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COMMUNITY POLICE AND POLICING PROBLEM: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

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Abstract

This paper explores current concepts, development and functions of the police system as a crime prevention and peace keeping force in contemporary society. It further discusses various styles of policing and highlights a number of dilemmas militating against effective community policing in Nigeria. The situation crime prevention theory of Ronald Clarke is the theoretical framework for this study. The paper recommends amongst others that the police should be integrated into the mainstream of national security network. Furthermore, the independence of police authorities should be enhanced since it will assist the police to discharge their duties creditably.

Introduction

For purposes of clarification, the term "POLICE" in its original meaning stands for the good government of a community through civil administration, enforcement of laws and regulations and the maintenance of the health, cleanliness and the public order generally. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the concept and usage of the term began to take on a narrower form. In modern times, it is found being used to describe the civil force to which is entrusted the task of maintaining public order and enforcement of law for the prevention and punishment of its breaches and detecting crime (Walsh and Poole, 1983:13).

The World Book Encyclopedia (1984:546) volume 15, defines Police as government officers who enforce the law and maintain order. They work to prevent crime and to protect the lives and property of the people of the community. Policemen and Policewomen serve their communities in various ways. They patrol streets to guard against crime and to assist people with various problems, direct traffic to keep it running smoothly and safely. The police are often called on to settle family quarrels, find lost persons and

aid accident victims. During earthquakes, floods fires, and other disasters, they help provide shelter, transportation and protection to victims. Police activities include: Patrol operations, Traffic operations, Investigations of crimes, Criminal intelligence, Juvenile work, Records and communications, etc.

- **Patrol Operations** are the foundation of police work. Patrol officers are assigned (beats) that is, area or routes to cover on foot, in squad cars or on motorcycles. In some cities in Northern part of Nigeria for instance, they patrol parks on horseback. Patrol officers survey their area (beats) repeatedly (Carter, 1980).
- **Traffic Operations:** Traffic Police Officers promote public safety on streets and highways. In Nigeria, traffic Police are assisted by the Road Safety Enforcement Agency. They direct traffic, protect pedestrians, aid motorists and enforce speed, parking and other traffic laws. Traffic police and Road Safety Officers also investigate traffic accidents and enforce safety and license regulations for motor vehicles. Some Police Department use helicopters to survey traffic.
- **Investigation of Crimes** are conducted by detectives who are sometimes called plainclothes officers, because they do not wear uniforms. In some Police departments, the term plainclothes officers refer to members of the 'Vice Squad' who investigates illegal activities considered to be immoral. Detectives work in various specialized fields that deal with such crimes as murder, robbery or the illegal sales and trafficking in hard-drugs (Odekunle, 1979).
- **Criminal Intelligence:** Some Police Officers are assigned to gather intelligence), that is, information about the activities of suspected criminals. The men and women who work in the criminal intelligence division of a Police department are sometimes called (Undercover Agents). They gather information on such criminal operations as large-scale gambling and the illegal sales of hard-drugs. The reports of intelligence officers are used in planning ways to fight criminal activities. In the United States of America the Federal Bureau of Investigations (F.B.I) are the principal units that form the criminal intelligence division of the U.S. Police (Crumer, 1964).
- **Juvenile Work:** Police Officers in the juvenile division of the Police department handle cases involving young person accused of breaking the law. These Officers try to help young persons and their parents with personal problems. They also carry out investigations that involve the neglect or abuse of young children.
- **Records and Communications:** The records bureau of a police department keeps files on all reported crimes, investigations and arrests and various police activities. Many police departments use computers to process and store these records (Tamuno, 1970).

Other activities:

Large Police agencies have various specialized units, including (a) Search and Rescue teams; (b) Hostage negotiating teams; (c) Bomb Squads; and (d) Special weapons units. Most members of these units work at other assignments until their special skills are needed.

