

The Role of the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) in Crime Prevention in Ogun State, Nigeria

Prince Hadi Sani

B.Sc Economics, Ahmadu Bello University.

Corresponding author: sanihadii@gmail.com

Abstract

The return to democracy in 1999 which marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic brought with it so much hope. However, the spate of insecurity in the country with a particular emphasis on Ogun State which shares international boundary with some West African countries and local boundaries with some states like Lagos and Oyo shows that there is no day that passes by without the print media and the non-print media reporting cases of crime. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which is constitutionally charged with maintaining law and order have been criticized for its ineffectiveness, thereby leading to the setting up of PCRC by to complement their effort. It was against this ground the study was conducted to investigate the role of PCRC in crime prevention in Ogun State. The study relied on crime partnership theory which states that the criminal justice system cannot, by itself, solve the complex problems of crime and disorder in our society, that resources and inputs from outside the system are desperately needed, as well as new ways of thinking about diverse problems from the inside. The study concluded that the PCRC have performed excellently well in crime prevention in the study area, however there is a problem of trust between members of the communities and the police most especially in information sharing.

Keywords: PCRC, Ogun State, Police, Crime Prevention, Insecurity.

Introduction

The Nigeria State popularly described as the giant of Africa is richly endowed with both human and natural resources that should promote development. However, the country over the years is bedevilled by different problems such as: crime, insecurity, terrorism etc the different efforts put in place by the government such as having a codified law to regulate the affairs of people within the state, having a strong military which comprises of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy, The Nigerian Airforce, Nigerian Custom Service, Nigerian Immigration Service and also having paramilitary agencies like the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) etc. to manage the problem of insecurity have not provided the desired result.

Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution as amended, vested the internal security of the Nigerian State in the hands of the Nigerian Police. This as therefore put the NPF in the forefront of the crime prevention and management. However, the NPF over the years have not been able to achieve a crime free society. Ogbewe (1998) observes that most of the news being carried about the police are usually negative, this is because the police which is supposed to be a friend to the people suddenly became a terror force which sees itself as lord rather than the servant of the people. The Nigeria Police Force has always been criticized for ineffectiveness by members of the society especially, and this in turn affects the image of force. This has led them to loss of credibility and trust. No Nigerian wants to trust police, even when crimes are committed in their presence, they will rather choose to

keep silent than report to the police because the police may turn the complainant or witness to become the first suspect.

Ogun State which is the focus of this study is not exempted from the problems of crimes confronting the Nigerian State and the inability of the NPF to effectively manage the problem. Ogun State was created in 1976 from the former western region is covered predominantly by rain forest and wooden Savannah in the northwest region. However, the task of managing crime in the state has been a subject of concern not only to the dwellers of the place alone but also to the security agencies out of which the Nigerian Police ranked first. This is not unconnected with the international boundary the state shares with other neighbouring countries like Benin Republic, and it also has other national boundaries with Lagos State to the south, Ondo State to the west, Oyo State and the Osun States to the north, etc.

Recently, the state was in the news because of the different criminal activities and crises happening in it, as the print and non-print media reported cases of fresh assault by herdsmen against the largely agrarian community. This may not even be connected to the cache of arms and ammunition regularly intercepted within the border towns with the Benin of Republic. This is aside massive trans-border movement of the Fulani herdsmen from Mali, Niger, Benin, Togo, and other neighbouring West African states to Nigeria for either legitimate or illegitimate businesses. The scenario painted above portends grave danger and serious security challenges not just only to the security agencies, (Nigeria Police) in particular, but the entire citizenry at large out of which the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) formed a major plank. Put in a different way, fighting crimes and criminals is so difficult that the police and other law enforcement agencies alone cannot perform this task and achieve maximum positive results.

To this end, the Nigeria police set up the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) which was inaugurated on the 22 of April 2004 by the former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The PCRC was inaugurated essentially out of the need to bridge the communication gap between the Nigeria Police Force and members of the society, to involve the community in policing and shore up the image of the force. There lies the need to investigate if PCRC has been a success, because it is the success of PCRC that makes it a good tool of public relations by the Nigeria police. The Police Community Relations Committee grew essentially out of the need to bridge the communication gap between the Nigeria police and members of the society. The Nigerian populace view the police with disdain owing to perceived breach of trust, occasioned by their harassment of people.

