THE PROSPECTS AND DIFFICULTIES OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In a nation where there has long been widespread public suspicion and mistrust of the police, implementing community policing, which aims to alter the core essence of police operations, is a challenging and complex task. Community policing, as a strategy of bringing police and public together in order to reduce the level of crime has been severely hampered by the mistrust of the police in Nigeria. This study employed a qualitative survey design in order to establish the effectiveness of community policing in Nigeria's context of insecurity. The study followed Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines in conducting a systematic review of published articles. Extraction and analysis of information from the selected articles were done thematically. The study revealed that community policing if properly enforced has the potential to drastically reduce the level of insecurity as it empowers the police and the public to work closely together in order to solve the security challenges in the country. The conceptualization of this study was guided by broken windows theory which provided a theoretical model for the study. The broken windows theory emphasizes on the importance of addressing the issues of disorder in order to avert serious challenges such as increased crime levels. This study therefore recommends that the government should invest more in training of police officers on community policing and encourage active participation of the public in order for community policing to be effective in reducing the level of insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Policing, Community, Community Policing, Public Trust, Police Reform

Introduction

Insecurity has become a serious problem in Nigeria as there has been an increase in violent crimes, terrorism, kidnapping, and other related crimes in the country. The use of the traditional method to control crimes has not been effective which has led to Nigeria looking for other mechanisms for reducing the level of insecurity in the country. Community policing is a mechanism which requires police to work closely with the public in order to control and prevent crimes from prevailing in a given community.

Complaints about police corruption and malpractice have been recurring throughout history and no nation boasts of a healthy relationship with the police force. Police is a

government institution that has been set up to maintain law and order through force. Police does not have the mandate to amend the law in the best interests of the citizens. Experts agree that police must have a common understanding of community policing (Bucqueroux & Trojanowicz, 1994).

Community policing was proposed as a panacea for Nigeria's worsening security situation because the formal police, with its corrupt practices and aloof attitude could no longer serve as an effective and reliable resource for maintaining public order in a politically and culturally heterogeneous nation such as Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005). The police, as an institution, have lost much of its credibility in public life, especially in rural Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Oluwaniyi, 2011:67-83). This has reduced the rate of public assistance to the police in its crime control efforts, especially in relation to violent crimes. This policing strategy is deemed suitable for use in Nigeria due to its decentralized and participatory nature. This study is aimed at examining the principles, practices, and challenges of community policing in Nigeria, with a focus on its efficacy in reducing crime levels and building trust between the police and the public.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the principles and practices of community policing as a strategy for addressing the causes of insecurity and crimes in Nigeria
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of community policing and its impact on crime levels, public safety, and trust in the police
3. To identify the challenges and barriers to the successful implementation of community policing in Nigeria

Literature Review

Community policing is a relatively new concept in Nigeria, although it has been widely practiced in Western countries such as the United States since the late 1970s (Oluwaniyi, 2015:385). Although there is no generally accepted definition of community policing, most law enforcement officials agree that it involves partnerships between law enforcement agencies and non-law enforcement agencies in addressing crime-related issues. Eric and Kpae (2017:47) define community policing as a philosophy that emphasizes partnerships with the public in order to prevent crime and solve crime-related problems.

Community policing focuses on establishing a direct connection between the police and the community in an effort to increase police visibility and enhance community confidence and cooperation in support of law enforcement activities. Community policing was introduced in Nigeria with this goal in mind. This highlights the importance of community involvement in the crime prevention process because the police cannot operate in isolation. One of the reasons why community members

should be involved in policing includes the belief that the police cannot control or manage a community alone. As a result, community policing has become a major concern for many countries, including Nigeria, in terms of ensuring public safety. Due to the government's inability to provide security, it has become a private and individual matter that people must deal with on their own. Thus, the proliferation of vigilante organizations as agencies for maintaining public safety has occurred, with the aim of filling the security vacuum created by the inability of the official police to handle the crime clearance problems in Nigeria (Ode, 2007).

