

# EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY POLICING ON CRIME REDUCTION AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Nigeria has been grappling with security challenges for several years, the country is plagued with high rate of crime and insecurity, ranging from terrorism, kidnapping, and armed banditry to cybercrimes. The teeming unemployed youths, high poverty rate, corruption, tribalism, and nepotism are some of the factors contributing to the high rate of crime and insecurity in Nigeria. The Nigerian government and other stakeholders have intensified efforts to address this problem. This study critically evaluates the effectiveness of community policing in mitigating crime and insecurity in Nigeria, emphasizing its broader implications for community development. Utilizing the qualitative method through interviews with community members, law enforcement officials, and stakeholders, coupled with a descriptive analysis of their views on crime before and after the implementation of community policing strategies. Findings revealed positive correlation between the adoption of community policing and reduction in crime rates. Qualitative insights underscore the improvement in trust and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and local communities, fostering a proactive and participatory approach to public safety. Furthermore, the study explores the multifaceted implications of effective community policing on community development. Beyond crime reduction, the research highlights enhanced community engagement, social cohesion, and the creation of a conducive environment for economic activities. These positive outcomes suggest that community policing not only addresses immediate security concerns but also plays pivotal role in fostering sustainable community development. This assessment contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of community policing in the Nigerian context. The implications for community development underscore the importance of incorporating community-oriented policing strategies into national security frameworks, emphasizing the need for sustained investments in training, resources, and community outreach initiatives. Policymakers and law enforcement agencies can leverage these findings to formulate informed strategies aimed at fostering safer and more resilient communities across Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Community Policing, Crime, Insecurity, Nigeria, Police.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been faced with a rising rate of crime and insecurity, leading to a decrease in the standard of living for its citizens. The government is responsible for providing a secure environment for its citizens, but the resources needed to achieve this are limited (Okechukwu, 2021). In recent times, the concept of community policing has gained currency, especially in developing countries. This process involves partnering with

communities to enhance security while reducing crime. The goal is to increase public safety and reduce crime via citizen involvement. Its goal is to promote public safety by encouraging citizen involvement in crime deterrence. (Bullock and Fielding, 2017).

Community policing is a model of policing that involves the active participation of citizens in the protection of law as well as order. It involves using community or public members to provide policing services in their localities in collaboration with the official police force (Gondal, Ahmad, Raza, Bagum, & Husnain, 2023) and Cordner, (2014). A close relationship between the police and the community defines community policing. The fundamental goal of community policing is to integrate policing efforts into a community's everyday life, allowing for a partnership between the police and the public in creating safer neighbourhoods (Ogoti, 2018).

One of the significant challenges facing Nigeria's security agencies is the lack of trust in the public and law enforcement officials. This mistrust has led to a breakdown in communication and cooperation, making it difficult to combat crime (Hassan and Abdullah, 2018). Community policing offers a solution to this problem by fostering a closer relationship between the police and the public. By working together, the police can gain valuable information and intelligence from the community. At the same time, the public can feel more secure knowing they are actively involved in crime prevention (Arisukwu and Okunola, 2013).

Community policing is a proactive method of law enforcement that highlights collaboration between police officers and community members. This approach involves assigning officers to specific neighbourhoods to build relationships with residents and business owners (Skogan and Hartnett, 2019). By getting to know the community and its needs, officers can better understand their challenges and work with them to find solutions. Community policing also involves problem-solving strategies that address the root causes of crime, such as lack of education, unemployment, and poverty. By tackling these underlying issues, community policing can help prevent crime before it occurs, making neighbourhoods safer and more secure, (Boateng, Pryce and abbess, 2022).

Merenda, Trent, Rinke, and Buchanan (2021) and Reisig (2010) identified some of the critical elements of community-oriented policing to include:

1. Community partnerships: Law enforcement agencies can better understand and respond to community concerns contributing to crime and disorder through community partnerships.
2. Problem-solving: Crime and disorder are reduced when police and residents work together to address root causes like drug trafficking, gang violence, and abandoned buildings.
3. Community engagement: Police officers engage with the community by establishing and maintaining positive relationships with locals and learning about the issues that are most important to them.

