

## **Community Policing and Policing the Community: the Missing Link in Nigeria's Security Architecture**

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### **Abstract**

*The Nigerian State can now be described as a nation at war with itself. The country has inadvertently plunged into a kind of asymmetrical warfare with various armed non-state actors contending with the soul of the nation and angling to share its sovereignty. In the midst of the multifaceted security that confront the nation is the call for effective community policing. However, rather than encourage and practice community policing with a view to mitigating insecurity, what is seen from the Nigeria police Force is the act of policing the community. Certainly, community policing preaches inclusion, cooperation and partnership in the business of fishing out criminally minded members of the society. Whilst policing the community tends to emasculate, intimidate and alienate the citizens thereby, denying itself the benefits of sourcing and eliciting intelligence reports and vital information from the residents. Under policing the community, the police only report to the scene of crime long after the harm had been done. This is because, rather than being proactive, policing the community is reactive. This paper has adopted a variety of community police theories such as normative sponsorship; the broken window; and social resource theories. Relying on the secondary sources of data, this paper has x-rayed all the nuances and dimensions of combating crimes in Nigeria and the utility of community policing. This study contends that the current approach of policing the community is counterproductive. The paper recommends that genuine and concerted efforts toward community policing is the only antidote to the frequent breakdown of law and order and other violent crimes in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** *Citizenship participation; community policing; insecurity; Nigerian Police; policing the community*

### **Introduction:**

In recent times, Nigeria has been confronted with multiple security challenges. It is not uncommon to witness such horrendous crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, terrorism, arson, ritual killing, various forms of abuse, trafficking in women and children, etc. When these antisocial behaviours occur, it is usually extremely difficult to successfully investigate and apprehend the culprits. The perpetrators are

typically emboldened to proceed to the next level of crime because most often, law enforcers do not catch them. Worst still, they also know that the possibility of being arrested is too remote given the fact that the Nigerian Police Force is not only understaffed but also ill equipped. As a result, the majority of the law-abiding citizens who eke out a living from the harsh economic climate also suffer the double tragedy of lack of police protection and state security.

Whenever crimes take place in any part of Nigeria, it is very easy to discern the disconnection between the citizens and the Police. Ordinarily, the citizens are supposed to assist the Police in carrying out investigations and even give the Police some tip-offs and vital information that will aid the institution in their day-to-day functions. However, this is not the case. There is a high level of mutual distrust between the people and the Police. Many factors are responsible for this perceived mistrust. First, the Police, by their conduct and demeanor, do not see themselves as part of the people they are paid to serve. Second, the Police have always brutalized the people and treat them with iron fists. Third, most times, when the citizens volunteer pieces of information to the police concerning the alleged criminals and their activities, the identities of such informants are usually divulged to the criminal elements who in turn come back to hurt them. Fifth, the communities feel alienated by the Police; they do not know the Police officers; they do not speak the same language, the officers do not understand and appreciate the cultural peculiarities of their host and; ultimately, the people are not part and parcel of the recruitment process that brought about the Policemen.

Ideally, it is expected that individuals are to collaborate with the traditional police forces to make their neighborhoods and communities safer and to control and reduce crime. Modern policing is more like a "Neighborhood Watch" where citizens collaborate with the formal police structure to combat crime and maintain public safety. In fact, this is the kernel of community policing, where the philosophy is geared towards the promotion of organizational strategies in the neighborhood to combat latent situations that are capable of creating public safety concerns. In other words, criminality, social disorder and fear of crime are all general safety issues that community policing strives to address. From the foregoing, it then implies that community policing encompasses the use of partnerships between civic organizations, agencies, businesses, citizens, charity-based groups and the mass media in order to advance strategies and methods to police the community. These numerous organizations are expected to collaborate to address crimes and ease criminality. Rather than leaving it to the conventional police force, community policing gravitates around a mentality that the whole community can assist and aid systems and measures to avert crimes.

