COMMUNITY POLICING AS A PANACEA FOR MITIGATING ARMED BANDITARY IN CENTRAL NIGERIA:

THE ANKPA EXPERIENCE OF INTERCOMMUNITY SECURITY RELATIONS FROM 2020 TO THE PRESENT ERA

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ABSTRACT

Given the dearth of studies on community policing in Nigeria and Kogi State in particular, this study has focused on Ankpa Local Government Area, located in the north-east of Igalaland in Central Nigeria. The strategic location of Ankpa makes the area a cross current town between northern and southern Nigeria. Although studies on community policing in the area are equally rare, with the current global security challenges, a lot of lessons can be drawn from Ankpa's present community policing architecture comprising the neigbourhood watch, the village committee level headed by the king and council of chiefs as well as all the other local government organised levels. Historically, community policing is as old as evolution of communities in which some of these developments have metamorphosed into urban centres. Consequent upon the creation of a modern policing system as well as other security agencies, the old community guard system drastically declined. However, as time went by, the modern policing method has not been able to curb the ever growing crime wave in the modern 774 local government areas in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop therefore that the need for community policing has become more imperative to tackle the menace of modern crimes such as banditry and terrorism. Thus, the data for this study was generated and interpreted through in depth interview with successive local government chairmen, local policemen, chiefs, elders and youths of Ankpa communities, with related literature critically reviewed. Findings from this study reveal that the locals should be empowered for enhanced effective and efficient community policing structure as the success of food security can only be guaranteed by security of lives and property. In the final analysis, community policing will enable communities to quickly identify criminals and, through its strategic observation,

alert the local police and the Nigeria Police through technology driven devices. Arising from research findings, conclusion and recommendations were made.

Key Words: Ankpa, community, policing, and Banditry

Introduction

Geographically, the people of Ankpa Local Government Area live in an area of mixed forest and Savannah land. In other words, it is a combination of Southern Nigeria Forest and the Savannah of Northern Nigerian features. The strategic location of Ankpa in central Nigeria informed its geographical features mentioned above as this enhanced the diverse occupational activities in the area such as hunting, farming, animal rearing and mining, especially coal at Okaba area of Ankpa which is an open cast mining. Its location can also be described explicitly as a middle point between Omala and Olamaboro Rivers respectively. Olamaboro River is mainly known to most Nigerian people as River Anambra whose source is in Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State. This distortion of name arose from colonial misrepresentation which emanated from inadequate research and language barrier. Ankpa Local Government is a composition of many towns and villages. These include Ankpa town, Enjema, Okenyi, Inye, Okaba, Ojogboi, Awo, Pgodo, Odogomu, Ojoku, Ikanepo (Ikane-ekpo), Ikoja. Egbeche, Emekulu, among others.

Its advantageous location had also made Ankpa Local Government Area of Igalaland attractive to diverse peoples. These include the Igbo and Hausa who came to settle in the area mainly for commercial activities, the Idoma their immediate neighbours to the north, Nupe, Tiv among others. Consequent upon this, transportation business was facilitated as a result of inflow and outflow of people, goods and services. Worthy of mention too is that Ankpa Local Government Area (as an administrative arm of government) was created in the year 1969 by General Yakubu Gowon's Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria[1]. Many local government areas in Nigeria have one time or another enjoyed peace, till recent times when security concerns became widespread, especially in Northern Nigeria. In the case of Ankpa, issues of insecurity began with the fourth democratic dispensation which took off in 1999, initially characterised by thuggery but currently taking different dimensions.

This research is therefore motivated owing to the remarkably high level of insecurity in Nigeria. Bandits are ravaging villages and communities; herdsmen believed to be foreigners have been invading and attacking helpless farmers; Boko Haram terrorists are controlling parts of Nigerian territories; the highways in Nigeria

have become increasingly unsafe for road users and many other criminal activities are on the rise. Large numbers of people are being killed, maimed, kidnapped, tortured, raped and robbed. If one is not a direct victim, there are cases of vicarious victimisation, instability, fear, hunger and insecurity of life and properties ravaging Nigeria with every part composing a local government area.