4. Proactive policing: The term "proactive policing" refers to the shift in emphasis by law enforcement away from reactive policing and toward a focus on crime prevention and early intervention.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study is qualitative in nature and documentary method was adopted to generate data through secondary sources such as newspaper, internet, journal articles, government publications, textbooks, and research reports from international and local non-governmental organizations. Data gathered for the study were content analysed.

### **The Concept of Community Policing**

Community policing involves a partnership between the police and citizens in each community to prevent and reduce crime through community involvement. It is a proactive approach that emphasizes cooperation, problem-solving, and information sharing between the police and the public Schlosser, (2020). It seeks to shift the authority in public safety from the police and the government to the citizens. Community policing is based on the notion that the public has a role to play in ensuring their safety and that of their community. The police act as facilitators, empowering the community to detect and resolve problems related to crime and insecurity (Tillyer, 2018; Skolnick and Bayley, 1988).

According to Somerville (2009), Community policing is not a new concept. Still, it has gained renewed interest in recent years as a response to the growing distrust between the police and the communities they are serving. By involving citizens in the process of policing, community policing can help to build trust, improve communication, and foster a sense of shared responsibility for public safety.

Frank, (2023) and Tillyer, (2018) noted that community policing shifts from conventional law enforcement practices to a more collaborative approach emphasizing problem-solving and prevention. This approach requires police officers to liaise closely with community members in identifying and addressing the causes of crime and disorder. By doing so, community policing can help to lower crime rates, improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods, and enhance the overall well-being of residents. Additionally, community policing can help promote social justice by addressing the core issues contributing to crime, such as poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, and healthcare (Sparrow, 2016; Greene, 2000).

### **Police Work In Nigerian Communities**

The Nigerian police force has always been plagued by low public trust, low morale, and inadequate pay. The police have also been called out for their violent, corrupt, and harassing methods of keeping the peace. The trust between the police and the people has been shattered due to this strategy. Community policing, on the other hand, can help strengthen public trust in the police, increase public safety, and decrease crime in Nigeria. (Hassan and Abdullah, 2018 Giwa, 2018).

Onuoha, Oli & Ikezue (2020) maintained that community policing is a proactive method of law enforcement that involves collaboration between the police and the community. It is based on the principle that the police cannot effectively combat crime without the support and cooperation of the public. Community policing involves the police working closely with community members to identify and address the root causes of crime. According to Kasali and Odetola (2016), this strategy emphasizes building confidence between the police and the community to solve problems and reduce crime. Ogunsanya (2021) affirmed that Community policing could potentially improve crime rates, public safety, and relations between the police and the general people in Nigeria.

The accomplishment of any community policing initiative in Nigeria depends on the willingness of the public to participate actively. The police need to leverage available resources such as social media to reach out to the public, creating awareness of the significance of community policing and educating them on crime prevention practices (Omilusi and Isaac, 2020).

However, Amadi (2014) noted that the attainment of community policing in Nigeria is not solely determined by the public's willingness to participate. The police must also be willing to engage with the community and build trust through transparency and accountability. That includes addressing issues of police brutality and corruption, which have eroded public trust in law enforcement. By demonstrating a commitment to serving and protecting the community, the police can foster a collaborative relationship with the public and effectively implement community policing initiatives (Alhaji, 2017).

Kasali and Odetola (2016) noted that the involvement of traditional rulers, religious leaders and community organizations is also vital to the success of community policing in Nigeria. These groups significantly influence the community and can serve as mediators connecting the police and the public. Including these groups in community policing initiatives promotes public acceptance, trust, and participation in crime prevention.

Community policing is a joint effort between the police and the community to recognize and resolve the challenges related to crime and disorder. It involves a proactive approach to policing, where the police work closely with the people to prevent criminality before it occurs (Yegon, 2020). Community policing initiatives have successfully reduced crime rates in many parts of the world, and it has the potential to do the same in Nigeria. However, for community policing to be effective, it requires active participation and support of the community, as well as the assurance of the police to work with the public towards a common goal (Adegbile, 2017).

