



“EVERYBODY SHOULD BE INVOLVED” THE DIRE NEED FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF ALL NIGERIAN CITIZENS IN THE POLICING, MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA

SULEIMAN YAKUBU

PHD CANDIDATE, INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE

SUSUKHALDUN@YAHOO.COM

Abstract

The paper serves as a clarion call to every Nigerian citizen to actively participate in creating a crime-free and better Nigeria for all. The security situation in Nigeria is deeply troubling to both the government and its citizens. There is an urgent need to address this issue before it escalates. To achieve positive results, collaborative efforts among the police, government, and members of the public are essential for protecting lives and property at all levels within Nigeria. Several key factors should be prioritized to enhance the effectiveness of policing activities in Nigeria. These include the age-grade system, communal vigilante groups, hunters' associations, the police at state and regional levels, traditional rulers, the government, and every patriotic citizen. Furthermore, police-community partnerships, information sharing, and police involvement in community affairs should be emphasized as vital strategies for effective policing in Nigeria. It is, therefore, imperative that Nigerian citizens adopt a culture of integrity, social justice, and a thorough moral re-evaluation to foster the mutual support necessary for proactive policing in the country. This paper aims to demonstrate that Nigeria can successfully tackle crime if everyone is involved in the crime prevention process, working in collaboration with law enforcement agencies.

Keywords

Age Grades, community policing, crime, Nigeria, police and vigilante

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1. Introduction

In recent times, the importance of maintaining peace and ensuring the safety of citizens and property has become increasingly evident for the progress and survival of any sovereign nation. It serves as a fundamental requirement for good governance, which in turn fosters socioeconomic growth, political advancement, national peace-building, human capital development, and the proper functioning of institutions. Conversely, the lack of internal security creates disorder, heightens insecurity, distorts freedom, diminishes human value, and impoverishes citizens. Thus, no nation is willing to compromise its internal security, as doing so can lead to a breakdown of law and order, ultimately disrupting the country's democracy (Oikhala, 2021: 130). The security situation in Nigeria has become so disturbing that many people live in fear because security and law enforcement agencies are unable to provide them with adequate protection from Boko haram, herdsmen and bandits. Modern police institutions worldwide have developed various strategies to deliver essential services to citizens in an effective manner. However, the contributions of the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies to controlling crime and maintaining law and order have become more complex than ever before. As a result, their efforts have proven insufficient (Barley, 1994: 3). This issue represents a significant challenge faced by many developing countries, including Nigeria. It is crucial for all Nigerian citizens to participate in the policing and crime prevention process to address problems such as crime, theft, and other social vices that threaten the security and well-being of all Nigerians. This need has led to the implementation of community policing initiatives in various communities, villages, and cities across Nigeria (John, 2010: 4).

This article aims to appeal to all Nigerians and the various indigenous social control systems at work in the country to collaborate closely with the Nigerian police in combating the diverse range of crimes against individuals and property that characterize contemporary Nigerian society. It also aims to address the security challenges in Nigeria, particularly concerning crime detection, prevention, and control, to make Nigeria a safe haven for all. The article will also address the questions of how and what can be done to overcome the security challenges confronting Nigeria.

2. Clarification of terms

It is essential to distinguish between the concepts of 'police' and 'policing.' The police is a particular kind of institution, while 'policing' implies a set of processes with specific social functions. It may be true that the police may not found in every human society, but policing may be a universal requirement of most social order in communities, which may be represented by a variety of different processes and institutional arrangements (Maguire, 1997: 2). Traditionally, policing is the responsibility of all male adults in most African communities in their respective countries. In medieval African societies, all adult males were involved in policing activities before the emergence of specialized police forces for maintaining law and order, as well as serving as members of the state. They were organised into age groups or

grades and were responsible for providing security and the maintenance of law and order in their respective communities (Usman, 2014: 12).

With the rise of the state, modern systems of government developed complex bureaucracies characterized by centralization, hierarchical authority structures, and professional staff. This shift transformed the traditional philosophy of policing, which was based on the idea that policing was a communal responsibility (Weber, M., 1978: 5). As the state emerged as a legal entity, it faced an increase in crime, societal issues, and violence. As a result, specialized government agencies, such as the police force and armed forces, were established to control and uphold law and order (Alemika, 2000: 5).