Principles of Community Policing

In order to fully understand community policing and its mode of operation, it is critical to highlight the principles upon which it was developed. According to Kappler and Gaines (2009 cited in Gordon, 2013:2), in order for policing to be effective, nine principles need to be incorporated into police practices. The nine principles include philosophy, customization, policing, patrolling, persistence, localization, pro-activeness, partnership, and problem-solving. Community policing has become a police model that has been embraced by many countries to help improve public safety. Community policing, in its basic form, is a philosophy and a strategic orientation that seeks to use organizational initiatives that encourage partnerships and problem-solving methods to proactively address the underlying causes of public safety concerns like crime and social order issues (Skogan, 2006).

A major impediment to the successful implementation of community policing in Nigeria has been the public's negative perception of the police. Several studies have shown that the police in Nigeria are widely perceived as corrupt and abusive, which has resulted in the public being reluctant to cooperate with them (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). This has significantly hindered the effectiveness of community policing, as communities are often skeptical of the intentions of the police. Another challenge that has been identified in the implementation of community policing in Nigeria includes the lack of proper training of police officers on community policing strategies (Ogunode, 2016).

Difficulties and Prospects of Community Policing in Nigeria

Although the outstanding range of results documented by the evaluators, the implementation of Community Policing may encounter a number of major problems that must be addressed in order to ensure full compliance with the reform agenda. While police skills and police-community relations have significantly improved since the adoption of Community Policing, particularly in the pilot areas, it is true that our problems include ineffectiveness, corruption, brutality, and incivility to members of our public by some members of the NPF, resulting in a lack of trust in the entire organization among many members of communities.

Community policing in Nigeria encounters several challenges ranging from structural inefficiencies within the Nigerian Police Force to community mistrust of law enforcement. Balogun (2019) noted that the centralized structure of the Nigerian Police limits the efficacy of community policing initiatives as officers are disconnected with local realities. The absence of strong community ties leads to mistrust and lack of collaboration between the police and the communities they serve. Onyeozili et al. (2021) argue that the decentralization of the police force would enable enhanced police-community relationships, enabling a localized and contextual policing approach.

In conflict-prone areas, community policing holds the potential for reducing the recurrence of conflicts, although current disputes pose a challenge to its implementation. For community policing to succeed, Nigeria's police force needs to transition from the conventional approach to a more community-oriented approach with a focus on decentralization, collaboration and proactive policing. Building public trust through compassionate and non-brutal policing is crucial (Okeshola & Mudiare, 2012).

Prospects

In terms of prospects, Samuel et al. (2024) highlight that state police systems could bring about a more community-centric approach in addressing security challenges, particularly in states like Ekiti, where the state police option has been heavily debated as a means to enhance crime prevention efforts. Similarly, Bello et al. (2022) suggest that empowering local actors through community policing has the potential to curb insecurity, particularly in regions affected by banditry and armed non-state actors.

The concept of community policing as a tool for crime prevention has been greatly acknowledged in Nigeria. According to Oyibokure, Okereka, & Mukoro (2023), community policing has played a significant role in reducing crime rates in Delta and Edo States. The collaboration between the police and communities has resulted in an enhanced flow of intelligence, which has facilitated crime prevention. This finding aligns with Mwaniki's (2016) assertion that successful community policing hinges on active community involvement and the willingness of local populations to collaborate with law enforcement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this research work is anchored on broken windows theory. The broken windows theory posits that visible signs of disorder and neglect in a community, such as vandalism or abandoned buildings, encourage further crime and antisocial behavior (Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Shelden, 2004; Gau, & Pratt, 2010). By addressing minor infractions and promoting order, community policing is expected to prevent more serious crimes from taking root. In Nigerian communities plagued by crime, this theory implies that neglect of minor issues like loitering, illegal street trading or substance abuse could lead to more severe crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping or terrorism.

This theoretical perspectives offer crucial frameworks that can be directly linked to the effectiveness of community policing as a strategy for crime reduction, especially as Nigeria continues to grapple with series of security challenges as, minor crimes (e.g., petty theft, street- level drug dealing) may lead to more organized and violent forms of crime. By cleaning up neighborhoods and addressing these minor issues through community policing, local law enforcement can prevent more severe crimes from occurring. The community policing model, when framed in this lens, becomes a strategic tool that does not merely focus on law enforcement but engages the community in active problem-solving to create a more secure environment. (Welsh, Braga, & Bruinsma, 2015).

