



THE IMPERATIVES FOR COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Community policing—a relatively recent addition to law enforcement—has become everyone’s rhetorical solution for policing problems in an international arena. As an agenda for policing reform, it has received a lot of global attention in a series of studies that stretch from organizational reforms to theories of modeling and implementation strategies. Therefore, this examines the some of the benefits that can be derived while subscribing to the community policing philosophy in the quest to enforce law and order and protect the lives and properties of people in a society. The study utilizes secondary sources of data throughout and it is recommended that both the police and the public should jettison or discard the pre-conceived notion of enmity and rivalry that exist between them, they should cultivate every spirit of togetherness and see themselves as partners in the course of protection of lives and properties in the society.

Key words: *Community, Policing, Community Policing, Nigeria.*

Introduction

According to Reiner (2002) Policing has always been necessary in all societies for the preservation of order, safety and social relations. The necessity of policing becomes even more evident in modern societies characterized by diversities and contradictions arising from population heterogeneity, urbanization, industrialization conflicting ideologies on appropriate socio political and economic form of organization. However the emergence of the police, a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order, is a recent development in human history.

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

Approaches to policing vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Gaines and Cordner (1999: 119-120) suggest that Police agencies can choose from among four overarching strategies: professional crime fighting, strategic policing, and problem-oriented policing and community policing. For decades, Police followed the professional model, which rested on three foundations: preventive patrol, quick response time, and follow-up investigation. Sensing that professional model did not always operate as efficiently and effectively as it could, criminal justice researchers set out to review current procedures and evaluate alternative programmes.

By the 1970s, research began to show that rapid response to crime does not necessarily lead to more arrest and that having more Police Officers using methods made popular under the professional or reform model does not significantly reduce crime. What was emerging was the view that unattended disorderly behavior in neighborhoods—such as unruly groups of youth, prostitution, vandalism, drunkenness and disorderly vagrants, and aggressive street people—is a signal to more serious criminals that residents do not care what goes on in their community and that the criminals can move in and operate with impunity.

The 1970s and 1980s saw some experimentation with community and neighborhood based policing projects. Those projects got mixed result and many were abandoned because of high costs, administrative neglect and citizen apathy. However, higher crime rates, continued community deterioration, and recognition of the failure to control crime caused law enforcement to again question that role it was playing. The enforcer role still was not working well enough. It appeared senseless simply to respond to calls for service and arrive at scenes of crime and disorder time and time again without resolving the problems or having any lasting effect on the lives of the residents of the community. Out of this failure and frustration came the concept and idea of community policing in contemporary policing.

Therefore, this paper examines some of the benefits of the community policing as a new policing philosophy so as to educate the various communities with every justification as to why they should subscribe to it.

Conceptual Clarification

Community

The concept of community is used in a variety of ways. Community may refer to the neighbourhood in which people live; or refer to a group of people with common identity, such as race, ethnicity or religion; or refer to people with common profession, interest or needs.

In Africa, communities can be formed on the basis of kinship and the extended family system. In traditional Africa, the family community is extremely important the family was the basic component of social structure. According to Shorter (1977), many traditional African societies were construed on the principle of lineage segmentation, or experience

a precarious unity, focused on the political symbolism of a ruling family, related through affinal links to the clan of commoners.

In other words the African village or settlement usually represented a convergence of loyalties that made for strong sense of community.

In the early social science literature, the concept of community was defined in terms of a part of the larger society, "a geographical area with definite legal boundaries, occupied by residents engaged in interrelated economic activities and constituting a politically self-governing unit" (Dambazau, 2007:246).

It is possible therefore to arrange the definition of community in groupings:

- those related to neighbourhood
- those focus on social interaction
- those that highlighted feeling of belonging and social solidarity; and
- those based on rural or urban experience.

Policing

Once the word policing is mentioned what comes to the minds of vast majority of people is the activity of state police. However, policing is not just an activity of the state police, it involves any organized activity that seeks to ensure the maintenance of communal order, security and peace through elements of prevention, deterrence, investigation of breaches, and punishment (Baker, 2008). It is in fact a mechanism of governance. As such it can be authorized and provided by non-state groups as well as the state.

Community Policing

Numerous definitions of community policing exist, but a common thread runs through them. Wroblewski and Hess (2003: 134) defined community policing as "an organization wide philosophy and management approach that promotes community, government and police partnerships; proactive problem solving; and community engagement to address the cause of crime, fear of crime and other community issues". The essence of community policing is to return to the day when safety and security are participatory in nature and everyone assumes responsibility for the general health of their community not just a selected few, not just the local government administration, not just the safety forces, but absolutely everyone living in the community (Brown, 2001: 56).