However, in Nigeria, efforts are targeted towards “policing the community”. This paper, however, attempts to divest ‘community policing’ from ‘policing the community’. Rather than being proactive, the Nigerian Police Force is reactive because of its disconnect from the communities. They usually wait for the crime to be committed before they act. In addition, when they arrive at the scene of the crime, they arrest indiscriminately: taking both the culprits and the innocent. This is a consequence of poor intelligence occasioned by poor ‘policing of the community’. In a study conducted by Okafor and Aniche (2018), they argued that rather than community policing, the Nigerian police have been busy policing the community thereby, alienating the people more. To them, this lack of cooperation from the people has a serious consequence, which is the inability of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to combat crime and tackle various security challenges in Nigeria leading to the proliferation of vigilante security architecture particularly in the form of vigilante militia groups. Their paper concluded that so long as the Nigerian Police engage in policing the community instead of partnering with the community in matters of security, safety and development in the communities will continue to elude Nigeria.

The Nigerian Police usually respond to criminal acts with brute force, and this has fatally damaged the reputation of police. As a result, many citizens do not trust the police in their neighborhoods. The present composition of the Nigerian Police Force alienates itself from the very people and community it sets out to protect. For instance, divisional police offices and police posts are remotely located from the people. The citizens do not immediately feel the presence and impact of the police especially when crimes occur. The practice of poor policing the community makes police to arrive the scene of crimes couple of hours after the incidents had taken place. This sends the feelings of resentment and angst against the police.

Community police ought to adequately engage community members, businesses, non-profit groups and others in partnerships to combat crime in mutual problem solving efforts. This practice of engagement has the advantage of making the police institution see itself as part of the community. The Police in the Nigeria architectural security space are completely detached from the communities. Officers and men of the institution see themselves as “lords” and superintend over the citizens. By so doing, they are far distanced from the community and cannot elicit vital intelligence information that is required for modern day community policing. Policing the community is synonymous to the traditional law-enforcement method of policing; it emphasizes the independence of police agencies from the communities they serve; it places premium to an individual officer's professional and dispassionate treatment of citizens; and rigidly maintains the close association between police work and crime fighting.

Policing the community lays too much emphasis on police professionalism and this attitude makes officers to be detached and aloof from local citizens. This is at variance with community policing, in which police officers are expected to initiate frequent personal contacts with community members on their beats, and to interact in an attentive, friendly, and compassionate manner. Enforcing the law and fighting crime remain important elements of policing, but community policing recognizes that, in reality, most police work is oriented toward non-enforcement tasks such as maintaining order and providing social services (Eck and Rosenbaum, 1994). Accordingly, reducing community disorder, helping to allay residents' fears about crime, solving problems, and caring for individual victims, are all considered as equally important to making arrests and solving crimes, as against intimidation and show of brute force.

The traditional model of policing the community does not recognize that the knowledge and experience of line officers is of critical importance to the police organization. The practice is not responsive to community problems neither does it engage in problem solving, it does not give the rank and file the needed autonomy in making decisions. The independence and freedom of line officers to respond to local community problems is not encouraged because of high centralization of the police command and structure, and the lack of the recognition that police work is, by its very nature, highly discretionary. This traditional method of policing abhors the creation of community substations in local neighborhoods and denies itself any attempt to provide the line officers with continuous access to resources, organizational flexibility and the capacity of the police officer for solving problems (Goldstein, 1987).

It is easy to discern this traditional model of policing by its characteristics, which include but not limited to the following:

- (1) The high number of police arrests is ultimately regarded as the sine qua non of a police organization and its effectiveness to crime control;
- (2) Divisional Police officers are only accountable to the high command (Inspector-General of Police and Police commissioners) rather than the community they serve;
- (3) citizens are more fearful of neighborhood crimes;
- (4) Police interactions with neighborhood residents are usually characterized with master-servant relationships and are largely uncourteous and dreadful;
- (5) Problem-solving strategies are absent or ineffective;
- (6) Attitude toward fighting crime is more or less reactive rather than proactive, etc.