- (a) **The Search and Rescue Teams** try to find persons in forest, mountains, caves or other out-of-the-way places. Members of these teams are trained in rock climbing, mountain survival and other skills. They often use helicopters in rescue missions.
- (b) **Hostage Negotiating Teams** handle cases in which criminals (terrorists) hold people captive. During such criminal activities as bank robberies and airplane hijackings, the criminals or (terrorist) may take innocent persons as hostages. They often threaten to injure or kill the hostages if certain demands are not met. Members of the team plead with the criminals to release the hostages without harm (Walsh and Poole, 1983).
- (c) **Bomb Squad** responds to reports of bomb threats. They carefully search the building or other places where a bomb supposedly has been planted. If they find a bomb, they try to prevent it from exploding or move it to a safe place where it cannot damage property or injure people.
- (d) **Special Weapons Units** handle dangerous situation involving armed criminals. Members of this unit are skilled in the use of high-powered rifles and other weapons. Their expert marksmen now know how to surround and capture criminals with the least possible danger to others. Special weapons units are often called S.W.A.T. team. Those letters (S.W.A.T.) stand for Special Weapons and Tactics or Special Weapons Attack Team (World Book Encyclopedia 1984: vol.15).

Every nation in the world has a Police System. Let us undertake an overview of Police around nine countries in the world namely, the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, France, West Germany, Russia, China and Nigeria.

- **United States**

There are about 40,000 separate Police agencies that operate under city, county, state or federal governments. In many countries including Nigeria, the National government directs all Police operations. Police Officers in the United States are often called cops. During the late 19th century, they were called constables. The word (Cop) may have come from the initials C.O.P. which stood for (constable in patrol). Some authorities believe (C.O.P.) is a shortened form of copper, a word that referred to the copper badges worn by police officers in the U.S.

- **Canada**

Canada has national provincial and city police forces. The Royal Canadian mounted police (RCMP) enforce federal laws throughout Canada. It serves as a provincial police force in all the provinces except Ontario and Quebec, which have their own forces. The (RCMP) is the only police force in the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories. It also provides police services on a contract basis to about 175 cities.

- **Great Britain**

In Great Britain, Walsh and Poole (1983) recorded that the Police system is organized into about 50 large forces that are connected with the local governments. There are well over 100,000 policemen and women in England and Wales who are either uniformed officers or plain-clothes police. There are four types of police force in England and Wales; namely:

- (i) **County Police Force** –run by an authority comprising two thirds local councilors and one-third magistrates. The authority appoints a Chief constable to lead the force, but he is approved by the Home Secretary,
 - (ii) **Combined Police Force:** run by a Police authority made up from several county councils,
 - (iii) **The London Metropolitan Police:** under the direct control of the Home Secretary and covering Greater London and parts of Surrey, Hertford and Essex. It is led by a Commissioner of Police, a deputy commissioner and four assistant commissioners who are appointed by the Crown after being recommended by the Home Secretary. The headquarters of the Metropolitan Police is called New Scotland Yard. The name Scotland Yard is often used to refer to the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police
 - (iv) **City of London Police:** is a small separate Police force-run by the city's court of the common council which appoints a commissioner, subject to the approval of the Home Secretary.
- **Australia:** In Australia, each of the six states and two mainland territories have a police force. Australia also has a national police force known as the Commonwealth Police Force (World Book Encyclopedia 1984).
 - **France:** In France, the national law enforcement agency is the Surete Nationale. It forms part of Ministry of the Interior. Police Officers called (gendarmes) serve as military police and provide police services in rural areas. This explains why a country like Cameroon still has gendarmes in the Police system, since they were once colonized by France.
 - **Germany:** In Germany, the Police are organized under the individual states. The states also maintain stand-by police who assist the state police when necessary.
 - **Russia:** In Russia, members of the national militia provide general police services. The militia operates under the direction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Committee of State Security (KGB). Both the MVD) and the (KGB) investigate any activities considered a threat to the security of the government similar to SSS duties in Nigeria.
 - **China:** In China, a national police force called the People's Police is directed locally by provincial public security bureaus. These bureaus function under the Ministry of Public Security, an agency of the national government. There is also an international organization of police force (INTERPOL) from more than 120 countries, including Nigeria. Members of INTERPOL exchange information about international crimes and cooperate in fighting such international crimes as counterfeiting, smuggling and illegal buying and selling of weapons or trafficking in hard-drugs. The headquarters of INTERPOL is in St. Cloud, a suburb of Paris (Crumer, 1964).

