

Review

Policing Nigeria: A case for partnership between formal and informal police institutions

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This paper explores the Nigeria police system with particular reference to the formal and informal police institutions. It discusses the history of policing in Nigeria and the challenges affecting the one-agency police institution which is the conventional Nigeria Police Force. The inability of the NPF to control the rising spate of crime and the fact the institution is regarded as oppressive tool in the hands of the rich has given room for public distrust and subsequent debate on how to improve safety and security for foreigners and Nigerians within the country. The partnership theory of Dennis Rosenbaum is the theoretical framework that is adopted as a guide to this study. The paper recommends amongst others that the informal police methodology should be recognized by the government and given the necessary financial support to partner with the formal police force in order to enhance the process of providing security for Nigerians and foreigners residing and doing business in the country. Furthermore, the study has suggested that a code of conduct should be enacted by the legislative arm of government to assist regularized activities of the informal police sector who are often blamed for brutality during the exercise of their duties.

Keywords: Policing, Nigeria, Partnership, Formal, Informal, Police Institution

INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria Police System is predominantly controlled by the formal police institutions that is, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other legalized security agencies. Though there is apparent existence of the informal police sector that is largely unrecognized by government. The former as the name implies, depicts government-owned or statutorily approved agencies in charge of security, while the latter is regarded as community-established security institutions that are not government-owned or

constitutionally approved for operations. This include community based vigilante formations, neighbourhood watch groups, religious based vigilante groups and the likes, all engaging in the business of providing safety and security in the Nigerian society (Etannibi et al., 2009).

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provision for a single police force. By this provision, no other security agency is allowed to be established by the Federation or any of the component parts. This inevitably imposes the statutorily responsibility of 'detection and prevention of crime, apprehending and prosecution of offenders, protection of lives and property of citizens, enforcement and maintenance of laws and order' on the NPF. It was later in 1966 that the function of

ensuring 'free flow of traffic' especially in cities was added to police duties (Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, LFRN, 1966). These statutory functions have guided policing activity within the country, without regards to any other informal groups (Olong, 2010; Inyang and Brown, 2011).

However as the Nigerian society progresses, especially with the advent of the current democratic system of government, new forms of violent crimes have also emerged and the society has become more insecure with many people getting involved in diverse sophisticated criminal activities (Otto and Ukpere, 2012). This phenomenon has affected the NPF; it has exposed its inability to accomplish the bulk of its constitutional responsibility. In response, government has established other law enforcement agencies as Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in addition to existing military police to assist in the process of law enforcement and maintenance of order in the country. These established security institutions are charged with the responsibility to protect government properties and ensure civic security. The Economic, Financial and Crime Commission (EFCC) is established and empowered to fight financial crimes; Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) to tackle corruption and its perpetrators; National Drug and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to combat illegal drug business; National Agency for Trafficking in Persons (NATIP) to tackle human trafficking; etc. Also, other Private Security Companies such as; ASE Security Limited, Bemil Nigeria Limited, Cardinal Security Limited and a lots more have been given constitutional approval through the Private Security Act to assist in the security business and their activities are supervised by the NSCDC, that is, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps.

These establishments have little impact on current security demands by Nigerian masses. The inability of the NPF and other related agencies to control the rising spate of crime, and the fact that these institutions are seen as oppressive tools in the hands of people in government especially the 'rich few', has given room for public distrust and subsequent debates on how to improve safety and security for Nigerians and foreigners residing and doing business in the country. Hence, increasing attention has been given to informal policing, and it is seen as a rational response of 'poor' communities to the weak criminal justice system, with regards to low policing and high levels of criminality (Wisler and Onwudiwe, 2005). In spite of this development, the nation still finds it difficult to integrate the activities of the informal police sector into mainstream policing in Nigeria, even when it is obvious that the formal police institutions are not providing the expected result.

Daily, Nigerians and foreigners residing in the country face violent criminal activities such as kidnapping, terro-

rism, pipeline vandalization, oil theft, rape, political assassinations and more on escalating frequencies. In an attempt to curtail these crimes, officers and men of the NPF who are at the forefront of performing security responsibility meet their untimely death in the hands of perpetrators. This situation has made a mockery of the formal police institutions and it is worrisome that the country is currently seeking for a lasting solution to the rising security challenges. Despite the much purported reforms made to improve the national police force, the huge security gap experienced over the years still persist. It is on this premise that this paper intends to explore the Nigeria Police System, taking into cognizance the formal and informal police institutions, their catalytic roles in crime prevention, their challenges and prospects, as well as the need for partnership between the two institutions for effective policing in the country.

Theoretical framework

The task of providing security to lives and property in most societies is the exclusive function of the conventional police institution. This forms the major tenet of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) social contract theory which noted that security and order could only be achieved by a contract in which all citizens would give up all their individual powers to a central power, the sovereign in return for the protection of life and property (Marshall, 1998).