### **Framework of analysis: community policing**

This study adopts the community policing theory as the basis of analysis. The theory of community policing is a recent addition to the theory of policing. Policing is generally seen as the processes and intervention that ensures the maintenance of law and order in the society. Interests in Police and Policing according to Fielding (2005), is traceable to the early studies of law, which also is linked to policing. Policing from the perspective of Adam Smith is located within the ambit of police institutions and is situated within the general division of jurisprudence (Meele et al, 1978). Policing in the opinion of Adam Smith is also situated in the realm of domestic governance for which Fielding (2005) also noted that policing is more closely related to 'policy' than police force. However, contemporary thoughts in community policing is premised on three core areas: citizens' involvement, problem solving and decentralization. Citizens' involvement resonates with Normative Sponsorship Theory of Community Policing (Tiedke et al 1975). This theory posits that cooperation and the people's goodwill is a condition precedent and necessary factor for a harmonious community or society.

Another theoretical construct of community policing is that advanced by Wilson and Kelling (1982) in (Oliver 2000): The theory of the broken window. This is a socio-psychological theory, based on the assumption that if a broken window is left unattended to, it is therefore, most likely that other broken windows may suffer similar fate of neglect. The broken window theory is aptly manifested in the lackadaisical handling of indiscipline among some police personnel by police authorities. A more profound theory of community policing is the Social Resource theory by Wong (2008). The theory is premised on the functions of the police, the relationships between the police and the people and lastly, the reasons the people need the police.

The social resource theory exempts and exonerates the State from the incidences of crime and criminality. Crimes and criminalities are acts of individuals that may have been challenged by lack and needs not met which poor resources or greed may occasion. The theory also posits that crimes and criminalities are aided by police inefficiency (Yero et al 2012). This theory sees the police as a social resource that ought to bridge some of the challenges of the people. An evaluation of the community policing theory will no doubt provide a pathway and road map in identifying the missing link in the Nigeria security architecture.

The theory of community policing can aptly be situated within the prism of policing in Nigeria. Generally, policing in Nigeria is aimed at assisting in crime prevention and control with a view to solving or reducing the various security challenges. The Nigeria police has attempted to patronize Nigerians by the slogan of 'police is your

friend' with a view of courting citizens' support in fighting crime. The Nigeria public however do not trust their police. The disconnect between the citizens and the police is gaping. The tenet of citizens' participation as explained in the normative theory of community policing is lacking in the Nigeria security architecture. Conversely the high level of corruption and indiscipline that has festered and left unattended to in the Nigeria police resonates with the theory of the broken window in community policing

### **Conceptualizing citizens' participation and policing the community**

Citizens' participation is a necessary condition for the success of any community security arrangements being also a major factor for any successful effort toward community policing. Conceptualizing citizens' participation will, therefore, be essential for this study. According to Adefisoye (2017), participation is the mechanism open to individuals to ventilate or express their opinion and exert influence regarding political and social decisions concerning them. According to Anore, Martin and Lanmafakpotin (2006) cited in Adefisoye (2017), citizens' participation is the process in which the generality of the citizens are part of, either on a voluntary or obligatory basis, individually or as a group with a view to influencing the decisions that affect themselves and the community.

According to Anore et al cited in Adefisoye (2017), such participation may take place within the framework of organized institution like the civil society organizations, or through mass actions and demonstrations or through the formation of citizen's committees. Citizens' participation may also be actualized through referendum, parliamentary committees, etc. Braimah (2019) also conceptualized citizens within the framework of town 'hall bureaucracy'. He conceptualized town hall bureaucracy as the decision-making processes where the local inhabitants arrive at decisions concerning themselves in their community town halls or village squares.

Citizens' participation can also be conceptualized and compartmentalized from the perspectives of the ordinary people in the community whose only source of power is their numbers, the leaders who influence decisions in the community and the decisions reached by the community concerning their affairs (Cunningham 1972). Hadina (2008), however, sees citizens' participation as the processes that entails the involvement of the pedestrian contingents in the decision-making processes concerning the services they receive from their representatives.