Styles of Policing

Alderson (1999) proffers that an examination of the nature of policing will reveal considerable variation in styles. These include (1) Informal policing; (2) Passive Policing; (3) Punitive Policing; (4) Preventive Policing and (5) Reactive Policing and Repressive Policing Starting with;

Informal Policing

Among the most successful checks of crimes in a society are those stemming from traditional and informal social controls. Customs, shared norms, values and moral standards have preceded the laws upon which the more formal policing arrangements of an advanced society are developed. Where a society retains the cohesion and stability of family units, it is likely that the behaviour of the members of that unit will be controlled which could enhance the overall stability of the society.

Passive Policing

Passive policing is characterized by police whose main purpose is to provide a presence and to achieve their aim of maintaining order through informal means. Passive police are reluctant to activate the law except in serious crimes or in blatant cases of public disorder where there is little alternative. The merit for the community in passive style of policing is that, since it permits self-regulation, it usually avoids petty scandal and generally makes for a live and let live atmosphere in which recourse to remedies through the criminal courts is kept to a minimum.

Punitive Policing

Punitive Policing has been described as policing by suspended terror. It works on the assumption that provided the penalties for crimes are sufficiently horrible; people will be deterred from committing them. Certainly, without an effective police to back up the draconian code, its effect is likely to be considerably reduced. The reason is because as a society becomes gentler in its attitudes and manners, which usually coincides with advancement in knowledge and civilization, it is less likely to permit inhuman penalties.

Preventive Policing

Of all the strategies of policing, it is the preventive one which is superior. It is superior in the ethical sense since by preventing crime it saves people from their moral sensitivity which confrontation with the criminal justice system brings. It marks the concern of society in reducing criminality, which victimizes both the perpetrator and the person who is the object of the crime. In this way a dual purpose is served. Prevention is not only ethically superior as a strategy but its utility is greater since it reduces the cost as well as the suffering of crime.

Reactive Policing

Police have to be capable of reacting to emergencies which rate high priority in public estimation. They not only have to possess the necessary mobility and communication to do this, but they have to deploy in such a way that other matters such as bad geographical distribution will not impede their adequate response. The time taken from receipt of a call to arrival at the scene, known as 'response time' is regarded as a key measurement of police efficiency. Any police

system which cannot keep pace with public demands for quick response in emergencies is in danger of losing its reputation.

Repressive Policing

Rulers or governments lacking in popular support may rely on repressive style of policing to maintain them in power. In such circumstances the police, inevitably supported by the military, have to be endowed with considerable emergency powers of search, arrest and detention. To maintain their reputation they will have to act firmly when required to do so. It is a style of policing, which generally, though not extensively, tends to alienate the police from the community and this can be further compounded by living in barracks apart from the community. Such police are almost invariably likely to be armed and of a quasi-military nature since disciplinary control, firepower and military training are necessary for success (Walsh and Poole, 1983).

Theoretical Framework

It is generally assumed that crime is an ever present condition in the society. Menninger (1988) argues that society secretly wants crime, needs crime, and gains definite satisfactions from the present mishandling of it. Wilson (1993) submits that in spite of socialization experiences and the structural aspects of people's social circumstances they may still have inherent sense of fairness and morality. If, however, a big difference must be affected in crime, fundamental changes must first be made in the society.

Put differently, the formal or informal processes must be modified. Thus, crime is a societal problem and it takes social responsibility to tackle it. This reality makes room for the adoption of the situational crime prevention theory of Ronald V Clarke which is predicated on the need to:

- ◆ Reduce the opportunities for criminals to commit crime;
- ◆ Change criminal's ideas about whether they can get away with a particular crime; and
- ◆ Make it seem harder, riskier, and less rewarding to commit crime.

Clarke (1997) argues that to achieve the above, the theory encourages: changes in buildings and streets to make them safer; asking the police for help and the police providing the help; using common sense to stop criminals; using neighbours to look out for crime and criminals; working with people from different agencies; and acknowledging that it is everybody's job to police. The theory thus discourages the buying of weapons to protect one's self or one's crime; claiming to be able to solve it all alone; moving of crime to another place; nor spending lots of money to destroy crime evidence. The underlying assumptions of the theory revolve around the environment, national choice and routine activities (Clarke, 1997).

