

Community Government and Police Public Relations: Agenda for Effective Security in Nigeria

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Abstract: There has been a growing realization that effective security in various communities in Nigeria could only be guaranteed through effective partnership between the community leadership and the Nigeria Police Force. This partnership is needed to ensure cordiality between the officers and men of the force and members of the community, who could assist the force in intelligence gathering to make for proactive policing. Regrettably, there has been poor police public relations which have undermined security situations in various communities leading to loss of lives and valuable properties of the people. This study is therefore geared towards examining critical role of community government in promoting police public relations for effective security. To realize this objective, qualitative methodology was adopted as data for the study were mainly obtained from textbooks, articles from reputable journals, official publications, newspaper reports, as well unpublished materials. Critical analysis of data obtained revealed that ineffective security situations in most of our communities could be partly blamed on the poor police public relations as exemplified in non-involvement of community leaders in taking critical security decisions. Moreso, the ugly impression created overtime about the police has continued to discourage the members of community to volunteer security information (tip off) to police for immediate action, hence the carnage that is now a current decimal in the society. It is against the above backdrop that some recommendations were proffered – that there should be participation of the community government in the process of making security decisions as well as in the course of implementation so as to drum support to the force in its war against crimes in communities; that there should always be a joint security meeting involving the police, communities leadership and community members to rekindle public trust and confidence in the force; that the police should not only rehearse the clause “the police are your friends” but should also start demonstrating it in their actions. These measures are essential to shore up security in our various communities.

Key words: Community Government • Police • Police Public Relations • Community Policing • Security

INTRODUCTION

History has it that prior to the discovery of Agriculture, the early man migrated from one location to another for hunting and gathering expeditions to fend for himself. With the discovery of Agriculture, he (man) was sure of his next meal; his living condition improved just as there was significant increase in his population. The upsurge in his population gave rise to the formation of communities. To [1], Agriculture has always been fingered as the primary factor that led to the formation of communities or towns. She maintained that the emergence

of communities would not have been possible without such occupation that encourages settlement in a specific location.

The concept of community has received attention of scholars, which has made it difficult to have a generally acceptable definition. To [2], a community is seen as a group of people who live within a specific geographical area such as village, town, or city, a neighbourhood or even a whole state. She maintained that community from the above definition, could be perceived from two senses – First, it portrays it as a social unit and second, it suggests a geographical entity. As a social unit, such

group of people are so closely knit and organized in such a way that there develops a strong feeling of communality. As a geographical entity, community exists in a defined geographical area. [3], opined that a community is a group of people living together as a group of social unit within a larger one and having interest, work, etc in common. It could be grasped from the above that a community simply means a group of people who share common descent, attitude, language, culture, tradition, belief system and in most cases occupy a given geographical location. As a result of their oneness, closeness, etc there is usually tendency that each member of the community gets acquainted with other members.

It has become customary for each community to have leadership structure. Thus, there exists community government (Development Unions or Town Union government) that ensures effective administration of the affairs of communities. Community leadership works in consonance with other important organs (stakeholders) of the community such as the traditional rulers, title holders, age grades, etc to engender the overall wellbeing of the people. It equally extends its hands of fellowship to other neighbouring communities for purpose of peaceful co-existence. In some cases, the community leadership has served as a go-between the government, its agents and the community members.

To ensure peaceful co-existence among people and as well guarantee protection of lives and properties against criminally minded elements, there are usually laid down codes of conduct, otherwise known as rules and regulations determined overtime to serve as guide to human conducts. It is noteworthy that most of those rules and regulations are not codified in a specific document. Nevertheless, the rules prescribe and proscribe social behaviours which are acceptable and unacceptable respectively in the community. Stringent sanctions are put forward for the punishment of defaulters in the event of contravention of the approved behavioural pattern. The above social control measures are aimed at ensuring protection of lives and properties otherwise known as security. Security implies freedom from threat or violence which could result in loss of lives and valuable properties [4].