Statement of problem and objective of study

The society progresses, this ideology has proven uncongenial to modern crime prevention strategy and it has created room for advocacy in support of an alternative strategy. To buttress this fact, Robert K. Merton structural functionalism theory submits that it is not only the consequences of formalized social institutions that makes the society works, but that other functioning cultural institutions can play the same role. Thus, people should be willing to admit that there exist various structural and functional alternatives that can perform the same task in the society (Ritzer, 1996). This reality makes room for the adoption of Dennis P. Rosenbaum partnership theory of crime prevention which noted that the criminal justice system cannot, by itself, solve the complex problems of crime and disorder in our society, that resources from outside the system are desperately needed, as well as new ways of thinking about diverse problems from the inside. To achieve this, the theory advocates for the creation of 'partnerships'— a group of organizations that can bring distinctive but complementary skills and resources to the table and can produce coordinated and targeted responses to public

safety problems (Rosenbaum, 2003).

The Nigeria Police system

Historically, policing in Nigeria can be traced to three epochs, that is, the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. In the pre-colonial era, crime prevention was the duty of indigenous institutions responsible for crime control. The absence of codified laws and social structure provided the necessary basis for the regulation of behaviour which was largely enforced by various institutions responsible for crime prevention in different parts of the country e.g. secret societies, messengers and palace guards (Marenin, 1985 cited by Ikuteyiyo and Rotimi, 2010).

In the colonial epoch, policing was operated based on the provisions of the British law. This model marked a paradigm shift from the traditional pattern of policing where lots of emphasis was placed on traditions, customs and unwritten laws. It is observed that during this era, the police served and protected the commercial interest of the colonial masters at the detriment of the masses which they were commissioned to protect. Rotimi (2001) described this pattern of policing as that in which 'strangers policed strangers'. The police were pitched against the people they were meant to protect and there were series of clashes between both parties.

The post-colonial era of policing which incorporates the present Nigeria Police Force reflects a cultural transfer with reference to style of policing from the colonial law enforcement officers. Scholars have observed that, the NPF also serves the interests of their financiers and nothing better can be expected from them since it is obvious that 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune' (Ikuteyiyo and Rotimi, 2010: 4). Apparently, this methodology has produced the same policing problems that characterized the colonial police era. For over three decades since the operationalization of the Nigeria Police Force and its related agencies, insecurity has remained a major problem that Nigeria is facing. The police authorities have developed policy issues over the years with the intention of reforming the police force for better performance, but the implementation of such policies thereof have always been the problem. This laxity together with apparent inefficiency of the formal police force to tackle emerging security challenges in the country has led to invitations from different quarters for a change in the current police methods of operations, with options including dissolution of police powers from the central government to accommodate regional and state levels; community policing; and incorporation of informal police institutions into mainstream policing for effective police system in the country. Despite this demands, there are fears attached to each option.

For advocates of state or regional police, there are

fears and scepticism from critics opposing it that the sad experience of the local police in the 1960s, in which policing became an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling class could repeat itself (Nimbe and Bayo, 2011). Therefore decentralizing the police powers to regional or state level will mean giving some state governors who are major agitators for its establishment an undue advantage to harass and victimize the public (Soyinka et al., 2011). This situation raises doubt on whether the federal police force is not already serving the same purpose in the hands of politicians.

Alternatively, many have argued that community policing which demands effective police-public partnership in crime prevention is the best form of policing. This advocacy surprisingly also emerge from the police personnel themselves. From a research carried out between March 2001 and December 2003 by the Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria (CLEEN Foundation) in partnership with the NPF in fourteen states selected from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, it was discovered that if community policing strategy is adopted, it could assist to eradicate most of the challenges attributed to the traditional reactive police culture (Pam Sha, 2005). Despite this discovery, the low publicity given to this project and the laxity exhibited towards its full implementation together with other factors such as incessant transfer of criminal Investigation Police Officers (IPO's) who have unfinished cases on their tables, poses a threat to its success.

Nigeria has witnessed the proliferation of private security companies and the surge in informal policing, that is vigilantism (ethnic and religious) during the past few years. This uprising is attributed to the worrisome state of insecurity in the country in recent times and the inability of the NPF and other related government security agencies to curtail the situation. There are over 2,000 registered Private Security Companies (PSC) operating in the country presently (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2005), but unfortunately much of their services are rendered to people who can pay for them, particularly the multinationals, banks and few government institutions, while the poor masses are left on their own to carter for their security. This mode of operation aligns with what is obtainable with the government-owned security agencies where the rich, especially top government officials are given security preference over the poor. The result of this negligence is the formation of various vigilante groups by the poor community to safeguard their safety. Prominent among these community established security groups in Nigeria are the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) in the south-west, the Bakassi Boys in the southeast, religious/Islamic vigilantes called Hisbah in Sharia-practising northern states and many others across the country.

