

## Community Policing in Nigeria: Issue and Challenges

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**Abstract:** This paper briefly traced the historical origin of community policing globally and then in Nigeria in particular. It examined such issues as the aims and objectives of setting up community policing in Nigeria; the legal regime and how the body operates. It further examined whether community policing have achieved, so far, the stated aims and objectives; and posed the question: should community policing be disbanded or retained? The author proffered an answer to this poser. Furthermore, this work came to terms with such challenges as the effect of the operational methods of community policing in Nigeria; disbandment of the entity and the likely after effects such as throwing more unemployed people into the already saturated labour market; likely upsurge in criminal activities like rape, armed robbery and kidnapping; more firearms in unauthorized and unsafe hands as not all the firearms formerly used by the group members may be recovered; and increased fear of insecurity amongst the public. The challenge of how to control and keep the operations of the entity within the ambits of law, if retained, was also tackled. The paper eventually drew conclusion from the discourse, emphasizing the need and relevance of community policing in Nigeria in spite of the shortcomings; and finally came up with recommendation on how best to put community policing operations on the proper perspective to achieve results without either violating citizens' rights or any relevant extant law.

**Key words:** Community Policing • Neighbourhood • Crime and Security • Human rights.

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### INTRODUCTION

Historically neighbourhood watch is one of the oldest and best known crime prevention concepts in North America. It was popularly known as the neighbourhood watch organization in Pasadena Hills, under the direction of St. Louis Country Police Officer, Kyle Jundt, resident Geno Salvati and resident Ed Tyler.

In the late 1960s, an increase in crime heightened the need for a crime prevention initiative, focused on residential areas and involving local citizens. The National Sheriffs Association (NSA) responded, creating the National Neighbourhood Watch programme in 1972 to assist citizens and law enforcement.

In 2002, the NSA in partnership with USA Freedom Corps, citizen corps and the US Department of Justice launched USA on watch, the face of the revitalized neighbourhood watch initiative, which represents the expanded role of watch programmes throughout the United States [1].

With the realization, according to Bunyard, that the factors contributing to the growth of crime are complex

and are deep rooted in society itself', E. M. Davis, Chief of Police, Los Angeles, USA, in 1975 arrived at a conceptualized frame-work under the rubric-'Territorial Imperatives'. He contended that police is one of the most personal of all personal services, it deals with human beings in life and death situations. The police officers and the people they serve must be as close as possible and where possible must know one another. Such closeness can generate the police-citizen cooperation necessary for the involvement of the whole community in community protection. Organization of assignments should ensure that the same police and the same citizens have an opportunity to continuously work for the protection of a specific community. The principal objective being to create a joint commitment, between police officers and the people living on their beat, to keep their community free from crime. The police team and members of the community maintain fixed periods of watch [2].

Similar approach was adopted in Ontario, Canada in 1972, called the 'Canadian Approach'. This approach involved setting up a task force composed of representatives of the government, municipalities and

general public to examine the policing of the province. In this approach, the task force analyzed present and future needs and studies alternative approaches related to those needs.

In essence, Community Policing or neighbourhood watch or vigilance group services date back to the sixties and seventies from the North American hemisphere from where the idea and practice was exported or replicated in other countries. In Nigeria, precisely on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2004, Community Policing or the vigilance group of Nigeria was inaugurated by the late President Umaru Yar'Adua to complement the services of the Nigerian Police Force in combating crime on the principle that in a democratic society, the police are entrusted by their fellow citizens to protect and serve the public's fundamental rights, liberty, equality and justice under the law [3].

In other words, Community Policing approach to crime detection, prevention and fighting became active in Nigeria in April, 2004 with the formal inauguration by the late President Umaru Yar'Adua, even though its legal existence may have preceded that period [4].

**Explanation of Relevant Terms:** In order to enhance effective appreciation of the discourse, certain relevant terms need be explained. Such terms include 'Community Policing', 'Issues' and 'Challenges'.

Community refers to the people who reside in one locality and are subject to the same laws, have the same interests (Policing means to protect, regulate, or maintain order in a city, country and so forth with or as with police [5]. Community Policing therefore refers to the act of protecting, regulating or maintaining law and order in a given community in police style, either with or without police presence.