Irvin and Stansburey (2004), summarized the advantages and outcomes of citizens' participations in the decision-making processes as follows:

- The citizens are able to learn from government representatives and vice versa
- The people are better positioned to persuade and enlighten government
- The people are advantaged on the skills of activist citizenship
- There is a buildup of trust between the people and the government
- It leads to a buildup of strategic alliance
- It enables government decisions to gain legitimacy.
- It leads to better policy decision and implementation

This paper conceptualizes community policing from the perspective of the citizens participating directly or indirectly in the decisions of how their communities and neighbourhoods are policed as different from policing the community which is a formal and structured police institution designed to serve the local community; which presence is awkwardly felt when acts of crimes and violence occur. The people must be informed to see the need to be involved in their security arrangements. An informed and enlightened citizen is better than an uninformed one. Community policing from our perspective, entails the collaboration of the people in identifying criminal elements from within their communities and collaborating with the formal police institution in stemming the incidences of criminality. Community policing is citizen based and remains a veritable source of intelligence gathering for national security.

### **Policing in the contemporary Nigeria security architecture**

While it is a truism that policing is the process or intervention that ensures the maintenance of law and order in the society, the business of policing in Nigeria is unrestricted to the Nigeria Police Force in contemporary Nigeria security set-up. A country's security architecture is designed to meet the security needs of the citizens. The Nigeria security system as presently constituted is highly centralized and unable to cope with the present asymmetric security challenges in the country. Security in Nigeria is constitutionally the prerogative of the national government. The Nigeria armed forces, made up of the Army, Navy and the Air force are under the direct command of the federal government. Other security organizations under the direct control of the central government include the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Civil Defense Corps, the Nigeria Immigration, Nigeria Road Safety Corps, the Directorate of State Security, the Nigeria Prisons Services, etc. These security organizations, which have their operational bases located within the precincts of the areas of jurisdiction of the subnational governments, are structured to take directives and command from the federal government. It is also a truism that most of the incidences of security breaches are localized. Community participation in the security architecture of Nigeria is nonexistent. Policing in this centralized security arrangement is most challenging and may not be able to deliver on the mandate of securing lives and

property. The discourse on Fighting Insecurity, Changing Nigeria's Security Architecture (2020) recommended the need for a homegrown national security strategy that will involve state institutions and non-state actors. Since the state no longer has the monopoly of violence, the need to involve non-state actors and citizens' involvement in the security architecture of Nigeria has become imperative.

### **Police / public relations in Nigeria: an appraisal**

Some empirical studies and relevant literature on the assessment of the perception of the Nigeria Police by Nigerians reveal that Nigerians have a poor and negative perception of their police force. In an empirical study, Oluwasola (2016), using a sample size of two hundred comprising respondents from the Lagos command of the Nigeria Police, Public Relation Practitioners, Crime Correspondents and other members of the public, reveals that only 2.7% of the respondents gave the Nigeria Police an approval rating. The study also revealed that 64% of the respondents attributed the poor image of the Nigeria Police to corruption.

In another extensive empirical study carried out in the south west geographical zone of Nigeria covering the entire six states of the zone, Ajayi and Longe (2015), retrieved 1125 questionnaires from a sample size 1350 with respondents drawn from 15 professional groups. The study found out that the Nigeria Police is antagonistic in their relationship with Nigerians. 85% of the respondents polled agreed that the Nigeria police is unfriendly in their relationship with the public.

The study also revealed that the public perception of the Nigeria police is negative. 65% of the respondents believed that the Nigeria police is very ineffectual in the provision of public safety while 25% believed they are ineffectual in their responses on the Likert scale. Most relevant to this study are the findings concerning the relationship of the Nigeria Police and other community based civil defense groups. The study found out that the Nigeria Police and other community based civil defense groups are incompatible. 77.6% of the respondents agreed that the Nigeria Police and community based civil groups are mostly not compatible. Simply put, community policing cannot be adequately accommodated within the ambits of the Nigeria police as presently constituted.