The environmental dimension submits that crime occurs when four things come together, namely: a law, an offender, a victim or target, and a place. The national choice component is of the proposition that criminals think about their decisions before they commit crime. They are lured to commit crime because the benefits of committing crime outweigh those of not committing crimes. And the routine activity holds that in order for crime to happen, there must be three things – an offender, a suitable target and no one watching the target. It should be noted that the theory departs from mainstream criminology as it focuses on the importance of the opportunity for crime to occur, the settings for crime, the prevention of the occurrence of crime, and (though with less emphasis) detecting and punishing of offenders (Clarke and ECK, 2003).

The Police System in Nigeria

To maintain public order, control crimes and defend government interest, Nigeria has relied primarily on the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The constitution clearly defined the Nigerian Police Force as the country's only official police force, excepting specialized police element that protect waterways, railways and airfields; these were, to be branches of the Nigerian Police Force.

The history of the Police system has been marked by increasing centralization of national authority in the capital city. The national police, like the army, developed from the early constabularies raised to protect British persons and their interests after they arrived in Lagos in 1861. After the British government assumed administrative control over the whole of Nigeria, these forces were amalgamated into police establishments corresponding to the three political administration in the country; the Southern Nigerian Police, the Northern Nigerian constabulary and the Lagos Police. In 1930, the three systems were merged to form the NPF. For four decades after its establishment the NPF existed alongside the Native Authority Police, which was an outgrowth of law enforcement system that had existed before colonialism (Nelson 1981:274).

These local police were especially useful for policing remote areas beyond the reach of the NPF. At Independence, the Native Authority Police constituted virtually the entire force in the North while in the South the NPF shared responsibility with about fifteen local forces known as the local government police force. When the Mid-Western Region was created in 1963, The Regional Government relinquished its control over local police units, which were integrated into the NPF. Although the local police force were discredited for being tools of various political factions during the chaotic period of the First Republic, their removal proved politically impossible until the January 1966 military coup (Nelson 1981:275).

The centralized nature of the police system is specified in the Constitution. At the Federal level the inspector general of police commands the NPF and carries out policies prescribed by the president or the minister of police affairs who acts as the head of state's adviser on police matters. At the state level, the lines of authority were not clear-cut. Nigerian Police Force state commands were headed by commissioners of police who took directions from the state governors but were appointed by the Federal Police Service Commission. Any governor's order that was questioned by the Police Commissioner was referred to the president or his minister of police affairs rather than to the NPF's inspector general. The president thus, was firmly in command of the police force, but the state governors were given the opportunity to make their views known.

The headquarters of the NPF was located in Lagos. Under the Inspector General, two bodies - The Police Service Commission and the Police Council-maintained administrative control of the national force. The commission served as an advisory panel on matters involving appointment, dismissals, promotions and discipline. The council, headed by the inspector general was charged with administration and operational control of the NPF. Various specialized departments such as the Criminal Investigation Department, traffic control, vehicle registry and general administration operated from the national headquarters. The headquarters organization also supervised the activities of all police training schools (Nelson, 1981:277).

The NPF comprised all state command, each under the direction of a police commissioners and the governor and headquarter in the state capital. The size and organizational complexity of each state and its need for police authority. The largest of the state police command was that of Lagos state which had formerly included a branch of the Nigerian Port Authority Police Force. Expansion of the NPF from 45,000 personnel in 1975 to 83,500 in 1979 had an adverse effect on the quality of recruits. One reason for

increasing the size of the NPF under the Third National Development Plan (1975-79) was to provide employment for demobilized soldiers from the armed forces. These ex-soldiers were generally undisciplined and many recruits deserted after joining the force.