Furthermore, literature on police and policing reveals that the police are often in conflict with a significant percentage of the population in almost all countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000). The above assertions only gave credence to the fact that the Nigerian Police alone cannot secure the country, talk alone of building lasting peace without the collaborative effort of the larger society. Chapter Six (6) of the UN Charter talked about pacific resolution of conflict, while Chapter Seven (7) Articles 41 and 42 talked of Peace Enforcement (UN Charter, 1945). The responsibility to Protect (R2P) as expounded by the UN in 2005 is another clear example of the concern of the global body for world peace to checkmate nations hiding under the guise of sovereignty to perpetrate crime.

Since the most visible part of criminal activities take place at the neighbourhood level, policing agencies need public support and cooperation. Intensive partnership and collaborative efforts of both the formal and informal agents of social control remain preconditions for a possible near 'crime-free society (a complete crime-free society is a utopia); in other words, the idea will lead to great

success in crime prevention and control in the community. Arising from the foregoing, it appears that the collaborative effort between the Nigerian Police and the larger community seems to be paying off in checkmating and managing partly the conflict and security challenges that are rearing their ugly heads, but not much had been done by the same bodies in translating the relative peace attained to a sustainable one if not permanently, going by pockets of conflict and security breaches that are still prevalent in the area. It is against this background that this research work seeks to interrogate how the partnership between the local populace and the Nigerian Police under the umbrella of the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) can build sustainable peace in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

What are the types of conflicts and crimes that are common in Ogun state?

What are the conflict management strategies put in place to manage these crimes?

What are the peace-building mechanisms used by Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) in Ogun State Nigeria?

What are the challenges facing the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) in her peace-building efforts in Ogun State, Nigeria?

Research Aim and Specific Objectives

The general aim of this research work is to interrogate the Police-Community Relations Committee's (PCRC) effort in building lasting peace in Ogun State, Nigeria, while the specific objectives of the study are highlighted below:

- i. Highlight the types of conflict that are prevalent in Ogun State, Nigeria
- ii. Interrogate the conflict management strategies that are available to the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) in managing conflict in the area.
- iii. Investigate the peace-building mechanisms put in place by the Police-Community Relations Committee in Ogun State.
- iv. Examine the challenges facing the PCRC in peace-building initiatives in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Police-Community Relation Committee (PCRC)

Kemi and Laure, (2012) described community policing as entailing community partnership in creating a safe and secure environment for all and in which people take an active part in their affairs. In the same vein, Stipak, (1994) defines community policing as a management strategy that promotes the joint responsibility of citizens and the police for community safety, through working partnerships and interpersonal contact. Similarly, VanRooyen (2001) conceives community policing as a philosophy and strategy which is based on a partnership between the community and the police to find creative solutions for contemporary community problems, crime, and other related matters. Thus, PCRC is, therefore, an organization created when the Nigeria State was experiencing a high level of crime rate which led to too many people being: kidnapped, raped, killed, maimed. It is a known fact these crimes are committed by members of the community, when they commit such offenses, they disappear into the same community and it was difficult for the police to arrest or apprehend them. PCRC was therefore established to assist the police in addressing these challenges by providing timely information to them.

Community Policing

Community policing is built on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry. The police perform a lot of functions which include: law enforcement, maintenance of lives and properties. The transition from traditional policing to community policing is a global phenomenon and the Nigeria Police cannot be an exception. Like several other nations the world over, Nigerian Police embraced the philosophy of community policing on the principle that in a democratic society, the police are interested in their fellow citizens to protect and serve the public's fundamental rights to liberty, equality, and justice under the law. Community policing is known as in some quarters, describes a situation whereby or system in which the police and community members establish "citizen advisory committees that would open up channels of communication between police officers and the community" (Sykes, 1978). They are not only composed of police personnel, but also members of the business community, clergy, and some community leaders and members. All these community policing agents were duly recognized in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, as amended) and the 2004 Police Reform/Police Act, where the importance of this policing mechanism is acknowledged as a powerful tool for solving crime-problem in the country. Community policing is a paradigm shift that seeks to focus on constructive engagement with people who are the end-users of the police service and re-negotiate the contract between the people and the police thereby making the community co-producers of justice and a quality police service.