In Nigeria, Community policing is a security strategy that needs to be adopted as a supplementary effort to enhance the police force's efforts in combating criminal activities and crime across all communities in Nigeria. The police in Nigeria cannot sustain or maintain crime-free communities without the voluntary efforts of local and communal groups to complement their efforts. It is also believed that people residing in a particular community can easily identify those who perpetrate evil in their immediate environment and will be more easily able to track them down because they have adequate knowledge of the geographical settings of their areas and communities (Okafor, 2018: 66). In Nigeria, Community policing takes different forms, which include community development associations, peace and security committees, and landlords and tenants' security harmony initiatives. In these initiatives, able-bodied men in their respective communities are grouped or organised into parties to watch over the community on a rotational basis. Civilian joint task forces, vigilante service groups, age grades, hunters' associations, and other organizations should also be involved in community policing activities. Community policing can significantly assist or aid the Nigerian police force and other security agencies in preventing crime in most communities if a cordial relationship is established between the community and the security agencies. This will enable the security agencies to track down and apprehend all perpetrators and criminals in various communities. It is no new information that there is little or no harmonious working relationship or understanding between the police force and several communities in Nigeria. This results from mistrust and suspicion between the Nigerian police force and the people, making cooperation almost impossible (Olusegun, 2016: 11).

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3. Theoretical framework

The most suitable theory for this analysis is Strain Theory. It was developed by American sociologist Robert Merton in the late 1930s. According to Merton, crime is not simply a function of deprivation but the result of a disjuncture and lack of connection between ends (goals) and the means to attain those ends. Robert further argued that deviance results not from pathological personalities but from the structure and culture of society (Mathieu, 2018: 144). He begins from the standard functionalist perspective of value consensus, which argues that all members of a society share similar or the same values. However, because individuals occupy different positions within the social structure, such as varying class positions, they do not all have the same opportunities to realize these shared values. This disparity can lead to deviance. Social and cultural structures exert pressure that can cause individuals in different positions within those structures to engage in socially deviant behaviours (Mathieu, 2018: 144). The theory further states that society places pressure on people to achieve socially accepted goals, even when they lack the necessary means to do so. People aspire to achieve the cultural norms of economic success but are denied the education, capital, or other means to realize those ends, and as a result, they will experience strain. According to Robert, there is a possible response to this strain. The person may try what Robert calls innovation. Innovation, in this vein, refers to accepting society's goals and designing one's means for achieving them. Often using socially unapproved or unconventional means to obtain culturally approved goals. Examples of this include dealing drugs or stealing to achieve financial security. Although the individual continues to accept the cultural value of success, they will employ illegitimate means, such as theft or robbery, to obtain money or wealth because legitimate means to achieve this end are unavailable (John, 1980: 90).

In Nigeria, as in many modern societies, education is a vital means of social mobility. Individuals who receive quality education are more likely to secure better jobs and achieve occupational success, enabling them to reach greater heights in their communities. Consequently, those without access to quality education or social connections, and who are unable to attain a high level of education and occupational status, face significant challenges in advancing within society. There is a strong temptation for individuals who find it difficult to succeed through accepted channels of mobility to resort to socially unacceptable means to achieve their goals (Onyeozili, 2005: 32).

From the foregoing, it is therefore clear that the adoption of the Strain Theory will provide support for analysing the security situation. Presently, in Nigeria, even those who have the opportunity to attain a high level of education are found committing crimes. Due to the high level of unemployment and unbearable state of poverty in the country, many people are left with no other option than to resort to, as explained above, innovation, thereby becoming criminals. Property crime, including theft, arson, and burglary, is rapidly increasing and becoming a major problem hindering Nigeria's developmental progress (Ugwueke, 2011: 8). In light of the above, the Strain Theory clearly explains some of the major causes of the current security problems in Nigeria.

4. The idea of community policing

Policing is closely related to the concept of social control and is subject to various interpretations and uses. According to a dictionary definition, policing is “the function of maintaining social control in society” (Outhwaite, 1994: 8). When we refer to ‘community policing,’ we emphasise a community-oriented approach aimed at combating crime. Community policing involves a collaboration between the police and the community to identify and tackle crime-related issues. In this situation, the police are no longer the sole custodian of law and order; instead, all community members become active partners in enhancing the safety and security of their neighbourhoods (Samuel, 2012: 135).

