

Police and Crime Prevention in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Benefits

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Abstract— *The primary role of the Police globally is crime prevention. However, in discharging this onerous responsibility, it is known to have come up against myriad problems, such as poor welfare, inadequate logistics, corruption, lack of public trust, interagency rivalry, etc., which tend to impede its effectiveness and efficiency. This study aims to interrogate the issues, challenges and benefits if any, that accrue from crime prevention. The study utilised a desktop approach to conduct content analysis of published and unpublished works relevant to its objectives, and argued that the Police effectiveness and efficiency is further undermined by increased crime rate in the society; noting that an alternative mechanism such as job creation, improved education system and provision of basic social amenities was imperative. It concludes that adopting a proactive approach to crime prevention by providing basic livelihoods, outweighs spending on criminal justice administration or system.*

Keywords— *Benefits, Cost, Crime Prevention, Nigeria, Police.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Crime prevention is synonymous with policing globally. However, the issues surrounding the performance of the police in the area of crime prevention remain subject of discussion in many places, at different times; and the challenges confronting it are also enormous, that they appear insurmountable. Effective crime prevention has eluded the Nigerian Police for decades since its establishment in colonial Nigeria. Numerous studies conducted by academics and non-academics revealed that successive administrations have grappled with the prospects of reforming the Police and re-positioning it to meet global standard and best practices. Nonetheless, these efforts have proved inadequate, in that the country continues to experience increasing crime rate manifested in different forms and patterns. Close to seventy years after the first indigenous police was established, there still has not been any significant improvements in terms of its performance, capabilities and the welfare of officers that can bring it at par with its counterparts elsewhere, especially in the West.

Crime prevention and the strategies employed to achieve same may vary from one society to another, but the fact as research has proven, is that preventing a crime from occurring is a lot cheaper than the cost of arrest and prosecution. Crime prevention is an important activity that law enforcement agencies can carry out within the society generally, which if successfully and justly done, would reduce the societal costs (economic and social) and suffering associated with the effects of crime (RAND, 2013). Thus, investing in crime by policy formulations and implementations, benefits not only the

society but also the government in the areas of justice, health, welfare and social capital (Ford, n.d). Crime prevention involves the formulation and implementation of strategies and programmes with the singular objective of minimising crime before it occurs (White & Perrone, as cited in Ford, n.d). This paper focuses on the issues, challenges and benefits that accrue from a well thought out plan for the police that aim to facilitate its statutory role of combating or preventing crime and criminality within the Nigerian society.

Section 4 of the Police acts of 1967 provides that “the police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other act”. This being the case, it is befitting of the Police to ensure that the life and property of Nigerians are adequately protected and secured, and the citizenry is free to go about their lawful business without fear of victimization resulting from activities of hoodlums masquerading in various forms in all nooks and crannies of the country. The main objective of this study is to examine the benefits, if any, of crime prevention, that is, whether it is better to be proactive rather than reactive in matters pertaining to crime and security in the nation.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of crime prevention appears to be the biggest in Nigeria, and the Police that is saddled with the responsibility of preventing crime (Section 4 of the Police Acts, 1967) before it ever rears its ugly head, is grossly handicapped and incapacitated by the myriads of issues surrounding its performance such as bribery, corruption, extrajudicial killings, rape, among others, as well as sundry challenges ranging from rapid urbanisation, population growth, rising inequality, unemployment, mass migration, breakdown of older systems of social order, neighbouring weak states, and the opening of new economic arenas, which give rise to a huge range of criminal challenges including robbery, kidnap, corruption, fraud, terrorism, sexual assault, domestic violence, communal strife, and criminality in politics (Owen, 2014). Notwithstanding these issues and challenges, studies revealed that the Police “remain provider of choice, against odds” as Nigerians still rely on the Police for security and crime control, and continue to report crime to the Police more than the other alternative community-based security

providers. For example, according to CLEEN Foundation, crime reporting preferences in Nigeria shows that 20.2% of crime victims reported to the Police as against 2.4% who reported to the other security outfits such as Vigilante groups (Owen, 2014). The situation is further compounded by failure to realize that good policy formulation addressing the basic needs of the people and proper implementation, when juxtaposed with judicious resource allocation and management, could be the antidote for crime and criminality within the society.

