

Ibadan Journal of Peace & Development
Vol. 8 No. 1 February 2018 pp. 78-87

Best Practices for Community Policing and Crime Prevention in Nigeria in The 21st Century

Nwogu, G. A.

Abstract

Community engagement lies at the centre of policing. Therefore, through collaborative efforts, community and police personnel address criminality and chaos using approaches determined to be best practices for their communities. Today, community policing involves a new philosophy of police operations and management; hosting an accountability system involving the entire organisation. Nevertheless, to be effective in preventing crime, Nigerian police should place renewed emphasis on community engagement and practices. Based on this premise, this paper examines the best practices for community policing and crime prevention in Nigeria in the 21st Century. The paper began with an introduction which x-rayed community policing as evolving to meet the new expectations that emerge in the 21st Century. The paper further looked into the philosophical principles of community policing, crime prevention, community policing best practices for Nigeria in the 21st Century, organizational changes for implementing community policing best practices for Nigeria in the 21st Century, and the expected benefits of community policing to Nigerians in the 21st Century. The paper concluded that while the ways of implementing community policing may differ in practice in accordance with certain conditions in the communities, it is imperative to know that the major philosophical principles of community policing should always be adhered to, if the best practices for community policing is to be achieved in Nigeria in the 21st Century.

Keywords: *Best practices, Community policing, Crime prevention, 21st Century*

Introduction

The fundamental idea of community policing is that the level of community participation in enhancing safety and social directive and in solving community-related crime should be raised since only the police cannot carry out this task on their own. According to Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1994) in the study conducted by National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018), community policing is a philosophy and organizational tactic in which the emphasis is on cooperation between the citizens and the police. To them, police and the community work together to identify problems, set priorities and find solutions to the problems such as crime, drug abuse, fear of crime, social issues, ecological problems and other types of awkwardness and aberration in one's living and working environs. Consequently, the study conducted by Hahn (1998) and Fleming (2007) assert that community policing is characterized by a decentralized organization whereby police officers obtain legitimacy for their work from the community they serve in furtherance to the traditional sources of legitimization (e.g. laws, the ruling power and other political structures). He added that police officers are appraised and awarded for their communication skills (sensitivity to cultural diversity, solutions to problems, mediation in conflicts etc.) and many other kinds of knowledge and skill otherwise

excluded from the appraisal models used in traditional, para-militaristic organizational systems.

Community policing is a security system established at the core of community partnership in creating safe and secure environs for all. It is policing whereby the people actively participate in their own affairs. The police are not seen as a problem or stranger whose presence stands for danger but as partners in development and those members of the community are co-producers of justice and quality police service. This fact shows the need of involving the community, the local government and the police to work together to tackle crime. One justification for public involvement is the belief that police alone can neither create nor maintain safe communities. Despite the creation of community policing and several efforts by police administrations to curtail the level of crime in Nigeria, criminality and social chaos still persist in the country. With growing urbanization and national development, there are signs of complexity and multiplicity of criminal offenses and acts.

Therefore, in order to encourage the public to share responsibility for enhancing the communities' quality of life and actively support the police in efforts to control and prevent crime, the police must build trust and develop a partnership between themselves and the community members (Cordner,

2005). This partnership needs to be characterized by mutual responsiveness and an equal footing for both partners. Therefore, the police must be better integrated into the community and strengthen their legitimacy in the community through policing by consent and improving their services to the community members in order to achieve such a partnership.

Philosophical Principles of Community

Policing

The philosophical principles of policing in the communities are as follow:

- i. **Visibility and Accessibility:** This require that police officers be easily approachable by community members through creation of a visible and non-threatening presence within the neighbourhood.
- ii. **Police officers should be aware of the social fabric of their communities.** They should cooperation with other administrative agencies to develop social maps of the neighbourhoods to which they are assigned and listed. For instance, vulnerable residents and groups, troublemakers and criminals, crime generators and hot spots, community leaders, types of businesses in the area and social facilities.
- iii. **Responsiveness:** This is a vital philosophical principle of democratic

policing. According to Fleming (2007), the police respond to the needs and concerns of all members of the public and strive to deliver their services at the appointed time, and in an even-handed and unbiased manner, showing empathy to those in need and respect for human rights. He added that the services of the police should also be geared towards the norms and values of the community and the individual needs of the members of the communities in which they work.