Miller and Hess (2002) defined community policing as a belief that working together, the police and the community can accomplish what neither can accomplish alone. Community policing is a collaborative effort between the police and the community that identifies problems of crime and disorder and involves all elements of the community in the search for solutions to these problems. It attempts to actively involve the community with the police in the task of crime control by creating an effective working partnership between the community and the police. Under the community policing ideal, community members and the police are expected to share responsibility for establishing and maintaining peaceful neighborhoods.

According to Skolmick and Bayley (1988) community policing involves at least one of the following elements:

- a) Community based crime prevention.
- b) The re-orientation of patrol activities to emphasize the importance of emergency services.
- c) Increased police accountability to the public and.
- d) A decentralization of command including a
- e) Greater use of civilians of all levels of police decision making.

Key Elements/Components of Community Policing

Components of community policing according to Bohn and Haley, (2002), these elements or components contain in the community policing philosophy are identified differently by different scholars. McEwen (1998:13) list six elements of community policing with particular reference to the Chicago alternative policing strategy (APS).

- I. The entire department and the city were to be involved.
- II. Officers were to have permanent beat assignments.
- III. There was to be a serious commitment to training.
- IV. The community was to play a significant role in the program.
- V. Police was to be linked to the delivery of city services.
- VI. There was to be an emphasis on crime analysis.

McEwen further advanced that other key elements often present within agencies adopting community policing include decentralization of authority and structure, with police and citizens sharing power and being empowered to address community problems together.

However, some literature's identified only two elements while some identified three. According to Wroblewski and Hess (2003) the two critical elements of community policing are partnership and problem solving.

On the other hand, Bohn and Haley (2002), in addition to the elements recognized by Wroblewski and Hess, included the element of change management. It was argued that achieving the goals of community policing requires successful implementation of three essential and complementary components or operational strategies, namely Community partnership, problem solving, and change management (Bohn and Haley, 2002: 212).

In a nutshell the key elements or components of community policing are commonly recognized to be community partnership, problem solving and change management. Firstly, **community partnership** is the first component or element of community policing and is often seen as the cornerstone of community policing. Establishing and maintaining mutual trust between citizen of a community and the police is the main goal of the first components of community partnership require police to always recognize the need for cooperation with the community and to encourage members of the community to come forward with crime fighting information.

While *problem-solving* requires a lot more thought, energy and action than traditional incident based policing 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 concern then become priorities of joint police-community interventions (Bohn and Haley, 2002).

However, for this problem-solving to operate effectively, the police need to devote time and attention to discovering a community's concerns, and they need to recognize the validity of those concerns. Police and neighborhood groups may not always agree on the specific problems that deserve attention first. In community policing both problems should receive early attention from the police, other government agencies and the community.

Some community policing advocates recommend a four-step problem solving process (Bohn and Haley, 2002; Wroblewski and Hess, 2003; Schmallegger, 2003). This process is popularly referred to as SARA literally meaning Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment. By Scanning it simply entails identify problems; Analysis means understanding the underlying conditions, while Response means developing and implementing solutions; Assessment refers to determining the solutions effect (Bohn and Haley, 2002).

Another component in community policing is the idea of *change management*. Forgoing community policing partnership 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 organization and have been dominated by agency structures.

Community policing in contrasts, emphasizes the value of the patrol function and the patrol office as an individual. This requires the shifting of initiative, decision making and responsibility downward within the police organization. Patrol officers are the most familiar with the needs and concerns 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 action of the patrol officers and must ensure that patrol officers 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 (Wroblewski and Hess, 2003).

Imperatives for Community Policing

Essentially, community policing is a philosophy with operating principles based on the assumption that changes today will make communities safer and more attractive tomorrow, which is achieved by working together towards shared goals (Segrave and Ratcliffe, 2004). Community policing brings the police and community closer and offers a myriad of other benefits. Palmitto explains the benefit of community policing to be:

“... a game the Police can't lose. If coproduction through community participation leads to lower crime rates and higher arrest rates, the Police can take the credit for being foresighted agents of change. If community policing fails to increase public security, the public is hardly likely to reduce support for policing because a new gambit doesn't work out. Moreover, even if the police cannot actually deliver on the large goal of crime reduction, a heightened police presence is reassuring. Thus, community policing reduces fear of crime-and, from the perspective of political benefits to police, delivers the message that police care” (Palmitto, 2000: 207).