Additionally, the 2008 Annual Report of the Nigeria Police indicated that the Police grapple with serious issues of police extortion and corruption and other vices the Police is prone to in their line of duty. Coupled with this are the numerous challenges hampering the effective and efficient performance of the Police in Nigeria, which include lack of resources, poor government support, poor condition of service, lack of appropriate and adequate training [sic] and ill-equipped workforce (Adegoke, 2014). All this and others, clogs the Police ability to prevent and combat crime and criminality in the Nigerian society.

This study departs from the usual literature which examine the role of the Police in crime prevention from just the perspective of issues and the challenges confronting the Police in Nigeria, without mentioning the benefits derivable from preventing a crime from happening through the implementation of people-centred programmes that meaningfully engages them, thereby becoming pro-active rather than reactive to crime and criminality. Therefore, the current study adds to the existing literature on the Police and crime prevention and control generally, but more specifically, it brings to the consciousness of the government the need to weigh the cost and benefits of crime prevention and control so as to formulate policies and programmes in tandem with this objective. It may also have implications for criminologists, criminal justice practitioners, researchers, policy makers and administrators in quest of viable options to tackle the challenges of crime and insecurity globally.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the role of the Nigeria Police in crime prevention, while the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine some of the issues germane to the Police in Crime Prevention in Nigeria.
- ii. Analyse the challenges confronting the Police in crime prevention in Nigeria.
- iii. Discuss the economic and social benefits accruable to the nation in preventing crime before it occurs.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the documentary/desktop method to collect primary data from books, online journal articles, government publications, agency reports, among others. The contents were then analysed in line with the objectives of the study.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Conceptual Exposition

5.1.1 Police

One definition of *police* refers to it as body of officers representing the civil authority of government, responsible for maintaining public order and safety, enforcing the law, and preventing, detecting, and investigating criminal activities, or simply policing. This seeming holistic conceptualisation is being punctured by experts in police affairs. These scholars, arguing that it refers to members of a public organisation having the legal competence to maintain order and enforce the law – for two reasons, which include defining police by their ends rather than by the specific means that they use to achieve their goals; and, the variety of situations in which police are asked to intervene in much greater than law enforcement and order maintenance (Banton, Walsh, Whetstone, Kelling & Brodeur, n.d).

Drawing on a definition of Police by American Sociologist, Egon Bittner, Banton, et al. (n.d), noted that researchers are in agreement that legal competence to enforce coercive, non-negotiable measures to resolve problematic situations remains a common feature among all the different agencies engaged in policing; that such situations are characterised by two features – their potential for harm and the need to solve them urgently before they develop that potential – leading to the actual use of coercion or threat of using it, which allows police to put a quick, non-negotiated, and conclusive end to problematic situations such as keeping people away from the scene of a fire for their own protection and to allow firemen to do their job.

Another definition of Police indicates that it is a civil force entrusted with the task of monitoring public order and law enforcement for the prevention and punishment of their breaches (Anderson, as cited in Mathias, 2016). Police is also defined as an organ of government that is charged with public safety; and responsible for the civil society security (Adedipe, as cited in Mathias, 2016).

5.1.2 Crime Prevention

Crime prevention is defined in paragraph 3 of the Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime as comprising: strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring, and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society, including fear of crime, by intervening to influence their multiple causes (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime [UNODC], 2010). Crime Prevention refers to the range of strategies that are implemented by individuals, communities, business, non-governmental organisations and all levels of government to target the various social and environmental factors that increase the risk of crime, disorder and victimization (ECOSOC, 2002; AIC, 2003; IPC, 2008). Sherman et al. (1997) noted that from general society perspective, the best and most useful activity that law enforcement agencies can carry out is crime prevention; and that most crime prevention emanates from informal and formal practices and programmes found in such institutional settings as communities, families, schools, labour markets,

places, police, and criminal justice (as cited in *Crime Prevention*, n.d).