- iv. **Requirement for Community Consultation:** This is based on the recognition that an introverted police organization which unilaterally decides what the public needs will not be successful. Consulting, engaging and mobilizing the community in the identification of community problems, in analyzing the underlying causes of the problems, in setting priorities for actions and implementing these actions are also essential aspects of another distinct strategic feature of community policing. Through consultation, the police demonstrate that the community's concerns, values and advice will be considered (Fridell, 2004). In exchange, the community is desired to provide information, resources and moral support for police

activities. In practice, the community should be an active partner with the police in identifying and addressing these issues.

- v. **Accountability and Transparency:** These demand that the police be open to having their activity observed including the behaviour of individual police officers, strategies for police operations, appointment procedures and budget management by a variety of oversight institutions. According to Goldenberg (2007), police need to voluntarily provide the public with both information and reassurance, be accountable to the law, and transparent to the public. If the police are willing to be transparent regarding their operation, the communities may be much more likely to be supportive when issues arise.

Crime Prevention

Crime prevention is a plan of action that focuses on individual groups which are at a danger of either becoming suspects or becoming targets of offence. Prevention of crime is to design schedules that deal with the weak people as well as programmes that deal with reducing the chances of committing crime in the short and long-term. Murphy (2000) and Nyanya (2017) asserts that preventing crime does not only target the

causes of offences, but in the long term, it may do so in the most cost effective way. Prevention of crime involves all activities that aim to reduce, discourage or prevent the occurrence of certain criminalities, which is changing specific circumstances, altering the situations perceived to have caused them, and introducing a powerful discouragement by means of a strong system of criminal justice (Shiner, Thom & MacGregor, 2004; Nyanya, 2017).

Community policing is known as involvement in action and it requires collective participation of all persons in communities and at all diverse levels of government set ups and private sectors. Crime prevention is known to be the expectation, acceptance and appreciation of a criminal situation and creation of a decision to change and diminish it. Crime prevention is an important approach that should consider usage of public awareness campaigns as preventative measures to diminish crime. It also mean to endeavour reducing, deterring crime and criminal activities. It is applied when government actors make efforts to minimise crime, enforce the law and maintain public law and order (Jonyo & Buchere, 2011).

Community Policing Best Practices for Nigeria in the 21st Century

In order to successfully prevent crime and disorder in the communities of Nigeria in

the 21st Century, the country should adopt the following practices for community policing.

There should be creation of fixed geographic neighbourhood beats. This would allow continuously assigned police officers to focus on the communities, including minority ethnic communities within the designated neighbourhoods with their specific characteristics and concerns and would also demonstrate the officers' feelings of territorial responsibility and enhance their feelings of accountability. Continuing assignment would also allow for mutual recognition and foster communication with the community, as the police officers and the people would have the opportunity to meet one another daily. In this way, the police officers would acquire adequate understanding of what is important for community members as well as been able to provide them with information about their activities. The officers assigned to the neighbourhood would act as the direct link between the people and the police agency, other public administration agencies or private organizations that can offer help.

Government should introduce visible and easily accessible police officers and police facilities in the communities. Communication will only improve if police officers are easily visible and accessible. This can be attained if the officers patrol on foot, bicycle, or motorcycle. The establishment of sub-stations and mobile stations with community contact

points, or high traffic contact points in schools, community centres, transit hubs, or shopping malls, should be staffed with officers who are representative of the communities in the locality as this would facilitate the contacts between the public and the police. The appearance of patrol officers and the atmosphere at police stations should be friendly and non-threatening so that the public will not hesitate to get in contact with them.

During reorienting patrol activities to non-emergency servicing, the officers conducting foot patrols need to respond to emergency calls and make arrests but should seek other ways to get in non-emergency contact with the public and develop long-term cooperative initiatives with the public to prevent crimes and improve the overall quality of life in the community. Responses to non-emergency phone calls could be organized differently to free more time for long-term problem-solving activities. Instead of routinely sending patrol cars, the police might suggest ways for managing minor concerns without police involvement or to report concerns in alternative ways e.g. sending e-mails, reporting on the telephone or making appointments at police facility.

The police should facilitate forums where they can exchange views with the community on issues of mutual concern. This could be achieved through community advisory boards,

joint police-community workshops, public meetings, and police open days. Specific efforts may need to be made to ensure that groups such as ethnic minorities, women and young people actually become involved in these processes. Such public forums would permit police actions to be discussed (including sharing of personal experiences by police officers and members of the public) and empower the population to engage actively in the issues related to their safety and security. It would also be an opportunity for community members to give input on their concerns and priorities and on how they think their neighbourhood should be policed.