Major Objectives of Community Policing

Community policing is not just a programme of a single unified form to implement; rather, it varies according to the community and its needs along with the Community Police Department that attempts to apply it[2]. In the United States, many programmes have been established under the banner of community policing. Specifically, the objectives of community policing in Ankpa include crime prevention, community partnership and change of guards.

Crime Prevention in Community

Crimes in rural parts of Nigeria under the modern dispensation are quite common, because criminals operate more where they can easily escape after their nefarious activities. The porous nature rural communities gives them a safe haven as the rural areas lack modern communication gadgets, electricity and have little or no state security personnel or other state security actors. Rural areas have thus become shelters for criminals. For instance, most bandits usually take their victims to unknown forests at night. Thus, the objective for setting up community policing is primarily for crime prevention in the community. The role of the community police within the framework of community policing philosophy emphasises partnership with the community in solving problems about which the community is most concerned. Community policing and problem solving are essentially about preventing crime and they are inextricably connected with each other.

Community Partnership

Community Partnership has dominated both private and public sector management ideology for the past thirty years[3]. The participation of citizens in solving community problems is important in almost every community based programme. When there is no community participation, any community policing programme is subject to failure. Thus, the community is an essential element in a programme's failure or success. Not surprising then, the collaborative operation between community and community policing is one of the major promises of community policing to improve community police performance. In addition, the people themselves take charge in participating so as to ensure the security of lives and properties, and equally yielding positive results.

Change of Guards

Another strategy of community policing is the changing of security personnel from one duty post to another without any prior notice. Traditionally, patrol officers have been accorded lower status in community policing and have been dominated by agency command structure. The importance of the patrol function in community policing cannot be overemphasized. It requires shifting of initiative, the decision making and responsibilities downward within the community policing organisational hiarachy.

Strategies for Community Policing in Ankpa Local Government Area

There have been a good number of proposals as strategies for effective and efficient community policing policy outlined in the sub-headings presented below.

Creation of bye-law(s) to enhance security of life and property

A bye-law refers to an authority clothed with statutory power, ordering something to be done or not be done and accompanied by some sanction or penalty for its non-observance. Put differently, a bye-law is an ordinance or law affecting an area, portion of an area, made or imported. Principles of bye-law are operated over its jurisdiction and it is made in compliance with the power conferred by the state or local government[4]. By implication, all local governments in Nigeria are permitted by their various laws or legislations to make bye-laws. Consequently, Ankpa Local Government Area makes bye-laws from time to time to enhance security. Apart from security matters, bye-laws are also used to enhance internally generated revenue (IGR) which in turn compliments the payment of security services as in payment of salaries.

Going by the aforementioned bye-laws, they were all publicized in all communities in the local government. This publicity through the town criers would make parents to warn their children, brothers, sisters, uncle, nephews, nieces and visitors among others on punishments that will be meted out to defaulters of bye-laws.

Apart from that, the Nigeria Police Force is carried along in the implementation of bye-laws. The normal method of enforcement of bye-laws is for local government council to take Criminal Proceeding for penalty, if it is provided for in the bye-law.

By-laws on Security Matters

The local government must make sure that the bye-law passes the following test: the legal draftsmen will prepare a draft bye-law in the form of a bill for presentation to local government council and the councilors. The bye-law will now pass through the first, second and

third reading where the bye-law goes into serious debate as to whether it will be accepted by the people.

A bill is a legislative proposal the end result of which if it is successfully passed through the legislative process becomes a bye-law of the Council. The bye-laws usually contain the enacting formula, short title commencement interpretation, objective of the bye-law, establishing provision (where necessary) offence/penalties schedules and finally Chairman's assent.

The bye-law may be cited as Ankpa Local Government Bye-law on operation of motor park, market, late night movement, intercommunity crisis, farm land conflict, thuggery, violence fight and among other threats in Ankpa Local Government Area.

Enforcement of Bye-Laws

The Nigeria Police is carried along in the implementation of bye-laws. The normal method of enforcement of bye-law is for the local government council to take criminal proceedings for a penalty, if it is provided for in the bye-law. Preventing the erection of any building or structure which contravenes the exiting bye-law, or the pulling down of such structure, which is forbidden by the bye-law, may be enforced by the police. The procedures for involving Nigeria Police in this matter is to ensure that the constitutional power of the Nigeria Police Force is not neglected. However, in a situation where the Nigeria Police personnel are not readily available, the local police who are mainly youths intervene in the enforcement of the law pending when proper prosecution will be done.