However, inspite of the existence of those rules of human conducts, there have been cases of outright violation of such rules of conduct. There have been crimes and abnormal behaviours that have often undermined peace and security of lives and properties of

the people. Even with the presence of law enforcement agents (police), such die hard criminal elements have continued to unleash terror on the community members. It has been argued that insecurity has assumed dangerous dimension in our various communities to the extent that there have been numerous cases of killing of innocent souls, destruction of properties, broad daylight robbery, mischief making, aggressive behavioural tendencies, among others. This ugly development appears to be compounded by poor image of the security agents (police) as the community members have consistently perceived them as enemies and had refused to divulge vital security information to them. In other words, the relationship between the police and general public has not been cordial, hence the failure of the people to see the police in good light with its attendant adverse consequences on effective security of communities.

It has to be emphasized that every community requires adequate security to guarantee protection of lives and properties since development could elude any community where violence and crimes have assumed disproportionate dimensions. This calls to mind the importance of effective police public relations. By police public relations, it is meant an aspect of management of the police organization which seeks to forge positive interpersonal relationship between the force and its general public. It is generally believed that with adequate sensitization of the community members that the police are their friends, people may tend to see the security agents as dependable allies who could be given tip off with regards to any perceived security threats. This cordiality may not be attainable without the critical role of community government, who as pointed out earlier acts as a liaison between the police and people. As the community leadership is composed in most cases of people with unquestionable character, knowledge and exposure, they are in a better position to help assist in public enlightenment of the people on the need for cordiality between them (community members) and the police so as to enhance security of lives and properties. It is a known fact that security of communities means security of the local government areas and security of all the communities is tantamount to national security. It is in view of the foregoing, that this research intends to justify the imperative of community government/town union government in enhancing Police Public Relations for effective security.

The Nigeria Police Force: Origin and Meaning: There is no society or community however backwards without some forms of security outfits entrusted with the onerous function to maintain law and order and ensure safety of lives and properties. Thus, the indigenous peoples of Nigeria had their peculiar form of policing prior to the advent of the whites which is referred to as Tribal Custom Police System that functionally prepared youths for active participation in the maintenance of peace and security in the society.

It is argued that the objectives of this form of police system were many and varied but the overall goal was to produce able bodied men who could ensure the preservation and maintenance of public safety, law and order; who are honest, respectful, skilled and conform to societal acceptable standard of behaviour. Examples of such tribal custom police are the Ekpe in Calabar, Ekpo in Ibibio and Okonkwo in Arochukwu. This form of police was operational before the emergence and superimposition of institutionalized police system in Nigeria.

Sequel to the coming of the white and the imposition of their colonial administration, the tribal police system was replaced with institutionalized police system. In the words of Nmesle, the Nigeria Police Force was established on the 1st of April 1930 for the fundamental purpose and strategy of sustaining, promoting and ensuring the socio-politico-economic empire of British in Nigeria.

With the attainment of Nigerian independence in 1960, she inherited the institutionalized police system. In this form of policing, the state instead of the individual or loosely organized body is charged with the function to preserve and maintain public safety, law and order in the society. This new system created formal structure of police administration and has been instrumental in enthrone sustainable security of lives and properties.

However, a police or the police according to Jaja (1985), implies a member or members of the police force entrusted with the responsibility of prevention, detection of crime, the apprehension of offender, the preservation of law and order, the protection of lives and properties, with due enforcement of all laws and regulations; the performance of such military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required of them by the Federal Government. Police is a body of civilian who are uniformed and not secret agents, exercising in their own person the authority of law and responsible for their own action under the law and not answerable to any private persons or body of persons, but to government whose mission it is to ensure crime prevention and detection

rather than punishment. We can safely argue that a police is a uniformed person whose function is to ensure prevention and detection of crimes and who is responsible to government for his actions or inactions.

Functions of the Nigeria Police Force: The functions of the Nigeria Police in crime control, prevention and detection are as outlined hereunder:

- Prevention and detection of crime.
- It is responsible for apprehension of offenders.
- The police also see to the preservation of law and order in the society.
- The police ensure the protection of people's lives and properties.
- It is charged with the enforcement of all the laid down laws in the country.
- The police perform military functions/duties within and outside the shores of Nigeria as may be required by the federal government.