There should be promotion of cooperation between police personnel and members of the communities. This can mobilise communities to become actively involved in crime prevention activities and to develop a sense of shared responsibility for enhancing public safety. For instance, involvement of members of the community would be to: enhance informal social control through certain activities, create neighbourhood watch groups, development 'Community Service Officer' programmes that will allow uniformed civilians to assist police officers in their non-emergency activities, adopt self-protection measures, and use mediation to settle local disputes (Kondi, 2007).

Complementing traditional (reactive) enforcement activities, a pro-active problem-

solving approach to reducing crime and increasing safety is another important aspect of community policing that needs to be adopted. This strategy systematically analyze social problems by focusing on recurring patterns of incidents rather than on isolated incidents, treating them as a group of problems; and by determining the core causes of crime and disorder. The first thing to be done here is to scan the problems and incidents identified and then analyze. In the next step, solutions are developed and implemented. On a final note, the results of that implementation are assessed. All of these steps are carried out in cooperation between the community and the police. To formalize the problem-solving process, community safety plans can be developed that include a clear statement of the problem; the steps agreed upon to address the problem; the allocation of tasks to individual working group members; objectives and indicators of progress; and regular review dates (Groenewald & Peake, 2004).

Government agencies such as local governments and administrations, courts, the prosecutor's office, as well as social, health and environmental services should also be actively involved as they may offer complementary resources for resolving certain crime and safety related issues. Also, in order to make a police-public partnership approach to problem-solving successful and sustainable,

all branches of the police need to adopt the philosophical principles of community policing and be committed to following the crime preventive, problem-solving and cooperative approach in dealing with the public and with other government agencies as well as with all other police units.

Organizational Changes for Implementing Community Policing Best Practices for Nigeria in the 21st Century

Organizational changes required for implementing the community policing best practices mainly involve management issues, internal structures of the police organization as well as the structures of the community and other government agencies.

Changes in structures and management styles within the police

The police officers assigned to communities need to be flexible enough to adapt their police-public partnership methods to the specific conditions of the neighbourhoods in which they work since communities have different values, customs and concerns. As the officers on the beat are most familiar with the community's needs and capacities, they should have the autonomy to act at their own discretion when they put police policy into action (for instance when initiating contacts, conducting problem-solving, and using resources). Devolution and

decentralization of decision-making and resource management from the mid-level management to the "front-line" officers are thus particularly important. Decentralization is the transformation of responsibilities of all police officers, with subordinate ranks becoming more self-directing and supervisors and senior ranks assuming a coordinating, guiding and supporting role encouraging front-line officers to be disciplined but creative in their initiative-taking, and ensuring that they have the resources necessary for effective problem-solving (Pettersson, 2005). Police officers along with their supervisors are accountable to the public, the law and the government for the actions taken by the officers.

Communication within the police should shift from a predominantly top-down approach to a style with more emphasis on a bottom-up approach, where front-line officers transmit the community's concerns and requests to their supervisors and the higher management (Purdy, 2007). This two-way communication should also lead to a collaborative style of decision-making.

In addition, to devolving responsibilities and enabling the officers to communicate on an equal footing and participate in decision-making with their superiors, empowering police officers to perform community policing in a satisfactory way also requires extensive training and

mentoring of the officers. Beyond the traditional technical skills and basic requirements for democratic policing, community policing demands an even broader range of skills, including the ability to communicate (also in the languages of the local communities), to listen to different opinions, to build trust and to mediate in conflicts (Parker, 2007). In addition, it requires ability to develop creative approaches to community concerns, including organizing community groups, conducting problem-solving and gathering technology-based information as well as translating general mandates into appropriate action as well as conveying the concerns of the community to the police leadership and other stakeholders. The skills required for community policing should be taught in basic training for cadets and in field training for probationary officers as well as in in-service training for police officers, supervisors and managers.

Police officers, who are adopting the community policing approach and who are willing to learn the new skills, should be considered for incentives such as promotional opportunities or flexible shifts and have their achievements formally recognized (Stoykov, 2007). The performance evaluation must focus on the officers' ability to effectively address community problems and to involve the community in these efforts. For instance, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative

criteria measuring (long-term) impacts and outcomes such as the level of the officer's effectiveness in addressing community problems, the level of public satisfaction with the police service, or the level of public cooperation, the sustainability of community projects, and feelings of safety within the community should be introduced (Kondi, 2007).