The Federal Military Government was accused with some justification of neglecting the police in the later years of its administration. In the late 1970s when increased recruitment raised police manpower levels, the NPF's capital budget fell from N77.2 in F.Y 1975/76 to N28.8 in FY-1979/80. NPF transportation and communication equipment, housing and other facilities inadequate to start off with deteriorated. The NPF manpower problem was not eased by the increased recruitment because the demobilized army veterans recruited by the police lowered the overall quality of the force. Relative pay and conditions of service also deteriorated during the 1970s; while experienced constables were barely earning the national minimum wage and recruits were receiving far less. Well-educated and well-trained personnel had little incentive to remain with the NPF and were tempted by opportunities for corruption (Odekunle 1979; Nelson 1982).

In order to remedy police inadequacies and ameliorate the crime problem, the outline for the Fourth Plan earmarked ₦800 million for police programs, three times the amount allocated during the Third Plan. The centerpiece of the plan was the increase in manpower to 200,000 which would raise the police to population ratio of one to 400 (although it would not improve quality) new police colleges and training institutions were to be established to train recruits. Also, the NPF was to be given funds to upgrade its transportation and communications capabilities (Odekunle 1979; Nelson 1982).

Beyond this, recent history holds it as a common contemporary knowledge that the challenges for better funding of the police led the Olusegun Obasanjo democratic Administration (1999 – 2007) to conceive of the Police Equipment Fund. Much money was raised; but the irony is that the managers needed to be policed. Currently, the management of the fund is in a legal battle on the issue. Such is the situation of the police in Nigeria.

Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing is a system in which policemen work only in one particular area of the community so that every one knows them. Community policing means more than responding to distress calls and solving crime. It means transforming the Nigerian police force to adopt a more pro-active approach to policing responsibilities where crimes are prevented before they occur. It means police partnership with members of the society, captains of industries, community leaders etc. to improve the quality of life in our communities and enhance the security of life and property in the community (Olakpa, 2006).

Under section 215 (3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the police is responsible for the maintenance and security of public safety and public order. Another reason for the introduction of community policing in Nigeria is that police must be transparent, fair, accountable and responsive to public perceptions, thus bringing "police service" rather than police force into the community. The police cannot effectively perform their duties as envisaged by section 4 of police Act, section 10 of Criminal Procedure Act of 1990 and various laws empowering the police without reciprocal and mutual respect and knowledge of the laws of Nigeria from both the police and members of the society.

It must be acknowledged that the inability of the formal police sector (NPF) to adequately police Nigeria all alone has granted credence to the need for community policing as a complementary tool and method (Brown, 2006). Sadly, the police system (both formal and informal) is yet to come to terms with the viability of a workable system.

As a result, many risks become inherent in our conception and application of the virtues of community policing. To this end, Thatcher (2001) notes that police reformers, these days, regard the community with more ambivalence than first impressions may suggest. This is strengthened by the fact that the ideal of being responsive to individual community groups often conflicts with the equally-important ideal of equity which directs police to provide fair services to all segments of the public.

It further explains that this dilemma stems from the reality that the whole community never shows up at police-community meetings, and it is often difficult to find neighbourhood groups and other willing partners in poor neighbourhoods compared to wealthier ones. Consequently, formal policing would prove more enduring in the wealth organized community groups than the poor less organized groups. Hence, the risk of raising a highly skewed situation of priorities that favours the rich to the detriment of the poor.

In the light of the above, it could be argued that the Nigerian situation is as bad. This is evident in the fact that feasible policemen (mostly armed ones) are mainly attached to high-level political figures and the rich; while the poor helplessly cast their security on faith. The situation is definitely sordid and needs a positive review. This paints a poor picture of the viability of community policing in Nigeria. However, Brown (2006) submitted that with greater involvement of community-based organizations, confidence between the public and the formal policing institutions, guaranteed confidentiality of policing assistants, and good legislations, the exercise would record appreciable success.

Conclusion

In order to draw a valid conclusion from the study based on research findings, there exists evidence in the research which indicates that the police are required to keep pace with social change if they must remain effective and relevant. It has also been observed that modern democratic state requires a police service that understands the importance of state security which includes guiding and protecting lives and property of citizens within the bounds and laws of the state. In view of the above observation, the Nigerian police is required to embrace a policing strategy that will be found to be effective, efficient, proactive as well as preventive. The style of policing that fits into the above description is community policing. It is believed that this style of policing will promote crime reduction and improve police-public relations in various states in Nigeria, and in particular, the Nation in general.