The OPC in the past, professed to work towards the unity, progress, protection, and autonomy of all descen-

dants of Oduduwa, but from 1999 they changed their fundamental objective from seeking self-determination for the Yoruba people to crime-fighting activities and the settlement of personal disputes. This change of focus may have been inspired by the popularity of other self-established vigilante groups such as the Bakassi Boys in the southeast. However in recent times, the OPC has gone beyond vigilante activities and has been involved in scores of armed attacks and mass murders against other ethnic groups living in southwest Nigeria, particularly in Lagos (Nigeriafirst.org, 2006). This situation is blamed on the lack of supervision over their activities by the government approved security agencies.

Unlike the OPC, the Bakassi Boys were not established to protect the Ibos, the dominant ethnic group in the southeast of Nigeria. Their emergence in 1999 was a direct consequence of the prevalence of armed robbery in major markets in southeast Nigeria by people who were nicknamed "Mafia." Their successful elimination of the "Mafia" conferred on them a mythical status and their fame soon spread to most major cities in the southeast where they were invited to rid markets vicinities suspected of criminals (Nigeriafirst.org, 2006).

Despite the seemingly success, the pattern of administering justice by the Bakassi Boys was an issue of major concern to various human right groups who quickly called for the abolishment of the group. It was clear that the Bakassi Boys in their attempt to salvage the system from the hands of hoodlums, arrested suspected criminals arbitrarily, with little or no evidence, torture and summarily executed most of them in public (Nigeriafirst.org, 2006). Similarly, like the OPC, the activities of Bakassi Boys lacked supervision by government security agencies and this was responsible for their jungle justice approach.

The Hisbah Islamic vigilante group is predominant in Muslim States of Northern Nigeria that have adopted the Sharia legal system. The States include: Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano, Jigawa, Katsina and Kaduna in the northwest; Yobe, Borno, Bauchi and Gombe in the northeast; as well as Niger State in the north central region. In most cases, the Hisbah groups like the OPC and Bakassi Boys arbitrarily arrest suspects of the Sharia legal code and dispense their version of justice without recourse to the traditional law enforcement agencies (Nigeriafirst.org, 2006). This situation has constantly put the formal security institutions particularly the NPF against these community established vigilante groups. Several clashes between these institutions have been reported, thereby endangering the lives of people they were commissioned to protect. This situation has intensified interest by concerned citizens and various organizations particularly the human rights group for the regulation or outright abolition of vigilante activities in Nigeria. It is believed that a single security unit either formal or informal cannot ensure the overall security

needs of more than 160 million Nigerians including foreigners living and doing business in the country. Every security outfit have their deficiencies; hence, there is need for partnership between the two sectors for effective security system in the country. This is the rationale of this study.

Promoting a partnership approach

It is widely believed that no one agency alone can succeed in reducing crime. This fact is acknowledged by security experts who argue that, 'any comprehensive strategy to reduce crime must not only include the contribution of the police and the criminal justice system but also the whole range of environmental, social, economic and educational factors which affect the likelihood of crime'. To this end, many countries of the world due to the ravaging security challenges and the apparent inability of the conventional police to handle the situation alone satisfactorily have encouraged the establishment of partnerships between government organisations and private/community organisations in addressing crime. Increasingly, comparative experiences have shown that this approach of incorporating a professional police service and a responsible public seems to be the most effective and fruitful ways to achieve positive results and create a safer environment (Oppler, 1997:5).

In South Africa for instance, the law allows "partnership policing" with For-Profit or Non-For-Profit organizations. This has yielded tremendous positive results against the rising spate of crime that has been rocking the country since independence (Wisler and Onwudiwe, 2005; Etannibi et al., 2003). In the United States of America, police officers team up with citizens, business, private policing enterprises and other law enforcement agencies to achieve effective policing. This public-police partnership allows citizens to step beyond their daily law-abiding lives and get involved in projects, programs and other specific efforts to enhance their community's safety (Wroblewski and Hess, 2003). In the case of Britain, the policing partnership project in the London borough of Wadsworth has already provided positive results by establishing many projects that include key role players from the community. This has directly impacted on the quality of life of local people and is the envy of other boroughs (Oppler, 1997). In Pakistan, an innovative cross-sector partnership is incrementally improving public safety, security and social justice within the context of a highly complex society. For instance, in Karachi, a city deeply affected by crime, violence and fear, partnership policing creates 'safer spaces' for humanitarian activities. This approach offers insights for the humanitarian sector, which struggles worldwide with emergency response and longer-term recovery in situa-

tions with serious security challenges (Pryjomko, 2011).

From the above studies, it appears that partnership policing has proved to be rewarding in crime prevention and control. It is observed that, with no single practical model designed to cover the aforementioned countries, those involved in policing are constantly using their initiative to formulate policing strategy that works for them. Each country is tailoring the concept of partnership policing to suit its own environment, its people and its crime problems. This explanation shows how partnership policing should be operationalized. Success stories have shown that, to create safety in all communities, local participants must adapt the various partnerships techniques to suit their needs. This principle of seeking local solutions to local issues is important for the development of partnership policing in Nigeria, where there is diverse communities of people living side by side with diverse techniques to crime prevention and control.

Recommendations

Since observable evidence has shown that formal police institutions in Nigeria cannot effectively address the enormous crime problems ravaging the country, this paper recommends that the informal policing sector which is fast becoming popular amongst developed and developing countries in the world be recognized by the Nigerian government and made to partner with the formal sector in carrying-out policing activities nationwide. In this regard, massive police activities recommended by the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria to the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) should be reviewed and amended to arrogate a number of duties to the informal police sector or better still create an environment where the two institutions can function together for the safety of the Nigerian people.

Furthermore, no informal police institution should be allowed to operate in any part of the country without proper identification and registration with appropriate government agencies. Similar to the case of Private Security Companies, an Act specifying a Code of Conduct of laws regulating informal security institutions should be enacted by the legislature and passed to the Nigeria Police Force for proper enforcement.

In order to remedy the problem of 'jungle justice' amongst vigilante groups, government should forbid the use of firearms amongst such groups. In cases where sophisticated suspected persons are encountered, the backup NPF officers should respond immediately to such contingencies. This implies that, the formal policemen who are given authority to use firearms should always be with the informal security agents at all time in cases of emergency.

The Criminal Justice System should always welcome crime reports from the informal police institutions and

give them the necessary credit for doing so. In recent times, there are cases where community vigilante groups seek for or compete for recognition with the Nigeria Police Force over the apprehension of certain criminal activities. Such situations to a large extent contribute to frequent clashes between the two establishments.

In terms of funding for effective services, it is widely acknowledged that the welfare of informal vigilante groups is mostly borne by the community, but then it is recommended that this gesture be made a complimentary effort between government and the community. While government should be directly responsible for the welfare and upkeep of the formal police institutions, nothing stops them from contributing to the informal policing sector to add to what the community has done. The implication being that, it will ensure effective participation of the informal policing with the view to enhancing the activity of the formal policing system.

Furthermore, there is need for the integration of the informal mechanism of crime detection and prevention into the formal policing strategies. Where there is need, a separate department should be created where traditional policing strategies are incorporated to assist the formal police institutions when they have difficulties in detecting perpetrators of specific crimes. When these strategy and techniques are adopted, it is believed that suspects or people who engage in crimes like kidnapping, terrorism, and robbery and could evade detection and apprehension from the formal policing may be easily caught and made to face the full wrath of the law.

Police patrols in crime prone communities should be undertaken in collaboration with officers of the Nigeria Police Force and community approved vigilante groups. This will go a long way to enhancing intelligence policing that is currently a problem with the dreaded Boko Haram group. Similar measure could be applied to check the incessant pipeline vandalization and kidnapping activities across the country.

There is need to train more formal police officers attached to the public particularly those in position of authority. This ill trained policemen and women are as being responsible for the proliferation of unprofessional security problems in the country including police brutality and for the administration of jungle justice on alleged defaulters.

Community Policing is currently seen as one of the credible styles of policing worldwide. It should be adopted after experimentation and should be practiced in every community in the country. But before then, enough publicity should be given to the programme, as studies have shown that most Nigerians do not know what community policing is all about.

Incessant transfer of Police investigating officers who have unfinished criminal cases with them should be discouraged. Such transfers should only be undertaken

after they have concluded investigation or prosecution of cases they were handling. This will assist in reducing unnecessary delay in the Criminal Justice System and as well facilitate administration of justice in the country.

A standardized central security databank needs to be created to collect information about security issues in the country. Also, security network should be drawn and roles assigned to all security agencies to help expedite actions against suspects and awaiting trial persons in the country.

CONCLUSION

The historical analysis of police system in Nigeria has unravelled the complexity and diverse challenges in addressing criminality in our country. From the constitutional provisions, the bulk of police duties fall on conventional police force with its related agencies without regards to the rising a informal policing institutions despite the current security challenges the country is facing. This paper has pointed out that no one sector of the police institution can effectively ensure the security of over 160 million Nigerians alongside foreigners residing and doing business in the country. Therefore, the need to promote partnership between the security institutions for effective policing as is obtainable in other developed and developing countries of the world such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, India, South Africa, Pakistan, etc. cannot be neglected particularly when current security challenges in the country are considered. It is believed that when proper partnership is created between the security agencies, it will most likely promote crime reduction as well as enhance the much needed effective police-public relations in Nigeria.

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