Understanding Community Policing in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This work addressed the concept of community policing. The objective of this work was to explicate the concept of community policing in terms of its definitional components which involve providing: comprehensive or full service, personalized service, decentralized service, citizen empowerment, proactive collaborations; and problem-solving approaches to address the issues of improving quality of life. The work explained the above concepts one by one as they relate to the new policing objective. This study utilized secondary source of information. The data obtained from secondary source of information were discussed. This discussion showed that community policing broadens the scope and number of police functions compared with the traditional policing style anchored on militaristic approach. Community policing is culture bound and its operational modality is a function of community needs and priorities. However, irrespective of its operational locations, community policing shares the same set of core values of crime prevention, control and people's empowerment. In community policing, serious crimes are handled uniformly.

Key words: Community policing, police, public, citizen, collaborative, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community policing was introduced in Nigeria on the 6th day of September, 2004, while addressing officers, men and women of the Nigeria police service in Jos, by the former Inspector- General of police Tafa Balogun. The purpose of introducing the concept of community policing in Nigeria is to change the features of law enforcement and make policing to be down-up in terms of decision making and decision implementation (Balogun, 2004). This means changing from reactive style- responding to distress calls to proactive style of policing where the benchmark is controlling crime before it occurs and creating opportunities for all the ranks, the public, the citizens and any agency that may care to contribute to the policing process. Impliedly, decision making is not based on hierarchy.

In Nigeria, community policing has become a product of police reformation and hence a policing style (Odo, 2009). It is planned that the police are expected to be more sensitive, civil and courtesy to the public than before the introduction of community policing in Nigeria (Balogun: 2004). The police are also expected to adopt consultative, collaborative and problem-solving approaches and integrate police core values with community priorities and methods of policing. Community policing as designed will create forums in which people from various profiles of life come together to find ways of ensuring that their communities are safe, clean, healthy and prosperous (Balogun: 2004). The main concern of community policing is for the police to collaborate with the community, encourage them so that they can take charge of the portion of the policing responsibility and the difficult task of making their neighbourhoods safer (Trojanicz, 1980). Impliedly, community policing captures police forging collaborative actions with the residents, business owners,

community leaders, government departments and agencies; and the public with a view to eradicating crime and improving the quality of life in the community (Balogun, 2004).

Supporting war on crime is one of the civic roles of the public, while crime control and prevention is statutory obligation of the police (Ollorwi, 2004). For the public to fulfill their security role obligations, they must demonstrate working hand in hand with the police through collaborative actions needed for the delivery of security goals. The fundamental issue in community policing is that while police obviously provide leadership and direction, community policing is anchored on the co-operation between the police and the community based on the understanding of the police and the public.

In order to sustain this blood of co-operation, police must appreciate the fact that the police are the people and the people are the police by dumping the notion that the people are "idle civilians" and substituting it with "collaborative civilians" who can promote security pursuits in their respective domains. Community policing, when solidly instituted will reduce fear of crime, help organize neighbourhoods to reduce or even stop local crimes, improve community and police-community relations and even control more serious crimes that are about to be committed (Murray, 2013). Community policing is not a security outfit.

What then is community policing?

Objective

The objective of the work was to explain community policing from its definitional components.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

We utilized secondary source of information. We used documentary data from textbooks, journal articles, government documents and internet materials. Data from these sources were discussed.

Community Policing

Community policing is not a policing style that is meant for a particular profile of the community. It is an integrative policing formulated to be all embracing. It is a policing process that broadens the traditional police mandate anchored on responding to crime incidents and widens the scope of approaching crime to embrace solving community problems, encouraging the people in the community so that an average citizen can contribute meaningfully to the policing process in exchange for their support and participation (Trojanowicz, 1980). Community policing arose consequent upon the new thinking of the police as new pluralistic functional social agency working to reduce the despair of poverty, close the gap between the public and the police by promoting their interaction and at the same time maintain the professional models support for education and research (Patterson, 1980). It is full service provider, personalized and decentralized to work proactively and collaboratively with police, the community, the public and the citizens at solving the problems of crime, fear of crime, disorder, decay and empowerment of people to enhance their quality of life (Fridell and Wycoff 2006:1)

Providing comprehensive or full service implies that the services of community policing officers are available for 24 hours a day, and 7-day a week. Community policing is more civilianized, community focused, and conducts random house calls or performs home visits, and institutional visits. It is a policing system that moves away from fighting crime as its primary focus and performs wider function that includes reduction of fear of crime and maintenance of order and domestic peace or tranquility and positive empowerment.

