre, Emuoha, Etche, Obio/Akpor and Khana to validate the phenomenon. The term “Social Control” refers to a groups’ or community’s capacity to regulate its members. This entails the administration of rewards and sanctions. OSPAC vigilante drastically reduced crime in these LGAs by ensuring that those who violate the laws of the land face charges, fines, and the death penalty, depending on the severity of the offence.

Review of Related Literature

Ogadima et al, (2012) did a study on ‘‘The Content and Focus on Community Oriented Policing Training Programs in Nigeria’’ and observed that crime and fear are some of the social problems that are affecting the whole world.

Rachael, N.N (2023) also did a study on ‘‘the role of Community Police in Crime Prevention and Control for the Effective Management’’ and found that community policing has been an effective tool in combating crime and enforcing law and order. It also noted community policing is effective in generating information about suspects and modalities of arresting crimes. This agreed with the view of Arnold, (2009), that community should be responsible for their securities directly or indirectly. The study also revealed that as long as

community is united against crime, there will be safety in the community through sharing of information and proper communication channels.

Nwaeze (2010) conducted a study on the effect vigilante groups have on crime control on contemporary Nigeria. It indicated that the Nigeria Police is ineffective at crime control and that vigilante groups sprang up in their current form to compensate for this ineffectiveness, in addition it demonstrated that vigilante groups are gaining prominence as crime fighting agents in contemporary Nigeria.

Emeodu (2021), in his study on indigenous security outfit and socio-economic development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni and Emuoha LGAs, Rivers State, conceptualized OSPAC vigilante as a form of indigenous security outfit that aid the conventional securities to protect their territories. In the long run, various LGAs and communities adopted its name than using ONELGA. In fact, some LGAs, like Etche coined its name ESPAC security network with the aim of providing security to the people.

Adiele I.B and Emeodu E.N (2022), did a study on OSPAC Vigilante and crime control in Emuoha and Etche Local Government Areas of Rivers State. So have others attempted to define the role of OSPAC in crime control.

However, none of these studies has been able to present OSPAC as a model of civilian Joint Taskforce in Peace initiative to be emulated by government in her community policing effort. This is the gap this paper seeks to bridge.

OSPAC Vigilante Outfit and Crime Control in Ogba/Egbame/Ndoni, Ikwerre, Emohua, Etche, Obio/Akpor and Khana Local Government Areas of Rivers State

The acronym OSPAC means “Onelga Security Peace and Advisory Committee (Osi Olisa, 2023). Onelga is the short form of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area in Rivers State. Although, the name has also been used to mean Official Security Planning and Anti-Crime Control (OSPAC). Offor Anthony O, Atei M.O and Stanley I. Okoroafor (2020), experienced the new meaning in their research paper titled, “OSPAC and Crime Control in Onelga, Rivers State”.

Nigeria is plagued with many crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, assault, battery, kidnapping, arson, burglary, terrorism among others. The rate of crime in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA heightened sometime between 2012 and 2019. In response, a Local Government Vigilante group was formed in 2017 by the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government caretaker committee. The chairman, Barrister Osi Olisa in collaboration with His Royal Eminence (HRE) Eze Chukwuemela Nnam Obi, mainly to provide security in the area. The action was necessitated due to high rate of crime that was prevalent in the Local Government area (Okwu in Offor, Anthony O. et al 2019). At formation the name was Omoku Security Planning and Advisory Committee (OSPAC). By this, the activities of OSPAC were limited within the environment of Omoku. Later, as members were drawn from other communities, the name was changed to ONELGA Security Planning and Advisory Committee (OSPAC). In 2019, by extension of their services to other local government areas in the state and the recruitment of members outside ONELGA and the establishment of other branches outside the state, the name was again changed to Official Security Planning and Anti-Crime Control (OSPAC). Asinobi (2018), in his description of OSPAC affirmed that since its formation OSPAC has become a strong force in fighting crime such as rape, armed robbery, cultism, car snatching, Kidnapping and petty theft in the area. However, in course of their

duties, different people had brandished OSPAC in several forms, such as outfit of Bakassi, Spiritual Soldiers and Executioners (Eweh, 2019). But, some victims of crime in ONELGA who remained anonymous perceived OSPAC as “Saving Grace” for the people. Before 2017, kidnapping of the oil companies workers, rape, armed robbery, murders, arson and cultism were at the highest level in ONELGA. Okorobia (2007:209) noted that Stealing, Kidnapping and armed robbery as unorthodox ways of survival, was vigorously fought by OSPAC. The highest beneficiary of the evil profession was Igwedibia Joshua alias “General Don Waney”, who met his death while in self-exile because of the activities of OSPAC in ensuring the protection of lives and properties within their environs. OSPAC works in collaboration with the Nigeria Police as a form of private community policing strategy to enhance crime fighting at the community level. They do this having regards to section 214(1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) which states that, “No other Police force shall be established for the federation or any other part thereof”.