Issue is defined as a problem or worry that somebody has with something. Issues therefore mean problems or worries somebody or people have with something and in this respect, community policing.

Challenge means a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability and skills, especially in an interesting way. Thus challenges here refer to the difficult task of checkmating or ensuring successful operation of community policing in Nigeria.

In the light of the above, we shall be concerned with such issues as the aims and objectives of setting up Community policing; whether or not there is legal backing for it; whether members operate wholly within the law; has community policing achieved the objectives of setting it up; and whether it should be disbanded or retained.

On the other hand, such challenges as the effect of their mode of operation; disbandment and its likely effects and how to control and regulate their activities shall engage our attention.

**Aims and Objectives of Setting up Community Policing in Nigeria:** The aims and objectives of Community Policing may be gleaned from statements of the top hierarchy of the body and that of the police force. Speaking during the formal training of over 400 members of the Vigilance Group of Nigeria (VGN), at Enugu on how to mitigate various forms of crimes including kidnapping, The Commandment General of VGN, Usman Mohammed Jahun stated:

*Vigilante group in Nigeria is an informal Community Policing entity ... to complement or supplement the effort of Nigerian Police and all other security agencies in the country ... The workshop was also organized to sensitize members of the organization on issues of national security [6].*

In a similar vein, speaking during a two-day seminar and retreat on security awareness and strategy programme with the Ondo State Chapter of the Vigilance Group of Nigeria (VGN), The Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) in charge of Zone 8, Mr. Uzor Amakulor pledged that:

*The Police was ready to partner with the para-security organization to nib [sic] the criminal activities in the bud in their areas within the ambit of the law ... urged the vigilance members to join hands with the police in their various communities in fighting crime, saying that they should not close their two eyes on the issue of security in their areas.*

It is deducible from the preceding views of the two top security chiefs that the aims and objectives of Community Policing in Nigeria include complementing the functions of the Police in preventing, detecting and fighting crimes in their respective communities as partners. This may be achieved by giving useful and timely information on crimes to the police where the vigilance members could not adequately handle the situation.

In order to achieve these objectives, members of the vigilance group undergo regular trainings and briefings under the auspices of the police officers and their own top officers.

### **The Legal Regime for Community Policing in Nigeria:**

There is no single Federal statute or legislation in existence at the moment that created the body with clear definition of its nature, scope of authority, powers, procedures and limitations in the discharge of its assignments. The only Federal legal document in relation to the entity is the registration at Corporate Affairs Commission. The Commandant of the VGN, Usman Mohammed Jahun was clear on this when he said:

*Vigilante Group in Nigeria is an informal Community Policing entity registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (C.A.C) in 1999 to complement or supplement the effort of Nigerian Police and all other security agencies in the country.*

It is obvious from the above act that the sole purpose of that registration was meant to give the entity a formal recognition in law without more.

However, at state level, several states that have established the body have their respective enabling laws. In this aspect, Enugu State will be used for illustrative purpose. Enugu State established its own vigilance group otherwise called 'Neighbourhood Watch Group' under section 13. (2006) [7]

The functions of neighbourhood watch group were provided for under section 14 as follows:

The watch group shall perform the following functions:

- (a) To work in partnership with the Nigerian Police Force, Justice of the Peace, town union and other agencies as may be appropriate in any of the following:
  - prevention of commission of crime in the neighbourhood;
  - apprehension of offenders;
  - preservation of law and order; and
  - protection of life and property.
- (b) To reduce crime and fear of crime through:
  - awareness campaigns; and
  - encouragement of mutual assistance and concern among neighbourhoods.

There is no doubt that the preceding provision represents the aims and objectives of setting up the body.

In order to enhance the discharge of its functions by the group, S. 29 of the Law provides for the use of force, when the need arises, in the following terms:

- (1) A member of the watch group shall in appropriate cases use reasonable force in discharging of his duties.
- (2) A member of the watch group shall use force under the following conditions:
  - In self defense or to prevent the commission of a crime,
  - to arrest or prevent the escape of a person presenting danger and risk to public order and security within the neighbourhood.
- (3) The force used shall be proportionately commensurate with the circumstances leading to the use of such force.