Theoretical Framework

Crime Prevention Partnership Theory by Dennis P. Rosenbaum

The task of providing security to lives and property in most societies is the exclusive function of the conventional police institution. This forms the major tenet of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) social contract theory which stated that security and order could only be achieved by a contract in which all citizens would give up all their powers to a central power (The Sovereign) in return for the protection of life and property (Marshall, 1998). However, as society progresses, this ideology has proven uncongenial to modern crime prevention strategy and it has created room for advocacy in support of an alternative strategy. To buttress this fact, structural functionalism theory submits that it is not only the consequences of formalized social institutions that make the society works but that other functioning socio-cultural institutions can play the same role. This reality makes room for partnership between formal and informal security agencies. This theory notes that the criminal justice system cannot, by itself, solve the complex problems of crime and disorder in our society, that resources and inputs from outside the system are desperately needed, as well as new ways of thinking about diverse problems from the inside. To achieve this, the theory advocates for the creation of 'partnerships, a group of organizations that can bring distinctive but complementary skills and resources to the table and can produce coordinated and targeted responses to public safety problems' (Rosenbaum, 2003).

Juxtaposing the theory with the topic of research under reference, it could be seen that the task of building lasting peace in any society is a task that requires an eclectic approach anchored by a mutually dependent relationship between the Nigeria Police and the larger members of the society, who of course live and dine with such criminal elements. They possess first-hand information about crime and criminals, their modus operandi, and sometimes, their intent be it; before, during, or after the commission of a crime. Such a body as the PCRC, can serve as an interface between the Police and the members of the community in understanding the factors leading to a particular conflict, who

are the conflict actors? (both visible and shadow parties) etc. They can even come up with likely solution/s to the conflict at stake with minimal collateral damage to the warring parties in a win-win scenario. This explains the partnership between the police and members of the community (PCRC) in the area of crime prevention and promoting peace-building activities.

Historical Development of Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC)

The Police-Community Relations Community is anchored on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry. Police roles and functions are not simply law enforcement but also include tackling a huge range of community problems (Okoro, 2007). The stage was indeed set for a clear departure from traditional policing, which was reactive and incident-based, to a problem-solving-oriented policing that is proactive with the community as the cornerstone of policing objectives (Abdulrahman and Williams, 2005). The setting up of PCRC was a result of violent crimes such as armed robbery and armed burglary. Therefore, to have a society that is safe and conducive for human development in all ramifications demands creating a synergy between the police as an institution of the state and members of the host community who incidentally constitute a larger percentage of the community.

The challenges of building a society that engenders human development and by extension, the security of the state does not stop at conflict management alone, it goes further to put in place a mechanism for lasting harmonious relationship through the peace-building initiative. It would then be rational and wise that any attempt at conflict management should have a peace-building initiative as its long-term focus. While it could be said that the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) is a recent creation of the Nigerian State that dates back to the year 2004 according to Lanre Ikuteyijo and Kemi Rotimi (2012), however, this is not to say that effort at conflict management and Peace-Building had not started long ago through a synergy between the police and members of the community. The impact of such an effort has stemmed from the rise in criminal activities but has not eradicated it in its entirety.

Arising from this, the Police-Community Relations Committee (PCRC) was established by the Olusegun Obasanjo's regime precisely on 22nd April 2004 (Dudu 2010). It was a pilot program kick-started in Enugu State with Tafa Balogun as the then Inspector General of Police. Dudu (2010) claimed the body was set up when Nigeria was experiencing a high rate of crime, many people were killed and maimed. With the formation of the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) notwithstanding, a new wave of insecurity has continued to bedevil Nigeria in form of trans border crime such as smuggling of arms and ammunition, the proliferation of arms, human trafficking, cross border movement of militant herdsmen ravaging almost every part of the country especially the North-East and the Middle-Belt.

The frustration and helplessness in this regard were openly manifested by the Executive Governor of Benue state, Nigeria Mr. Samuel Ortom in his reaction to killings by armed herdsmen as reported by Channels Television when he told members of internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp in his domain to go home and defend themselves with stone in the face of the ravaging and killer herdsmen onslaught. The same frustration was expressed by former Chief of Army Staff Retired General Theophilus Danjuma in 2018 when he urged the people of Taraba State (North-East Nigeria) to devise means of defending themselves in the face of loss of confidence in the Nigerian Army to defend them against daily killing my herdsmen. The perspective of society as a whole is that the best that law enforcement agencies can do is conflict management through prompt action. However, the nature and extent of police-community antagonism differ from one society to another; from one

government to another, and of course from one police force to another. Among the major determining factors is the social structure of the society, the more unequal and uncaring a social order is the more hostile the relationship between the police and the marginalized sections of the society would be.