Community policing can also be seen as a strategy where police departments work together in partnership with their community to reduce crime and disorder and to uphold a sense of order in the community (Reiner, 2010: 5). In official circles, community policing is an idea that emerged in the mid-1980s when it was realised that formal and informal means of crime reduction, order, and maintenance were complementary and that the community should work together to stop crime and lawlessness. The movement towards community policing has, to a large extent, gained momentum in recent years. As a result of this, the police force and community leaders explore more effective ways to promote public safety and improve the quality of life in their communities. Also, community policing strategies differ depending on the needs and responses of the community involved (Dennis, 1989: 188).

From a historical perspective, contemporary community policing can be traced back to Sir Robert Peel, who established the London Metropolitan Police. He articulated several principles, one of which is foundational to community policing: “The police are the public and the public are the police” (College of Policing, 2016: 7). This type of community policing should be studied, adopted, and implemented in Nigeria to address its contemporary criminal challenges. The key issue here is the mutually beneficial relationship between the police force and the community, which forms the core idea of community policing, particularly in the United Kingdom. This approach emphasizes two complementary components: community partnership and problem-solving (Omowunmi, 2016: 34). To develop this community partnership, the police must develop a positive relationship with the community, must involve the community in the quest for better crime control and prevention, and must pool their resources with those of the community to address the most urgent concerns of community members with all sincerity and passion (Dominique, 2009: 148).

Before the colonization of Nigeria, the various ethnic nationalities that presently constitute Nigeria had traditional social control mechanisms in place. These indigenous social control systems performed many of the functions that modern police do. These systems of social control were deeply ingrained in the community and closely intertwined with its social and religious structures. These include agencies such as Age Grades (formal organizations whose membership is based on a pre-determined age range), secret societies, or vocational guilds. Some of these include local groups

such as hunters, farmers, or fishermen. Through these groups, law and order were maintained without force or violence (Elrena, 2008: 32).

In contemporary Nigeria, some varieties of these indigenous social control systems still exist. These kinds of social control systems are now represented in organisations such as the Bakasi Boys of the Igbo, the Hisha of the Hausa/Fulani, the Odu'a People's Congress (OPC) of the Yoruba, and the Umogbai of the Auchi Kingdom, among many others. Essentially, these indigenous social control systems are based primarily on the guiding principles derived from the norms and values of the indigenous people rather than the traditions, customs, and practices of other societies outside Nigeria. Apart from the large, coordinated, and well-organized indigenous organizations, such as the Bakasi Boys, Hisha, and OPC, there are numerous other indigenous watch organizations or vigilante groups that ensure community security (Akin, 1994: 36).

Traditional policing and vigilantism are widely accepted by citizens in Nigeria due to their effectiveness over the years. Members of a society to which traditional policing generally applies accept and participate in their indigenous policing systems. As part-owners of the system, it is unlikely that any significant portion of the population will be excluded from the system or its mode of operation. Decisions are always made and enforced with the knowledge and consent of the members. The personnel in indigenous social control systems come from the communities they serve, which makes them more acceptable to the locals compared to police officers (Samuel, 2012: 137). It is also crucial to note that many Nigerians lack trust and confidence in the Nigerian Police Force, viewing them as 'alien' agents of the government. This perception is compounded by widespread beliefs that the police are corrupt and unfair. As a result, the majority of Nigerians see the police's response to crime as grossly inadequate. Many citizens prefer to rely on local mechanisms, such as vigilante groups or age grade organizations, due to their quicker responses to distress calls (Okafor, 2007: 9).

5. Aims and objectives of community policing in Nigeria

Community policing in Nigeria has several aims and objectives, which highlight the importance of involving every Nigerian citizen in the process. These aims will be explained in detail. Firstly, community policing offers a broader perspective on crime control and prevention, which remains a central concern for individuals in communities, villages, and cities across Nigeria. Community members play an active role in addressing issues related to crime, insecurity, and neglect. They are engaged in dismantling gang activities, ensuring that abandoned houses and warehouses are not used as hideouts by criminals, preventing vandalism of broken-down vehicles, and monitoring bushes in neighbourhoods that could serve as potential hiding spots for criminals. These initiatives are undertaken by members of the community because they directly benefit their own safety and well-being. No one can address these issues better than the community itself. Strengthening the link between the police and community members enhances their partnership, enabling them to identify and

address the underlying causes of crime more effectively (Ikuteyijo, 2012: 12).