In the view of Ikedinma (2018), one of the critical elements of community policing is building confidence and trust between the police and the community. This can be accomplished through regular communication, meeting with community members, and transparency in police operations. Additionally, community policing can assist in addressing primary or core social issues aiding crime, such as poverty and unemployment. By working together, the police and the public can create a safer and

more secure environment for all Nigerians (Soyombo, 2003, Alemika and Asiwaju, 2008; Abubakar, 2022).

Community policing is not just about law enforcement but also about building relationships and partnerships with the community. It involves a shift from a reactive approach to a proactive one, where police officers work closely with community members to detect and address issues before they escalate into crime (Ojo, 2014). This approach has been successful in many countries, including Nigeria, where community policing has helped reduce crime rates and improve public safety. However, for community policing to be effective, it requires the commitment and cooperation of both the police and the community. Working together can create a safer and more peaceful society (Ordu & Nnam, 2017).

### **Benefits of Community Policing**

Malone and Dammert (2021) stated that community policing has several benefits, including changing the police-public relationship, promoting transparency, and enhancing trust. By integrating the public into the policing process, the police become more accountable to them. It also reduces negative attitudes towards the police, which often fuels resistance from the community (Skogan and Hartnett, 2019).

Community policing is also cost-effective. The cost of maintaining law and order is usually high. Still, with the participation of community members in the policing process, the cost can be reduced, as it is cheaper to recruit and train local persons familiar with the terrain and the people, thereby leading to a mutual understanding (Akinyemi, 2021).

Community policing has been implemented in various countries, including Nigeria. In Nigeria, community policing has successfully lowered crime rates and improved the relationship between the police and the public. The Nigerian Police Force has established community policing units in different states, working intimately with community leaders and members to identify and address local security challenges (Akinlabi, 2022, Omilusi & Isaac, 2020; Arisukwu & Okunola, 2013).

In the view of Hassan & Abdullah (2018), another area in which community policing can benefit Nigeria is information sharing and intelligence gathering. Through its close relationship with the community, the police force can gather reliable information about criminal activities, which can be used in intelligence gathering.

Ikedinma (2018) cites a sense of shared responsibility between the police and the population as one of the benefits of community policing. In Nigeria today, most people view the police with a lot of suspicion, resulting in the inability of the police to gather information that could help promote peace and security.

Community policing equally fosters better decision-making processes. Community policing is based on partnerships between citizens and the police in implementing law enforcement. Hence, community policing partners with local decision-makers and nongovernmental organizations. It allows neighbours and local officials to participate actively and improve decision-making processes (Alhaji, 2017).

Ordu & Nnam (2017) pointed out that one of the critical elements of community policing in Nigeria is the involvement of traditional leaders. These leaders are crucial in mediating conflicts and promoting peace within their communities. By working closely with the police, they can provide valuable insights into local security challenges and help develop effective solutions. In addition, community policing has also led to the establishment of neighbourhood watch groups, which serve as an extra layer of security for residents (Akinlabi, 2022).

Another advantage of community policing is that it promotes social cohesion. Community policing is not solely about policing but social inclusion and community building. Community members are encouraged to participate actively and take charge of their security. This approach ensures that all interests in the community are represented, leading to greater social cohesion, and promoting overall community safety (Erkan, 2015).

Community policing also helps in combating corruption within the police force. Nigeria's police force's image has been tainted with several corruption cases. However, when the community is involved in policing activities, and the connection between the police and the community is strengthened, it can help to combat corruption within the police force (Soyombo, 2008 Akinyetun and Adedini, 2022).

### **Challenges / Problems of Community Policing**

Community policing is a security approach that emphasizes the contribution of citizens and communities towards creating a safer and more secure environment. In Nigeria, community policing has been identified as a viable solution to the country's security challenges. However, community policing in Nigeria faces several problems that have hindered its effectiveness (Hassan and Abdullah, 2018).

The first problem of community policing in Nigeria is funding. Community policing requires a significant amount of funding to be effective. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government has not allocated enough funds for community policing. The lack of funding has made it difficult for the police to establish community policing programs in many areas, (Omilusi & Isaac, 2020).

According to Arisukwu and Okunola (2013), a significant issue with community policing in Nigeria is a lack of trust between the police and the population. Trust is a critical ingredient of community policing; without it, community policing cannot be effective. In Nigeria, many people do not trust the police.

