

Community Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

FOLASHADE B. OKESHOLA

PATIENCE E.U. MUDIARE

Department of Sociology
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria, Nigeria.

Abstract

Community oriented policing is a proactive philosophy that promotes solving problems that are either criminal, affect the quality of life, or increase citizens fear of crime. It involves identifying, analysing and addressing community problems at their source. Strategies involve in community policing include community partnership, problem solving and change management. However, in Nigeria, we are saddled with major challenges of policing. These are manpower shortage; inadequate funding, corruption, inadequate logistic support and infrastructure, lack of serviceable information and technological equipment to cover all the areas of the State are responsible for the current state of the police in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be serious retraining towards attitudinal change and professional efficiency and proficiency among both the rank and file and other officer cadre of the police.

Key words: Corruption, Human right abuse, godfatherism, Proactive policing and problem-solving,

Introduction

Community policing is anchored on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry. Police roles and functions are not simply law enforcement but also include tackling a huge range of community problems. The transition from traditional policing to community policing is a global phenomenon and the Nigeria police cannot be an exception. Indeed, community policing as a philosophy and practice is a veritable vehicle for police reforms (Okiro, 2007). The Nigeria police in 2004 embraced community policing as a pragmatic approach to police reforms. The stage was indeed set for a clear departure from traditional policing, that was reactive and incident based, to a problem – solving oriented policing that is proactive with the community as the cornerstone of policing objectives (Abdulrahman, 2007).

Like several other nations world over, Nigerian police force embraced the philosophy of community policing on the principle that in a democratic society, the police are interested by their fellow citizens to protect and serve the public's fundamental rights to liberty, equality and justice under the law. To fulfil that privileged role, the police must be a part of, not apart from, the communities they serve. On 27th April, 2004, community policing was formally launched throughout Nigeria (The Dawn Newspaper, 2011).

Community policing is a paradigm shift that seeks to focus on constructive engagement with people who are the end users of the police service and re – negotiate the contract between the people and the police thereby making the community co – producers of justice and a quality police service. The most recent attempt made by the Nigeria police force to improve its performance was the introduction of community policing programme in 2004. This was part of the Force's effort to change policing to a modern and professional policing capable of providing maximum security of lives and property in Nigeria. Community oriented policing is a proactive philosophy that promotes solving problems that are either criminal, affect the quality of life, or increase citizens fear of crime. It involves identifying, analysing and addressing community problems at their source.

Police are organized to defend and preserve the interests of the dominant groups and classes in society. Consequently, the significance of police as either facilitators or inhibitors of change initiatives will depend on the character of their society. In a totalitarian and economically inequitable society, police role will be more to defend the status quo of political oppression and economic injustice. In contrast, in a democratic society the police are more likely to provide services that will enhance development and democracy (Alemika, 1993b).

Strategies for Community Policing

A community policing perspective differs in a number of ways from a traditional policing perspective. In community policing, the police must share power with residents of a community, and critical decisions need to be made at the neighbourhood level. Achieving the goals of community policing requires successful implementation of three essential and complimentary components or operational strategies: community partnership, problem solving, and change management(www.communitypolicing.org/conpubs.html).

- (a) **Community Partnership:** Establishing and maintaining mutual trust between citizens of a community and the police is the main goal of the first component of community policing. Police have always recognized the need for cooperation with the community and have encouraged members of the community to come forward with crime-fighting information. The police no longer view community as a passive presence connected to the police by an isolated incident or series of incidents. The community's concerns with crime and disorder become the target of efforts by the police and the community working together (Bohm and Haley,2002) .
- (b) **Problem Solving:** Problem solving requires a lot more thought, energy, and action than traditional incidents-based police responses to crime and disorder. In full partnership, the police and a community's residents and business owners identify core problems, propose solutions, and implement a solution. Thus, community members identify the concerns that they feel are most threatening to their safety and well-being. Those areas of concern then become priorities for joint police-community interventions. For this problem-solving process to operate effectively, the police need to devote time and attention to discovering community's concerns, and they need to recognize the validity of those concerns (Bohm and Haley,2002).
- (c) **Change Management:** Forging community policing partnerships and implementing problem-solving strategies necessitates assigning new responsibilities and adopting a flexible style of management. Traditionally, patrol officers have been accorded lower status in police organizations and have been dominated by the agency's command structure. Community policing, in contrast, emphasizes the value of the patrol function and the patrol officer as an individual. It requires the shifting of initiative, decision making, and responsibility downward within the police organization. The officer must become responsible for managing the delivery of police services to the community. Patrol officers are the most familiar with the needs and concern of their communities and are in the best position to forge the close ties with the community that lead to effective solutions to local problems.