5.2 Issues Germane to the Police in crime Prevention in Nigeria

The Nigeria Police has the statutory responsibility to prevent crime within the shores of the country and sometimes too, in foreign lands, where they are known to have performed excellently to the admiration of the international community. However, at home, the Police have over time been embroiled in several issues pertaining to its performance and operations and in relation to crime prevention. This reality was addressed by a former Inspector General of Police, Mohammed D. Abubakar, when he assumed leadership of the organisation in 2012: *Police duties have become commercialised... Our men are deployed to rich individuals and corporate entities such that we lack manpower to provide security for the common man. Our investigations departments cannot equitably handle matters unless those involved have money to part with. Complainants suddenly become suspects at different investigation levels following spurious petitions filed with the connivance of police officers. Our police stations, State CID and operations offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of Squads and Teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS) have become killer teams, engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collection. Toll stations in the name of check-points adorn our highways with policemen shamelessly collecting money from motorists in the full glare of the public* (cited in Owen, 2014).

Against the backdrop of moral character, there is also the issue of *discretion* in the discharge of Police responsibility. Roberg, Crank & Kuykendall (as cited in Johnson, 2013), described discretion as the exercise of individual judgement, instead of former rules in making decisions; meaning, the officer makes a choice regarding both what laws would be enforced and how that enforcement would take place or how it should be carried out. The debate on the use of discretion is seen in the fact that it could be less or more, abused or appropriately applied; whether it should be increased or reduced. Nonetheless, the argument particularly on reduction is hinged on the abuses of that discretion which include physical abuse of citizens or unequal application of the law in making arrests (for example when an elite is allowed to go scot free after committing a heinous crime, while another poor or less privileged individual is arrested and perhaps brutalized for the same offence because, as noted by I.G P., Abubakar, the person has *no money to part with*).

The issue of widespread corruption among the ranks and file of the Nigeria Police is one that has engaged scholars and other stakeholders. Alemika (as cited in Adegoke, 2014), argued that corruption in the Police constituted a serious issue since they are expected to be moral as law enforcers. He cited instances where Police collude with some members of the society to facilitate offenders release from Police custody after obtaining money from suspect. Others include closure of case files, escorting vehicles loaded with contraband goods and stolen items, stealing from suspects and or accident victims,

stealing from crime scenes, supply of Police arms and ammunition with Police uniforms to criminals for monetary gains, etc. Among other issues involving crime prevention by the Police, are the following: recruitment, training, pay and conditions, promotions and postings, working practices, morale, motivation and management, professionalism, discipline, corruption, communal violence and terrorism, political interference, etc. (Adegoke, 2015).

5.3 Challenges Confronting the Police in crime prevention in Nigeria

According to Owen (2014), the Nigeria Police is confronted with myriads of problems in the bid to discharge its statutory responsibility of crime prevention. Some of these general problems include:

- a. Low morale and sense of worth
- b. Concentration of human and material resources at the centre (central government)
- c. Inhibition of public trust and partnership because of the paramilitary culture it inherited from the past.
- d. Politics and lobbying impinges on the independence of the Police and its effective performance

In addition to the general problems, the Nigeria Police also faces specific structural, resource and performance challenges due largely to the kind of society in which it operates. As numerous as these challenges are, five major limiting factors stand out:

- i. Current and ongoing dire peace and security challenges spread across many regions of the country with high profile cases in the Niger Delta, Middle-Belt, South-East, and North-East. Specifically, terrorism, communal conflicts, political conflicts, and other relatively new crime types are also reshaping the political landscape.
- ii. Lack of human resource, skills and motivation widespread within the Police.
- iii. Limited resources to achieve mandated tasks – the Federal Government cannot afford to fund the Nigeria Police adequately to achieve all tasks before it.
- iv. Multiple other overlapping agencies taking on special policing duties, for example, the Nigeria Army, National Security and Civil Defence Corps, State Security Service, among others.
- v. Structural constraints in which the tension between the central government and the federating states exacerbates the already resource problems that exists within the Police. Its structures of accountability also renders it vulnerable to interference by the political class who on occasion, employ their wealth and machinery to undermine or limit police effectiveness in law enforcement (Owen, 2014).