Recommendations

Since the success of community policing depends on how clearly a community voices its concerns to the police and how well the police respond to such concerns. In this regard, this work recommends implementation of community policing method in our communities as alternative means of solving crime problems, since traditional system of policing is less effective in dealing with the present crime problem in the country.

Furthermore, the police authority and members of the public should collectively introduce community policing as the new method of crime control to tackle the challenges of crime in various communities. Also, members of the community who had played major roles in assisting the police in the fight against crime in their area should be co-opted into the work of community policing. In similar related development, members of the public should be encouraged to cooperate with the police and should endeavour to render vital information that will lead to the reduction of crime and anti-social acts that hinders the

peace and safety of the community. The police authority too should endeavour to protect the interest of those citizens that provide useful information to the police.

Furthermore, regular workshops and training of community police officers should be intensified in order to know and to work with local agencies for problem solving police duties. The personnel of community policing should endeavour to possess the character of integrity, fairness, responsiveness and competence in discharging their duties. Also, there should be special welfare packages to members of the community, in order to encourage them put in their best in support of the community policing method. Also, vigilante groups in various communities should be trained, to assist the law enforcement agents in checking crime and anti-social acts in the community.

Also the recruitment and appointment of community policing personnel should be on merit in relation to moral behaviour, educational qualifications, and cultural knowledge of places and people in the community. Furthermore, short period of transfer and posting of police officers should be discouraged, to enable officers master the geographical and cultural heritage of places of their primary assignment. In this vein, scholars should be mobilized to undertake research for better approaches to crime control in the country.

The Federal Government should endeavour to show sincere commitment in finding lasting remedy to various factors that are responsible for criminality in our community such as poverty, unemployment, etc.

In another dimension, Federal Government should establish "complaint commission" in every local government area, where the members of the public can lodge complaints on any misconduct by the police. Thus, a retired judge or magistrate should be the chairman while retired senior police officers, community leaders, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and clergymen could form the members. The commission final report should be sent to the police authority for further action.

The Nigerian Government should endeavour to provide adequate training to her police force in order that they may perform their duties creditably. Policy makers should as a matter of urgency suggest to Federal Government to equip the Nigeria police force so that they could live up to public expectations with regard to its 'response time', particularly during emergencies; since we are aware that any police system which cannot keep pace with public demands for quick response in emergencies is in danger of losing its reputation and credibility.

The police should be seen as integral part of the national security network in the community and should not be alienated as an enemy of progress by the Nigerian public. Modern policing requires collaboration with the civic society, in order to effectively promote the quality of service they render. Laws that can improve the services of the police should be enacted by the lawmakers. The police Reform Bill of 2006 at the National Assembly is a welcome development.

The police authority should be independent of politicians; as this will drastically reduce unnecessary bottlenecks involved in crime detection, more especially when politically motivated crime is involved. Policy makers should amend the criminal law; by correcting the defects involved which has been frustrating the timely process of dispensing justice. This will revive public confidence in the Nigerian criminal justice system. The government should take the welfare of the police force seriously, by making sure that both their salary and other benefits are attractive, this will generally encourage the officers to put in their best. The ₦500,000 benefit for death officers should be implemented on time in case of any incidence.

The police force in Nigeria certainly needs to acquaint itself with modern and rigorous training in men and equipment in order to be able to handle effectively the

sophistication of present day law infractions in our developing society. Such items as computers for crime statistics, modern walkman, bullet-proof suits and vans for the anti-crime patrol team are indispensable tools to enhance efficiency in police duties. There should be more enlightenment programs on public expectations and role of police and police public relations. Police service in Nigeria should therefore be pro-active rather than re-active since re-active policing alienates the police from people and usually results in the loss of public confidence and the decline of police image in the community (Duru, 2007).

When these suggestions and recommendations are implemented, there is strong believe that community policing in Nigeria will undoubtedly be successful and will be appreciated by all. This, of course, will be for the good of the Nigerian society.

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