OSPAC therefore uphold complete adherence to the law hence their emergence at present is not seen as being in conflict with the Nigeria Police to affect their professional role. Aremu (2014:77) observed that the relevant information gathered and intelligence in security management meant that with the understanding of their territory and geographic mapping, such information circulated to the police enable them to raid and apprehend the criminals from their homes and hideouts. The success of the OSPAC Vigilante Outfit informed the Nigeria Police on August 2019 to direct all State commissioners of Police to train members of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) on information gathering intelligence and counter terrorism attack as a measure to enhancing community policing in Nigeria.

Methodology

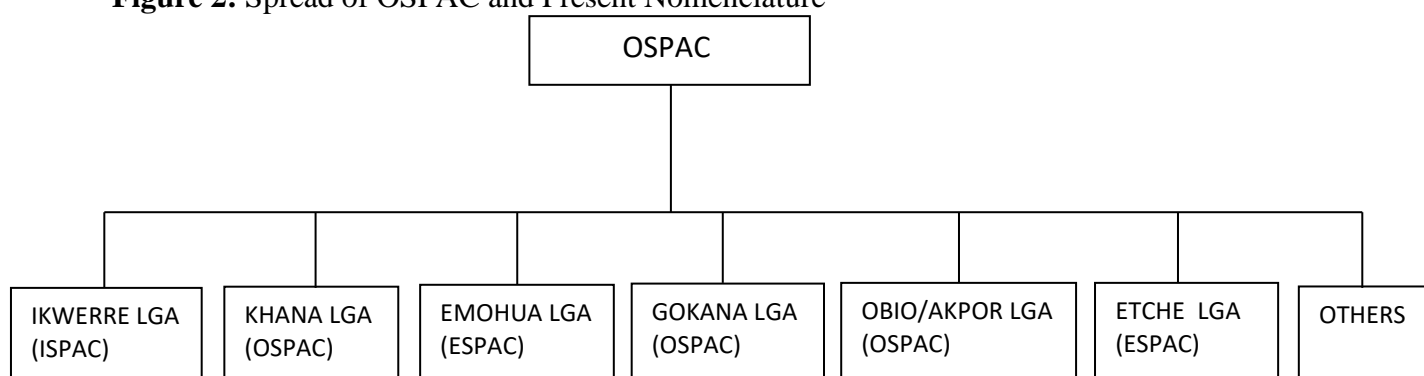
The paper adopted Qualitative Design method by the use of historical information. Primary sources were gotten from interviews and focus group discussions, while secondary information was sourced from books, journals, Newspapers and the internet.

The Growth of OSPAC

The effective collaboration of OSPAC with the police and the military brought about positive results in the fight against crime in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area and indeed parts of Rivers State. OSPAC in November 2017 led a team of soldiers from the Six (6) Division of Nigerian Army who raided the residence of Don Waney, the notorious gang leader who terrorized Omoku. During the raid, items discovered which aided his evil act included Sophisticated weapons, dynamites, dozens of cannabis, military uniforms, military boots, communication radios, ten human skulls and bones were recovered (Edozie, 2018:2). The group also hunted down the leaders of the 2018 New year Killings in Omoku by forcing his second in-command; Ikehukwu Adiele and another strong gang member, Lucky Ode to flee to Enugu in Enugu State where they finally met their death on 8th January 2018, in an encounter with troops from the 82 division of the Nigerian Army Enugu and men of the Department of State Services (DSS) from Rivers State command in their place of hideout. Their death was a consequence of the murder of twenty three (23) persons who were returning from “cross over service” on 31st December, 2018. The exit of these Kingpins brought relative peace and security in ONELGA as other of their followers fled the area for fear of OSPAC attack.