It has been argued that the main reason for establishing the Nigeria Police Force is to maintain law and order and to protect the lives and properties of Nigerian citizens. Thus, section 194 [1] of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended provides that the Nigeria Police Force shall have powers and duties as conferred upon it by law. The function of police is so enormous that they supervise through patrol all activities of members of the society so as achieve effective policing. Johnson and Gregory (1971), highlighted the role of the police in the following manner – She or he is a friend and a protector. He or she assures safety on the streets and keeps the peace. You call him/her when you are in trouble, when your neighbours are making too much noise, or when your property is lost. The police is also seen as a foe and a repressor. He/she inhibits your freedom; charges you when you violate a law, or illegally parked; He/she comes to your house to quiet you down when your neighbours complain about noise; investigates; and interrogates you when you are suspected of or involved in some forms of illegal activity. The list is endless. This scenario though a reflection of American society is obtainable as the role of the police in the contemporary Nigerian society.

The police are charged with the responsibility to enforce all laws irrespective of whether citizens want to be policed or not. The police are established solely to ensure harmony and security of lives and property in the every social setting.

Police-Public Relations: There is no gain saying the fact that cordial relations between the police and the public is sine-qua-non for effective security in Nigeria. This is so because the cordiality could make for prompt information exchange that is essential in police intelligence gathering. The reverse could be the case when people nurse mutual distrust against the security agents. Unfortunately, the public image of the Nigeria Police Force has been anything but good. The general public right from the period of independence has perceived it as oppressive force whose stock in trade was to satisfy the inordinate desires of the elites. For instance, the British employed the colonial police force in various colonial wars and punitive expeditions. The force was unreasonably used to maintain the exploitation and repression of labour during the same period. Moreso, the police was frequently used to scuttle, disperse and break strikes which had resulted in the demise of several workers during the Enugu Colliery Strike in 1949. The list is endless.

The brutal and repressive nature of the police is still noticeable in this modern period leading in most cases to poor public perception and relations with the force. Put differently, the police force is now perceived in bad light with public disdain and disrespect. To buttress this point, [5], maintained that the relationship between the police and members of the public in Nigeria have tended to be characterized by deep-rooted conflict, prejudice, corruption and violence. Similarly, [6], observed that in spite of decades of police assistance and the recent introduction of reform plans, the Nigeria Police Force's public image has remained notoriously brutal and corrupt. There has been general consensus that the Nigeria Police Force falls short of public expectation. This manifests in inefficiencies, corruption, unfairness in dealing with suspects, occasional over-use of force, bad temper, bullying and other abuses of citizens' rights with impunity [7]. A case in point was the Apo six killings in Abuja by the police in 2005 [8]. The Police have been accused of conniving with hoodlums or men of the underworld to commit heinous crimes in the country. [9], observed that there were cases of alleged destroying of crime evidences and reports by the police, release of arrested persons, dropping of criminal charges in exchange for bribes or other benefits. He went further to state that false charges were reportedly made against innocent and ignorant citizens, etc. [10], maintains that police has not been useful or helpful in promoting its image before the general public, as there are many cases of murder, assassination and robbery which took place in the society and had lasted for two or more years without the police identifying

and arresting the culprits talk more of prosecuting them. He argued that the failure of the police to either apprehend killers of robbery victims and assassins all over the country has reinforced the beliefs of the critics that the force is dubious, corrupt, inept and brutal.

The foregoing discussion to a large extent has tried to expose the ugly public image of the Nigeria Police Force which has been too difficult to change in the psyche of every average Nigerian. The perception of the public towards the force may degenerate to the point that there could be total withdrawal of public support to it with its attendant effects on public security.

To correct the above impression as well as encourage good police public relations, there is urgent need for community government to step in via the community policing approach. This is necessary because such leadership structure has the capacity to appeal to the conscience of their people with intent to change the poor police public image. Community policing has been seen as a paradigm shift which emphasizes the fact that there should be a strong synergy between the police and the community for all crimes to be prevented or better still reduced to the barest minimum in all communities in general and Nigeria in particular.