Community/Town Hall Meeting Level

Community or town hall meeting is held every month to evaluate the progress of security activities in communities within the local government. Here, community leaders are made to know that if any crime is committed in their domain they will be held responsible and punished accordingly based on the local government bye-law. This makes them to report any suspected situation of insecurity in their areas and those who have crime free communities are encouraged and rewarded openly. In town hall meetings, all cultural groups are carried along. Thus, every ethnic group or community such as Hausa community, Idoma community, Yoruba community among others do talk to their members not to flaunt the laws of the land.

Intercommunity Relations Level

An insecurity alert by a neighbouring community is very important to the community as well as other communities. Proactive measures are preferred to reactionary ones as each neighbour know their areas

better than the Nigeria Police Officer who is a not indigenous to that community. Security at the ward level is through the use of units such as , family head, village head, the ward or clan head and traditional rulers or leaders as the case may be. Popular village chiefs or heads are sometimes associated with crimes in their communities, because they give protection to wards, relatives who have committed crimes thereby covering up crime in the community. Total vigilance by the community leaders and total cleanup of the community security system through one-on-one contact to achieve positive result is sacrosanct to community security system through one-on-one contact to achieve positive results

Mode of Operation

Change is a common term that the world has come to accept and, due to these changes, the world has become a global village. There have been new technological changes in the area crime creation and the enhancement of the performance of the police force as an agency responsible for the prevention of crime. One cannot adequately know the exact reasons behind the adoption of certain technological ways of crime prevention. However, this study examines intended and unintended technological innovation, summarize the available research on the extent of adoption in Nigeria, and then review the available research on the impact both the intended and unintended technological innovation of each form of new technology on crime which has been used to refer both activities (e.g, crime prevention programmes and /or strategies) and outcomes (such as lower level of crime prevention).

Security Personnel WhatsApp Group

This is used to disseminate information after monitoring the movements of strangers in and out of communities in Ankpa Local Governemnt Area. In this regard, data are collectively provided for members with Android phones by the local government. In addition, those who live in storey buildings are also mandated to monitor movement of criminals from upstairs and report same to the local police or community police via WhatsApp messages to prevent anyone from monitoring their movement. In this regards, video clips of stranger activities are shared to their WhatsApp members to alert members to be security conscious as well as to be proactive to challenge insecurity situation, instead of being reactive to them by perceiving them as normal, even as the idiom states ‘a stitch in time saves nine’.

Strategic Observation Post

These are secretly situated in advantageous places especially in and out of every community in Ankpa Local Government Area. This makes the criminals visible to security personnel. The use of strategic observation post makes it easy to ambush criminals in transit. Transient people here also refer to the population of people that are not likely to return to a regular or an institutional household. That is, they are those who are on the move and cannot be located. Thus, such people pose security risk to any community and even urban areas. Among these peoples in town centres are people who sleep along streets, filling stations, shops fronts among others.

Cryptology

This has to do with coding of intelligent report and strategic planning that will enhance bringing criminals to book. By this, such messages are highly confined to those concerned. It is pertinent to note that this tactic was used in war even before the birth of Christ by Egyptian Pharaohs[5]. It is done with utmost confidence which must be devoid of prejudice either on religion or other personal interest. Thus the bearer of such message must be a man or woman that is totally reliable.

Provision of Maps for Supervisory Areas

Security agents especially the Nigerian police personnel require maps of the area they cover. The advancements in technology have made it very easy for this mode of operation to be carried out. These maps enable the security agents to track criminals swiftly. It is therefore the duty of indigenous community police to guide the state actors on survey trips based on the map provided.

Regular Training of Security Agents

Another mode of operation is the constant training of security agents. Through this, the security agents are equipped with adequate security information which is the modern technological means of preventing crimes in any community. Thus, by updating them to the evolving dimensions of crime prevention, they will also be protected from enemy baits against their lives as they must live to protect others in their communities.

Telephone Contact

Another important mode of operation of the community police in Ankpa Local Government is the use of telephones by security agents. The use of telephones brings various security agents in contact. Information dissemination is made possible, quick and effective with the use of telephones. Apart from the security agents, the people within the community can get across to the security

agents through the use of telephones when strange movements are detected. The crux of community policing is community police-public partnership. Thus, the ultimate success of the programme is highly contingent on the readiness and willingness on the part of pubic to collaborate with the community police[6].