Under community policing, police management must guide, rather than dominate, the actions of the patrol officer must ensure that they have the necessary resources to solve the problems in their communities. Management must determine the guiding principles to convert the philosophy of the agency to community policing and then to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies implemented (Bohm and Haley, 2002).

Challenges to Community Policing in Nigeria

Despite numerous efforts by various police administrations to curtail the level of crime in Nigeria, crime and social disorder still persist in the country. Thousands of lives and millions of naira worth of property are being lost as a result of one crime or the other. Some believed that the inability of the Nigeria police to ensure maximum security in the country is as a result of so many social and technical constraints, among which are lack of equipment and sour relationship between police and public (Dawn Newspaper, 2011).

Corruption: Wide spread corruption in the Nigeria police force is fuelling abuses against ordinary citizens and severely undermining the rule of law in Nigeria on a daily basis. Countless ordinary Nigerians are accosted by armed police officers who demand bribes and commit human rights abuses against them as a means of extorting money. 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).

Police is not unique. Corruption exists in the Nigeria police force much the same as it does in any other police organisation the world over, except perhaps, in terms of its extent and the organisation's reaction to it. However, the issue of corruption in the Nigeria police as noted above cannot be treated in isolation of the larger society. Police routinely extort money from victims of crimes to initiate investigations and demand bribes from suspects to drop investigations. Corruption in the police is so endemic that it has eroded public trust and confidence they have in the police. To achieve any success in combating corruption in the Nigerian police one has to take a holistic approach and most importantly understanding the growth and existence of corruption within the police.

Institutional Constraints: According to Onyeozili (2005), allegations levelled against the institution and its personnel, some of which have proven to be true, include arbitrariness in exercising its power, corruption, perversion of justice, and delays in the administration of justice. Various factors have been blamed as constituting a stumbling block to the effective administration of justice and efficient maintenance of law and order in Nigeria. Other factors are inadequate manpower (both in strength and expertise), insufficient education and training, inadequate equipment, and poor conditions of service of the average policeman. The long-term failure of the Nigerian authorities to address police bribery, extortion, and wholesale embezzlement threatens the basic rights of all Nigerians. Therefore, good policy is the bedrock for the rule of law and public safety according to Dufka (2010).

In a research conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2010 on 145 victims of and witnesses to police corruption in Nigeria. Among them are market traders, commercial drivers, sex workers, criminal suspects, and victims of common crime, rank-and-file and senior level police officers; federal government officials; judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, religious and civil society leaders, journalist, diplomats and members of an armed vigilante group.

Findings from the research shows “the myriad forms of police corruption in Nigeria” and “also show how institutionalized extortion and a profound lack of political will to reform the force, and impunity combine to make police corruption a deeply embedded problems”. This includes cases of extortion, bribery, embezzlement, and failure of oversight functions. One corrupt practice detailed in the findings is called “returns” in which rank- and – file officers are compelled to pay up the chain of command a share of the money they extort from the public. “Another form of corruption the report noted is the practice of forcing crime victim “to pay the police to conduct every stage of an investigation (Human Right Watch, 2010).

Mammus (2010) further stressed that the major challenge of policing is the manpower shortage, inadequate funding, inadequate logistic support and infrastructure, lack of serviceable information and technological equipment to cover all the areas of the State are responsible for the current state of the police in Nigeria.

The police is arguably the most visible agent of government and citizens often assess the character of a government through its police force. This is because the police are the “guardians” of society. To a large extent, the growth , action and behaviour of the police as an institution not only reflect the political and economic character of society, but also mirror what those in power are willing or able to tolerate or condone or perhaps even demand of the police (ICPC,2008).