Schedule II to the Law on Code of Conduct outlined such conducts that should characterize the conduct of members as alertness, non-intoxication, approachability, professionalism, integrity, non-violence, identification, confidentiality and punctuality. Specifically, paragraph 6 sub paragraph 2 to the schedule on non-violence provides:

*It is unlawful for any neighbourhood watch group member to use any form of torture, brutality and use of violence of any form in the discharge of his duties in the course of obtaining confessional statements from a suspect.*

Lastly, section 2, the interpretation section of the law defines "abuse of power" to mean,

*any act or circumstance in which a member of a neighbourhood association or watch groups takes undue advantage of his position under this law to oppress, abuse, defraud, victimize, intimidate, molest or unleash inhuman treatment to a resident, neighbourhood member or to a member of the public in the course of discharging his duties. It includes any act, by any organ established under this law, intended to injure, insult, trespass upon the dignity of any person or manifest feelings of inferiority or violate the legal right of any person within or outside the neighbourhood.*

The above law as outlined in some relevant sections in this work, admittedly is good and quite helpful for effective functioning by the watch group to achieve desired result. It is the opinion of this writer that other state laws on the subject would have similar contents and provisions.

**Do Community Policing Members Wholly Operate Within the Law?** In order to provide a reasonable answer to this question, an examination of some of the activities of various vigilance groups would have to be made.

An investigation into the activities of some neighbourhood watch groups reveal the following pattern and habits:

**Public Parade of Suspect:** There is copious evidence that this practice is in vogue amongst various vigilance groups in society and in particular, Mbaogu-Kingdom Achi. In a case of house breaking and stealing, the chairman of the neighbourhood watch group [8], in handling the matter was quoted as saying:

*A case was brought before me by Mr. Ikoha Nze, on the claim that an unknown person invaded into [sic], his house while he was away for Igwe's cabinet meeting. And on reaching his house, he discovered that his padlock was broken and on entering his room, discovered that his television set including his money had been made away with. When the report got to me, I took my boys to his place and after some series of investigations, it was discovered that one master Chikodi Mgbe happened to be the culprit ... So, as the law demands (i.e. the law made by the watch group), the young boy was paraded around the nukes [sic] and crannies of the community and later handed over to the police.*

**Inflicting Corporal Punishment on Suspects:** A recurring feature among vigilance groups' method of handling cases is that of inflicting corporal punishments on suspects in the mistaken belief of administering justice. An example is resort to severe beating of the suspected individual. Mr. Emeka Nwogbo was a victim of this practice for being accused of stealing a goat. In handling this matter by members of the community's vigilance group, the chairman stated thus:

*Emeka Nwogbo was caught with Mr. Amaechi Okolie's goat, though he claimed that he mistake [sic] it for his own, so we had to investigate it. In our*

*conclusion, we found out that Emeka never had any goat like that before and to worsen the whole matter, he took the goat to the neighbourhouring market to sell it when the members of the neighbourhood watch were alerted. What drew people's attention to that crime was that he left very early in the morning for the Eke Owa Market where the men of the neighbourhood went and arrested him. So we brought him back, but before then he was made to refund the money for the goat to the buyer, who was ignorant of the theft. While at home, we questioned him. After investigation, it was established that he stole the goat. He was severely beaten for misleading the neighbourhood watch by allowing them (members) to enquire from people whom he knew that they never knew him as having such goat. Though he was released, but he was made to pay the sum of N7,500.00k, seven thousand, five hundred naira and the goat was restored to the owner, Mr. Amaechi.*

Another instance was a young man who was alleged to have flogged his old father because he ate the food in the pot. The secretary was quoted as saying:

*The boy who flogged his father was taken to 'Agu', a large deserted land; after been beaten mercilessly, he was tied to a tree that is being habited by bees for sometime. Our watch is very strict with children insulting their parents.*

**Confiscation of Property in Default of Payment:** Where a resident for any cause defaults in payment of any sum due from that person, be it monthly dues, which is supposed to be voluntary, fine or any other financial penalty imposed by the neighbourhood watch group, such a citizen risks having his/her property seized, either in discharge of such obligation, or as a lien or simply as a penalty resulting thereof.