To Ilufeye Sarafa and Utibe Monday (2022), another problem of community policing in Nigeria is the lack of partnership between the police and other security and social agencies. Effective community policing requires close cooperation between the police and other agencies, such as social and mental health services.

Chukwuemeka, Eyina, and Jacob (2021) noted that inadequate training is one of the problems confronting community policing in Nigeria. Effective community policing requires police officers to possess specific communication, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills.

Lack of technology is another problem of community policing in Nigeria. Technology is vital in modern policing, and community policing is no exception. The lack of technology has made it difficult for police officers to collect and analyze data that can help them make informed decisions. This problem has also made it difficult for the police to communicate with the community effectively (Ilufoye Sarafa and Utibe Monday, 2022).

Lack of political will is another problem confronting community policing in Nigeria. Community policing requires significant political will to be successful. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, there is a lack of political commitment to community policing. Many politicians view community policing as a threat to their interests and are unwilling to support it. Consequently, community policing programs are often underfunded, understaffed, and lacking political support (Chukwuemeka, Eyina, & Jacob, 2021).

Ilufoye Sarafa and Utibe Monday (2022) stated that another major problem facing community policing in Nigeria is the lack of trust between the police and the community. Lack of trust is often due to past experiences of police brutality, corruption, and abuse of Power. As a result, many public members are hesitant or cautious to work with the police or share information with them.

## Findings

### Informant 1

Highlights the positive aspects of existing policing policies entrenched in the 1999 constitution for crime detection, prevention, and maintenance of peace in the society. However, it emphasizes the challenges of institutionalization and inconsistent implementation of community policing leading to limited success.

### Informant 2

Expresses similar viewpoint on a positive opinion on the policy, emphasizing the positive impact on Nigerian youths thus, "In my opinion, I believe it has been of great help to Nigerian youths".

### Informant 3

however, appreciates the policy, especially considering the attention needed for the youth amidst concerns about their involvement in crime and illegal activities in this manner, "It is quite impressive especially in a time like this where youth required great attention because of the rate to which they are venturing into crime and all forms of illegality."

**Informant 4** said, "Successful engagement of young people in the community policing is crucial not only for their own personal economic prospects and well-being, but also for overall economic growth and social cohesion but also because it promote security and safety in the society." This assertion emphasizes the critical importance of engaging young people in policing the society, not just for individual well-being but also for broader economic growth and social harmony. Offering a critical perspective,

**Informant 5** observed that, "community policing to tackle crime and unemployment are poorly designed and not achieving the desired result."

**Informant 6** said, "OK, you are talking about community policing set up for youth unemployment or to fight crime and insecurity. Well, I don't think it was actually set up for youth unemployment, how many youths were employed or recruited into the programme".

**Informant 7** also acknowledges community policing as lofty ideas aimed at reducing crime among youths and to fight insecurity in the country but criticizes them for being flawed and inconsistent over the years, "The economic policies on youth unemployment are lofty ideas that were actually directed towards the empowerment of youth people, after their tertiary education but there should be a synergy with security sector to have the desired result"

This perspective was also expressed by **Informant 8** who sees community policing and other socio-economic policies as beneficial, helping to cushion the impact of crime prevention, unemployment and expressing encouragement for their positive effects, "The socio-economic policies set up by different government is to help cushion the effect of unemployment which to some extent is beneficial to the youths. So, it is encouraging but the security aspect needs to be integrated"

From the perspective of **Informant 9** the positive impact of community policing in providing employment opportunities for those willing to work is good, "It has helped in providing employment for those who are willing to work but it has fallen short in fighting or reducing crime and insecurity"

**Informant 10** echoes a similar sentiment to **Informant 9**, emphasizing the goodness and praiseworthiness of the youth empowerment through community policing program succinctly thus, "The youth empowerment programme is good and laudable but more needs to be done in terms of fighting and reducing crime and insecurity."

The findings generally reflect a diverse range of opinions on community policing addressing crime and insecurity in Nigeria. While some respondents appreciate the positive impact and intentions, others highlight challenges related to implementation, design, and political motivations. The overall consensus suggests that there is recognition of the importance of addressing crime and insecurity, but improvements in policy implementation and design are needed.