Providing personalized service means that police officers, citizens, residents; and other interested stake holders should know each other as much as practicable. Community policing recognizes community cultural variations and posits that police follow the will of the community when handling any observed security challenges and enforcing the law. However, police must handle serious crimes uniformly. In order to be close to the people, the police establish zones known as beats where community policing officers are posted for some specified periods depending on cultural and social considerations. This positing is based on the assumption that this fosters better understanding and easy communication with the citizens and residents. This enables the

community policing officers to understand, prevent and respond to community problems through town hall meetings and home visits.

Decentralizing management may imply several management actions like: permanent shift duties, creation of beats areas or zones, permitting first-line officers the autonomy and freedom to initiate ideas and make decisions; job enlargement and enrichment, grass root and lower level decision making and policy making (Fridell and WyCoff (2004). Community policing is "bottom-up" management with implications for the removal of hierarchical structure. It involves participatory management. Decentralization of management allows policy to be driven by custom and conventions as articulated by first-line officers. Bicycle, motorcycle; and foot patrols are utilized to promote decentralized community policy management.

In community policing, empowering people means Community with a capital "C." self-esteem, responsibility and maturity levels that are expected to increase as community policing helps people to become more active at taking charge of their life (Fridell and Wycoff, 2024). This means that those who have least gained from the police services in the past now feel protected and enfranchised. Impliedly, community policing means identifying and prioritizing the needs of special population so that these people feel they have "input to make". It also implies that as a result of respect they receive, they are more determined to co-operate when the police need their input, and they are more determined to accept responsibility for the things they can- that is police themselves. This means engaging the community and community engagement must take place with the police encouraging, motivating or inducing citizens to become involved; and that means building a caring community. In particular, empowering people means organizing teaching cultural values and civics to establish citizen's roles in the community development. It also involves organizing career sessions for the youths in the community and establishing skill acquisition centres for the youths in the community. It also means mounting health improvement campaigns in the community (Odo, 2023).

Under proactive collaborations, the police, the public the citizens and other agencies make joint efforts to bring back those who are on the negative side of the community. This can be sourced by the police creating positive impact on the community. This means that police allow the public and the citizens to decide upon the police role and mandate as community policing is a function of the cultures of their locational operations. In addition, the police go further to create citizen advisory boards, citizen academies, citizen review boards and any action that help to transform the lifestyle of the people from negative to positive. The police encourage the citizens to be involved in neighbourhood watch, youth education, and cleanup programmes.

On solving community problems, police have to provide explanatory reasons to the public on why certain actions are taken and not the other actions. It also means creating opportunities or providing information on the available career opportunities. There are certain social problems that generate crime and these are: crime itself, the fear of crime, disorder, decay, and quality of life (Fridell and Wycoff, 2004). Community policing takes care of these problems to reduce crime in the community.

With crime itself, police provide information concerning citizen understanding for when charges will be filed and when non-arrest options will be used to settle some social disorders. The failure of the police to provide information that explains when charges will be filed and why non arrest options are used to handle some situations will generate another crime consequent upon the negative reactions of the citizens against police actions The purpose of this explanation is to ensure that the community understands the police actions.

Another social problem, is fear of crime. Fear of crime is associated a feeling that an area is unsafe for human habitation. This scares people away from the area and the area becomes isolated. In effect the area constitutes a hay for criminals. In order to solve the problem of fear of crime, the police encourage installing road lights and neighbourhood watch programmes; and go further to approve citizen patrols, safe house and even defense training for security volunteers.

Disorder constitutes another social problem. Social disorder pertains to a community that is ridden with noise, disobedience, drug abuse, alcoholic abuse and traffic abuse. Community policing handles this problem by outreach-that is social work style policing. It also manages this problem by school liaison programmes, mentoring or tutoring, gang summits; and intra mural recreation programmes.

Decay is another community problem. It is physical defacing of the environment like: litter, vandalism, graffiti, abandoned buildings, broken windows, dark alleys. Community policing addresses the problem of decay by organizing and coordinating citizen clean-up and clear-up porgrammes.

Quality of life is another factor which the community faces. The concept of quality of life in this context pertains to the comprehensive state of well-being and satisfaction experienced by the people; and it embraces assurance of income, knowledge and skill development, adequate security and absence of war of any sort and availability of public utilities. Quality of life is managed through public relations as efforts to portray that the community has become a better and not a bad place to live. Community policing further involves police initiating educational and economic improvement programmes. Specifically, community policing helps to organize academic remediation or preparation programmes, job fair and career days.

Community policing broadens the scope and number of police functions compared with the traditional policing hinged on militaristic approach. It addresses organizational change, active solving of problems and outside partnership in order to address the issues that involve the police, the public the community and the citizens. Community policing shifts the focus of policing hinged on responding to distress calls by placing equal emphasis on crime control, order maintenance and service delivery (Stephens and Hartman, 2002). In effect, community policing in Nigeria is planned to substitute reactive approach to policing with proactive approach to policing where the focus is on crime prevention before it occurs.

Community policing is circumscribed in the model which posits that policing is visible and accessible (project Plan, 2024). Project plan (2004) states that selected patrol officers are assigned permanently to small areas of zones usually known as beats with delegated responsibility for policing that area in Nigeria. Community policing is designed in such a way that these visibility patrols are conducted ordinarily on foot to interact with the public, gain confidence and cooperation of citizen; and develop local knowledge) Project Plan 2004). The purpose of patrol activity according to the project plan (2004) is to be preventive and provide public reassurance. Patrolling is packaged to be directed and focused on clear objectives, not aimless and undirected. The demeanor of patrol officer is not to make arrest but to enable citizens feel free to seek police assistance and co-operation. Community policing officer acts as a problem solver and as ombudsman to other public and private agencies that can render help (Bucqueneux, 1980). Under community policing, community policing officers are groomed to act as family physicians who visit homes to ascertain the security challenges facing the people.

In all, community policing according to Skolunick and Bayley (1988) hinges on:

- Community based crime prevention through the use of citizen education, nighbourhood watch.
- Reorientation of patrols from being focused on distress response strike force to a greater emphasis on proactive approaches,
- Enhanced police accountability to the citizens they were employed to serve; and
- Decentralization of command and decision making and implementation; and public authority with discretion allowed to lower ranking officers and given more chance to initiate and implement actions.

Community policing is a total quality governance. A type of governance that asks the police to work with the entire citizens and with other government agencies in efforts to improve the overall security situation in the community. Community policing is culture bound; and its operational morality is a function of the environmental priorities (Odo; 2022). Impliedly, local policing models vary and evolve according to the differing needs of differing communities (Balogun, 2004). However, community policing irrespective of the operational locations maintains the same set of core values of crime prevention, control and people's empowerment.

Objectives of Community Policing

The objectives of community policing as articulated by Fridell and Wycoff (2004) consist of: supporting people with special needs, preparing for the futures, decentralized, and personalized policing, giving responsibility, establishing trust with the public; and attitudinal change.

Attitudinal change: Community policing transforms police from officer: insensitivity to sensitivity, incivility to civility; and discourtesy to courtesy towards the public and the citizens. Community policing takes into cognizant that people deserve making inputs into police process in exchange for their participation and support. It also recognizes that the solutions of today's community problems require making the people and the police to explore creative new ways to handle neighbourhood concerns.

Establishing trust with the public: community policing recognizes that the contributions the public make to the police process are reliable. It also recognizes that both the public and the police are friends who can help each other.

Assigning responsibility: Under community policing citizens and residents are asked to handle more of their minor problems themselves but in exchange. This will create avenue for police to work with the people in developing immediate as well as long term solutions for community challenges in ways that promote mutual understanding and respect.

Decentralized policing: In order to ensure that every body benefits from police, police departments must create sub departments in the hinterlands. Community policing officers who act as the link between the police and the public are posted to these sub-departments or beats. These officers do not use isolation patrol cars so that they can maintain daily, direct face-to-face contact with the people they serve in a clearly defined beat area. Bicycle, motorcycle; and foot patrol are the major approaches that are necessary for implementing decentralized policing.

Personalized policing: Community policing as planned ensures that community policing officers act as physicians to institutions, organizations, and homes. They pay visits to these places from time to time to ascertain the level of security health and offer necessary advice.

Preparing for the future: Community policing recognizes that police cannot impose order on the community from outside; but that people must be encouraged to think of the police as resource that can be used in helping to solve contemporary community problems. Community policing as planned provides flexibility to meet community needs and priorities as they change over time.

Supporting those with special needs: community policing recognizes the importance of protecting and promoting the lives of those who are most vulnerable the elderly, the minorities, the poor the disabled and the homeless.

Reasons for Introducing Community Policing in Nigeria

There are two theoretical foundations for introducing community policing in Nigeria as identified by the policing project plan (2004). These reasons are both philosophical and pragmatic.

Philosophically, the project plan (2004) asserts that any police organization that seeks to serve democratic and humanitarian ideal must be transparent, fair, apolitical, accountable and responsive to public perceptions and expectations. Thus, in instituting democratic governance, community policing must possess the features of "police service" rather their "the police force" where the most significant benchmark of performance is public satisfaction trust; and confidence (Project plan, 2004). In the present democratic process, the police are expected to rely on goodwill and co-operation of the masses when carrying out their assigned functions. They are expected to operate within the environment of their statutory powers and what is more respond to the mandate of the people in the discharge of their duties. Moving closer to the people fulfills community policing mandate to build trust with the consumers of their services (Bucqueroux, 1980).

Programmatically, project plan (2004) posits that policing today tends to be proactive policing. Proactive policing in the sense that efforts are made to ensure that cases of crimes and anti-social behaviours are stopped or at worst reduced before they occur. Community policing emphasizes organizational improvement, active problem solving and external collaborations to address the issues that concern improving the security situation in the community. The project plan (2004) asserts that the traditional approach to policing which tends to be reactive and exclusively law enforcement based is ultimately not effective in controlling crime and anti-social

behaviours within the community. Reactive policing style encourages an alienating police culture where the police and the public develop "them and us" mentality towards each other. The implication of this is that the police image suffers and citizens with draw their voluntary support and co-operation. With organizational improvement there will be public support and co-operation and the efforts of the community policing officers will be valid.

Another reason which we present here is that community policing is 360-degree policing. This technique can also be called circular policing. It is a systematic policing that is focused on all directions at the same time. It has no limit or boundary it spreads towards all directions with the sole aim of reducing security challenges in the community. Community policing is infinitely symmetrical in the pursuance of security challenges.

CONCLUSION

Community policing is a new concept in the development of police service in Nigeria. The main purpose of introducing community policing in Nigeria is to improve the features of law enforcement by changing from military command notion to one that is more civilianized or civilian –oriented. By this, the police recognize that the police are the people and the people are the police. It also makes the management of policing to be non-hierarchically based.

Community policing is unlike task force or committee affair. It has come to stay as a police reformation that will eventually be transformed to police style in Nigeria. This style of policing that is consultative, collaborative and problem solving in nature requires the active participation of all-the police, the public, the citizen, and any agency that can help. The conceptualization of community policing was based on its functions and approaches like: providing comprehensive service, providing personalized service, empowering the people, adopting decentralization of management, and adopting proactive collaborations.

The objectives of community policing are anchored on: attitudinal change for example, from officer insensitivity to officer sensitivity to community needs and priorities, responsibility and trust for instance the public are asked to address more of their minor problems themselves; decentralized and personalized for example, the community policing officers maintain daily, direct face-to-face contact with the people they serve in a clearly designated beat areas; building for the future for instance community policing provides a plan to meet community needs and concerns as the time demands and helping those with special need for example, community policing protects those who are weak, the minorities, the poor; and the disabled.

Project plan (2004) posited two reasons that prompted the introduction of community policing in Nigeria as philosophical and pragmatic and we added the third reason as being 360-degree policing. Philosophical in the sense that any police establishment promoting democratic governance must be transparent, fair and responsive to public perception. Pragmatic in the sense that community policing is proactive and does not wait for crime to occur before finding the solutions and being 360 degree policing in the sense that community policing focuses on all directions for its operations. It can also be called circular policing.

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