The fate of Mrs. Blessing Uchechukwu Odanwu is quite illustrative here. The petition by Evang. John Ejike Odanwu, the woman's son, to the Commissioner of Police (Odanwu, 2011) [9] tells the whole story. The relevant portion of the said petition reads:

*They told my mother that she is the woman said to own some goats and that Mr. Dennis Nnaji sent them to come and get one of her goats on the basis that she has goats and cooks and sells local delicacy called 'okpa' and therefore has money ... They pursued two of her goats and caught them. As they were doing all these, one of them went into her room and took the sum of five*

*thousand naira (N5,000.00) earmarked for payment of those who did farm work for her. They also took away four plastic chairs, put them in a barrow together with the goats and went away. As they made away with those items, other members of her premises brought the sum of one thousand two hundred naira (N1,200.00) and went after them to plead with them to release the items. They accepted the money, released the two goats and the four plastic chairs. However, afterwards, we could not see the two goats as at the time of my writing this petition.*

**Banishing Citizens from Native Homes/Residence:**

An unpleasant but adopted mode of inflicting punishment to suspects and ex-convicts alike is resort to banishment of an individual adjudged blameworthy by the group. This forced exile imposed on a victim radically dismembers him/her from members of one's family even after one has legitimately served the legitimate punishment after conviction by a court of law. The imposition of banishment, not even permitted under our law, amounts to double jeopardy on the individual and a gross violation of the individual's fundamental right of freedom of association and that of right to private and family life. The case of Mr. Chikodi Mgbe, once more, drives this point home. On allegation of stealing and even after formal trial by a Court of Law and after serving the resulting punishment, the Chairman of his community neighbourhood watch still maintained that he would have to face banishment from the community. In the words of the chairman,

*According to our criminal law that prescribes punishment to such crimes, which states that 'anybody found or caught and after some investigations found to have committed such crimes, such a person or group of persons will carry that particular stolen property or material on his head and will latter [sic] be handed over to the police; and after serving his prison tenure [sic], will be banished out of the community for a period of two years' ... As I'm talking to you now, he is still under the police net. And the neighbourhood watch is still watching over, for him to be released anytime, any moment, to be banished for a period of two years.*

**Extra-Judicial Killing:** Extra-judicial killing means killing of a human being not in accordance with the due process of law as determined by a competent judicial authority after regular trial in a court of law.

The perpetration of extra-judicial killing by vigilance groups is the height of absurdity and recklessness in discharging their functions. For whatever purpose or intention, it is unacceptable and unlawful, yet this act is becoming a recurring feature amongst vigilance members in our society today. Two instances will show the frightening menace this act poses to the generality of the citizenry.

The Nation reported under the caption: Vigilance Group Kills One in Anambra, as follows:

*A vigilance group yesterday shot and killed a 27-year-old man in Onitsha, Anambra State. The incident occurred at St. Joseph's Catholic Church during the harvest bazaar sales. The victim was identified as Onyebuchi, alias Magic Fingers. He was a Disc Jockey (DJ). Sources said the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Dennis Sokei and the executives of Dum-Omodi Street had invited the vigilance group to provide security during the bazaar sales. They said the late Onyebuchi was on his way out of the parish when men of the Vigilance group ordered him to raise his hands up. Eye witnesses said an argument ensued and a member of the group, now at large, shot the victim in the waist, killing him on the spot. A source said, 'When Magic Finger refused to raise his hands as directed by the group, one of them told him that he would shoot him, but Onyebuchi asked the man to try it and the man shot him in the waist'. One of the executives of Dum-Omodi Street, Mr. Emeka Oko, said the vigilance group was contracted from Zion Security Company. Oko regretted the incidence.*

The second case occurred in Enugu State. In describing how his watch group tackles criminal activities in their Community, a principal member of the group gave a graphic detail of how a particular suspect met his death extra-judicially thus:

