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Democratization of community policing: Insights and perspectives on the Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

In this work, the methods of democratization of community policing in Nigeria were addressed. The traditional methods of policing which focused on militaristic style of policing and the current focus of policing which hinges on police-public collaborations in policing make this study significant. The broad objective of this study is to identify the roles of various stakeholders in the democratization of community policing in Nigeria and the challenges. The specific objectives were to identify the roles of: the police, the public, and the challenges facing democratization of community policing in Nigeria. The work raised three research questions to address the objectives of the study. We adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The result of this survey indicated that the police organize various workshops for police officers to enable them adapt to new policing style and accommodate views from all ranks including lower ranking officers; that the public participate in policing by promoting security outfits, monitoring immigrants, providing useful information to the police and arresting criminals and handing them over to the police; that this new policing programme suffers some institutional setbacks: selective implementation; inadequate personnel and poor budgetary allocations. Based on our findings, we recommend that Nigeria police service should be transformed to Nigeria community policing service; the numerical strength of the police should be raised in order to meet the international standard of one police officer to forty people, and that the budgetary provision for the police should be enhanced.

Keywords: Democratization; Community policing; security; Public participation; Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The undemocratized policing system in Nigeria dates back to the British intervention in the leadership of Nigeria and her subsequent institution of regimental police force which produced a militaristic style that acted as an agent of oppression and largely alienated from the public it should serve. According to Chukwuma (2004:2), “the colonial government institutionalized the police service as an instrument of riot opposition and suppression”. In the words of Okoli (2000:57), “the core task of the regime in power was by then the total subjugation of the people of Nigeria and maintenance of law and order”. He further observed that “these administrators were used to prevent any possible counterattack or insurgency by the indigenous people, to maintain peace and tranquility and to ensure security and protection of British interests in the areas”. Thus the colonial police in Nigeria acted as an occupation force to solidify British interest. The police were not established as agents for promoting the rule of law, human right, community safety or deliverance of social services. The colonial police force in Nigeria were used in punitive expeditions to further the goal of colonial annexation of territories, namely to suppress opposition that arose against colonial exploitation of Nigeria’s resources. This operational modality set the pace for police alienation in Nigeria. The departments were built far away from the public. They were located at places where the government agents lived or where they conducted their

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official duties. The police were rarely seen by the members of the community. Their demeanor signified making some arrests or threat of arrests. Hence the police were dreaded by the public.

The alienation of the police from the public did not stop with the attainment of political independence on October 1, 1960. It was hopefully expected that the policing style would change and that the police would be reorganized and retrained from the colonial method of policing to one that would serve the public. With all due respect to the nationalists, this did not happen. Our brothers, who assumed the mantle of leadership on attainment of political independence failed to restructure the colonial policing style in solving the problem of disorder. As Chukwuma (2004:1) observed thus:

...instead of a major reorganization of the police to serve and protect the Nigerian people what was witnessed was a ceremonial oath, transferring allegiance of the Nigeria police force from British crown to the federal republic of Nigeria. All other features of the police that made them widely feared and despised under the colonial government were left untouched.

Our post-colonial leaders retained all those policing cultures of coercion that characterized colonial government in Nigeria. The police were used to protect the lives and property of our post-independence political leaders and their fellows. The policing values of different environments were not articulated in to the policing process. Police functions were not democratized and police departments were not decentralized.