Homeless Persons

Homeless persons include beggars, vagrants and lunatics who are usually found in public places; places where homeless people may sleep such as motor parks, under bridges and market places. The people are difficult to locate when they escape committing crime. Thus, routine community police are always positioned to monitor their activities and ensure that such are not inimical to the society. Sometimes, good sense of judgment by security personnel to estimate their ages in case it is difficult to obtain same. The reason is that certain age groups are more prone to committing criminal acts than others.

Camp Approach

With the camp approach you make first a list of camps where nomads usually stay. The nomad's leaders could be helpful in making such a list.

Monitoring of Transient populations

Transient population refer to persons and/or households that are on transit. They are either returning home from journey or leaving home for a journey. The nomads also fall into this category. The nomads here refer to persons who migrate from place to place in search of pastures for their animals. They sometimes destroy farmers' crops and even engage in violent conflict with farmers and communities by extension.

The Intention of Community Policing Participation

Community policing is a collaboration and partnership with the residents of the neighbourhood, and the community police officers not only enforce the law but also perform other non-criminal activities, such as being facilitators, advisors and supporters of the introduced community-based policing scheme. Engaging community members in crime prevention and control permits a more targeted approach in identifying and responding to community concerns (with wider-angle benefit) extending from improved community police-public relation to reduction in the fear of crime[7]. These definitions emphasize on partnership between the community police and the public, and that is the crux of community policing programme.

A very essential element of successful implementation of community policing is communication. Communication must be

timely, comprehensive and direct. The implementation of a community policing strategy must be a dynamic and flexible process. Ongoing input, evaluation and feedback from both inside and outside the police organization are essential to making community policing work. All phases of community policing implementation must be carefully planned and properly timed to maximize success; even good ideas can fail if they are poorly executed. Planning must be responsive to changing needs, conditions and priorities. A strong research and planning capability that is open to suggestion and criticism will allow refinements and revisions to be made during the implementation process. Such flexibility is crucial to the success of community policing.

In Ankpa, for instance, true representatives of citizen advisory committees are councilors, traditional rulers and members of their cabinet, town union, opinion leaders and youth leaders. The committees meet regularly with community police to discuss their welfare, crime related problems, community police-community relationships; and then work out modalities on how to combat crime to the barest minimum. By implication, the committee members are equally security agents who pull their resources together with that of the conventional community police in the fight against crime and criminals.

The community police involvement in community affairs is another strong strategy that allows the community police to display themselves as both private citizens and state agents of social control. Community policing under this programme or strategy presents the community police as servants of the society who should, in a reasonable manner, enforce law and order and ensure public compliance with policies. Extant studies also have also attested to the fact that the involvement of community police in community affairs has actually yielded fruitful results.

Challenges to Community Policing

Social system or subsystem is most confronted with a number of challenges that hamper its operational and management performances; and community policing in Ankpa Local Government Area is not an exception. As a result of economic challenges in Nigeria, the country is characterised by bribery and corruption and selective enforcement of law. Consequent upon these are public loss of trust and confidence, poor community relations, ‘godfatherism’, lack of visionary schemes, among others. Bribery and corruption is particularly endemic in the Nigeria community police formation.

Another major challenge is lack of adequate fund to finance the community police system. This is because most local government areas live at the mercy of the state governors for meager allocation

of funds for survival. This is because the budgetary allocation is divided among other projects. Poor funding, systematic corruption, internal decadence, inadequate manpower, partisanship, ethnicity, lack of accountability, defects in constitutional provisions and apparent lack of public confidence, further leading to weak or low legitimacy. The community tends to control the community police and gets them corrupt in the process. So, the implication is that when the community police are controlled by the community, the community police sometimes connive with or get involved with illegal activities of some members of the community. The auspicious security measure or programme has suffered for many years under the taint of corruption. The crime of graft refers to getting something of value through dishonest or unfair means especially using political connections or community relationships. On this note, the community police may deliberately use illegal or unconstitutional means to make arrest and in the process ensure that the charges are thrown out of court.