Additionally, community policing places a new emphasis on engaging community members as active participants in addressing community security challenges. The partnership between the police and community members should be built on mutual trust and confidence. However, this trust is lacking, which significantly contributes to the police's lack of proactivity. As a result, the police often miss out on critical information due to insufficient proactive policing. The distance between the Nigerian Police Force and the public is further exacerbated by the frequent transfer of officers from one geographical location to another, often moving from their communities of origin to areas where they are unfamiliar. This makes it challenging for them to adjust to their new environment and connect with local community members (Alemika, 2005: 14).

Community policing complements and enhances the work of the Nigerian Police, leading to increased resources and personnel dedicated to preventing crimes and law enforcement activities. It is important to recognize that community policing does not diminish the authority of the police or undermine their primary responsibility of maintaining law and order. Instead, community policing enables the police to leverage the skills, expertise, and resources available within the neighbourhood. This collaboration helps alleviate some of the burdens faced by the police (Ugwueke, 2011: 34).

Furthermore, the void created by the lack of mutual trust and confidence between the people and the police can be filled by community policing. Community policing will help gather and share security information with the police force in a timely way, enabling them to be more responsive in their policing efforts and activities. This mutual relationship between the police and the community would positively enhance the police's activities by improving their image among Nigerians (Onyeozili, 2005: 35).

Protecting lives and property is a capital-intensive endeavour, making it a crucial goal of community policing. A person's sense of well-being is closely linked to their security; one cannot truly feel secure if their safety is at risk. In the near future, Nigeria may need to allocate more resources to ensure the security of its citizens' lives and property. The inclusion of community policing in the security architecture may also involve engaging several idle hands across various communities, villages, cities, and the nation as a whole. What this means is that the energies of the youths will be positively redirected from criminality and idleness to more patriotic and productive endeavours, such as securing the lives and property of their respective

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community members. This demonstrates why members of society may actively participate in community policing to create a safe and crime-free country for themselves (Odinkalu, 2005: 28).

Community policing, through the use of vigilance groups, plays a very important role in the maintenance of an orderly and secure environment during national events, such as elections for various political positions. This effort complements the responsibilities of the police, who are statutorily mandated to uphold law and order during these occasions (Oikhala, 2021: 137). Community policing has undoubtedly created significant awareness and sensitization regarding crime among people in many communities where it operates. These efforts have significantly heightened residents' awareness and vigilance regarding crime. The awareness campaigns include advising residents to be observant around their homes, especially concerning strangers, and providing them with office and personal cell phone numbers for timely reporting of incidents. Additionally, they encourage individuals to avoid carelessly moving or staying in the dark and to secure their homes by locking doors and windows when they are away. Regularly ringing bells or gongs at night is another measure that has been implemented. As a result of these initiatives, people are now more aware of potential criminal activity and are taking proactive steps to ensure the security of their towns and communities (Onyeozili, 2005: 48).

6. The much-needed community policing in Nigeria

There is considerable hope for integrating community policing into the Nigerian police's activities. This approach could significantly aid in combating crime and maintaining law and order in Nigeria. Historically, community policing has been the foundation upon which effective policing and internal security management can be improved in the nation. Local communities had practised community policing effectively long before the colonial period. Since gaining independence, Nigeria has yet to adopt a workable national policy on internal security. It is the responsibility of all Nigerians to advocate for a strong police-public partnership to combat and prevent crime. This suggests that the community policing policy in Nigeria should incorporate distinct principles and pathways for strengthening public trust and fostering partnerships between the police and citizens (Ibrahim, 2017: 19). In this way, the needed national policy on internal security will define the necessary corridors for achieving the community policing vision. Programs and initiatives that focus on crime prevention through community policing, retraining and development of personnel for capacity building, and enhancing police-public relations should be introduced and implemented. Additionally, intelligence-led policing that utilizes neighbourhood and inter-agency collaboration is essential to combat corruption and crime. These measures should be prioritized to address the country's security concerns (The Agora Policy Report 2, 2022).