Police Perception: Another important factor that has been neglected for many years is the perception of the police force itself by the police officers. Questions that readily come to mind are: What is police officer’s perception of the citizens they claimed to be serving? What is the perception of citizens to police officers in Nigeria? To be frank, the image of police in the eyes of Nigerians is bad arising from all the factors enumerated above.

Military Orientation: The police as it is now came out of a military administration. That is probably the biggest challenge we face – turning it from a force into a service. Although Iwar (2009) agrees that police officers often lack the skills needed to police effectively, but refuses to admit the most serious allegations made about the police – that they brutally torture and sometimes kill suspects without –trial (Iwar, 2009)

Godfatherism: is an endemic problem in Nigeria, which the police still battle with. Godfatherism is the funding and abetting of vices and shielding “connected” criminals from justice by government agents and highly placed officials entrusted with the power and authority to investigate and prosecute such vices. It has become a dominant issue in African polity and impedes the course of justice in virtually all the countries in Africa (Onyeozili, 2005). Furthermore, many highly placed public officers in Nigeria are known to pervert the course of justice by the virtue of their closeness to the seat of power. Often, the police get sucked in, and this accounts for their complicity in several unresolved crimes across the country.

According to Alemika (1993b), many of these problem in the Nigeria police force are self – evident and have been sources of serious concern to the public , governments, police authorities and officials, the mass media and human rights organization in the country. What is required is a determination to address the problems.

The knowledge of human rights among the majority of policemen is poor. This might be as a result of the long period of military rule. Although policemen are taught the principles of the rule of law, in reality this is not put into practice because military rule does not recognize the rule of law. In the new democratic dispensation, policemen should be given intensive on-the-job training on citizens’ fundamental rights which they must uphold at all times.

Prospects of Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing in Nigeria presumes that it demands better communication and understanding between police and public; it encourages more liberal and tolerant attitude towards criminal. Proactive policing is therefore, more effective both in preventing offending and in achieving offender detection and remedial action post offence.

The Nigerian community policing was on the same ideal that is not only for uniform patrol or specific community policing units rather the potential rewards cannot be fully realized unless there is a shared understanding of the community towards that approach throughout the police organization. Community policing therefore requires the integrated involvement of all departments and functions with their combined efforts and expertise being focused on community based actions plan to addressing local priorities. Community policing in Nigeria does not replace all other policing styles and methods but harness core policing functions such as traffic enforcement, crime prevention as well as public order management. These responsibilities remain essential and are entirely compatible and complementary if they meet the performance standards and criteria demanded by the community policing (The Dawn Newspaper, 2011).

According to Ikuteyijo (2009), community policing entails community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment for all. It is policing whereby the people take active part in their own affairs. With community policing, the police is not seen as a stranger whose presence stands for danger and imminent hazard, but as partners in development. He further stressed that the unfriendly nature of the relationship between the police and members of the public has enjoyed a wide coverage among scholars. It was in reaction to this development that the concept of community policing was introduced. This is particularly the case in Nigeria where the informal ethnic militia groups contested policing space with the Nigerian police in the early year of the forth republic which began in May 1999.

The Nigeria police force has not met the minimum demands of democratic policing which cardinal elements are "Justice, equality, accountability, and efficiency" (Law Commission of Canada, 2002). These elements imply the following: *Justice* means that all individuals ought to be treated fairly and their rights are respected. *Equality* means, first, that all...ought to received policing service sufficient to feel safe in their community. Equality also means that there ought to be representative participation from all members of society in the delivery of policing services. i.e. that it requires equal and inclusive security forces. *Accountability* means that the actions of a body are subjected and that there are formal channels that individuals can use to lodge a complaint. Finally, *efficiency* means that services are provided in a cost effective manner (Law Commission of Canada, 2002:3).

Conclusion

There is every need to reposition the police in Nigeria to conform to what is obtainable in other countries of the world. Security is a very sensitive issue and no nation can afford to toy with it. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society and seems intractable, but the situation can be remedied given disciplined and forthright leadership and a citizenry that is united in its resentment to corruption. The police force as an institution is one that the Nigerian society cannot do without. It is however, necessary that in-depth and comprehensive reforms be carried out within it to make it a force that will satisfactorily discharge its constitutional duties without alienating, or making itself an enemy, of the Nigerian people.