Furthermore, the persistence seizure of political power by the Nigerian military officers worsened the police-community disconnection. As Madiebo (1980:31) noted, the incursion of the military in government hindered the development of a democratic police and adherence to the rule of law in the country. The military forceful takeover of the government on January 15, 1966 and the subsequent appointment of the inspector-general of police Alhaji Kam Salem and his deputy as members of the then supreme military council under General Ironsi and also the appointment of some commissioners of police and deputy commissioners of police as state military governors led to a marriage of convenience between the police and the military. In effect, the command notion of military politics and political behaviour was transferred to the Nigeria police force. As Okoye and Nnabugwu (2004: 2) argued; the impact of the prolonged military stay in power cannot be farfetched. "Many individuals over time got used to military psyche, imbibed military values and ways of life". In effect the command structure did not make legislators under military dictatorship to advise the community on ways to improve policing process and the police distanced themselves from the community. Thus the police continued to use militaristic style to police the community consequent upon the training programme of drill, command and control approaches inherited from the prolonged military regime in Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

On the second rung of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the safety need. Safety need reflects the human desire to avoid physical attack or danger as assault, accident and fire outbreak (Ferguson, Mckinney and Todes 1977). There are other related desires like economic security, health security, food security and the desire for certainty, in human organization and environmental relationships. In whichever form, safety need is discussed all we know is that safety needs are important and that certain actions have to be performed to achieve the desired goals. During the traditional policing regime which was anchored on militaristic culture, the performance of these actions was thought by the police to be within their sole domain. The police thought that contribution from "outsiders" were regarded as intrusion and that the public knew-nothing about policing. During this period, policing process was bureaucratically planned and there was no incorporation of the public in planning process and decision making.

The current thinking of policing is no longer in that direction. There is a strategic move to shift the way the policing process was planned. This means shifting from centralization of command to decentralization of command and to encouraging the public to participate in policing process. The problem now is that specific collaborative strategies of the police and the expected responses of public in the present democratization of community policing have not been identified. Based on the above problem we pose the following research questions:

- What are the collaborative strategies of the police in the present democratization of community policing in Nigeria?
- What are the expected responses of the public in the present democratization of community policing in Nigeria?
- What are the institutional challenges facing the democratization of community policing in Nigeria.

Objectives of this study

The broad objective of this study is to identify the roles of stakeholders in the democratization of community policing in Nigeria and the challenges.

- The specific objectives of this study are to identify:
- The collaborative strategies of the police in democratization of community policing in Nigeria.
- The expected responses of the public in democratization of community policing in Nigeria.
- The problems facing democratization of community policing in Nigeria.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Theoretical basis of democratization of community policing in Nigeria

Democratization is the creation of enabling latitude that allows individuals to contribute, participate and behave in matters of public concern in accordance with the law of the environment. In this current political dispensation, the core task of the regime in power according to Okoli (2000:118) is democratization of the country. The police process is not an exception. Democracy does not end with the institution of an elected government, genuine democracy according to Lake as in Ofuebe (1988:115) implies more, such as respect for individual and minority rights and tolerance for a loyal opposition. Community policing has come to observe these obligations as the role of the police in post military regime in Nigeria according to Balogun (2004) should be to respect human rights and bridge the existing gap between the police and the public. So community policing is a type of policing process that is all inclusive and is geared towards covering all aspects of empowerments and being very close to the community level.

One of the most positive means of being close to the community is to build a caring community. Torjman (2005:2) posits thus:

Building a caring community is about improving the quality of life for all members of a community. It involves both social intervention and social investment. In considering the strategies for building a caring community, there is no single answer or pat formula” for this work. But there seem to be a few key elements for success, including citizen involvement, problem-solving and community-based leadership. Most importantly, caring communities are built upon a strong foundation of partnerships which combine resources and ideas in new and creative ways.

The police and community work in partnership and in democratic sense to establish programmes that would enhance the implementation of community policing. Such programmes include: volunteer schemes, initiating neighbourhood support networks consensus building and collaborative governance in decision making and implementation. The police would give room for the participation of the citizens and communities in the policing process at their preferred standard ranging from providing information and reassurance to empowering them to discover and implement solutions to minor problems and influence strategic priorities and decisions (Myhill 2005:11).