Changes in structures and management styles outside the police

Empowering the community is as important as empowering the police officers. Police could facilitate the organization of community meetings and forums, and should educate community members on how they can be actively involved in the problem-solving process. This would include helping them to formulate their own priorities and allocating resources for problem-solving. Empowering community members does not mean making them part of the police or allowing vigilantism. Other government agencies must also be made aware of their role and encouraged to take part in the problem-solving approach, and formal structures should be established for smooth cooperation in the interest of avoiding duplication, dividing the labour, assisting each other and developing synergies in the usage of public resources.

Expected Benefits of Community Policing to Nigerians in the 21st Century

The public and the police will enjoy a number of benefits if the best practices of community policing is successfully implemented. Therefore, some of the expected benefits are listed below.

- i. Communities will be able to convey their concerns to the police as well as become partners in finding solutions tailored to their problems, which, in turn, will lead to improved crime prevention, improved safety and an enhanced perception of safety.
- ii. Communities which have come together with the common goal of achieving improved safety, security and livability, will quickly begin to establish long-term relationships, regardless of ethnicity, religious, and political differences. These relationships can also enhance the ability of communities to withstand social problems and pressures that could lead to crime or disorder in the future.
- iii. Police-Public Partnership (PPP) can lead to improved relations between the police and the public, thereby increasing public trust, particularly important for the relationships between the police and minority

communities that have, in the past, been burdened by conflict.

- iv. Police may receive information or assistance from the communities in disruption of more serious, organized crimes and criminal markets or environment.
- v. Good personal relationship of police officer with community members may mobilize law-abiding community members to lend their support or even give direct help, if they see any of the community police officer in danger.

Conclusion

To promote community policing in the communities of Nigeria, it is necessary to pay more attention to professional policing, learning skills for solving problems, the development of a sense of belonging to the community, and solving social problems. Also, those who are acquainted with the idea of community policing, should emphasize police-public partnerships and as well support community members in organizing “crime control networks” through which they will be educated in what anyone can do for his/her safety and other kinds of problem solving. Consequently, all stakeholders involved in a community (politicians, police, other government agencies and the public) should actively be committed and support police-public partnerships approach and accept their share of responsibility for

sustainability success of community policing in Nigeria in the 21st Century.

References

- Cordner, G. (2005). Community policing: elements and effects. In R. G. Dunham & G. P. Alpert (Eds.). *Critical issues in policing: contemporary readings*, 5th ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, pp. 401-418.
- Fleming, J. (2007). *Experience in implementing community policing in Kosovo*. Presentation at OSCE regional police experts meeting on community policing, Skopje, 16-17 October.
- Fridell, L. (2004). The defining characteristics of community policing. In L. Fridell & M. A. Wycoff (Eds.). *Community policing: the past, present, and future*. Washington DC: Casey Foundation.
- Goldenberg, P. G. (2007). Law enforcement officers training programme for combating hate crimes and community policing. Presentation at OSCE Western European regional police experts meeting on community policing, Vienna 11th - 12th June.
- Groenewald, H. & Peake, G. (2004). *Police reform through community-based policing: Philosophy and guidelines for implementation*. New York: International Peace Academy and Safer world.
- Hahn, P. H. (1998). *Emerging criminal justice: three pillars for a proactive justice system*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jonyo, F. & Buchere, P. (2011). *The changing nature of security and intelligence in Africa: A Theoretical perspective, challenges and reforms*. Nairobi: Azinger Ltd.
- Kondi, T. (2007). Community policing concept and characteristics in the Albanian State police. Presentation at OSCE regional police experts meeting on community policing, Skopje, 16-17 October.
- Murphy, P. (2000). *Management project: Design and presentation*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018). *Proactive policing: effects on crime and communities*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Nyanya, J. T. (2017). Community policing as a strategy to prevent crime in the Zambezi region. An unpublished Master dissertation, University of South Africa.
- Parker, R. (2007). *Implementing community policing in practice: lessons learned and challenges*. Presentation at OSCE Western European regional police experts meeting on community policing, Vienna 11th - 12th June.
- Pettersson, K. (2005). *Developing community policing*. A food-for-thought-paper at OSCE SPMU, Vienna.
- Purdy, D. W. (2007). *Community policing*. Presentation at OSCE Western European regional police experts meeting on community policing, Vienna 11th - 12th June.
- Shiner, M., Thom, B. & MacGregor, S. (2004). *Exploring community responses to drugs*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Stoykov, M. (2007). *Community policing*. Presentation at OSCE regional police experts meeting on community policing, Skopje, 16th - 17th October.
- Trojanowicz, R.C. & Bucqueroux, B. (1994). *Community policing: how to get started*. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing.