



Strategy for Effective Community Policing for Grassroot Development

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Abstract

Security has globally been recognized as a very critical aspect of national development. This is based on the fact that every aspect of national growth and development is dependent on the level of peace, security and the extent to which citizens feel secured in their various communities in particular and the society at large. Community policing, however, is considered a significant tool and step further towards the achievement of national security through the effective policing of communities and localities. The central idea of this paper is to examine strategies for effective implementation and strengthening of community policing for grassroot development. This paper started with the examining the concept of community policing and then provided an overview of contemporary and emerging strategies for strengthening community policing as a policy in Nigeria. It also discussed the meaning of grassroot development. The paper climaxed by identifying and discussing the strategies for effective implementation and strengthening community policing in Nigeria in relation to grassroot development.

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Introduction

Community policing is the systematic involvement and inclusion of credible local guards, vigilance groups, able-bodied civilian youths, and traditional rulers and chiefs. The central purpose of community policing is to achieve a far-reaching success in crime prevention and control at the grassroots. Community policing has gained so much attention in the recent past as community stakeholders search for a more effective ways to promote safety of lives and properties in the community. Community policing can only thrive where every member of the community participate in crime prevention and problem solving efforts in the community which is central to the idea of community policing. Community policing in other words is community member's participation, engagement or involvement of individual community members and stakeholders in crime management in the community. According to World Health Organization community participation is "a process by which people are enabled to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them, in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, formulating, implementing policies, planning, developing and delivering services and ultimately taking action to achieve change". Community policing begins with community participation that is involving the community members in identifying the security problems and risk.

Community policing is critical to the sustenance of social order in communities, more importantly due to the increasing demand for state police as a result of the inefficiency of the current structure of crime management in communities which put rural community members at disadvantage point as most communities lack police presence.

According to Osayekemwen and Adeoluwa residents of a particular community are more likely than others to be able to easily identify and track down those who commit crime within their immediate socioeconomic environment because they have a thorough knowledge and understanding of their neighbourhoods.

Grassroots development is referred to as the process where disadvantaged people organize themselves for the seemingly purpose of improving their social, cultural and economic well-being. The concept of grassroots development is based on the fact that the key to a sustainable social order is equitable distribution of resources and a people-oriented policy and strategy that emphasizes the participation of all members of the community.

According to Diwe grassroots development refers to a process where underserved individuals organize locally to enhance the well-being of their families, communities, and societies. It involves a people-oriented approach that emphasizes community participation, networking, and strengthening local organizations to address various social, cultural, and economic needs. Grassroots development is characterized by bottom-up decision-making, focusing on community needs, values, and knowledge to achieve sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

In community development practice, it is rudimentary that the solution to community problems is sought first within the community relying on its resources and capabilities. Thus, when people are adequately informed about opportunities that abound within and outside their locality, they will be further persuaded to take practical steps towards harnessing such opportunities to better their lot. The notion of grassroots development, therefore, operates on the notion that those living at the periphery where poverty, hunger, disease, and other socio-economic vices are more pronounced need to be sensitized, energized, and motivated to participate in development programmes and projects capable to improve their quality of their lives.

In ensuring the realization of a more equitable security of lives and properties in rural communities the level of participation of community members in crime prevention and management in their community through community policing must improve considerably as most urban communities are more policed than rural ones because no community can develop in the absence of peace and security. Otherwise the dream of transforming grassroots to city centres or urban areas will be difficult. This, therefore implies that community policing must be properly implemented in various communities in order to increase the level of security of lives and properties. It is against this background that this paper seeks to address strategies for effective implementation of community policing for grassroots development.

Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing as a security policy in Nigeria is done under the express supervision of the Nigerian Police Force because the police provides the guidelines and models for its operation through regular interphase with the community members. Community policing is faced with several obstacles as every other policy of government; namely, nepotism, bribery and corruption.

According to Otu and Aro Police as an organisation in Nigeria is facing serious obstacles which have continued to affect its legitimacy and the performance of its functions of crime prevention, control, or management. These challenges include poor funding by the government, systemic corruption and 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.

According to Hess, Markson and Stein as cited by Ordu and

Nnam (2017) ^[18] politicians, business elite and community leaders are not as policed as the poor and underprivileged are being policed, this has led to the fears expressed by the public and community members as regards the idea of community policing that if the community controls its own internal security those charged with the duty of securing lives and properties in the community will abuse such office. Again Alemika as cited by Ordu and Nnam (2017) ^[18] argued that the negative community perception of police has impacted on their performances. The community sometimes turns against the police when they use coercion to secure social control. The police using force or violence to sustain its authority will invariably arouse negative attitudes of the public towards the police.

According to the Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria the police play important role without which the sustenance of order, legality, development and democracy may be difficult. The police have over the years ride on the above understanding in its operation but however sometimes negatively due to its excessive use of force and threatening of harmless citizens because many of them see themselves as above the law they are to uphold this has led to the impasse between the public and the police.

Another significant obstacle to effective community policing is again the public loss of trust and confidence in the police and its authority. It could be seen that community members have lost confidence in police due to police brutality, bribery and corruption, coerciveness, and lack of proper channels of communication. As a result, the community no longer see the police as a valuable instrument for the maintenance of peace and order. When the police alienate themselves from the community, the relationship becomes rigid, and this presents police to the community as aliens. When crime occurs in the community, the community alienate themselves from the police, and it becomes very difficult to locate or identify the perpetrators without the help and cooperation of the community. This situation is particularly antithesis to the philosophy of police public partnership.

Apparently, 'godfatherism' in Nigeria is an Achilles' heel in community policing. The community policing and other activities of the police are influenced by meddling political godfathers, who like to direct the pendulum of policing, law, security and justice in the country-this process or activity is referred to as 'godfatherism'. To some observers like godfatherism is the "funding and abetting of vices and shielding connected criminals from justice by government agents and highly placed officials entrusted with the power and authority to investigate and prosecute such vices". When some powerful Nigerians nurture and incubate criminals, the police are presented with the situation of not being successful in removing the criminals from the community.

Strategies for Effective Implementation and Strengthening of Community Policing for Grassroots Development

If security reforms in Nigeria is to be effective, key institutional reforms such as community policing must be strategically implemented. The effectiveness of the community policing system however depends to a large extent on the decentralization of authority as to crime prevention, prosecution and management, regular and proper orientation, evaluation, and re-evaluation. Folashade, Okeshola, Patience and Mudiare (2019) emphasized that community policing is anchored on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry. However, that

implies that the role and function of the police should not simply be law enforcement alone, but also to tackle community problems.

Contemporary Strategies of Community Policing

1. **Police-community partnership programmes:** This is a strategy emphasizes that the public should be a serious partner in policing the community. Through the citizen advisory committees, which open channels of communication between the police and the public. Ren, Cao, Lovrich and Gaffney (2015) are of the view that this programme gives the police the opportunity to meet with local residents and actors in order to discuss crime in the neighbourhood and how to use personal initiative to solve problems. In Nigeria, for instance, true representatives of citizen advisory committees are traditional rulers and members of their cabinet, town union and opinion leaders, and youth leaders. The committees meet regularly with police to discuss their welfare, crime related problems, 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 police in the fight against crime and criminals within their communities. When this synergy is formed, the general public "may find that officers are more respectful of citizenry; a condition that helps lower the number of complaints and improves community relations" (Davis, Mateu-Gelabert and Miller, 2017). In relation to grassroot development, the police-community partnership helps to forge a strong relationship between the two parties which is very critical for the peaceful existence of the community. Through this partnership, a clear cut and regular rapport between the police and community members is established.
2. **Police-community information sharing:** This strategy emphasizes that for effective community policing Information sharing between the police and the community members must be maintained. Information sharing provides the basic and necessary information for investigation of crime. Citizens' participation in information sharing with the police will assists in gathering socio-demographic data that could help to control the errors and difficulties sometimes encountered in the course of identifying criminals within the community. Igbuzor (2020) stressed the need for strategic policing and explained that strategic policing is a situation where the police adopts proactive and preventive methods of crime prevention e.g. preventive patrols. It has been recognized that the key to success in policing is making better use of information about criminal activity whether the information comes from the police, the public or even the criminals themselves. The police-community information sharing tends to provide police with vital crime information about a suspect and his or her activities and whereabouts. This development, undoubtedly, is useful in solving multitude of challenges confronting community policing in Nigeria. The essence of information sharing in community policing is to either deter crime before it occurs or tracks down offender and at the long-run achieve huge success in crime reduction. Crime reduction in any community will, no doubt, boost the

confidence of community members both at home and in diaspora. It will encourage them to reside in and invest more in their community. In addition, a relatively crime free community is more likely to attract foreign investment which will lead to the development of various skills and talents within the community and even increase employment of community members, thereby encouraging grassroot development.

3. **The police involvement in community affairs:** The police involvement in community affairs is very useful for grassroot development. When members of the police force consider themselves as members of their host communities and sincerely get involved in community activities like indigenes themselves, a sense of familiarity and oneness is developed. This transcends to the development of a level of trust and cooperation from community members which is expected to increase as police involvement deepens. It is only when trust is earned that community can freely provide necessary information that will help the police prevent crimes or arrest criminals. Police involvement will also help the police force to understand the nature and culture of their host community members and with this, workout modalities on how to solve the problem of insecurity in the community which will create avenue for socio-economic development in the grassroots.

Emerging Strategies for Effective Community Policing

1. **Community Partnership:** Community policing in Nigeria is required to empower neighbourhood citizens to engage in crime prevention. This is achieved through active cooperation between the police and members of the neighbourhood in attempt to gather and share intelligence information to solve crime related or disorderly issues. This conformed to Ikuteyijo (2009) ^[9] who maintained that police-community partnerships formed in support of community crime prevention efforts shall always provide a framework for engaging citizens to assist the law enforcement agent in gaining wide and easy access into valuable community information.
2. **Inter/Intra Community Partnerships:** Communities can collaborate to fight a common cause especially the issue of insecurity. This approach utilizes inter community relationships to ensure peace and safety. In other words community A and B or C can partner with equal commitment and responsibility to fight insecurity within their localities and borders. According to Oyitso (2013) ^[16] Peace is the cornerstone or pillar that supports a harmonious existence of family, community or a country. Thus when communities are at peace there is room for partnership that will in turn ensure grassroot development.
3. **Community Engagement:** According to Okiro (2007) ^[15], community engagement is inseparable from police-community partnership. It is a major point of departure from the incidence-based traditional policing in Nigeria to engage neighbourhood stakeholders for effective control and management of crime. By engaging the neighbourhood residents, the police will not just have easy and timely access to covert crime related information; but, the police are able to engage the neighbourhood teamwork spirit to keep peace, maintain security and sustain mutual relationship and public trust.

This view is conformed to Kelling that the ability of community members to produce dynamic neighbourhood watch network and protect them against predators are stimulated by police. This was also the position of who posited that the police need to pay much attention to how communities mobilise and develop trust for engaging in police-public teamwork policing.

4. **Self-Help:** Arase (2018) ^[3] remarked, the idea of community policing as a shift from the pre- colonial traditional policing perspective has a lot of charming things to bear. Most importantly, it hugs on 'do-it-yourself' way of control and management of crime. What this implies is for the Nigerian police force to genuinely allow members of the neighbourhood to participate in keeping the peace, securing and protecting their communities. Omoruyi (2008) ^[17] Self-help also implies self-reliance that is the capacity of the communities must be improved to ensure their own security and development.

Conclusion

Community policing is a veritable tool in combatting crime and providing security for various communities in Nigeria. The nature of the system is that community members are expected to play role in securing their community. Unlike the traditional policing structure where security was left in the hands of policemen alone, community policing officially recognises community members in the security architecture and requires their full involvement in preventing crime through identification of crime spots, reporting unlawful activities and providing information about dubious characters within the community. This is based on the fact that most crimes have their roots tied to one locality of the other. Though community policing in Nigeria is faced with several obstacles which tend to limit the effectiveness of this system, it can, however, achieve its goals and objectives through a conscious and deliberate implementation of community policing strategies such as police-community partnership, police-community information sharing police, and community involvement in police affairs and recruitment, and very importantly inter and intra community partnership in crime prevention and management.

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