While working on community policing, Myhill (2005:1) theorized that informal mechanisms of social control may play a greater role than formal mechanism based on traditional reactive enforcement based policing” He pointed out that greater community involvement in policing is likely to have benefits for both police and community relations and actual levels of crime and disorder and in detail the benefits associated with the adoption of this theory in policing include: reducing disorder or anti-social behaviour, increasing feelings of safety, improving policing-community relations and community perception, increasing community capacity and re-orientating police officers’ attitudes towards the public and democratic community policing. Myhill (2005) presented three dimensions in which community engagement can operate as: democratic mandate, neighbourhood level and intermediate level. Under democratic mandate, which is our focus, police appreciate community input in form of advisory role and the provision of auxiliaries and volunteers to augment the performance of the police. Democratic mandate stimulates strategic management in all ranks in the police service and gives equal opportunities to generate ideas and share opinions. It is public-inclusive in decision making for the implementation of policing policy. It is transformational in that it promotes research and intellectual education that equip the officers with skills that enable them to perform their functions and adapt to evolving policing environment. The police would blur the line between the police and the public by suppressing “them” and “us” mentality that had hitherto separated the police from the public. Policing provides day and night patrol support in the community. Neighbourhood mandate also provides opportunities for solving minor problems in the community. Intermediate mandate level provides security for inter-community or interregional proactive crime prevention actions, implement solutions to minor problems and influence strategic priorities and decisions (Myhill 2005:11). It focuses on controlling crime across cultural boundaries and establishing inter-ethnic relations.

Burns and Pettason cited in Anyanwu (1998:365) posit that democracy hinged on a firm belief in the fundamental dignity and importance of the individual, in the essential equality of human beings and the individuals need for freedom. Thus, in providing democratic community policing, the police must possess the features of police service” rather than “police force” where the most significant measure of performance are: public satisfaction, trust confidence and increased co-operation between the police and the public (Project plan 2004:2). The public rely on these variables for cooperation and meaningful contributions to crime controls. In all-inclusive policing, or democratized community policing police provide leadership and direction in anticipation of the cooperation of the community (Murray 2013:2). However, police are expected to recognize that communities have ways they handle their problems.

Democratization of community policing is effected only if there are collective building and democratic decision making opportunities for all ranks from junior to senior ranks. As Murray (2013:5) pointed out that a desired policing culture is one which empowers officers at lower levels so that they have authority and decision making powers at possible level. In effect, democratization of community policing starts from accommodating the views of the lower ranks to adjusting to public participation in policing. Democratized community policing is policing process that asks the police to be civil, sensitive, tolerant and courtesy towards the public and at the same time asks the public and lower ranking officers to participate constructively in decision making and generate ideas that would promote crime control and prevention.

4. Theoretical framework

In this study, we anchor our framework on the definition of democracy as offered by Trilly (n.d). Trilly (n.d) posited that democracy is best understood not as a specific institutional form for example election, or party systems or the separation of powers, but rather by a broader set of social, economic; and political institutions that make possible “broad, equal protected; and mutually binding consultations” between state actors and the public.

Tilly (n.d) sharpened this definition into some major dimensions that are each interrelated and mutually dependent.

First, changes to internal political norms, cultures and dynamics are necessary for assuring mutual consultation between constituencies likened to public and state actors likened to police in broad, equal and protected ways.

Second, democracy requires inclusion which Tilly (n.d) described as breath and equality. A democracy according to Tilly (n.d) is not real if only some constituencies likened to public are included in political likened to powering dialogue while other groups are not. All constituencies require industries.

Third, mutually consultative democratic politics also requires civic capacity. This is the ability of individuals and groups to mobilize, organize; and make political claims. This is in turn a function of a range of social, economic and political conditions. This civic capacity requires for instance, a public sphere, a media and information content in which political claims likened to policing approached can be made and discussed.

These underlying infrastructural conditions for democratic functioning are not static; they must be resilient and adaptive to changing conditions and the demand of our time for instance, demographics technology, economic and social conditions change over time (Tilly n.d) and these infrastructural conditions must follow the trend. In applying this theory to this study of democratization of community policing in Nigeria, the police must abandon their old policing norms and cultures which failed to recognize the contributions of the public and in effect regarded consultation between the public and other stakeholders as unnecessary and thus undermined policing process.

