Community Policing in Contemporary Nigeria:
A Synthesis of Models

Samuel Iornenge Zumve

Department of Sociology, Federal University, Dutsin- Ma,
Katsina State,Nigeria

Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore ways in which the agencies of the indigenous Nigerian social control mechanisms can be integrated into the community policing project in contemporary Nigeria It begins by discussing the ineffectiveness of community policing project based on the structures of the Nigerian police service a 'colonial legacy' in combating person and property crimes in Nigeria. The article describes the limitations of the Nigerian Police Organisation, the relevance of the indigenous agencies of social control in detecting and preventing the criminal acts of terrorism and kidnapping based on the notion that perpetrators of these acts most at times resides or hide in the locations where these criminals acts take place.The article concludes by reconverting that agencies of the indigenous social control systems be incorporated in the formal community policing project.Finally, apart from the formal collaboration between the police and agencies of the indigenous social control systems in the area of formulating crime prevention strategies, the police should bereorganised and be more responsive, civil and fair to members of the Nigerian citizenry.

Introduction

From its inception, the modern police institution worldwide had evolved various strategies for delivering services to their citizenry. However, the contribution of the police to the control of crime and maintenance of order today is debatable as studies of police effectiveness imply (Reiner, 1992; Bayley, 1994). From the onset, it is important we distinguish the ideas of 'police' and 'policing'. The police are a particular kind of institution whilst, 'policing' implies a set of processes with specific social functions.

As observed by Maguire et al: (1997), 'police are not found in every society, but 'policing' is arguably a universal requirement of any social order, which may be carried out by a variety of different processes and institutional arrangements. Traditionally, policing was the responsibility of all adults in a community.

In medieval society, all adult males were obliged to contribute towards the prevention and control of crime and disorder under the systems of 'hue, cry and pursuit' and the 'watch and ward that preceded the emergence of specialized police force as organs of the state. But the emergence of the state, and its vast bureaucracies anchored on centralization, hierarchical authority/power structure, and professional staff (Weber, 1968) changed the traditional policing philosophy rooted in the idea of policing as everyday's business. The emergence of the state as an entity with claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society resulted into the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by other groups (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000).

In Britain, policing developed as a local affair with a role which has remained in force up till today, it is therefore the responsibility of everybody to maintain law and order. This role is rooted in the history and common law tradition of Britain that each citizen has a duty to   suppress crime and disorder. Therefore, the burden of policing was placed on every adult citizen. It was an obligatory issue. These are the ways and forms on which policing as a profession today started. Policing and police did not start as a paid profession, it started as a noble, incorruptible profession with considerable responsibility and distinction (Ahire, 1993).

The aim of this article is to explore ways in which the agencies of the unofficial indigenous Nigerian Social control systems can be integrated into the activities of the Nigeria police to combat the variety of persons and property crimes that characterized the contemporary Nigerian society. A central theme is that addressing the contemporary security challenges in Nigeria both in terms of crime detection, prevention and control needs to be conceptualized as a community task. The 'community' includes a wide diversity of people and institutions with varying perceptions, interests and safety concerns. The local neighbourhood provides the physical site in which those criminal acts (be it acts of terrorism by the Boko Haram sects, kidnapping or armed-robbery e.t.c.) take place.

Using the principle of the *Dialectical Materialistic approach,* section one of this article discusses the evolution of the police institution in Nigeria. Contained in the first part also a summary of the tenets of the indigenous Nigerian social control systems. The second part discusses community policing as a new model/strategy to fight crime in the Nigerian society. As an off shoot of the Nigerian police service, the community policing project is based on the principles and doctrines of the Nigerian police organization. The effects of polices' general conducts, and public perception of the police on community policing project is also discussed under this section.

Part three of the article attempts a broader comparative assessment of these two social systems (the Nigerian Police and Indigenous social control systems). The strength and limitations of the police institution and their effects on effective community policing in contemporary Nigeria is further discussed under part three. The article concludes with the discussion of a proposed synthesis of the principles and agencies of the two models to evolve a more effective community policing project in contemporary Nigeria.