Methodology

This study employs a systematic review of scholarly articles, dissertations and reports that explore the relationship between community policing and insecurity in Nigeria. The systematic review allows for a comprehensive synthesis of available literature on a particular topic, helping to identify patterns, contradictions and gaps in the research (Booth et al., 2016)..A comprehensive search was conducted using several electronic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL).. Search terms used include: "community policing," "insecurity in Nigeria," "police reform," "crime prevention strategies," "community-police collaboration" and "security sector reform."

Data Analysis

The findings were analyzed using a thematic approach to explore the key factors influencing the success or failure of community policing in Nigeria. This included examining the role of government policy, public perception, police-community relations and socio-economic conditions.

Presentation of Data

The tables below contain the results and discussion of the research, which include an in-depth analysis and review of the results derived from the data gathered for research. Each table highlights the main points and themes that emerged from the data. This is done to emphasize the key aspects that influenced community policing implementation and performance in Nigeria.

Table 1: Thematic review of community policing as a solution for insecurity in Nigeria.

S/N	Theme	Major Studies/Scholars	Key Concepts	Implications for Nigeria
1	**Decentralization of Policing**	Balogun, O. B. (2019); Samuel et al. (2024); Oyibokure et al. (2023); Adenuga et al. (2024) Ekpo & Oghojafor (2020); Oluwaniyi (2011)	-Bringing policing closer to communities - Regional/state policing - Addressing local security needs	- Decentralized policing enables tailoredsecurity solutions for different regions,improving crime prevention locally.
2	**Police-Community Relationships**	Tuotamuno (2024); Onyeozili et al. (2021); Bununu & Yunusa (2024); Alimi & Arogundade (2019) Bayley (1988); Clemons (2000)	- Building trust between police and the community - Collaboration in crime reporting - Mutual responsibility	- Trust and cooperation between citizens and police reduce crime and improve reporting, which strengthens crime prevention efforts.
3	**Integration of Informal Security Networks**	Fourchard (2008); Oyibokure et al. (2023); Ayodele et al. (2024); Eguo (2023)	- Incorporation of vigilantes - Cooperation between formal and informal security	- Formalizing vigilante groups under police oversight reduces extra-legal violence
		Oluwaniyi (2011); Odinkalu (2020)	forces - Oversight needed	while strengthening overall community safety.
4	**Youth Engagement in Crime Prevention**	Samuel et al. (2024); Diphoorn & van Stapele (2021); Baker (2017); Macharia (2020) Clemons (2000); Obasanjo et al. (2021)	- Engaging youth through mentorship - Developing youth- focused crime prevention strategi es - Reducing youth involvement in crime	- Engaging youth in crime prevention efforts curbs their vulnerability to criminal activities and promotes sustainable community safety.

Source: Compilation of Authors (2026).

Table 2: Programs and Community Policing Interventions for Insecurity Reduction

S/N	Study	Type of Intervention	Key Impact on Reducing Insecurity
1	Bayley (1988)	Police-Community Partnerships	Reduced crime rates and improved public trust in police
2	Ekpo & Oghojafor (2020)	Decentralization of Police Forces	Enhanced local responsiveness to security challenges
3	Oluwaniyi (2011)	Vigilante-Police Cooperation	Strengthened informal policing structures and reduced minor crimes
4	Odinkalu (2020)	Amotekun Security Network	Successfully curbed kidnappings and violer crimes in Ondo State
5	Clemons (2000)	Youth Engagement in Crime Prevention	Lowered youth involvement in crime throug mentorship programs
6	Obasanjo et al. (2021)	Intelligence-Led Policing	Increased crime detection and dismantling of organized crime networks

Source: Compilation of Authors (2026).

Discussion of Findings

Decentralization of Police Forces

Decentralization as discussed by Ekpo & Oghojafor (2020) enhances proximity of the police forces to the communities they serve thus enabling a responsive approach to tackling the security challenges in a given state or municipality since there are multiple issues in different localities like insurgency in the north or kidnapping in the southwest. Oluwaniyi (2011), in his observations, concludes that the collaboration between the vigilante groups and state police in the provision of security services to the rural communities is an effective strategy to consider in ensuring internal security. The informal vigilante groups however require formal oversight to ensure that the rights of the citizens are not infringed upon thus balancing the informal and formal policing which ultimately enhances sustainable peace in the communities.