In the new democratic policing, collective integration, consultation and collaborations between the police, the public and other stakeholders are required to forge community policing ahead. Democratic policing as an inclusive participatory system which is wide and creates equality opportunity for all to make contributions to the policing process. Individuals and groups must be empowered to mobilize, organize and contribute positively to community policing process.

5. Methodology

This study was a survey research. Research design is a plan, mode or conceptual structure of the research and type of approach adopted in the study. It was a descriptive population for this study. The population for this study was 180 police officers in Nsukka Area Command and Nsukka Urban Division from 2009–2022. The sample size for this study was made up of the 26 community policing officers in Nsukka Area Command. This study adopted purposive sampling. Purposive sampling in the sense that only community officers were sampled for this study. Both primary and secondary

sources of data collection were used. Primary data were raised from oral interview while secondary data were collected from books, journal articles, magazines, Newspapers, government documents, internet materials and past research work on community policing. The method adopted for analyzing data in this work was descriptive content approach. This implies describing data collected using content analytical method.

6. Findings

Our findings on the mobilization strategies of the police in democratization of community policing in Nigeria findings of this study showed that the police will be:

6.1. Organizing Sensitization Workshops

our investigation reveals that the police will be organizing workshops for members of the police service about the democratization of community policing and the need to recognize the human rights of the citizens. They are to be made to recognize that in the new dispensation, the public can contribute meaningful ideas and materials for the enhancement of democratization of community policing and that these ideas are to be integrated into the policing core values which are hinged on the protection of lives, property and empowerment of the citizens.

6.2. Organizing awareness campaigns for the public

The police will be organizing awareness education for members of the public on the need to embrace democratic policing and support. During this awareness education, the public are told that democratic policing promotes proactive policing and reduces the rate of reactive policing. Proactive policing is system of policing that prevent crimes from occurring. Reactive policing responds to already committed crime. In addition, democratic policing enhances citizen empowerment, trustworthiness and reliability of citizens and the police.

6.3. Embarking on Workshop training for police officers on how to handle the public

The police will be taught to be civil, sensitive and responsive to the yearnings of the public. The police are expected to let the police officers understand that they are the public and the public are the police. The police are taught to be resourceful to the public and that the police would be providing leadership to the public in form of support and encouragement.

6.4. Establishing collaborative actions

The police would be building collaborative actions that would enable the public to be initiating actions contributing constructive to decision making donating materials, money and volunteers augment about the efforts of the police. The police would be proving that the police are the public and the public are the police by integrating their constructive contributions to enhance policy implementation.

6.5. Embarking on Workplace intervention

The police would be intervening on the road or in their place of work. This intervention is directed towards solving the problem of injustice that is imposed on the public. This means protecting the interests of the public from police officers who still maintain the command notion of policing. Workplace intervention not only assures the public that they are friends of the police but goes further to assure them that they are part of the polices.

6.6. Visiting School for handling

The police would be visiting schools to educate the students on how to live life worthy of emulation, avoiding keeping bad company, being polite when handling issues and try to be free from bad habits that may lead one to correctional centres.

6.7. Treating human right abuses

The police would receive and treat all cases of human right abuses by the police officers. In this new dispensation, police would handle and protect the lives of those who are most vulnerable, the minorities, the poor and the disabled by ensuring that they are given their rights.

6.8. Accommodating views from lower ranking officers and the public

The police would provide necessary avenues that permit lower ranking police men and women to be involved in constructive decision making and decision implementation. The police would also provide necessary strategic management approaches that would permit the public to be part of decision making and planning. Finding that the public are expected to responds to the democratization process of community policing by:

6.9. Gathering and giving useful information

Our findings showed that one of the roles of the public would be providing reliable information to the police on crime prevention and control and other social disorders. The police would generate dialogue where the public can provide good quality information and feedback. Good interaction of the police with public would provide good result of any investigation because someone would just tell the police the situation of things which is more reliable than forensic findings.