The Nigeria Police: A Historical Perspective

To understand the role of the police in the control of crime in Nigeria, it is crucial to have knowledge of the historical factors in terms of political and economic forces that informed the establishment of the police institution in Nigeria by the British. This is because these socio-economic and political forces to some extent shaped the ideology, character and functional roles of the police as an institution.

Nigeria is a former British colony located in West Africa with a population of about 152 million, which makes it the most populous country in Africa, with one in six Africans being a Nigerian. The population is young (i.e. 50% younger than 20 years old) and ethnically diverse. There are more than 250 ethnic groups, but the three major ones are the Hausa/Fulani, Igbos and Yorubas constituting 68% of the Nigerian population (Bamgbose, 2002). Before the colonization of Nigeria, the various ethnic groups and nationalities had their indigenous and traditional social control agencies (Holleman, 1974; Milner, 1956). Issues of crime and disputes in the pre-colonial Nigerian state was mainly the duties of such institutions like cults, secret societies, messengers and palace guards (Milner, 1985). Traditional rulers were involved in the past in ensuring personal security of citizens, and their properties, by maintaining law and order through the native authority system, and their vast network of intelligence gathering system (Mohammed, 2003). Through these

traditional social control mechanisms, traditional authorities punished violators of the established norms.

The theoretical perspective deployed in this analysis is the *Historical Materialistic Approach* That is a perspective that gives primacy to material conditions particularly the economic structures (Ake, 1986) to discuss this topic. The principles and assumptions of this theoretical frame will be adopted to substantiate our claims in this article. The central theses of scholars in this camp is that, the history of the establishment of the police institution in Nigeria is inseparable with the factors that account for the establishment of colonization in Nigeria by the British.

The circumstances that led to the European colonization of Nigeria and other society on the globe have become a topic of much bitter controversy among scholars (Boahen, 1991). Early writers such as Hobson and Lenin attributed it primarily to the rise of the new imperialism in Europe which was in turn the outcome of the economic forces operating in Europe by the 1870s and 1880s. In this particular respect it was necessary to invest the surplus capital being generated by these forces and Africa was seen as offering a good possibility. To others such as Robinson and Gallagher, colonization was more or less an accidental diplomatic by-product of the conflict among European powers; especially between Britain and France. According to this view point colonization was triggered off by the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.

The third and most current explanation being advanced by some European and African historians such as Hopkins, Uzoigwe and Asiwaju is that colonization was the outcome of a combination of external European factors and internal African conditions. As one of them contended:

> *"The establishment of formal colonial rule must be seen against the background of a major change in what came to be referred to as "balance of power" in Europe following the rise of Germany, and increasing political instability occasioned by Africa wars of the nineteenth century which came to threaten peace in African interior and consequently European trade on the coast".*

However, the present writer subscribes to the school of thought that see the colonial venture as being triggered by the economic, social and political forces operating in Europe in the nineteenth century (Amir, 1972; Brerte, 1973; Charles, 1964). Ake (1981) note that the contradictions of capitalization not only transform it, they also transplant it. The transplanting of capitalism arises from those contradictions which reduce the rate of profit and arrest the capitalism of surplus value. Confronted with these effects, it was inevitable that the capitalist, forever bent on profit maximization, would look for a new environment in which the process of accumulation could proceed apace. Capitalists turned to foreign lands attacked and subjugated them and integrated their economies in those of Western Europe.

The colonial police was created primarily in response to rioting and disorder directed against British interests. As rightly observed by Alemika and Chukuma 2005, there is need to recognise and comprehend three important historical factors that have shaped the development and character of the police forces and police-public relations in Nigeria. First, colonial conquest of Nigerian nationalities took place pice-meal over a long period of time (1861-1903). Nigeria's constituent nationalities were conquered at different period. As a nationality is conquered a British colonial presence is established by creating a police force for the territory. Second, violence and fraud were employed in the conquest of the nationalities and police forces under various names were established and employed as instrument of violence and oppression against the indigenous

population. Third, given the character of colonial rule, police forces were the instrument used to sustain the alien domination.

The primary purpose of the police during this time was to advance the economic and political agenda of the colonizers. In many areas, the police engaged in the brutal subjugation of communities and the suppression of resistance to colonial rule. The use of violence and repression from the beginning of the colonial era, marked a dislocation in the relationship between the police and local communities which has characterized law enforcement practices in Nigeria ever since. For decades the police in Nigeria have betrayed their responsibility to protect Nigerian citizens and have instead preyed on them for economic gain. Indeed, the relationship between citizens and the police is very often characterised by brutality, confrontation, and exploitation.

Unfortunately 52 years after the demise of colonialism and series of reforms the Nigerian police institution still retains its oppressive and aggressive colonial character towards the Nigerian citizenry. The police roles in contemporary Nigeria therefore, contradicts the basic principles of community policing which is designed to unite the police with the community. That is an attempt to address crime problem through a working partnership with the community.

The Concept of Community Policing

The concept of policing is related to that of social control and is subject to the same variations in usage and interpretations. Indeed a recent dictionary definition identifies policing as "the function of maintaining social control in society (Wilson, 1993). When we append the word 'community' to policing (community policing) we are definitely referring to a community oriented approach to policing to combat crime. Community policing is in essence a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community crime problems. 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 neighbourhoods.

In sum community policing is the strategy where police departments work together in partnership with their community to reduce crime and the fear it generates, and being responsible for restoring a sense of community. In official circles, community policing is an idea that emerged in the mid-1980's when it was realised that formal and informal means of crime reduction/order maintenance were complementary and that the community should work together to define "community crime prevention"(Rosenbaun, 1989).

The movement towards community policing has gained momentum in recent years as police and community leaders search for more effective ways to promote public safety and to enhance the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. Community policing strategies vary depending on the needs and responses of the community involved; however, certain basic principles and considerations are common to all community policing efforts. What then are the basic principles and the conceptual framework of community policing in general? How do community oriented and traditional policing differ?

According to Chris Braiden3'this concept was really "nothing new under the sun". Although touted as the "latest and newest thing" in policing, Braiden1 that it is contended, neither new nor "thing". He argued that community policing is actually a re-emergence of the founding philosophy on which Peel built his public police in 1829, and that the philosophy of community policing today can be found in one of Peel's original principles.

To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police: the police being only the

members of the public that are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent in every citizen in the interest of community welfare and resistance (Bittner, 1967).

Braiden[1] argued that his passage is a most accurate and concise definition of community policing. It was Peel's contention that a community must police itself, with certain members paid to do it full-time in uniform while the rest did it part-time as they went about their daily work. Moreover, the phrase "in the interest of community welfare and existence" demonstrates that Peel's thinking was clearly not limited to crime, criminals, criminal investigations, or law enforcement. Braiden concluded that what Peel was describing in 1829 is now being called community policing (Peak and Glensor, 1996).

In historical perspective it will be instructive to note that contemporary community policing could be considered the handiwork of Sir Robert Peel when he established the London Metropolitan Police. He set forth a number of principles, one of which could be considered the seed of community policing……" the police are the public and the public are the police".

This therefore is the model of community policing that is once again transferred and implemented in Nigeria to deal with Nigeria's contemporary criminal problem.

The basic issues raised by the above and which one considers important here is the mutually beneficial ties between police and community members which is the dominant philosophy underlying the community policing project especially in Britain. That is the complementary core components, community partnership and problem solving. To develop this community partnership, the police must develop positive relationship with the community, must involve the community in the quest for better crime control and prevention, and must pool their resources with those of the community to address the most urgent concerns of community members.

Major questions arising from this analysis could be summarised as follows: Is the crime scenario in Nigeria a reflection of the typologies of crimes that occur in Britain? Can the same methodology of combating crime adopted in Britain produce the same results in Nigeria? If for decades the Nigerian police institution has betrayed their responsibility to protect the citizenry and have instead preyed on them for economic gains how then will members of the public cooperate with the police personnel for effective community policing? Will the community police project be successful if the relationship between members of the public and police personnel is constantly conflictual and violent?

The history of police in Nigeria is a "legacy of arbitrariness, ruthlessness, brutality, vandalism, incivility, low accountability to the public, and corruption" (Alemika, 1988, P.161). This horrible image of the police prompted a onetime Inspector General of the Nigeria Police Force Sir Mike Mbama Okiro to state that "our focus shall be to reverse the disdain and contempt with which policemen are held within the Nigerian society……… There is no gainsaying the fact that the police image is now at a low ebb" (Nigeria police force, 2007b).

Research conducted in 2000 by the centre for Law Enforcement and Education (CLEEN) found that the use of violence by the police against citizens in Nigeria was widespread. Of 637 respondents to a survey carried out in fourteen states, 14.8 percent said they had been beaten by the police, 22.5 percent said police has threatened to shoot them in the past, and 73.2 percent said

---

[1] Braiden is former superintendent of police in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and consultant in community policing

they witnessed the police beating another person. A sample of 197 prison inmates, revealed higher figures of police abuse; 81 percent of the respondents said they had been beaten or slapped and 39 percent burnt with hot objects (see Human Rights Watch, vol. 17). This further reaffirms our proposition that, the rift between the police and the Nigerian citizenry makes community policing a failed project in contemporary Nigeria. It has therefore failed to meet contemporary Nigeria crime and security challenges. The brutal oppressive and repressive conducts of the police beginning from the colonial era (features the police maintain to date) made the Nigerian public regard them as their enemy, this is a rift between the police and members of the local community.

As indicated earlier before the colonization of Nigeria, different ethnic nationalities which presently constitute Nigeria today had their traditional social control mechanism. These indigenous social control systems performed modern police functions. These systems of social control were deeply rooted in the community and closely interlinked with the social and religious structures.

These include agencies such as Age Grades (formal organizations whose membership based on pre-determined age range), secret societies or vocational guilds (for example, of hunter's farmers or fishermen). Through these diffuse systems of crime control, law and order was maintained largely without the use of violence (Akin, 1994).

In contemporary Nigeria some variety of these indigenous social control systems still exist. These alternative unofficial social control systems now represented in agencies like the Bakasi Boys of the Igbo, the Hisha of the Hausa/Fulani, and the Odu'a people's congress (OPC) of the Yoruba among many others. Basically, these indigenous social control systems operate based largely on indigenous ideas of social control. The guiding principle of these indigenous systems are derived from the norms and values of the indigenous people rather than the traditions, customs and practices of other societies outside Nigeria. Apart from the large, coordinated, and well-organized indigenous organizations (the likes of Bakasi Boys, Hisha and OPC) there are numerous other indigenous watch organizations or vigilante groups that guarantee community security. Okafo (2007) notes that

> *"Generally, these groups are more active in the night than during   the   day.   Usually,   able-bodied young men of each community supported   financially   and   materially   by   other community members,are charged with the task of securing the community and enforcing law, often with the aids of small weapons, such as machetes, bows and arrows, spears, and some guns."*

It is instructive to note that, traditional policing and vigilantism is widely accepted in Nigeria by the citizens. Members of a society to which traditional policing e.t.c apply generally accept and participate in their indigenous systems. Being part owners of the system, it is very unlikely that any significant part of the population will be excluded from the system or its mode of operation Okafo (2007) further notes that 'decisions are made and enforced with members' knowledge and consent.

Comparatively, the principles, and personnel of the indigenous social control systems are products of the natives as such they command acceptability more than their police counterparts. Also of critical importance is the fact that most Nigerians lack trust and confidence in the official police simply because they consider them to be 'alien' agents of the Government that is equally perceived as being corrupt and unfair. Majority of Nigerian presently consider police's response to the crime problem as been grossly inadequate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has identified a number of reasons why community policing framed after the Nigerian police structure cannot effectively control persons and property crimes in Nigeria. The Nigerian police as an organization has a long history of engaging in acts of brutality, violence and harassment of members of the public as such they lack public cooperation and acceptability.

Police attitudes and conducts in Nigeria violates the basic requirments and principles of community policing.