The rot and decadence in the community police subsystem includes: kickbacks, favouritism, recruitment malpractice, partisanship, complicity, white-watch and cover-ups, and romantic exuberance and compensation. All these shortcomings are inimical to effective community policing in Nigeria. One of the major setbacks in community policing is the selective enforcement-of-law syndrome that is common place in Nigeria. The poor and minority groups in the community tend to withdraw themselves from the community police because most of the law enforcement operations focus on the behaviours of the poor, minorities, downtrodden and underprivileged members of the society.

Apparently, 'godfatherism' in Nigeria is an Achilles' heel in community policing. The community policing and other activities of the community police are influenced by meddlesome political influencers, who direct the pendulum of policing law, security and justice in the country- this process or activity has been labelled 'godfatherism'. To some observers like Onyeozi, godfatherism is the funding and abetting of vices and shielding connected with criminals from justice by government agents and highly place officials entrusted with the power and authority to investigate and prosecute such vices.[8]

Attitudes of Community Policing Towards Community

A study conducted in 1999 by the Center for Law Enforcement Education (CLEBN) and the National Human Right Commission (NHRC) revealed that majority of Nigerians (including the Community Police Officers interviewed) maintained that the Nigerian community still clings on colonial mentality and practices

and are also adversely affected by the prolonged military rule and inadequate training for community policing in a post-dictatorship Nigeria. The long military rule in Nigeria which influenced the attitude of the community police is indeed a major setback that weakened the informal community policing and also delayed the development of modern democratic community policing in the country. As cumbersome as community police duties are, partnering with the community will ease community police functions in the areas of collaborative information and sharing.

Since the society creates rules to combat crimes and criminals, law enforcement agencies (the community police precisely) are also created to enforce rules that are moulded into law. The community policing is a paradigm shift for effective policing in Nigeria. It started out as a drive to convince the world of the moral necessity to adopt a new method of policing and later became a formal organisation devoted to the enforcement of law in the community. The final outcome of this moral crusade is the establishment of community policing. On the other hand, members of the society must understand the motives and interest of community police as law enforcement agents. The obvious interest is to enforce the laws, maintain peace and order and secure compliance with the community and society at large; hence their co-operation is highly needed to achieve this great height. Both the community police and the community members owe each other a moral obligation to maintain a hitch-free community policing. Community policing, otherwise known as neigbourhood watch, is both a philosophical and practical approach to crime prevention and control, which entails full involvement and participation of community members. It is an art of policing that helps to improve the performance of the community police in crime detection, prevention and control which ordinarily would have diminished the quality of community police work and relationship and the public. If the local residents were excluded in the art of policing, the public perception of community police would still be very negative and much needs to be done to positively change the trend. Most of these negative trends observed in the community police formation by the public revolve round moral and social turpitudes: bribery and corruption, community police brutality, dishonest and criminal tendencies, improprieties and inadequacies, complicity and perversion of justice, etc. Generally, the Nigerian community police have image problems, which makes members of the society to withdraw their trust, support and co-operation; disrespect them; cast aspersions on their competence and integrity; and dishonor their position as both bonfire fellow community members and certified law enforcers.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is quite glaring that in order to surmount security challenges in Nigeria local governments, community policing is imperative. This is because it is the closest government to the people. This is because every part of Nigeria belongs to a local government or local council. Thus, grass root security is a makeup of the entire Nigeria network. In addition, with the ever growing increase in violent crimes across Nigeria, there is need for local government community policing architecture. This chronic situation needs to be tackled holistically by bringing to book everybody that is culpable of any offence. In this case, justice should be the watch word for the success of community policing in Nigeria as the great Late Shiekh Usman Danfodio said over two centuries ago in his book, *Bayan Wujub al-Hyira*. "A kingdom can endure with unbelief, but it cannot endure with injustice".[9] So for Nigeria to have proper security system, let justice be done, though the sky may fall without religion and ethnic prejudice. For this reason, Ankpa community policing has been very successful. The Nigeria police and other security agents should pay serious attention to forests and bushes on the highways as these are places where criminal elements hide. The issue of insecurity and the need for formal attempt to curb it, in global discourse affirms the popular sayings of Rosseau that 'Man is born Free but everywhere in chains'.

Endnotes

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