Police internal control systems are another factor if the police internal control system is proactive, internalized by police officers, and rigorously enforced through formal and informal mechanisms, the police in that society would be less disposed to antagonizing the communities they serve. The nature, scope, and extent of contact between the police and the community it serves is another factor to consider. If the scope and nature of interactions between the police and the community they serve are restricted to involuntary law enforcement encounters such as arrests, stop and search encounters, detention, etc. the relationship that would ensue from such contacts would be involuntary and hostile. Whereas if the people and the police have other avenues of meeting and understanding each other their relationship would be less hostile and friendly. The role/s of police as either facilitators or inhibitors of change initiatives will depend on the character of their society. In an autocratic and economically inequitable society, the police role will be more to defend the status quo of political oppression and economic injustice.

PCRC, The Nigeria Police and Crime Prevention in Nigeria

The Nigerian Police has not met the minimum demands of democratic policing whose cardinal elements are "justice, equality, accountability and efficiency" (Law Commission of Canada 2002). These elements imply the following: "Justice means that all individuals ought to be treated fairly and their rights are respected. Equality means, first, that all ought to receive policing service sufficient to feel safe in their community. Equality also means that there ought to be representative participation from all members of society in the delivery of policing services, i.e. that it requires equal and inclusive security force. Accountability means that the actions of a body are subjected and that there are formal channels that individuals can use to complain. Finally, efficiency means that services are provided in a cost-effective manner (Law Commission of Canada, 2002).

Owing to the failure or inability of the Nigeria Police and the court systems to successfully tackle the security challenges confronting the country, some state governments began to use alternative dispute resolution techniques. The states in Nigeria unlike other federations like the United States of America are not constitutionally empowered to have their police. Thus, there is only one federal police for the whole of the country making it very difficult if not impossible for the Nigeria police to effectively police or secure over 180 million people with diverse cultures, religions, and languages in a geographical area of 913,075 square kilometres unevenly distributed.

According to the Police Service Commission, (2006), the total number of policemen in Nigeria in 2006 was 315,588 policemen policing over 180 million people this figure implies that approximately one policeman for 475 persons in Nigeria, each covering approximately 2.89 square kilometres on average. Out of these 315,588 policemen in 2006 only 269,164 policemen are rank and files, the greater number of which should have been on patrol and the streets, while the rest should be in offices. But alas of the 269,164 policemen in rank and file in Nigeria Police (NP), a greater percentage of them are bodyguards to politicians, rich people, banks, and other financial institutions. The total number of area commands, divisions, police stations, police posts, and village posts in Nigeria Police (NP) in 2006 are 126, 1,040, 1,598, 2,631, and 3,924, respectively. But in the year 2019, the total

number of police personnel is put at 371,800 but with a plan to increase the force to 650,000 before the end of the year (Police Service Commission, 2019)

This means in a country where there are over 150,000 communities and over two million villages, many communities and villages do not have police posts and village posts. From the foregoing, it becomes impossible for the police to effectively police the length and breadth of Nigeria, let alone implement effective community policing. The bottom line is that Nigeria lacks police officers and police patrols often find themselves fighting against heavily armed robbers who have killed dozens of police officers. The rise in crime and insecurity and sense of low performances by the Nigeria Police (NP) led to the Fourth Republic witnessing the worst violence that has shaken the Nigerian state to its foundation. The challenge of gaining confidence, cooperation, and understanding of the members of the public in that numerous studies conducted on the police-public relations in Nigeria reveals that most of the members of the society had no confidence in the Nigeria Police (NP).