We therefore recommend the following:

For community policing to be effective and efficient in combating crimes in Nigeria, the agencies of the intelligence social control systems be formally incorporated to work with the police.

Most members of these indigenous social control agencies are as indicated Indegenes of their local communities and more conversant with the environment and terrain.

Members of the police be given a new orientation (through their trainings) to recognise, and protect the dignity and rights of the Nigerian citizens to establish cordial relationships with the citizenry.

More importantly, the police organisation be more accountable, civil and incorruptible in their dealings with members of the public. This will change the negative perception members of the Nigerian public have on the police.

References

Ahire, P.T. (1989), Rethinking Crime in Nigerian Society: "In search of new bottles for old wine". Departmental seminar paper presentation, Department of Sociology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria-Nigeria

Ake, C. (1981), A Political Economy of Africa Longman-Nigeria

Akin, O. (1994), "Police Brutality: Dimensions and Control in Nigeria "In civil Liberties Organisation, Law Enforcement and Human Rights in Nigeria, H.R.W, vol. 17, no. 11 (A).

Alemika, E (1988), Policing and Perception of Police in Nigeria, Police studies, 11, 161-176.

Alemika, E and Chukwuma, (2000), Criminal Victimization and Fear of Crime in Lagos Metropplis, Nigeria. Lagos, Nigeria: CLEEN Foundation.

Bamgbose, O. (2002), Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female adolescent in Nigeria. International Journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology, 46,569-585.

Barley, D. (1994), Police for the Future. New York: Oxford University Press

Wilson, C. (1993), 'Police, in W. Outhwaite, T. Bottomore, E. Gellner, R. Nisbet, and A. Touraine, eds. The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-century social thought :Oxford Blackwell

Bittner, E. (1967), "The police on skid Row: A study of peace keeping ". American sociological Review 32.

Chambliss, W (1975), "The Political Economy of Crime. A comparative study of Nigeria and U.S.A". Cited in Taylor et al (ed) Critical Criminology, London Routledge and Kegan.

Elechi, O. (2004), Community Oriented Policing in Nigeria Law Enforcement Executives Forum, 4, 21-35

Gyong, E. (1998), "The Victims of Crime and the Criminal Phenomenon" Paper presentation at staff seminar, Department of Sociology A.B.U, Zaria.

Holleman, J. (1974), Issues in African Law, Muto and Company, London.

Innocent Chukwuma (2000), "Police Transformation in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects", paper presented at conference on crime and policing in Transitional societies, Konrad Adenaeur Stiftung, in conjunction with the South African Institute of International Affairs, University of Witswatersrand, Johannesburg.

Lambert, E.G et al (2010), Policing Views from Around the Globe: An Exploratory Study of the Views of College Students from Bangladesh, Canada, Nigeria, and the United States. International Criminal Justice Review 2010, 20:229.

Maguire, M. et al., (1997), The Oxford Handbook of Criminology (2nd ed), Oxford: New York.

Nigerian Police Force (2007b), 9-way test of the Nigerian Police Force. Retrieved July, 15 2012 from http://Nigeriapolice.org/public/moudle/mastop_publish/?tul+9_way_test

Okafor, N. (2007), Law Enforcement in post –colonial Africa: Interfacing Indigenous and English Policing in Nigeria. In International Police Executive Symposium working paper no.7

Okereke, G (1993), Public attitudes towards the police force in Nigeria. Police studies, 16, 113-121

Reiner, R. (1993) " Police Accountability: Principles, patterns and practices" in R. Reiner and S. Spencer (eds) Accountability Policing: Effectiveness, Empowerment and Equity (London Institute for Public Policy Research)..

Peak, J.K, Glensor, R.E. (1994), Community Policing and Problem Solving Strategies and Pratices. Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

Reiner, R. (1992), The politics of the police. 2nd (ed.) Hemel Hempstead: Wheatsheaf.

Rosenbaun, P. (1989) "Community Crime Prevention: A Review of what is known, "in Dennis Jay Kenney (ed), Police and Policing: Contemporary Issues (New York: Praeger)".

Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action Bureau of Justice August, 1994.