Specifically, the imperatives for community policing include:

- Improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police;
- Increasing community capacity to deal with issues;
- Changing police officers' attitudes and behaviours;
- Increasing perceptions of safety; and
- Reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behavior (Coquilhat, 2008).

Improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police

Community policing enables police to develop improved police-community relationships (Segrave and Ratcliffe, 2004). This provides the police with the opportunity to meet the community's needs, while increasing public accountability over police through participation (Palmiotto, 2000). A number of initiatives have showed positive improvements in police-community relationships and community perceptions of police (Skogan, 2006).

Increasing community capacity to deal with issues

Building community capacity can mobilise and empower the community to identify and respond to concerns (Segrave and Ratcliffe, 2004). The benefit of an empowered community is a stronger community who want to participate in addressing issues (Mastrofski, 2006). Community policing offers the public a larger window into police activity and provides opportunities for 'grass roots' support for police (Palmiotto, 2000). However, communities with existing capacity are more likely to participate in community policing, but are less likely to benefit from it because, in general, they are already proactively addressing issues to increase community safety (Mayhill, 2006).

Changing police officers' attitudes and behaviours

Strong anecdotal evidence suggests that community policing has positive effects on police through increased job satisfaction and improved interaction with, and confidence in, the community (Patterson, 2007). Mayhill (2006) argues that community policing 'embeds' officers within the community where they become more understanding of the local situations and promote a positive image of police. This provides the officers with the opportunity to make positive community-police experiences and contacts, which is said to increase morale amongst police through the encouragement of a supportive and welcoming community (Palmiotto, 2000).

Increasing perceptions of safety/decreasing fear of crime

It is widely accepted that community policing increases the perceptions of safety and decreases the fear of crime. Skogan (2006) argues there is evidence to suggest that increasing community-police interactions are associated with lower levels in fear of crime. However, police and the community have differing levels of perceptions of safety and it has been suggested that police are more likely to perceive a reduction in the fear of crime than the community.

Reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour

Community policing is beneficial as a policing approach to address a range of different crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. For example, community policing approaches have been used to address graffiti and property damage to gang violence and organised crime (Skogan, 2006). More recently it has been an approach adopted to deal with anti-terrorist activities in some communities. Sherman (1997) argues that community policing needs clear objectives that focus on crime risk factors. While there is fairly strong evidence that community policing is able to reduce disorder and anti-social behaviour, overall findings are mixed about the ability to reduce crime (Mayhill, 2006). Reducing crime, although a benefit, is not always the main focus of the community policing programmes and often the principle outcome is to reduce victimisation.

Conclusion

The police are termed to be fraught with so many problems that they engage in some activities which make the public lose confidence in the police and even distance themselves from the police. The public no more see police as their protector of lives and properties but rather as extortionists in the course of law enforcement. These therefore require certain consideration or measure to be taken in order to cement the relation between the police and the public. For cordial relationships between the police and the public facilitates police efforts at crime prevention and control, since the public provide most of the information about crime, otherwise most of the crimes committed will go unnoticed and unidentifiable.

Recommendations

Based on the above, this paper recommends the following for policy formulation to ensure effective police community relations and community policing in Nigeria.

- (a) Adequate effort should be made not only at improving the condition of service and welfare package of the police officers but also ensure adequate supply of adequate and modern operational equipments. For this would enable police on patrol to withstand all the real and emerging threat from the criminal minded individuals.
- (b) Adequate education on the various policing strategies should ensure. The police should for instance enlighten on not only to have the idea of community policing and police community relations but also full understanding of its context and basic elements.
- (c) Both the police and the public should jettison or discard the pre-conceived notion of enmity and rivalry that exist between them, they should cultivate every spirit of togetherness and see themselves as partners in the course of protection of lives and properties in the society. For to wage a strike or war against any phenomena, it requires most importantly cooperation and unity among the members of society.
- (d) In addition to the above, the police should cultivate every spirit of honesty, justice and fairness in the course of policing Nigerian society. For these will instill some elements of confidence and ensure appreciation of police work among the people in the society, thus, guarantees cordial relationship and cooperation between the police and the public.
- (e) All in the course of cementing the relationship between the police and the public, the police should not only see barracks and police stations as the only place of work, rather they should take into cognizance the fact that their functions can only become very effective when they relate and interact with the members of the public. They should on patrol spend much part of their time on duty within the community. For crime are committed within and against the community not police barracks and stations.
- (f) Inter-disciplinary approaches should be utilized in the criminal justice system (C.J.S) especially among the police officers. Psychologists and sociologists should be engaged for value re-orientation in the force.

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