Towards a Sustainable Community Policing in Nigeria: The Role of Police and the Public

Since society creates rules to combat crimes and criminals, law enforcement agencies (the police precisely) are also created to enforce rules that are crafted into law. Community policing is a new paradigm shift for effective policing in Nigeria. It started as a drive to convince the world of the moral necessity to adopt a new method of policing and later became a formal organization devoted to the enforcement of law in the community. The outcome of this moral crusade is the establishment of community policing. On the other hand, members of society must understand the motives and interests of 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 police and community members owe each other a moral obligation to maintain a hitch-free community policing. Onyeozili (2005) noted that full public cooperation with the police is an ingredient necessary for effective law enforcement and order maintenance; but this public co-operation with the police is not given, it has to be earned. Thus, earning and retaining a positive public image requires the police to place the general public's interest as the ultimate and paramount. Although some policemen undoubtedly have a keen interest in stamping out evil, it is probably much more typical for the Nigerian police to have a detached objective view of their job in that manner. In community policing, the interest is not so much focused on preventing evil, they are mainly concerned with executing their job as law enforcement agents and maintaining peace and order. The existence of laws creates justification for community policing as a profession (Okoro, 2007). Like physicians, lawyers, and other professionals in respect of their clients and maintaining a respectful, healthy relationship with them, the police methodically want to justify their work and win the respect of others in society. The police must win respect and recognition from the public; otherwise, their feeling of security on the job would be lost.

Hence, the police devote a great deal of time coercing the public into respecting them. In this manner, an individual (even a law-abiding citizen) may be labelled as deviant or criminal not because he/she broke the law but because he/she did not show respect to the police. In justifying community policing as a profession, community policing agents must demonstrate to the society that the law which they are enforcing is contemporarily valid. The law enforcers must ensure that the law was broken; or else, the enforcement attempts would be ineffective and undemocratic. Indeed, both the Nigerian police and community members should keep abreast of development and ever-changing

trends in political reconstruction, social engineering, and legal dynamics to enable them to unite to achieve sustainable community policing in the country.

This is not far from the stance of the International Code of Enforcement Ethics earlier cited in this work: as a law enforcement officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind and property; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception; the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to respect constitutional rights of all the men to liberty, equity, and justice. But in a situation where violations of rules are widespread and threaten public safety as well as in a volatile neighbourhood, the police can then adopt a repressive approach towards solving social problems. The ineptitude of the police can only be observed in this regard if they refuse or fail to restore good public relationships after the incident(s). Community policing plays positive and significant roles in peace talks, promotion of peaceful coexistence, initiating programs and interventions to check or combat insecurity and threats to public order at the neighbourhood level; hence, the term 'neighbourhood watch'. For the Nigerian police to achieve this end, strategies or programs for effective community policing as previously mentioned in this work must take the centre piece. Also, the impediments identified herein should be critically addressed. When this is done, police will be in a better position to carry out the expectations of the community, and in the process earn or get back the lost reputation, respect, recognition, and cooperation they deserve as law enforcers of the new era.

The public perception of police is still very negative and much needs to be done to positively change the trend. Most of these negativities observed in the policy formation by the public revolve around moral and social turpitudes: bribery and corruption, police brutality, dishonesty, and criminal tendencies, improprieties and inadequacies, complicity and perversion of justice, etc. Generally, the Nigerian police have an image problem, which makes members of the society withdraw their trust, support, and co-operation; disrespect them; cast aspersions on their competence and integrity, and dishonour their position as both bonafide fellow community members and certified law enforcers. The Nigeria police subsystem is characteristically militarized. Police brutality and their involvement in bribery and corruption have particularly earned them the worst reputation and notoriety. This development, coupled with widespread violation of the fundamental rights of citizens with impunity, has not permitted many Nigerians to imbibe the good spirit and moral conscience of forgiving the police.

Conclusion

The importance of security in any state cannot be overlooked as it is an essential component required for any meaningful development to take place. However, since the return to democracy in 1999 the Nigerian State has been enmeshed with different form of conflict, internal resurrection, militancy, crime etc which has made the country unable to achieve its full potential. The different forms of conflict have severally affected the development of the different aspect of the country's social, economic, and political life. The researcher, therefore, concludes that the relative successes achieved by PCRC in some communities in Ogun State should be sustained and it should also be encouraged in all communities in Nigeria. This will most likely promote crime reduction as well as enhance the much-needed effective police-public relations in the country which is required for the much needed development.

The study recommends that the government should take early warning signs seriously and should be more proactive in responding to issues of insecurity in the country. The government should also train the police personnel regularly on modern warfare and crime prevention methods.

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