*My men and I have handled many criminal cases in this community, but there is one particular one that is outstanding, which also paved way for the enormous peace, security and stability we are now enjoying in this community. It all started with men and women almost on daily basis complaining of either house breaking, burglary or theft in both their residential houses and in their business stores; and such complaints will always pain me to the heart when we get them. It got to a point that we now made a law that anyone caught stealing will be burnt alive, all in a bid to reduce this anti-social*

*trend but all to no avail. You know 'dey say everyday na for the thief but one day na for the owner' and that action speaks louder than voice. At last, one Mr. Okey Elugwu was caught at night by my men on duty stealing some bags of cements from Chief Igbokwe's building site. The said Okey Elugwu was held by my men and a locally made pistol was recovered from him. At dusk, they brought him to the village square, tied him with a rope, hung tyres on him and burnt him to death. I tell you it may be very sad story, but it was this single act that saved this community from the marauding effect of lawless individuals because it served as deterrence to others [10].*

Asked whether he thought his decision or judgment on the above incident was fair enough, the chairman responded affirmatively thus:

*That very verdict attracted wide criticism and applause by men and women of this community. Yes my decisions were justifiable because we were able to enact it as one of our subsidiary legislations and carried out proper sensitization round the community. Also under the doctrine of necessity, precautionary measures have to be taken otherwise man will become a wolf to his fellow man and anarchy will thrive. And you know that law is a social engineer that will always frown on any anti-social behaviour*

In the light of the preceding practices by vigilance groups just x-rayed, it can affirmatively be declared that Community Policing members do not wholly operate within the ambit of law.

**Has Community Policing Achieved the Objectives of Setting it Up?** Again, for an objective answer to be made concerning this issue, a review of some of the activities and assessment thereof must have to be made. Bearing in mind that community policing was set up to complement the police and in indeed, work in partnership with the police in securing the relevant community, the following accomplishments were achieved by vigilance groups in different locations, *to wit:*

**Provision of Security During General Elections:** Vigilance groups provide orderly and secured environment during national assignments like elections into various political positions. This duty is certainly in complementing the functions of the police that have the statutory duty of maintaining law and order in such occasions.

In this wise, speaking with officers and men of the VGN who paid him a visit in his palace, the Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Olayiwole Adeyemi III, commended the Oyo State Chapter for their efficiency, thoroughness, courtesy, tact, temper and tolerance, as well as impartiality in the following words:

*The service you are rendering is a voluntary one. You are not equipped with operational vehicles, let alone arms and ammunition. You don't even receive any salary. Yet, your performance is delightful and pleasant to the people. we held general elections and you proved yourselves, by not compromising patriotism and diligence for gratification. You did not allow any electoral malpractices, but provided adequate security to the electorate. The people are grateful to you. Your patriotic zeal and commitment to nation-building is highly appreciated and admired by the people ... The traditional ruler specifically commended perseverance of the officers and men numbering about 5,000, who stood in the torrential rain for six hours before being attended to.*

**Sensitization of People on Crimes:** Undoubtedly, vigilance groups have created enough awareness and sensitization on crimes amongst the people in most communities they operate. This sensitization and awareness campaign on crimes have raised the people's consciousness and alertness on crimes to an appreciable degree. Such awareness and sensitization measures include telling the residents to be observant around their homes especially with strangers; giving their office cell phone numbers as well as personal ones to residents; encouraging people to timely report cases of crime to them; advising residents to avoid moving or staying in the dark carelessly; advising people to help secure their homes by locking them whenever they would be away from homes; and ringing of gongs/bells at night hours at regular intervals.

The effect of all these measures is that the people are now more than before conscious of crimes and situations that may result in commission of crimes and take pro-active measures.

**Crime Detection and Prevention:** Community policing efforts have done well in crime detection, prevention as well as in tracking down criminals in the bid to make the society safe and secure. They do some of these in partnership with the police force. A case in point was

described as ‘a case of burglary, breaking and entry.’ According to the chairman of the neighbourhood watch group,

*This involved eight (8) boys in this our community. It happened in Umuaga in Udi Local Government Area. Members of the neighbourhood watch did not catch them on the act but used intelligence reports and information to arrest one of them. We handed him over to the police and while in police custody, he confessed the names of the other members of his group. The police invited me as the chairman of the group and gave me the names of the remaining boys whom we later apprehended and handed over to the police after much effort. On further investigations, the police were able to get the name of another culprit who happened to be the buyer of the stolen items. The man in question was also arrested and handed over to the police by my men of the neighbourhood watch. The police after concluding their investigations and making the necessary findings, charged the matter to the Udi Magistrate Court. This took place in 2008 [11].*

**Protection of Public Property:** Vigilance groups have done quite well in protecting public property stationed in their various localities from vandals and thieves. Such public property like petroleum pipelines, electrical wires, cables and transformers and others have been effectively protected by men of the vigilance group. Relieving his experience between his men and hoodlums who wanted to steal the community’s transformer, Mr. Hyacinth Onuigbo said:

*There have been quite a number of crimes. There is one I remember so much. One cold night during the watch, we were warming our palms with fire been lit with firewood. We heard a screeching sound from afar. We crept to the place the sound was heard. On getting there, we saw a small lorry parked along the road. Suddenly we saw four boys working on the new transformer given to our community by the local government chairman. We stepped back and strategized on how to catch them. The ten of us surrounded them and caught three of them while on slipped off our hands. It was a terrible night ... We locked them up at first, then we called the police to take custody of them [12].*

In another village, three young men were seen within the vicinity where the Community’s transformer was installed; even though it was faulty for about a week and

as a result, the community had no light for that period. Eventually, those men started cutting the amoured cable from the transformer. This operation was still going on when the watch members organized themselves and went immediately to the scene and rounded up those men at about 2 a.m. The police were invited and the three men handed over to them.

**Protecting and Securing Residential Homes:**

Community Policing offers invaluable services in protecting and securing private homes of the residents from armed robbers and thieves. This is one important function of community policing, ensuring secured environment. To illustrate the alertness and dutifulness of vigilance bodies in securing homes and fighting crimes, Mr. William Chukwu stated as follows:

*There have been quite a number of crimes. Well, there is one we just handed over to the police a few days ago. It was in the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> June, i.e. last month (June, 2011). We got a report from a neighbour living in a 6-flat building. He called us to inform us that he thinks someone has broken into the flat down stairs, gave us the street and number. We immediately located the place since we are very familiar with the environs; upon getting there, we saw two young men inside the house moving some items. When we asked how they got into the building and if they were related to the owner, they said that the owner is their uncle and that they lost their own keys and that was why they had to break in. we asked them who their uncle is and they couldn’t say and it became obvious that they were bandits. We arrested them and called the owner of the house with his GSM number; he told us he didn’t order, or authorize anyone to enter his house. He in fact directed we hold them in our custody until he comes back. When he came, we interrogated the boys, when we became convinced that they were bandits, we invited the police and handed the bandits over to them [13].*

**Acting as Prosecution Witnesses:** Members of the neighbourhood watch also play the vital function of acting as prosecution witnesses, especially with cases originating from their area of operation. This is very important in the fight against lawlessness and crimes in society to ensure due administration of justice and that criminals do not escape the punishment they rightly deserve.

A chairman of a neighbourhood watch group explained his group's encounter with a seven-man criminal gang and their role during the prosecution of the accused persons thus:

*I received a call at about 8.30 p.m. that hoodlums invaded a place at Nkwo Adogba where wires meant for the electrification of this Community were kept. I immediately alerted the security officer who then mobilized other members of the watch group. Before we could get to the place, they had made away with some of the wires. Being that we know all the nooks and crannies of this community, we dispatched ourselves into the various roads which they would possibly pass through. Little did they know that our group is aware of the road they took. We came to the main road where their vehicle was parked. Immediately we got there, one of them carrying a big roll of wire came out and we caught him. After the night's operation, we were able to catch four of them who later revealed that they were seven in number. We immediately took them to the police station the next morning since it was a criminal issue which we are not supposed to determine the end. Through the help of the police, the four hoodlums gave vital information about how to get the rest of them. The three of them were finally arrested and they were immediately charged to court by the police. When the trials were going on, we went there to give evidence and at the end, they were convicted of theft and disturbance of public peace and were sentenced to prison, three years each [14].*

Looking at the above efforts and accomplishments by the vigilance groups, on objective judgment, it would be justifiable to assert that community policing groups have been achieving the aims and objectives of setting them up.

#### **Should Community Policing Be Disbanded or Retained?**

Having quite examined the modus operandi of the Community Policing entity which are outside legal permits; and the efforts and accomplishments of the group in enhancing protection and security in society, it is strongly urged that the baby should not be thrown out with the water. In other words, considering the positive results achieved by the entity, it should be retained; but a continuing training and re-training, coupled with proper orientation and enlightenment of the membership on how to go about their duties in order not to violate citizens' fundamental rights irrespective of the

crime allegedly committed should be regularly carried out [15].

It is hoped that in due course, with the appropriate training and enlightenment seminars and workshops being organized for the members, they will attain the desired level of professionalism and competence needed to conduct their duties in a very civilized manner and still achieve results.

Certainly, the advantages of retaining the outfit quite outweigh those for disbanding it if the appropriate measures are taken.

**The Effect of Their Mode of Operation:** The effects of the mode of operation of some of these vigilance groups, as have been shown above, represent part of the challenges of community policing.

The effects include violation of the right to respect for the dignity of the human [16]. By the act of public parade of a suspect as well as by inflicting corporal punishments; violation of the right to acquire and own property anywhere in Nigeria by the act of confiscation of a citizen's property in default of payment of dues or levies imposed by the group; and violation of right to private and family life as well as right to peaceful assembly and association.

Of course, the most worrisome effect of all is the violation of right to life by engaging in extra-judicial killings.

The challenges posed by these effects are how to eliminate them by making the members of these vigilance bodies change their tactics and mode of operation and still achieve positive result.

**Disbandment and its Likely Effects:** The option of disbanding community policing entity and its likely effects poses another challenge to the operation of the Community Policing as a crime fighting organ. In the event of disbandment, the following are some of the likely effects and challenges that ought to be taken into consideration by the political authority in the State, namely:

#### **More Unemployed People in the Labour Market:**

The natural consequence of any mass retrenchment is sending large numbers into the labour market and how bad this will be with our own labour market already saturated. Therefore, government should do well to avoid this and by implication, provide jobs to those already in the service. Consider, for instance, Oyo State Chapter

which boasts not less than five thousand members. Some states may have more or slightly less numbers. Approximately, Community Policing may have offered jobs to about thirty-three thousand Nigerians [17].

**Upsurge in Criminal Activities:** If disbandment becomes the preferred option, a lot more people now retrenched may now take to criminal activities like armed robbery, burglary, kidnapping, ambushing and dispossessing people of their property, rape, impersonation and a whole lot of others. These may be, even though not justifiable, as a measure to survive in life. Government must not gloss over this likely effect of disbanding the outfit.

**More Firearms in Unsafe Hands:** Whether formally permitted or not, sizeable number of the membership of this body have guns and evenly carry them about openly within their areas. If the body is disbanded, how would these guns be recovered?

Certainly, not all the guns being used by this group would be recovered. In the first place, do we even have appropriate documentation of those who use guns?

It is being urged here that beside allowing the outfit to function, government should take measures to see that use of guns by the group is well regulated and coordinated. The danger posed by this scenario is very real and should be a food for thought to the government.

**Increased Fear of Security Amongst the Public:** There is no doubt that vigilance groups have restored some level of security and assurance amongst their respective areas, especially those that are quite active and effective.

There are certain areas that were hitherto havens for armed robbers and other hoodlums that have become no-go-areas for such miscreants as a result of the active and effective nature of vigilance groups operating in such areas.

If the entity is disbanded, it will bolster criminal activities once more, as those run-away criminal would regroup and re-strategize in tormenting the neighbourhood. Feelings of insecurity and helplessness will once more reign supreme, especially in such places where police presence is not usually felt.

The result will be that the people will be exposed to the marauding acts of these lawless individuals as, the proper application of this popular refrain by Nigerians come to play: "everyman for himself, God for all".

Certainly, such a scenario is not an indication of good governance by any measure.

**How to Control and Regulate Their Operation:** This is another aspect of the challenges posed by the Community Policing option we have adopted.