Community policing is rooted in a systematic connection between the police and the communities they serve. Therefore, the duties of the police force are not limited to law enforcement alone but extend to addressing a wide range of com-

munity issues. To realise or achieve such obligations, the police must be part of and not apart from the community they are meant to protect and safeguard. It is worth noting that community policing involves fostering community partnerships to create a safe and secure environment for all. It is a kind of policing whereby the people take an active part in their own affairs. With community policing, the police are not seen as strangers whose presence signifies danger and imminent hazard but as partners in development and advancement, which is the much-desired form of policing in Nigeria (Ikuteyijo, 2008: 285). The community policing strategy that is suitable and beneficial for Nigeria should focus on a collaborative effort between the police and local neighbourhoods. This approach must be supported by all parties involved and effectively implemented. It is essential that traditional rulers and their communities actively participate, making it challenging for criminals to operate within their neighbourhoods. In this model, the police would share authority and information with community residents, while key decisions should be made in collaboration with local dwellers (Okeshola, 2013: 134). In summary, this paper highlights several critical elements, including change management, community partnership, community engagement, organizational transformation, and self-help. These elements are expected to be integral to the application of community policing in Nigeria, and they will be further explained in the following paragraphs.

6.1. Change Management

The change management canvassed in this paper posits that the Nigerian Police should redesign their soft patterns of new orientation and flexible managerial innovation to encourage neighbourhood residents to be actively involved in policing their areas. In this design, community members will see themselves as integral to the policing process in their areas, as they share a vested interest in its outcomes. It has been argued that a wise person does not allow misfortune to befall their ancestral home, as they have nowhere else to turn (Arase, 2017). If police officers on the ground are re-educated to work collaboratively and courteously with community members, rather than dictating their actions, and if police operations are made to reflect public interests, there will be fewer opportunities for crime and criminal activities in Nigerian communities, villages, and cities. The new management approach of the Nigerian Police Force is that the institution has adopted and continued to encourage active community policing (John, 2010: 6). This approach involves actively engaging in problem-solving within the community and fostering shared interests and values that promote development for everyone. As a result, community members will begin to view the Nigerian Police as friends and partners rather than adversaries (Dandison, 2006: 65).

6.2. Community Partnership

The policing process in Nigeria is designed to empower its residents to engage in crime prevention. This is achieved through active cooperation between the police and members of the neighbourhood in an attempt to gather and share intelligence

information to solve crime-related and disorder issues (Okeshola, 2013: 134). This would lead to the formation of a police-community partnership aimed at supporting crime prevention efforts. Such a partnership would provide a framework for engaging citizens, enabling law enforcement agents to easily access valuable community information. The Nigeria Police Force is expected to employ sufficient personnel, and a spirit of police-community teamwork will be encouraged to address all forms of crime in Nigeria. In other words, everyone should be actively involved in crime prevention activities to achieve success, as it benefits the entire community (Oikhala, 2019, 39).

6.3. Community Engagement

Engaging neighbourhood residents enables the police to access covert crime-related information easily and promptly. This collaboration also encourages a sense of teamwork within the community, helping to maintain peace, ensure security, and build mutual relationships based on public trust. This is where vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch programs come into play. Both are volunteer-based private security organizations that operate with the legal backing of the states they serve. They have proven to be functional, effective, and efficient in crime prevention and control, as they possess the ability to identify criminals regardless of their efforts to conceal their identities (Adeniyi, 2019: 179). Vigilante groups are engaged and used to complement the national security management framework of the country. Over the years, this has proven to be very effective in most rural communities and small towns in Nigeria (Alemika, 1999: 34).

6.4. Organisational Transformation

There should be a way or method that community policing can be modelled to fit into the Nigerian police system that would make it harmonized with the traditional policing model that has always alienated neighbourhood residents from police functions or roles. This supported (Kelling, 1988: 4) that the police would radically alter their reactive traditional policing model to suit the requirements of a people-oriented police system. Similarly, (Goldstein, 1990: 3) argued that the philosophy or idea of community policing is at risk if the police fail to change their old orientation and still get on with the traditional ways alongside the community policing. Therefore, the stance of this paper is well acknowledged in (Brown, 1989: 1) that organisational transformation is a driver of community engagement, self-help, problem solving, change management, and police-community partnership in an attempt to properly implement the ethos of community policing. Without re-orientation, the issue of integrating community policing would be unrealistic in the Nigeria police force.