Owen (2014) further observed that there are other sundry and current challenges deviling the Police, which include rapid urbanization, population growth, rising inequality, unemployment, mass migration, breakdown of older systems of social order, neighbouring weak states, and the opening of new economic arenas, which give rise to a huge range of criminal challenges such as robbery, kidnap, corruption, fraud, terrorism, sexual assault, domestic violence, communal strife, and criminality in politics. He noted that whereas there are

specialised bodies empowered to tackle some of these challenges, the Nigeria Police is solely saddled with the responsibility.

5.4 The benefits of Crime Prevention to a Nation

Crime prevention benefits relates to investment in prevention programmes with the aim of saving money. The UNODC (2010) reported that in the preceding decades, studies conducted on the costs and benefits of crime prevention programmes had shown that early intervention programmes, such as providing support to children and families at risk, or working with young people to encourage them to stay in school and complete their education, led to significant reductions in long-term criminal, social and economic costs that exceeded the sums invested in those programmes which invariably led to increased earned income or lower health costs.

In Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Crime Statistics on reported offences by Type and State showed that a total of 134,663 cases were reported in 2017. Offence against property had the highest number of cases reported with 68,579 of such cases reported. Offence against persons recorded 53,641 cases reported while offence against lawful authority recorded the least with 12,443 cases recorded respectively. Lagos State had the highest percentage share of total cases reported with 50,975 (37.9%) cases recorded. Abia and Delta State followed closely with 12,408(9.2%) and 7,150(5.3%) cases recorded respectively. Kebbi State had the lowest percentage share of total cases reported with 205(0.2%) cases recorded. Kogi and Bauchi States followed closely with 282(0.20%) and 386(0.30%) cases recorded respectively. In 2016 alone, 125,790 cases were reported, indicating an increase of 8,873 (NBS, 2017).

The increasing rise in crime rates in Nigeria suggests that more money is being spent on preventing crime. The nation has been inundated with various kinds, patterns and degrees of crime and criminal activities ranging from terrorism, insurgency, militancy, kidnapping, armed banditry, cybercrime, fraud, cattle rustling, communal conflicts involving murder, etc., all of which constitute grave concern to the Federal, State and Local Government authorities. This implies that the costs of criminal justice and policing in particular have increased disproportionately; thus, any genuine attempts aimed at reducing the costs of crime and maximising its benefits via prevention strategies or programmes, would be much appreciated by the majority of Nigerians.

Research has established that the costs of prevention programmes have long run advantage than those of criminal justice interventions, in which cases are processed through the three sectors of the criminal justice system. UNODC (2010) stated that the criminal justice system is very costly to maintain in all countries, therefore, any reductions in rates of crime and in the numbers of people processed through the courts and prisons are likely to save on policing, prosecution, defence and court costs, as well as the high expenses of running prison and parole systems. It noted that there were other long-term social and economic costs associated with lost productivity, and the social and welfare services incurred by

offenders and their families, as when breadwinners are imprisoned or children taken into care. Overall, the cost of crime for victims and society in terms of health, lost earnings and productivity put together could be higher than the criminal justice costs; that is, after considering all expenditure on protective security such as technological systems, private policing or fencing and barriers, which are part of the costs of crime.