Community Policing: According to [11], security is a prime factor in national development; it is the superstructure on which other structures or subsystems rely on for smooth operations, growth and development. Thus, security is, therefore, perceived as everybody's business. However, it is the primary function of police to enforce law and order, detect as well as prevent crimes. To achieve this, emphasis has been placed on police visibility through neighbourhood watch, where the police should be seen to be proactive rather than reactive in crime control. A crime is a wrong which affects the interest of the community as a whole and for which the offender is punishable [12]. This approach to policing to be best achieved through community policing.

Community policing is therefore a collaboration between the police and the community who collectively identify and solve crime related problems in the community. In this form of policing, the police, as an organization, is no longer seen as the sole enforcer of law and order rather all members of the community become active allies in the avowed effort to enhance the security of lives and properties in the area. To [13], community policing is a philosophy of full service, personalized policing, where the same officers patrol and work in the same area on a partnership with the citizens to identify

and solve crime problems. Community policing is a system of policing that provides members of community ample opportunity to be part and parcel of those policing their immediate community [14]. This kind of policing perceives police functions as “police service” instead of “police force”. This policing approach gives satisfaction to the people; rekindle their trust and confidence in the police. There is no gainsaying the fact that the relationship between the police and the community is set on an interactive footing. There is a shift from being on the sideline of the policing of the areas into a partnership wherein policies and activities of the police will be formulated with inputs from the community. It is noteworthy that in some communities, it will take some reasonable time to break the barrier of apathy and distrust so as to forge meaningful partnership. As earlier pointed out, trust is the value that underlies and links components of community partnership and problem solving. A solid foundation of trust will definitely enable police to form close ties with the community which will surely produce laudable achievements. Therefore, without trust between the police and people, effective policing may be effort in futility.

Community policing has some remarkable principles that set it apart from other forms of policing. They include:

- Practice policing by consent not coercion.
- Be part of the community not part from it.
- Find out (together with the community) what the community needs.
- Work in partnership with other agencies and the public.
- Tailor the business of policing to meet the community needs.
- Be accountable for its service.
- Provide a quality service.
- The police adopt a proactive problem solving approach to their roles and responsibilities [15].

Similarly, the core values of community policing include the following:

- Respect and protect human rights.
- Be transparent and open in carrying out policing function
- Demonstrate commitment at all times to deliver best quality services
- Empower police personnel through training and re-training for effective service delivery.

- Be willing to seek, listen to and act upon public opinion and perception.
- Be accountable and properly answerable for what they do.
- Ensure that citizens with a genuine sense of grievances against the police have effective redress [16].

Be that as it may, community policing has been viewed as the best form of policing in that it incorporates community members in the business of ensuring protection of lives and properties of all and sundry. In other words, it creates a strong synergy between the police and community members where the police is assisted by the people in crime prevention and control. It also discourages the police themselves in engaging in acts unbecoming of their professional callings. The bottom line of community policing is that it engenders confidence, trust and satisfaction among the community dwellers who now volunteer to divulge any perceived security threat to the police as well as co-operate with them to enthrone preventive policing rather than reactive policing which has become the order of the day.

Key Roles of Community/Town Union Government in Police Public Relations for Effective Security in Nigerian Communities:

Community/town union government is a body of distinguished members of a given community either elected or appointed to steer the ship of leadership in the community. The appointees in most cases are persons of unquestionable character, who in many occasions have demonstrated commitment and dedication to the progress, growth and development of their areas. In partnership with the traditional stool, the community government sees to the maintenance and sustenance of the tradition, customs, beliefs, norms and culture of the people. It serves as a go-between the community dwellers and external bodies such as government at either the local, state or federal level. Moreso, the community government is also charged with the onerous function to mobilize abundant local resources towards maximum development of the entire community. This may have partly explained why ascension to leadership positions in the community has become more or less a fierce contest. In extreme cases, it leads to break down of law and order in several communities especially in communities where some vital natural resources are in large supply.

In order to realize the mandate entrusted to them (community government) in areas of development, it often embarks on self-help projects such as construction of

feeder roads, building of culverts, markets, clearing of pathways, provision of potable water, maintenance of vigilante groups and forges cordial relationship with security agencies to nip crimes in the bud across the community. Community government tries at all times to maintain cordial police public relations.

Police public relations is the aspect of management of police organization, which seeks to establish positive interpersonal relationships between the force and its public through an assessment of public attitude and interest so that the police organization can carry out its statutory role in line with the law and with support, respect and acceptance of the general public. [17], argued that police alone may fail in the war against crime without co-operation from members of the public. He maintained that without a strong synergy between the police and community, vital information necessary to help control, manage, solve and deter crime may not be made available.

The community government however, plays the following roles in police public relations to make for a proactive, preventive rather than reactive policing approach:

- The community/town union government sets up vigilante groups (neighbourhood watch) who keep awake at night to possibly ward off any threat in and around the community. It is the function of the group to detect as well as control crimes in the area by arresting anyone who indulges in criminal activities. Where strangers are involved they are allowed to carry out in-depth interrogation to identify where they come from and their mission. In all, the vigilante groups usually hand over any suspicious characters in their custody to the police for prosecution.
- The town union government equally makes available any vital security information at their disposal to the police for prompt action. In other words, they give the police tip off which aid in carrying out successful operation especially in criminal hideouts.
- Since the community members in most cases know almost each other, it could be safely argued that they could stand a better chance to detect members of the community with criminal tendencies and subsequently hand them over to security personnel for prosecution in the court of law. This security role is played by the members of the community in consonance with the community leadership. In other words, before, anyone is handed over to the police, such person should first be investigated by community leadership for purpose of ascertaining his mission and possibly where he came from.

- Community/town union government carries out enlightenment campaigns to educate members of the community on the need to see police as their friends. These campaigns to a large extent have aided the people to accord the needed respect and co-operation to officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force in areas of criminal investigations and relaying of vital security information to them.
- The town union government equally participates in the formulation of policing policies and strategies which are critical to effective elimination or reduction of crimes to the barest minimum in the community.
- It also ensures the maintenance of mutual respect and co-operation between the community members on the one hand and the police on the other hand.

Justification for Town Union Government in Police Public Relations for Effective Security in Nigeria:

The role of town union government in the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in their domains looms large indeed. This is so because the members of the community government understand the terrain of their community and equally in most cases know the bad eggs in the area. There is a near consensus that the town union governments should forge a strong partnership with the officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force. This synergy becomes imperative considering their strategic positions in the management of the affairs of their respective domains. They are always placed on the know with regards to the actions of die hard criminal elements in their areas. It is argued that where there is cordiality in the relationship between the police and the community leadership, there are chances that they (town union leaders) could volunteer privileged information to the police in confidence. But the reverse has always been the case as there has been no strong partnership existing between them (leadership of the communities) and the police. Apart from this, there is also a serious case of sabotage where some bad eggs in the police divulge the identities of the informants to criminals such that their security becomes problematic.

It has been argued that the precarious security situations in the country could be blamed mainly on mutual suspicion or distrust between the police and the community leadership. The community members and leadership for fear of endangering their precious lives choose to, in most cases, hide important security information from the police. For instance, in the North, village heads and members of the emir cabinet obtain vital information on some of their community members who have joined or have remained sympathetic to the dreaded

Boko Haram sect. Unfortunately, they fail to give such information to security personnel especially the police for fear that they could be implicated. The killings of the some emirs and village heads by Boko Haram sect are instructive here; some of them must have been killed for volunteering information to security personnel who thereafter sabotaged them by revealing their identities to the dreaded sect.

That the government through the military joint task force did not win the war against terrorism during the regime of Goodluck Jonathan may be partly blamed on lack of partnership and mutual distrust between the security agents and the community leadership. There was no community participation especially in areas of intelligence gathering and other assistance. However, the above trend changed in June 2013 as there was emergence of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) who willingly volunteered to assist in the counter-terrorism campaign. The civilian JTF is composed of young and old armed with such old fashioned weapons as bows and arrows, swords, clubs and daggers who operate under the supervision of civilian JTF sector commanders. The civilian JTF represent a community effort towards combating anti-terrorism in the Northeast. The civilian JTF addressed the intelligence failure of the special task force against Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast terrain. It was reported that civil JTF assisted greatly in returning normalcy in Maiduguri as many of the Boko Haram members who feared the civilian JTF ran out of Maiduguri and out of major towns of the state to villages and quite a good number of them travelled to neighbouring countries [18]. The civilian JTF exploits their knowledge of the communities to identify suspected Boko Haram members or other suspicious individuals [19]. It has helped in successfully stopping many attacks through identification of strange faces in their communities and have equally aided the security agencies to arrest Boko Haram members [19]. The Northeast governors now offer financial and logistics support to the civil JTF in the form of vehicles and other materials in appreciation of its strategic role in checking insurgency in the region (Nigerian Watch, 2014) cited in [18].

The renewed security challenges in the Niger Delta region could be partly explained from the angle of non-participation of community leadership and other critical stakeholders in engaging the militants in meaningful dialogue. The government of the day has been perceived to be insincere in its stance to use dialogue to end the wanton destruction of oil facilities in the region. This is because, it has deployed military personnel and

other sister security operatives to root out the militants in the area. As a result, there has been consistent break down in the ceasefire truce reached between government negotiating team and representatives of the groups. Nevertheless, with the co-operation or participation of critical community stakeholders, it is believed that intelligence reports could be gathered on the perceived grievances of the militants. With this information on hand, government could come up with lasting measures to end the hostilities. This therefore, underscores the importance of community government in the enthronement of effective security of lives, properties and natural habitats.

In the southeast, community governments have been helpful in the setting up vigilante groups who provide security in communities especially in the night. The southeast is noted for armed robbery, kidnapping cases and all manner of frauds. With the establishment of these security outfits, there has been significant reduction in such criminal activities in the region. A case in point was the Bakassi Boys. During the period they were in operation, they identified and killed criminal elements extra-judicially. This group could have been retrained with a new orientation to identify criminal elements for onward hand over to the security agents for prosecution. This could have gone a long way in eliminating or reducing to the barest minimum all forms of criminal activities in the Southeast. In the southwest, OPC is there as a community driven security outfit to tackle crimes headlong in the region.

The point being made here is that for sustainable security to be attained in Nigeria, there is a dire need for a partnership or cordial relationship between the security agents and members of the community especially the community government. This form of cordiality is important in information/intelligence gathering to counteract security threats from all parts of the country. Thus, government security agents should work in concert with community security outfits so as to achieve a safe social environment where everyone is at liberty to go about his/her normal businesses without threat to his life and hard earned properties.

CONCLUSION

Effective police public relations have been identified as the corner stone for effective security in the country. Unfortunately, the Nigeria Police Force have been overtime perceived in bad light to be repressive, brutal, corrupt, inept and ineffective in the performance of its assigned functions. This has no doubt resulted in

strained relationship existing between the force and the public with its adverse effect on public security. It is therefore advocated that through effective partnership between the community government and the police, the poor public perception of the force could be reversed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the force in the discharge of their assigned security functions.

Recommendations: Based on the foregoing analysis, we make bold to recommend as follows should there be effective policing where people could willingly co-operate with the police to ensure crime-free communities:

- That the police should first and foremost carryout massive value re-orientation among its ranks and files for the purpose of changing their negative attitude in the performance of their assignment.
- That the government should increase funding to the police institution in order to provide good conducive environment for the force to operate. Similarly, the remunerations of the officers and men of the force should be enhanced so as to discourage them from engaging in extortion and collection of bribes.
- There should be establishment of internal control mechanism that will help to identify the criminally minded elements within the force with a view to weeding them off the system.
- The poor police public image could be remedied through massive public enlightenment campaign with intent to change the negative public perception towards the force.
- There should be participation of the community government in the process of making security decisions as well as in the course of implementation so as to drum support to the force in its war against crimes in communities.
- There should always be a joint security meeting involving the police, communities leaders and the members of the community to rekindle public trust and confidence in the force.
- The police should not only rehearse the clause “the police are your friends” but should also start living it up in their actions.

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