6.5. Self-Help

The concept of community policing represents a shift from the traditional pre-colonial policing perspective. It involves ways of controlling and managing crime. This implies that the Nigerian police force genuinely allows community members

to participate in keeping peace, securing and protecting their various. Community policing paves the way for the local community to actively develop and implement self-help projects and activities that promote their shared interests and improve their quality of living. One of such self-help policing is the vigilante group. (Justice, 2009: 245). Community policing is also hinged on the belief that fellow citizens protect and serve themselves through a range of self-initiated laudable programmes (Reiner, 1992: 29). This involves educating and orienting community members on crime prevention and security awareness. Community members are consistently informed and encouraged to report any suspicious or criminal activity they observe to the police and local security authorities for prompt action. This initiative should begin at the level of immediate or nuclear families and gradually expand to encompass the larger Nigerian society (Abba, 2014: 35). The goal is to ensure that everyone participates in making Nigeria a safe haven for all.

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7. Citizens, Community Policing and Community Development in Nigeria

Security is crucial to the people in all communities in Nigeria and constitutes one of the important social services provided through community development and engagement. It should be noted that it requires the cooperation of the government, the citizens, and the communities to ensure a successful community policing activity. The citizens in their various communities cannot handle security matters alone; cooperation with security agents, particularly the police, is essential. In the same vein, the police force cannot ensure security or effectively tackle crime without partnering with the citizens and the communities. Everyone must be involved in the processes and actions that lead to success. Security is vital for community development, as both lives and property must be protected for development to be possible. Without law, order, and peace, no development, especially community development, can take place. Security not only facilitates development; it is also a fundamental component of development itself. In this regard, community policing is essential for fostering community and economic development in Nigeria (Adams, 1994: 894).

In reality, community policing, as implemented in Nigeria, has not ensured security and safety, nor has it facilitated community development. Instead of fostering

cooperation, the Nigerian police have been busy enforcing laws on the community and alienating its members. As a result, insecurity, crime, and disorder have driven investors away from Nigeria, crippled economic activities, and hindered development within communities. As long as the Nigeria Police Force focuses on policing the community rather than partnering with it on matters of security, safety, and development, people will remain hesitant to engage in activities that could enhance security. This absence of trust between community people and the Nigerian police means that development will continue to evade Nigeria (Jude, 2018: 12).

8. Conclusion

This paper focused on how community policing can enhance service delivery within the Nigerian Police Force and effectively reduce crime and criminality in Nigeria. It serves as a call to all Nigerians to actively participate in crime prevention initiatives and collaborate with the Nigerian Police Force to create a safe and crime-free country for everyone. Community policing is not a novel concept in Africa. Before European colonialism, many villages and communities in Africa practised similar models. In these societies, structures such as hunters' associations, age grades, and masquerade societies played roles in law enforcement before the establishment of the Nigerian Police Force after Nigeria was granted independence in 1960. Every adult male citizen are part of these groups, indicating that the responsibility for policing and securing their communities rested with all adult males in their respective villages and communities (Falola, 2018: 11). However, European colonialism supplanted the then existing model of community policing activities with the colonial police which alienated the people indigenous policing activities and relegated them to the background. This alienation continued in post-independent Nigeria, increasing the distrust or mistrust between the people and the police force.

In recent times, the question of how and what can be done to overcome the security challenges confronting Nigeria has been a subject of discourse among researchers and stakeholders in Nigeria. To curb crimes and enhance an effective policing system, the police force should be encouraged to work together in partnership with the community inhabitants to reduce crime and disorder and also uphold a sense of order in the community. This lack of cooperation from the people and police has had a serious consequence: the inability of the Nigeria Police Force to combat crime and tackle various security challenges in Nigeria, rendering the problem almost unsolvable.

The Nigerian police should prioritize creating or encouraging cooperation or partnership with the community on security matters, allowing for broader involvement rather than simply policing neighbourhoods. The focus should be on improving the strained relationship between the police and the community, integrating effective community engagement strategies into policing efforts, and collaborating with community residents to share policing responsibilities. This approach aims to maintain peace and ensure safety for all, with active participation from every citizen. ✨

Note

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