One of the objectives of policing is the early detection of crime through credible intelligence. According to Ajayi and Alonge (2015), this finding is a pointer that systematic partnerships between the Nigeria Police and the efforts of local communities in securing themselves have not been harmonious. The study also established the fact that the Nigeria Police are generally insensitive to the security challenges of the people they are legally assigned to protect. The research also



found out that the Nigeria Police are always at loggerheads with the people. Though the Nigeria Police has an onerous responsibility of crime prevention and crime mitigation, their performance and responsibility from the findings of the study are less than optimal. The study, therefore, recommended a reorganization of the Nigeria Police with a view to making it have a closer collaboration with the Nigeria public. This is a necessary ingredient for the enhancement of crime prevention and control in Nigeria.

Another study of 942 respondents carried out in Benin City, south-south geo political zone of Nigeria, by Obarisiagbon and Omagie (2018), revealed that the public perception of the Nigeria Police is poor. The study further identified obstacles hindering the Nigeria Police in curbing the growing incidences of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. 95% of the respondents agreed that the Police as an institution are unable to stem the growing incidences of kidnapping in the country. The reasons stated for the Nigeria Police inability to curb the incidences of kidnapping are corruption, poor perception of the Police by the public, inadequate training, poor equipment and motivation and lack of synergy between the Nigeria Police and GSM service providers.

According to Kasali and Odetola (2013), the enemy image that adorned the relations between the police and local community in the colonial era has failed to fade away in post-colonial Nigeria as many decades even after independence, the police are yet to change its orientation to a people oriented police force. In their opinion, Kasali and Odetola (2013), believe that lack of partnership between police and community could be said to be one of the major factors responsible for the inability of the police in the country to address the growing security challenges bedeviling Nigeria such as incessant armed robbery, ethnic and religious violence, political assassinations, arson, kidnapping, among others.

#### **Community policing and policing the community: locating the missing link.**

Like this paper stated elsewhere, Folashade, Okeshola and Mediara (2013), argue that community policing advocates that police should be highly visible in community through foot patrols and should integrate themselves into communities to ensure confidence and trust from their hosts. It requires a methodical investment and insertion of credible local guards, hunters, vigilante groups, able-bodied youths, traditional rulers, and religious leaders in the conventional police system for achieving a far-reaching accomplishment in crime fighting and control at the grassroots or community level. In other words, as the first responders to crimes and primary victims of insecurity, community people and citizens should be ingrained and made to be part of any problem-solving approach to their security challengers.

Community policing involves establishment and maintenance of shared trust between the inhabitants of a community and police unit/department. Ndudi (2014), maintains that the police have recognized the need for cooperation with the community and have encouraged members of the community to come forward with crime fighting information. Police partnership with the community will involve confidence building measures and capacities in which confidence is achieved in conjunction with other government agencies, community members and groups, human and social service providers, private businesses and the media.

However, Jaja (2005), averred that police police-community relations highlight the relationship between the police and communities, as co-producers of police services and partners in community policing, bearers of responsibilities for preventing crime, reducing crime and improving the quality of life in communities where the police serve. It, therefore, means that if there are strains in the relations between the police and the communities, the desired cordiality that that is needed for trust and confidence is lost. Consequently, the citizens will be constrained to partner with the traditional police in information gathering and sharing, thereby, making the task of policing a daunting one. Here appears to be the missing link between community policing and policing the community on one hand and crime prevention and crime fighting on the other hand. Ikufeyijo and Rotimi (2010), buttressed this position when they expressed “the no-love lost relationship between the police and the public from the colonial era to post-colonial” as a preconceived notion of repressive, exploitative, and hostile policing of our society from the on-set.