6.10. Helping to arrest criminals

The public would be arresting criminals and handing them over to the police. This action would involve dislodging the criminals from their hideouts. The criminals would also be questioned and necessary information obtained before taking them to the police.

6.11. Saving the police

As part of their contribution towards the implementation of democratic policing, the public would also put various efforts to save the police when they are in danger especially from physical attack or ill-health. The public would also help to redirect the police when they have lost their direction because most policemen and women are non-natives where they work.

6.12. Giving the chance to recommend for recruitment

The public have the responsibility of recommending objectively those to be recruited. The public know the characters of those to be recruited better than the police and would be in a better position to have better view of those to be recruited. The police authority should keep to this because even in financial management budgeting stands from the cost centres so also should be recruitment of policeman and woman come from the people they are meant to serve.

6.13. Contributing financial and material resource

The public would help the police in the areas of financial and material support. For example providing accommodation especially for the establishment of beat areas, motor vehicles, torchlight, food and donating lands for the establishment of police beat areas in communities. Our findings also indicated that the public are expected to be donating money which can be ploughed to electric power generation and commuters.

6.14. Providing healthcare services

Members of the public who are biased in medicine can provide on a voluntary basis medical services for the police. Health is wealth they say and someone who is not healthy enough finds it difficult to perform his duty creditably.

6.15. Organizing morality retreat

The public would be organizing morality retreat from time to time for the residents. Part of the instructions would be the implications of drug abuse, being involved in crime and other anti-social behaviours. Drug abuse may lead one to involve in crime or may result in health hazards.

6.16. Establishing security outfits

The public would be establishing security outfits or vigilante groups to augment the patrol activities of the police. The vigilante groups would be patrolling day and night on the community roads and paths to prevent incidences of both minor and major crimes. We found that some members of neighborhood can challenge major crimes and prevent them from occurring.

6.17. Monitoring Immigrants

The public would be monitoring the activities of immigrants in their domain. The purpose being to check when they begin to use the advantage of the weaknesses of the communities where they have found themselves to commit

questionable act. It is worthy of note that most immigrants do not have the interest of their host communities at heart and do anything that will favour their personal interest. Most social disorders are caused by immigrants.

6.18. Reducing Decays

Members of the public would be reducing decays or abandonment in their environment. Decays breed crimes as criminals feel safe to hide in those areas. This can be done by embarking on cleanup programme and clear up campaigns.

6.19. Establishment of community skill centres

The public would be establishing community skill centres. These centres should be focused on providing training for the acquisition of necessary skills by the youths. This will enhance their quality of life as they would settle down and look for their daily food. Engagement of youths in productive ventures is one of the ways of controlling crimes.

6.20. Settling of minor disorders

Members of the public would be helping to settle minor disorders in their communities. Disorders breed crime and when they are stopped before they escalate. On the problems inhibiting the democratization of community policing in Nigeria, it was found that institutional challenges like: selective implementation, inadequate personnel and poor funding of the police commands hinder the democratization process of community policing in Nigeria.

7. Discussion

From this study, it was found that the police would be organizing sensitization workshops and workshop training for police officers. These workshops for police officers will go a long way towards enhancing the democratization of community policing as most of the police men and women have been resistant to the introduction of community policing in Nigeria.

As matter of fact, when we were interviewing one of the community policing officers, another officer who overheard our discussion said you and your community policing should give us a chance.”

These workshops will give them another orientation concerning the new evolving policing style which is shifting from isolating and military command notion. It was also found that the police would be organizing awareness campaigns for the public and establishing collaborative actions.

