

## **Effective Community Policing: A Panacea to Inefficiency and Impunity in Nigerian Police**

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### ***1.0 Introduction***

The unification effort of the British Colonial Government in Nigeria towards unifying the police force of the proletariats of Southern and that of Northern Nigeria birthed the Nigerian Police Force with its headquarters in Lagos. This came on April 1, 1930 and Dr. Duncan was appointed as the first (non-indigenous) Inspector – General of the Nigerian Police Force. This marked the beginning of what is known today as the Nigerian Police Force (NPF).

The police force has the traditional function of maintaining law and order in the society. While denying that the Nigerian Police Force has recorded some success in the fight against crime and in the maintenance of law and order amounts to a huge disservice to the force, asserting that it has not done well may not be far from the truth. Crime rate has been on the increase as people even accuse the police of conniving with criminals to rob them of their belongings, police impunity, cases of “stray bullets”, “accidental discharge” etc. has been the order of the day in Nigeria. Many Nigerians have been sent to untimely graves by gun-throttling police officers. In a report jointly produced by a New York-based Open Society Justice Initiative and the Network of Police Reform in Nigeria, they described police stations in the country as “torture chambers.” It accused the Nigeria police of routinely carrying out extra-judicial killings of suspects, torture or molestation while in detention. The report added that the pattern emerging from the study “is that the police are more likely to commit crimes than prevent them.” International rights bodies have consistently accused the Nigerian police of killing and abusing suspects with impunity, demanding and taking bribes.

Abubakar (2012) states that like most countries, Nigeria has a history of violence – a nasty civil war with about three million casualties, a succession of military coups and its attendant brutality, an even longer and seemingly endless sequence of civil unrests and constant breakdown of law and order. However, recent happenings in this country throw up concerns about the little or nothing being done by the police to check this circle of violence and brutality that has bedevilled Nigeria.

The rave these days include the Boko Haram menace, militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, jungle justice, rape and other criminal activities being perpetrated in Nigeria. It was these threatening menaces that forced the Independence Day parade to be held within the confines of Aso Rock. However, as the celebration was taking place in Aso Rock on that same day, October 1st, somewhere in Zamfara State, in Lingyado village, an army of suspected armed robbers carried a ‘reprisal’ attack, killing over twenty villagers in cold blood. While twelve corpses was discovered dumped by the roadside by unknown persons in Rivers state (Abubakar, 2012).

Bomb blasts in Borno, Yobe, Suleja and elsewhere, continuous massacres in Jos, marauding armed robbers and ritual killers prowling, indiscriminately plucking, killing and maiming with impunity; inexhaustible list, portraying the total disregard for the sanctity of human lives and the indiscriminate violation of human rights that has characterised human existence in Nigeria.

These social vices continued and the performance of the Nigerian Police has remained relatively grossly low despite the existence of the Ministry of Police Affairs, Police Service Commission, Nigerian Police Academy and College, changing from the Nigerian Police Service to Nigerian Police Force and the billions of naira annually allocated to them.

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What could be the answer to this state of insecurity, criminality and police inability to contend crime and insecurity? The paper seeks to address the challenges of inefficiency and impunity within the Nigerian Police as vehicle for maintaining law and order.

### ***Review of Extant Literature***

Like other societal issues, scholars have variegated views on community policing. In other words there is no consensus or generally accepted definition of the concept. But this work will dwell on those definitions that are widely accepted. The dominant paradigm in policing currently is community policing, which combines consultation with community members, responsiveness to their security needs, collective problem solving to identify the most appropriate means of meeting these needs, and mobilization of the public to make all of these happen (Grabosky, 2009, Bayley, 2006). According to Trojanowincz (1986) community policing entails an organisation-wide philosophy of full-service, personalized and decentralized policing, where the community is empowered to work in proactive partnerships with the police at solving the problems of crime, fear of crime, disorder, decay, and other societal issues (cited in Stolz & William, 2007). The above definitions capture the soul and spirit of community policing. It entails the collaboration, involvement and participation of stakeholders in the security of the society. Stakeholders include; the traditional rulers, indigenes & residents of the community, police officers, business community, schools, churches and mosques etc.

There are certain principles of community policing. Stolz and William (2007) listed these principles as follows;

- a) it is a community based philosophy
- b) it focuses on creative problem-solving
- c) promotes the development of trust
- d) establishes a broader role for the officer
- e) stresses community involvement
- f) it is reactive but proactive
- g) it provides help where and when it is needed most
- h) enhances traditional policing
- i) it gets everyone involved
- j) it personalizes police service

For an efficient and effective community policing certain qualities and characteristics are important. Trojanowincz and Pollard (1986) these characteristics include;

1. Self-motivated, independent, innovative
2. Communication skills
3. Compassion and caring
4. Extroverted, friendly
5. Community service oriented, sells program
6. Extensive police experience
7. Ability to motivate people, likes to work with people
8. Flexible, open-minded, adaptable
9. Organizational skills
10. Patience and self-esteem

These are important features that a good community police officer must possess to function effectively in the office. They should be trained in the effective use of firearm and first aid kits. Women are very important agents of community policing because of the caring nature and their natural ability to penetrate and get information from men. Table 1 below show a clear partnership for efficient community policing.



Long years of military rules in Nigeria “institutionalised” police repression. However, it has not only persisted but also intensified despite the return to civil rule in 1999. This is portrayed below:

*The Nigeria Police Force is still largely vicious and corrupt. Political opponents of governments and military administrations – usually workers, students, radicals and human rights activists – continue to suffer excessive and recurrent waves of brutalities, abductions, unwarranted searches and violations of privacy and private family life, extra-judicial killings, bodily injury, intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of the police and sundry state “intelligence” and security agencies in the country (Alemika 1993: 208).*

Impunity (especially indiscriminate arrest, detention and extra-judicial killings) did not abate with the return to democracy and the handing over the reins of office to an elected government on May 29, 1999. According to a press statement issued by the Haz Iwendi, (Force Police Public Relations Officer), in early January 2001, over 134 persons were killed by armed robbers while 320 others were injured; 88 policemen were injured and 29 others were killed by the robbers between 15 August and 19 December 2000,. However, within this period, the police killed 348 robbery suspects. During the same period, however, the police killed 348 robbery suspects. In an official police publication “Police News” it was reported

*... in a five year period of 1996 – 2000, some 10,345 Armed Robbery cases were reported nationwide, which led to the arrest of 13,365 suspects in the same period.*

*A total of 2,201 of the armed hoodlums lost their lives in gun battle with the Police as against 381 Policemen killed by robbers while another 822 Policemen sustained injury within the period under review.*

Data gathered from the foregoing suggest that extra-judicial killing of armed robbery suspects by the police increased significantly under the new civilian government (348 robbers so killed in just four months: August – December 2000) which came to power on 29 May 1999. It also shows no significant change in police orientation regarding extrajudicial killing since the beginning of the fourth republic and period of military rule in Nigeria.

International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, Nigeria<sup>2</sup> in a report asserted;

*It is widely believed that the Nigeria Police Force carries out an average of 1,500 extra-judicial executions annually in Nigeria since 1999, resulting from custody and roadblock killings. There are also unlawful killings by the Police Force, which are associated with torture, highhanded crowd control and conflict management. Many, if not most of these killings originate from the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS), the Joint Taskforce (JTF) and the Anti-riot Police Personnel (Mobile Police). The latter mount roadblocks on Nigerian roads and engage in killing and maiming those who resist their extortionist and other graft activities. Torture, which is nicknamed “discipline” by the Nigerian Army, is also common among various departments of the Nigeria Police Force, particularly its Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and SCID or SCIB operatives.*

Even human right organizations are not spared in the abridgement of the rights of Nigerians. They have also recorded a fair share of deaths arising from torture and unlawful detention. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, about twenty (20) innocent detainees, who had been held for several months awaiting trial in Central Police Station, Awka, were murdered by officers and men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Anambra State Police Command.

According to Comrade Ifeanyi Onuchukwu, who was also detained with the deceased detainees in the SARS cell from 4<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November 2004 when he was granted bail, one of the Police officers handed a sheet of paper with a pen to one of the detainees to re-compile their names and their States of origin and at around 7:15pm same day, they were taken out of the cell. He added that he took possession of the sheet of paper containing their names when the Police officer forgot to recover it from the detainee. The detainees were lined up and shot dead by the corner of the Station and their remains taken to Agu-Awka dumping site and mass buried. The burial site was revealed to him by one of the passers-by forced to carry their remains to the burial site.

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<sup>2</sup> International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, Nigeria (2011), Nigeria In State of War: How Over 54,000 Nigerians Died Outside The Law Since 1999

This case quickly brings to mind the popular Apo Eight (8 Ibo traders that were murdered by police) of 7th June 2005. The trial of the officers that killed these young Nigerians which commenced since June 2006 has been at a snail speed despite the establishment of enough prima facie evidence.

It is widely believed that extra-judicial killing by the Police is partly responsible for the bloody bombings and violence carried out in various parts of Nigeria by the Boko-Haram Sect, especially since 2009. On Wednesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, a team of security forces led by the Nigerian Police Force invaded a Boko Haram controlled Mosque in Bornu State and killed over 100 suspected members of the sect extra-judicially. As that was not enough the leader of the Islamic Sect Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf was extra-judicially killed by the Police on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009. According to International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, Nigeria (2011), in a report posited that Yusuf;

*was captured alive by the Nigerian Army Taskforce, code-named “Operation Flush” and handed over to the Nigeria Police Force. The pictorial evidence obtained by the British Broadcasting Corporation authenticated Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf’s extra-judicial killing. The second-in-command in the Islamic Sect, which is also called “Taliban”, Alhaji Fuju Foi, died under extra-judicial circumstances too. In the Jos sectarian violence of 2008, where over 700 people were killed, according to HRW; there were about 133 extra-judicial executions by the Nigeria Police Force. As a result of the July 9, 2011 bombing of Kaleri, Ngomari Custain area in Maiduguri, Borno State, according to the Amnesty International, at least 25 people were killed extra-judicially by the Joint Military Taskforce in response to the bombing through house-to-house invasion and application of maximum force against the areas innocent residents.*

Maintenance of law and order which is the primary/ traditional function of the police force anywhere in the world encompasses the protection of peoples’ rights, fight against crime and enforcement of law and order within the society. The above analysis has shown that most of those commissioned as police officers to protect the lives and property, as well as the right of Nigerians are have turned to intimidate, extort, dehumanize, kill and maim them. This is a huge indictment on their part and glaring sign of gross inefficiency.

### ***Corruption in Nigerian Police***

There are various forms of corruption in Nigeria police force. Institutionalized extortions, a profound lack of political will to reform the force, and impunity combined to make police corruption a deeply embedded problem (Okeshola & Mudaiare, 2013). However, good policing is the bedrock upon which rule of law and public safety stand. The failure of the Nigerian authorities to address police bribery, extortion, and embezzlement, threatens the basic rights of all Nigerians, the rich inclusive. Regular victims of police corruption include but not limited to commercial motorcycle operators (Okada), market traders, commercial drivers, sex workers, criminal suspects and victims of common crimes, judges, prosecutors and lawyers, religious and civil society leaders, journalists and diplomats.

Although, there are still some Nigerian police officers who conduct themselves in an exemplary manner, working in difficult and often dangerous conditions without soiling their hands. Yet it is evident that corruption and abusive behaviour within the Nigeria Police Force is endemic. Okeshola & Mudaiare (2013) stated that corruption is like a deadly disease plaguing the police force in Nigeria. Extortion and bribery on a daily basis, countless number of Nigerians traveling on the country’s roads, buying or selling at markets, running daily errands or working in their offices are accosted by armed police officers demanding bribes. The impression is that the Nigerian police does not investigate or handle many cases except those concerned grease their palms.

### ***Police Reform Efforts in Nigeria***

The Federal Government of Nigeria has not relented on its efforts towards reforming the Nigeria Police Force and makes it acceptable to Nigerians and to meet international standards. Addressing the Senate Committee on Police Affairs in October 2011, the Chairman Police Service Commission (PSC), Parry Osayande, DIG (rtd) opined that

*“the staff strength of the Nigerian Police stands at 330,000 and 100,000 policemen/women are attached to individuals to be carrying handbags for their wives!! Therefore police staff strength of 230,000 is left to police over 150 million Nigerians. Are these 150 million Nigerians supposed not to be protected, if only a few individuals are being protected by over 100,000 policemen”?* (Nigerian Tribune 19, October 2011).

Osayande also highlighted and identified the factors impacting adversely the performance of the Police Force as follows:-

- a. Misuse, misapplication of available resources and lack of accountability, award of bogus contracts including outright diversion and misappropriation of police meagre resources.
- b. Failure to plan and lack of vision.
- c. Corruption assumed great dimension and seemed to have been institutionalised, as some officers and men who engaged in the practice had been found to collude with and sometimes shield criminals rather than prevent same.
- d. Some police men had been found to facilitate the escape of criminals from lawful custody, obtain money from suspects for closure of case files or to derail the cause of justice, escort contrabands, steal from suspects and accident victims and supply police weapons and uniforms to criminals. (Nigerian Tribune 19, October 2011).

Having critically examined the present state of the police in Nigeria, the need for reforms to ensure that the identified shortfalls are rectified cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, several efforts have been directed towards ensuring that the Nigerian police force become more effective and accountable. According to Chukwuma (2004) and Alemika & Chukwuma (2000);

- i. The police are perceived as inefficient and corrupt. The use of private security firms and armed vigilante groups is increasing.
- ii. Previous police reform efforts seem to have been motivated by the need for regime survival, rather than an attempt to make policing more effective.
- iii. Political and social factors, such as unemployment within Nigerian society, threaten both police reform and emerging democracy.

There has been series of reformative moves aimed at strengthening the image and effectiveness of the Nigerian Police Force. Recently, the present IGP M. D. Abubakar in maiden address as the new Inspector – General of Police opined that;

*“(The) police force has fallen to its lowest level...Police duties have become commercialized and provided at the whims and caprices of the highest bidder...Our police stations, state CID and operations offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of squads and teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our special anti-robbery squads (SARS) have become killer teams engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collectors. Toll stations in the name of checkpoints adorn our highways with Policemen shamefully collecting money from motorists in full glare of the public. Police connive with suspects to turn against complainants and investigations are usually not conducted unless those involved pay money to the police.*

*Justice has been perverted, peoples’ rights denied, innocent souls committed to prison, torture and extra judicial killings perpetrated and so many people arbitrarily detained in our cells because they cannot afford the illegal bail monies we demand. Illegalities thrive under your watchful eyes because you have compromised the very soul of our profession. Our respect is gone and the Nigerian public has lost even the slightest confidence in the ability of the police to do any good thing.” (Etim, 2012)*

These observations by the IGP are in concurrence with general perception of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). This has engendered reforms to address the ills facing the force. In this regard, committee reports and white papers to recommendations of civil society organizations like the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) abound. The various committee reports include that of former IGPs chaired by MD Yusuf (1994), Vision 2010 (1996), Tamuno on National Security (2001), Danmadami (2006), MD Yusuf (2008) and the most recent one under Parry Osayande (2012). As NOPRIN observed correctly, what are needed are not another committee but the will, resources and freedom to implement what has already been studied, recommended and accepted by government (El-Rufia, 2012).

### ***Policy Implication***

Achieving peace and maintaining law and order in any society remains a herculean task. While developed countries like Britain, U. S. A., Canada, Australia etc. have attained some levels of maturity in the maintenance of law and order, crime detection, etc. developing countries like Zimbabwe, Nigeria etc. where corruption has taken root in are faced with the challenge of effective and efficient policing. Community policing as stated above brings police and citizens together to prevent crime and solve neighbourhood problems.

It emphasizes the significance of stopping crime before it takes place, as against responding to calls for service after the crime happens (*Law Teacher*). It (community policing) also provides the people of a given community more control over the quality of life in their community. In community policing, the police become part of the community. Consequently, the police get a better sense of residents' security needs and engender trust between the residents of the community and the police. Drawing from King (*Undated*), community policing provides the society with numerous advantages as discussed below;

- i. It gives the officer self-satisfaction from solving problems. Instead of continually running from call to call and putting a temporary quick fix on the problem, the officer can get job satisfaction from analyzing the problem and solving it.
- ii. It engenders an opportunity to be creative and innovative. Through enabling the officer, the department allows that officer to seek solutions. This brings about the use of innovation and creative solutions instead of restricting the officers to using mere traditional policing strategy.
- iii. It gives the officer a chance to make a "real difference." Most police officers take up police job to affect lives positively. Therefore, these officers derive self-satisfaction which comes from being of help to others.
- iv. It gives the officer the opportunity to become familiar with more people. People get to know the officer as a person and not just as a nameless and faceless police officer whom they occasionally see drive or walk by. This will result in better communications, better relations with the public and in the delivery of quality service.
- v. It gives the community a voice on how it will be policed traditionally; police have selected the manner and style of policing to be used in any community. Under community policing, the community works in partnership with the Police to decide the style of policing which will be used within the community.
- vi. Under this the community has a say in setting law enforcement priorities to become a more efficient police department; we must evaluate how we prioritize our calls for service. The community should participate in this evaluation. There must be an effective partnership in formulating security policies and implementing them.
- vii. It provides a permanent resolution to recurring problems. Officers should "treat the illness" and not the symptoms. As a result the community will benefit by having recurring problems either permanently eliminated.
- viii. It provides a stronger, safer and friendlier community in which to live. If we actively involve the community in resolving neighbourhood problems, the community will develop a sense of unity and partnership with the Police. This will result in a friendlier and safer place in which to live. Our goal as police officers is to improve the quality of life in the community that we serve. "Quality of life" is a trendy touchy-feely phrase that may be overused, but it is really what we are about as a police organization.
- ix. Security conscious neighbourhood is central. Therefore, reinvigorating communities is essential if government is seriously bent to deter crime and create more vital societies. It will take time to break down barriers of apathy and mistrust so that meaningful partnerships can be forged in some communities (author's emphasis).
- x. Having suffered the pangs of insecurity for so long now, Nigeria should reform its police force to provide for community policing as panacea to crime, terrorism and other social vices. Both the community members and the police can easily trace the entrance and activities of hoodlums (terrorists, robbers, kidnapers, militants etc.).
- xi. This will engender effective security at reduced cost: the partnership between the police force and the community will be so strongly knitted such that members of the community would perceive it an obligation to report suspicious characters and crime to the police (this means solving security problems *a priori* instead of *a posteriori*). As a result police will be preoccupied with crime prevention strategies instead fighting crime when it has occurred.

## **Conclusion**

Maintaining law and order in the society has remained a challenge to governments all over the world. Security challenges pervade the entire length and breadth of Nigeria ranging from Boko Haram in the north, Kidnapping, Robbery, and Militancy in the south. This state of affairs calls to question the present structure and operation pattern of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and its inability to contain these vices. The survival of any human society depends largely on its strength of its security apparatus. Community policing which is, in essence, collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems has proved to be very effective in security reform and sustaining peace. It has proven in developed crimes that with the police no longer the sole guardians of law and order, all members of the community become active allies in the effort to enhance the safety and quality of the community.

However, the Nigerian police force should not allow political leaders and the public to develop unrealistic expectations for community policing in terms of crime deterrence or speed of implementation. Community policing calls for long-term commitment; it is not a quick fix. Achieving ongoing partnerships with the community and eradicating the underlying causes of crime will take planning, flexibility, time, and patience. Management can measure progress by their success in meeting interim goals and must reinforce the concept inside and outside the organization that success is reached through a series of gradual improvements.

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