Evidence based reality shows that the police high command in Nigeria pays lip service to the concept and practice of community policing rather they prefer to police the community. The distinction here is that whereas community policing is not just a policy that requires the police to adopt a proactive approach to address public safety concerns (Olaolu, 2015), it is equally a strategy which does not only allow the police to proactively act beyond mere crime fighting, but also to partner with the community members in setting the security priorities in the society and devising ways of resolving identifiable problems in the community (Tope, 2016). Policing the community refers to a military inspired approach to fighting crime whilst community policing means forming partnership with constituents (Adams, 1994). The long military rule in Nigeria spanning nearly thirty years put together no doubt affected every facet of her national life. Almost all institutions were militarized including the police. Even after the barrack boys were retired to their cocoon in 1999, most civil and paramilitary outfits still behave as though they were still under the clutches of the armed forces. This could partly explain why the police treat citizens with highhandedness and iron fists.

But the practice among Nigeria's police officers is to police the community. Policing the community is reactive; the Nigeria Police Force only comes to the scene of crimes after the crime has been perpetrated. Upon arrival, they arrest citizens indiscriminately, hound suspects into cells without pressing any valid charges against them. In this process, the rich and politically connected detainees get freed and other less privileged languish in police custody. Policing the community relies on brute force, torture and intimidation of the members of the public. Policing the community does not make use of intelligence gathering and information sharing from the citizens. Under this system of policing the community, officers do not see themselves as members of the same community. Because they are empowered by the law to wield arms and bear ammunition, they have a sense of superiority over "bloody civilians". While policing the community, officers thrive in taking bribes and extorting the weak and vulnerable members of the society. They are not really interested in preventing crimes, rather; they stay aloof and turn to the other way until there is breakdown of law and order. This will increase the incidence of arrest and will invariably put more money into the pockets of both officers, rank and file of the police hierarchy.

In policing the community, opportunities for partnership, cooperation and synergy between the (formal) police and the informal security outfits in the fight against crime (Mahmoud and Usman, 2014), are denied. The reason is not difficult to discern. Policing the community tends to be repressive, exploitative, and hostile to the society; this is unlike community policing which strategy, if it is adopted in Nigeria, could help to eradicate most of the challenges attributed to traditional reactive police culture, (Dung, 2014). The success of community police is driven by intelligence sourced from members of the community: citizens providing intelligence to the community police. But this cannot be the case with policing the community because the police are hostile and uncooperative with the public, therefore, it will be anachronistic to elicit any form of voluntary assistance from the community.

### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

The purpose of this paper is to amply demonstrate that there is a difference between community policing and policing the community. While community policing essentially depends on coming to grasp with building effective inter-personal skills, anger-management, emotional intelligence, adequate community orientation, having a positive public image and establishing a healthy community relationship. Policing the community on the other hand, is reactive, highhanded and centralized. Community policing relies on intelligence reports generated from the people. But because policing the community alienates the populace, it starves itself the capacity

to illicit support from the masses in the fight against crime and criminality. The missing link in Nigeria's security architecture is the lack of synergy between the community and the traditional state police institution. This paper surmise that to resolve the current security challenges confronting the State, there is the need for collaboration and cooperation between the Police and the people.

It is the view of this paper that for effective policing, the Police command should be decentralized and made closer to the community. If the police structure is decentralized, it will allow for seamless deployment in the community and makes effective use of officers and improves the response time to citizens and enhances the network of relations with citizens. It is corollary to recommend that it is high time Nigeria adopted the state-police model. State police is a model that is practiced by civilized nations with tangible resounding outcomes. Nigeria is a behemoth, therefore, having one centralized police command cannot adequately address the ubiquitous security concerns in the country today.

Recruitment and mobilization of police personnel should be community-oriented and mediation centred-officers. Police men and women should be recruited from among their own locality and posted or deployed accordingly. It is operationally cumbersome when total strangers are recruited and posted to strange lands without any idea of the terrain and topography of their operational base. Officers and men of Nigeria Police should be trained and motivated to be proactive, preventive and service/mediation-centered. In community policing, the main emphasis is not for residents to commit offenses and then be arrested. No! The focus is to be proactive and gather relevant information that are capable of causing the breach of law and order; and nipping same in the bud.

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