A vivid scenario is seen in the case of Canada in 2003, which spent some 70 billion Dollars as costs of crime; a breakdown which shows expenditure on criminal justice resulting from crime including police, courts, prosecution and corrections amounting to Can\$ 13 billion, on defensive measures such as improved locks or closed-circuit television cameras (Can\$ 10 billion, and the economic, social and health costs to victims of crime (Can \$ 40 billion), indicating that victims shouldered the largest bulk of the costs of crime (UNDOC, 2010).

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study anchors on two theories – structural-functionalism and situational crime prevention, to explicate police and crime prevention issues, challenges and benefits within the N

6.1 Structural-functionalism

Structural-functionalism is a sociological theory enunciated by various scholars such as Emile, Durkheim, Malinowski, Talcott Parsons, among others. The theory views society as an organic whole comprising of different parts each functioning to maintain the entire systems and subsystems of the society such as the family, politics, economy, education, religious institutions, etc. Durkheim (1933) for instance, held that specialised division of labour and rapid industrialisation witnessed in society constituted threats to social solidarity, which tended to generate a situation of anomie (normlessness), where social controls, that is, moral values that check individual excesses are no longer strong enough to function effectively. Thus, he argued that crime is an inevitable and normal component of human society because not every member of the society is equally committed to the collective sentiments (the shared values and moral beliefs) of their society (Adegoke, 2014).

According to Adegoke (2014), the Nigeria Police as a subsystem of the Nigerian society serves the function of providing security for the life and property of the citizens living in the country. Hence, any defect in the functions or operations of the Police subsystem which include crime prevention, would directly or indirectly affect the general security and well-being of the citizenry and lead to nationwide insecurity. As stated already, Nigeria currently has a very high crime rate such that the country is in a state of normlessness that has also stretched the capacity of the Police to perform effectively and efficiently; this is not to mention the numerous challenges of low morale, poor welfare, and inadequate equipment, among others, that the Police still faces.

6.2 Situational Crime Prevention

Situational crime prevention theory is a variant of rational choice theory. It applies rational choice theory tenets to very specific situations in which crime may occur. In effect, situational crime prevention efforts seek to increase the risks associated with specific criminal acts and/or to decrease the rewards associated with the offence. This type of crime prevention may emphasize increasing the effort required to commit the offence, increasing the risk of detection, reducing the gains associated with the crime, reducing the provocations that may escalate a course of action, and remove excuses for offending. These assumptions tie neatly into the concept of benefits of crime prevention. When the risks associated with specific criminal act is increased by putting adequate measures (such as natural surveillance where safe activities are placed in unsafe locations and vice versa) in place to prevent the particular act, it would reduce the reward associated with the offence. The idea of setting up gardens and relaxation/recreational areas (safe activities) for residents of Abuja, in hitherto dens of criminals (unsafe locations) during the administration of the former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mallam El-Rufai, is one of such measures worthy of mention here. The proactive measures taken by the Minister, helped to curb the spate of criminality prevalent in the nation's capital at the time; and residents were able to go about their legitimate businesses without fear of harassment and pilfering by hoodlums.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the role of the Nigeria Police in crime prevention, issues, challenges, and likely benefits accruing from taking appropriate measures to prevent a crime before it occurs within the society. Drawing on several studies and citing relevant examples, the paper argued that the cost of preventing crime is cheaper than arrest and prosecution, or processing an offender through the justice system. It found that there are tangible social and economic benefits in crime prevention including significant reductions in long-term criminal, social and economic costs that exceeded the sums invested in crime prevention programmes including remand homes, juvenile centres, parole, and even prisons, which invariably leads to increased earned income or lower health costs. The study concludes that preventing a crime from occurring has an added advantage of enhancing the

effectiveness and efficiency of the Police and reducing crime rate in the society. Thus, the study recommends a proactive rather than a reactive approach to crime prevention which include early intervention programs like education, provision of sustainable employment, provision of basic social infrastructures such as electricity, water, roads, , among others. Finally, if these measures are faithfully and justly implemented, they would stem the increasing wave of crime and criminality currently tearing at the very heart of Nigeria's corporate existence.

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