### **Solutions/Recommendations**

Community policing is a law enforcement strategy involving collaboration between the police and the local people (community) in preventing and solving crimes. In Nigeria, implementing community policing has been marred by several challenges, including inadequate resources, limited training opportunities, low community participation, and weak legal frameworks.

To address this challenge funding, the government should allocate more resources to the police force, including financial, human, and material resources. Increased funding will help to provide better training, salaries, and benefits for law enforcement officers, increasing their motivation to perform their duties and improving their relationship with local communities (Ilufoye Sarafa and Utibe Monday, 2022).



Omilusi and Isaac (2020) noted that police officers must be trained to engage with local communities effectively. The training should be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs of the Nigerian community. Local communities should also be involved in the training process to ensure that officers are trained in ways that are relevant to their communities. Training opportunities could include workshops, seminars, and unique courses on community policing (Chukwuemeka, Eyina, & Jacob, 2021).

Ilufeye Sarafa and Utibe Monday (2022) advised law enforcement agencies to build trust with the community by creating an open dialogue, encouraging collaboration, promoting transparency, and using outreach programs by police officers will help in building relationships with various communities across Nigeria (Soyombo, 2008).

There is a requirement for a legal framework that promotes transparency, accountability, and the protection of the rights of both citizens and law enforcement officers. The legal framework should be reviewed and amended to ensure the police have the necessary powers to carry out their duties effectively. The legal framework should also align with the Nigerian Constitution and international human rights standards (Hassan and Abdullah 2018).

Community policing and public confidence in the police are both weakened by corruption. The government should enact anti-corruption measures, including legislation that provides stringent penalties for corruption offences to overcome this challenge. Additionally, stiffer penalties, such as discipline and dismissal from work for corrupt police officers, should be enforced to deter such practices (Ilufeye Sarafa and Utibe Monday, 2022).

Community policing can only be effective if it works with other initiatives to reduce criminal activity in a given area (Arisukwu and Okunola, 2013). Such programs include providing social and economic opportunities for youths, the creation of jobs, and infrastructure improvements. Additionally, effective intelligence gathering to pre-empt crimes before they occur, patrolling crime-prone areas; and using technology such as CCTVs and GPS trackers to monitor criminal activities in the country. That will enhance community policing efforts in Nigeria, leading to safer and more secure communities (Soyombo, 2008 Akinyetun and Adedini, 2022).

Nigerians have different cultural and religious beliefs and tensions from these differences often flare up, leading to insecurity. That is why, Omilusi & Isaac (2020) recommended that community policing officers be recruited from their communities, providing a diverse experience and knowledge of ethnic and religious differences. That will reduce tension and build trust between the police and local communities (Soyombo, 2008).

Law enforcement agencies should establish an effective data management system that tracks crime incidents, their perpetrators and location, and other helpful information (Akinyetun & Adedini, 2022).

Furthermore, community policing can be a powerful tool in reducing crime rates and improving public safety (Akinyetun & Adedini, 2022). It involves collaboration between

law enforcement agencies and the community to identify and solve local crime problems. By building trust and communication between police officers and community members, community policing can help to prevent crime before it occurs and promote a safer environment for all. Law enforcement agencies in Nigeria need to prioritize community policing and educate the public on its benefits (Akinlabi, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Community policing presents a unique opportunity to reduce crime and insecurity in Nigeria. By engaging the public through partnerships, it seeks to promote crime prevention and enhance public safety. To achieve community policing in Nigeria, the government must provide adequate resources, training, and support to the police. The police, on the other hand, need to build trust and cooperation with the public by embracing a new approach to law enforcement. With the cooperation of the public, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community organizations, Nigeria can improve public safety and reduce crime. The success of this initiative will have a ripple effect on other aspects of life and society in Nigeria.

Community policing is not only beneficial for reducing crime and insecurity in Nigeria, but it also has the potential to improve the relationship between the police and the public. By working together, the police can better understand the needs and concerns of the community, and the community can feel more empowered to take an active role in promoting public safety. This collaborative approach can also help address underlying social issues contributing to crime, such as poverty and unemployment. By investing in community policing, Nigeria can create a safer and more prosperous society for all its citizens.

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