In order to successfully confront these challenges, control and regulate their operations, the following are suggested, namely:

Members must be told in clear terms to desist from such conducts that violate citizen's rights like public parade of suspect; seizure of property, banishment and ultimately, resort to extra-judicial killings as well as tying somebody to stake.

Regular joint patrol with the police from the appropriate police division in charge of each vigilance group. This will enable the police to have proper oversight functions.

Vehicles and other logistics should be provided for the members to enable them communicate and relate with the relevant police authority in time and also convey suspects to police stations to avoid the temptation of imposing punishment on suspects by themselves.

Punishment of defaulting members who take the law into their hands by punishing suspects must be carried out to act as deterrence to other members. This will put fear into them and make them realize that they are not above the law.

**Possibility of Facing Law Suits:** They must be made to understand that where they flagrantly abuse and violate a citizen's right by taking unauthorized action against the person, such individual reserves the legal right to sue such one(s) for violation of his/her fundamental rights in a court of law. Once this point is made clear to them, it will certainly act as a check on their excesses in dealing with people.

**Maintain Register of Cases Handled (Criminal/Civil):** Every vigilance group must be required to maintain register for recording of daily events handled and action taken. This register will be open for police inspection on such intervals as should be determined by the Divisional Police Officer in charge of each group. This will enable the police to determine when inappropriate action is taken for cautioning or some other required measure taken and thus have effective control and regulation of their activities.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusion:** In the light of the preceding discourse, it is clear that the community Policing option is attended with

some thought-provoking circumstances, even as there are some laudable aspects.

The conclusion is that notwithstanding some distasteful aspects of operating community policing in Nigeria, the entity is worth having as a complementary security enhancement body with brighter prospects of overcoming its inadequacies, if the appropriate measures and actions are taken towards standardizing the organ.

**Recommendations:** In order to overcome and eliminate the inadequacies associated with the entity and standardized its operational mechanisms, the following recommendations, in addition to what have been said under paragraph 3.3, if implemented, will go a long way in making vigilance groups responsible and responsive security enhancement state organ. These include:

First, there should be clear definition of guidelines, rules and regulations that guide the conduct of all vigilance groups in Nigeria. This uniformity of regulations will eliminate the situation where a given vigilance group would make its own “criminal law” within its own area of jurisdiction (community), as earlier seen.

Second, it appears that all members of the vigilance groups are not on salary on the understanding that the work is a voluntary one. Efforts should be made through the law whereby members would be entitled to some kind of allowances even if by the appropriate local government area where each group operates. This will the more encourage them to be more productive and motivated.

Alternatively, the monthly dues being solicited from residents should be made mandatory through legislation, as some residents claim that such payment is not compulsory but simple ex gratia. Members are actually making great sacrifices.

Third, every vigilance group that distinguished itself by excelling in taming criminal gangs or attacks in a gallant way should be publicly praised and rewarded either at local government level or state government or even both. Criteria for determining such excellence include rate of decline in crimes within the locality; attempts at or crimes actually prevented; number of suspects apprehended and handed over to the police, determined on specified periods, e.g. bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. Also to be taken into consideration is the level of respect for the fundamental rights of the citizens.

If such reward mechanism is put in place, it will certainly result in many positive achievements.

Fourth, regular and continuing training of members through seminars and workshops will be quite helpful in modernizing the outfit in terms of operational tactics and recognition of citizens’ fundamental rights.

Fifth, prompt and diligent prosecution of suspects handed over to the police by vigilance groups would also encourage them and also discourage them from engaging in self-help remedy in punishing suspects.

A very high ranking traditional ruler once took a swipe at the police, saying their performance fell short of expectation, hence its inability to deliver in crime detection and prevention when he stated:

*Sometime ago, about eight criminals were arrested with their exhibits by the people and handed over to the police. Surprisingly, rather than prosecuting them, five of the criminals were secretly released by the police without our knowledge. I later set up my surveillance team that eventually apprehended the five criminals released by the police.*

A recurring feature of the above scenario by the police will only make members of the vigilance groups believe that instant justice being meted out to suspects appear most assured and effective, since the people may not be trusted in prosecuting suspects handed over to them. Therefore, prompt and diligent prosecution by the police will help matters.

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