In addition, though the vigilante and security networks have been effective in curbing the vices in different communities, there is a need for the oversight framework that can

prevent the violation of the rights of the citizens by these informal structures hence the need to establish effective oversight mechanisms to ensure human rights and privacy are not compromised in the name of security especially in areas where vigilantism is rampant.

Effectiveness of Community Policing in Nigeria

The effectiveness of community policing in combating insecurity has been highlighted by many of the above researchers. For instance, Oyibokure, Okereka, & Mukoro, (2023) in his community policing examination in the communities of Delta and Edo states concluded that there was increased collaboration between the police and the communities resulting in the reduction of criminal activities in the communities. In a similar study, Samuel, Julius, &Abiodun. (2024) in his study of community policing in Ekiti state concluded that though community policing efforts have had positive effects on the police-community relations, the funding and training of the officers still pose a great challenge. Furthermore, the importance of communication is highlighted by studies such as that of Tuotamuno's (2023) in which he concludes that communication between the police and the public can be a panacea to the insecurity gripping Nigeria. Denney & Jenkins (2013) agree that communication promotes cooperation which is key in the success of community policing.

Challenges of Community Policing

The above literature reveals challenges that community policing faces in Nigeria. One of the challenges highlighted by many researchers is the public's mistrust of the police. According to Onyeozili et al. (2021), Nigeria's history of police brutality and corruption has resulted in a significant level of public mistrust of the police, which has hindered police reform and attempts to establish police-community partnerships that are necessary for effective community policing in the country. Luqman & Oladejo (2022) expounds on the above by discussing the institutional challenges that hinder community policing in Nigeria such as lack of training and funding and political interference which have hindered the wide spread implementation of community policing in Nigeria.

Furthermore, many researchers recommend that police officers who will be involved in community policing should be properly trained and equipped (Diphoorn & van Stapele, 2021). Kocak (2018), for instance, gives examples of community policing initiatives that have been implemented in various Asian countries where the police received training on community relations, resulting in improved local security.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The above literature that discusses community policing has various implications for policy and practice that can aid in effective implementation in Nigeria. Arisukwu et al. (2021) argue that for effective community policing, policymakers should develop an

understanding of the role that the "community" plays in police operations and make sure that communities are empowered appropriately and that communities have the necessary resources and training for effective policing. Alimi & Arogundade (2019) discusses the need for crime control measures in community policing initiatives. These measures include not only traditional law enforcement activities but also social measures that address the root causes of crime, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education.

Conclusion

Community policing has become an important aspect in Nigeria's efforts to reduce crime and enhance citizen security. Community policing has played an important role in helping the Nigeria Police Force tackle various forms of crime throughout the years. Community policing officers have a wide range of duties and responsibilities, including helping community members identify and address crime issues (as a facilitator), identifying and resolving community concerns (as an expert), advising consultative councils (as an educator), leading the community in problem-solving endeavours (as a problem-solving catalyst), and coordinating various community groups (as an organizer). Community policing offers a viable strategy for improving internal security in Nigeria but requires that certain structural challenges within the Nigerian Police Force be addressed as well as building trust between law enforcement and local communities and ensuring that community policing initiatives take into account the different needs of various localities. The debate around state policing in certain African nations provides valuable insight into the need for decentralizing policing in Nigeria. As Nigeria continues to grapple with rising insecurity, community policing stands out as a critical component of a comprehensive strategy to promote safety and stability across the country.

Recommendations

The paper suggested the following recommendations:

I. Reformative Training Programs for Police Officers by implementing culturally sensitive and community-focused training programs. These programs should equip officers with skills to better understand the socio-cultural dynamics of their communities which is crucial in tackling the root causes of crime. Furthermore, officers should also be trained in non- confrontational engagement techniques to improve relationships with local residents and reduce tensions during security operations.

II. Establishment of Community-Led Accountability Councils in key localities. These councils will consist of community leaders, youth representatives and local law enforcement. The role of these councils will be to monitor the activities of the community policing officers, ensure transparency in operations and act as mediators

between police and community members which will foster trust and collaboration.

III. Integration of Local Knowledge with Modern Technology by developing tools for community members to report suspicious activities safely. This will significantly enhance crime detection and prevention efforts. Using technology in conjunction with grassroots initiatives will increase police presence and efficiency in underserved rural areas.

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