Following this remarkable feat of OSPAC in ONELGA other Local Government Areas started to emulate the courage of the ONELGA chairman and OSPAC to set up similar outfits in their Councils. First they invited OSPAC to carry out direct intervention in their LGAs. Later they changed the nomenclature to reflect their Local needs. OSPAC therefore extended their services to other Local government areas that needed their gallant assistance. Such local government areas included Ikwerre, Emuoha, Obio/Akpor, Etche, Khana and communities in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State. Naku (2019:1), observed that in an effort to consolidate the system, Rumuji, Ibaa, Ogbakiri and Odegu in Emuoha Local government Area now have functional OSPAC in their various communities. Some of these Local Government Councils later changed the names of their vigilante group. For example, Emuoha changed its outfit name to Emuoha Security Peace and Crime Control (ESPAC). IKWERRE Local Government Area established Ikwerre Security Planning and Advisory Committee (ISPAC). Communities in these local government areas, following the success of OSPAC structured their community vigilante groups along those lines. Aluu, Apani, Omerelu, Elele and Ubima, all in Ikwerre Local Government Area, changed the name to include their community like Akpor Security Planning and Advisory Committee in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. Aluu has Aluu Security Planning and Advisory Committee (ASPAC), Apani community also has Apani Security Planning and Advisory Committee (ASPAC), while Ubima has Ubima Security Planning and Advisory Committee (USPAC) and so are other communities' security outfits coined to include the name of the community. The Seven-Brothers of K-Dere, and B-Dere in Gokana LGA, and also Seventeen Brothers drawn from the four Local Government Areas of Ogoni (Eleme, Tai, Khana, and Gokana). These joint task-forces or militia groups operating as vigilante organizations have committed to the security and policing of their communities.

Figure 2: Spread of OSPAC and Present Nomenclature



Source: Researchers' Fieldwork 2024

Community policing links the people or society with police to combat crime. The essence of community involvement is born out of the view that the Nigeria Police Force alone can neither build nor maintain a safe and sustainable security in our communities.

The failure of the Nigerian Security in curbing crime, high level of poverty, lack of quality leadership, cult clashes for supremacy, high level of unemployment and desire to get rich quick are factors responsible for insecurity. Further findings showed that since the inception of OSPAC vigilante security in Emuoha and Etche Local government areas, there have been crime

reductions in the areas as people go about their daily activities (Adiele I.B, Emeodu. E.N, 2022). Amnesty International reports that at least 60 people were killed in 2019 alone in various communities of Rivers State, especially Khana and Gokana Local Government areas. These and many other crimes informed the Khana Local government council to invite OSPAC to come to their rescue, especially as the state security apparatus failed to stem the tide.

Socio-Economic Impact of OSPAC Security

Rivers State recently witnessed unprecedented level of insecurity and crimes such as kidnapping, cultism, drug trafficking and abuse, rape and armed robbery were on the increase. This informed the formation of OSPAC Security. Nigeria consistently ranked low in Global Peace Index (GPI) and this was reflective of the true state of affairs in Rivers State. However, since the coming on board of OSPAC in some Local Government Areas of the state notably, Onelga, Obio/Akpor, Emuoha, Ikwerre, Etche, there has been significant reduction in crime wave in River State. According to Chris Aluta, insecurity is defined as “the state of fear or anxiety, stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection.” It refers to a lack of or inadequate freedom from danger. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it feeds into many other forms of insecurity such as economic security and social security. The traditional value system of the people of Rivers State, like most Nigerian societies, is characterized by such endearing features as collectivism, loyalty to authority and community, truthfulness, honesty and co-existence and identification of an individual with another. All of these values which made society secured and safe are now gradually returning due to the operation of OSPAC. In the past, night life in major towns of the state, especially in the Local Government Areas aforesaid, was short-lived but now businesses remain open until late into the night, with people moving freely without fear of being attacked, harassed or molested in any way. Schools that were closed due to cult activities have now reopened. The rate of kidnapping and armed robbery has also reduced. Also, farmers now go to their farms without fear of being kidnapped, raped or having their crops stolen. Most importantly is the fact that members of this Civilian Joint Task-Force seem to have found their rhythm with the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Military as they now work in synergy.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Conclusion

The idea of community Policing is to reduce crime and bring peace and order to the communities. It is also to foster good Police-Community relationship. When the government, the community and the Police work together to checkmate crime and deviance it promotes peace building at the grass root level. The people feel more secured as security is brought closer to them, and indeed involves the locals, who actually know their social environment better. OSPAC as a civilian joint task force in peace building has proven to be a reliable force in providing peace and security in the areas it operates hence the spread. However, it has not been without criticism and challenges. One of the criticisms is that they are disguised like SARS of yore. Their major challenge has been that of proper training and complete acceptance by the Nigeria Police Force and the military. They appear to be envious of the speed at which OSPAC carries out its assignment and the high rate of success.

Recommendations:

The paper therefore recommends as follows-

1. The OSPAC model of civilian joint task force in peace building should be adopted by government and replicated in all Local Government Areas of Rivers State.
2. Training of members of the civilian joint task force in peace building should be given attention to make them better equipped to assist the Nigeria Police Force carry out their duties effectively at the community level.
3. There should be synergy between the members of the civilian joint task force, in whatever name they will be called, and the Nigeria Police Force and the military.

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