Awareness campaigns will help to change the thinking of the public towards policing having been long under military command notion of policing. The campaign will educate the public on the importance of embracing the new emerging style of policing which will produce proactive policing, implying preventing crime before it occurs. Building consultative actions would enable the public to be initiating decision necessary for the actualization of democratic policing which will eventually lead to joint efforts of the police and the public for the preparation of community policing in Nigeria. It was also found that police would be intervening at workplaces treating human right abuses and accommodating suggestions from lower ranking officer’s workplace. Intervention and treating of human right abuses will assure the public that police are now their friends. The public will make every possible effort within their limit to co-operate with the police in an effort to promote community policing. Accommodating the views of junior officers will energize them to work harder and enhance the democratization of community policing by participating in the collaborative actions between the police and the public. It was found that the police would be visiting schools to provide counseling services to the students. During the counseling services, the students will be advised not to keep bad friends. They will also be advised to be polite when handling issues and live life worthy of emulation.

On the side of the public, it was found that the public are expected to respond to the democratization of community policing in Nigeria by: gathering and giving useful security information to the police, helping to arrest criminals, setting minor disorders, saving the police when they are in danger, and recommending for recruitment. Information they say is the sole of business, so gathering and giving useful information to the police will enable them to take precautionary move to stop the crime from occurring by calling the criminals to order and giving them correctional advice.

Disorder is one of the causes of crime and big crime starts from minor disorder. Therefore settling minor disorder will prevent big crime from occurring. Saving the police when they are in danger especially from physical attack or ill-health will motivate them to be focused on community concern. In some occasions, police would lose their directions as most of them are non-natives of where they serve. It is the duty of the public to redirect them so that they can find their way to their base. It was also found that the public would respond to the democratization of community policing in Nigeria

by: having the chance to recommend for recruitments, contributing financial and material resources, providing healthcare services, organizing morality retreat, establishing security outfits, monitoring immigrants in the community, reducing delays and establishing skill acquisition centers the public know better the characters and ways of life of those to be recruited within their community and because of this the public are in a better position to recommend those to be recruited. The police authority should keep to this because most recruits are criminals and if not properly screened or recommended they will enter the police service just to expand their criminal activities, the contributions of the public in terms of financial and material support, including provision of healthcare services will depend on motivation and mutual trust which the police give them.

As police men and women are expected to interact with the people in the hinter lands. The people are expected to: be providing healthcare services for the police; be organizing morality retreat and provide an opportunity to convince those who are criminally minded to change their ways of life and join the normal society, providing security outfits would complement the efforts of the police to interact with public and win their support. Monitoring immigrants in the community is very important because immigrants are major cause of disorder in the community where they live.

Delays generate criminal activities because criminals feel secured when they hide in such areas. Delays can be controlled by cleanup programme and cleanup campaigns. Idle mind is the devil's workshop, they say, establishing skill acquisition skill centres will propel the development of the participants as they can use practice the skills they acquired at the centres for their sustenance. The major concepts required for the democratization of community policing are consultation, agreement and collaboration or cooperation between the police the public and any agencies or stakeholders that may show concern.

8. Conclusion

In this study, we set out to look at democratization of community policing in Nigeria. We saw that command culture of policing was attributable to the colonial and prolonged military rule in Nigeria. We equally highlighted methods of participation of both the police and the public in order to make community policing truly democratic. We saw that the police would be organizing workshops to propagate the tenets of democratic community policing and organizing forums with the public in order to carry them along.

We identified the institutional challenges to the implementation of democratic community policing as selective implementation approach, inadequate personnel and poor funding of policing process. We recommend that: Nigeria police service should be transformed to community policing; the numerical strength of the police should be raised to 12,400,000 in order to meet the international standard of one police officer to forty people (1:40) and that the budgetary provision for the police should be enhanced to enable them carry out the new dispensation successfully. Policing is everybody's concern and it is the domain of the police, the public and any agency that may show concern. Police should relinquish their militaristic thinking and establish closer ties with the public they were established to serve and protect.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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