Recommendations

To enhance community policing in Nigeria, it is recommended that:

There should be serious retraining towards attitudinal change and professional efficiency and proficiency among both the rank and file and other officer cadre of the police. There is need for the police to improve its public relationship. They should see Nigerians as their fellow human beings who deserve to be treated with a high level of courtesy and decorum.

The Federal Government should as a matter of urgency equip the police with ultra modern arms and ammunitions as well as security gadgets. This has become necessary now more than ever to enable the force fight the gruesome scourge of armed robbery and orchestrated kidnappings ravaging the entire length and breadth of the country.

Nigerians should help the police to discharge their duties optimally. They could do this through giving vital information to them on the activities of undesirable elements in the society. Such invaluable information could help the police to perform creditably.

The police should be shielded from political appointments. The role of law enforcement in any civilized society is to serve and protect the citizens. This is because political appointments corrupt the officials, destroy spirit de corps, skew their sense of neutrality and impartiality, and infuse a sense of allegiance to appointing authority. It is a major obstacle to police effectiveness and must be discouraged at all cost if improved police performance must be achieved.

There is the need for Government to steadily increase logistic funding, so that the police can work towards attaining the standard patrol practice of developed countries. There should be a massive injection of funds into the police force so that operational and logistics equipment can be acquired.

Crime in our society has become rather sophisticated. The police should, therefore, acquire up-to-date weapons and equipments, which it deems necessary for the successful performance of its duties.

There should be an improvement in the conditions of services of policemen. This will go a long way in removing any justification or predisposing circumstances for corrupt practices or the extortion of the public in the performance of their duties.

The living conditions of policemen should be improved. Policemen live in barracks built several years ago which are poorly maintained.

Police authorities should put in place structures to motivate honest, dedicated and hard working policemen. Promotion should be giving to deserving officers as at when due. This is because denial of promotion is a major cause of the low morale and that seems to have permeated and pervaded the entire force.

References

- Abdulrahman, Y. (2007), Preface in Community Policing. Nigeria Police Force Operational Handbook.
- Alemika,E.E.O. (1988), Policing and Perceptions of Police in Nigeria. *Police Studies 11 (4):161 -176*
- Alemika,E,E,O. (1993b), Colonialism, State and Policing in Nigeria. *Crime, Law and Social Change 20:189 - 219.*
- Alemika E.E.O. and Chukwuma I.C.(2000),Analysis of Police and Policing in Nigeria. Center for Law Enforcement Education and National Human Rights Commission, Lagos.
- Bohm and Haley (2002), Introduction to Criminal Justice. Third Edition, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.
- CLEEN (1999), Policing a Democracy: A Survey Report on the Role and Functions of the Nigeria Police in a Post- Military Era. Center for Law Enforcement Education and the National Human Rights Commission, Lagos.
- Dufka,C. (2010), Force Operational Handbook. Nigeria: Report Shines Light son Nigerian Police Corruption. August 18th.
- Human Rights Watch (2010), Police Corruption in Nigeria.
- ICPC (2010), Combating Corruption in the Nigerian Police . A paper presented at the Police Service Commission Retreat. August 8th
- Ikuteyijo, L. (2009), The Challenges of Community Policing in Nigeria. *International Journal of Police Science and Management Vol.11. No3.*
- Iwar (2009), Can Nigeria's Police be reformed? BBC News, Thursday 30 July.
- Law Commission of Canada ,2002.
- Mammus (2010),Challenges and Prospects of Policing (Edo State, Nigeria in Perspective). *Study Mode.*
- Okaneme (2010),Challenges of Effective Policing in Nigeria. The Nigerian Voice 20th July.
- Okiro,M.M.(2007),Foreword in Community Policing . Nigeria Police Force Operational Handbook.
- Onyeozili, E.C. (2005), Obstacles to Effective Policing in Nigeria. Department of Criminal Justice Administration of Justice. Vol 1. No 1. April.
- Study Mode (2 001), Proactive Policing.
- The Dawn Newspaper (2011), Community Policing and National Security – Community Policing in Nigeria. Thursday 27, January.