



Perspectives of Community Members on Community Policing Initiatives in Lagos State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Community policing is a collaborative strategy between the police and the community aimed at building trust to address crime and social disorder. This study examined community members' perceptions of community policing initiatives in Lagos State, Nigeria, in the context of persistent security challenges and increasing demand for participatory policing. It seeks to understand how residents perceive, engage with, and evaluate community policing as a tool for improving public safety. A qualitative research design was adopted to capture lived experiences across the three senatorial districts of Lagos State. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected from diverse socio-demographic groups, including homeowners, youths, religious leaders, and business owners. Data were collected through 30 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions. Findings reveal mixed perceptions of community policing: while many respondents acknowledge its potential to improve security through collaboration and local engagement, concerns persist regarding corruption, inadequate training, politicization of policing structures, and limited community involvement in decision-making. Participants emphasized the need for transparency, consistent dialogue, and stronger institutional support to bridge existing trust deficits. It concludes that community policing can significantly reduce crime and social disorder if properly reformed, localized, and consistently implemented.

Keywords: Community members, Community policing, Perspectives

Word Count: 190

INTRODUCTION

Community policing CP, is a philosophy that promotes organisational strategies as well as the systematic use of partnership and problem-solving techniques to address the immediate conditions that contribute to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime (Akinyemi, 2021; Lopez, 2021). The importance of active community collaboration with the police in tackling crime issues cannot be overstated in community policing. It has the potential to play a critical role in reducing different types of violence in the community. From Individual violence that ranges from street crime, to domestic abuse, drug-related violence, civil unrest, which can frequently include gang violence and open confrontations among other various segments of society as the case may be (Frank, 2023; Lopez, 2021,).

Moreover, community policing can be traced back to the introduction of community constables, known as 'bobbies' by Sir Robert Peel during the early the 19th century in the Metropolitan London Police District. Community policing emerged in the United States of America in the 1970s as a result of the Kerner commission of the 1968 which was a response to growing concerns about crime and the effectiveness of traditional policing methods (Frank, 2023; Joski, 2017). This approach gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s as cities across the United States of America sought more collaborative and proactive strategies for public safety (Patterson, 1995; Greene, 2000). Community policing continues to evolve, incorporating modern technology and practices to strengthen trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the public.

Community policing emerged in Nigeria as a response to rising crime rates and public demand for better security. There was no specific date to the introduction but was officially introduced in the late 1990s and gained

momentum in the early 2000s (Bangu, 2022). The initiative aimed to foster collaboration between the police and communities, encouraging a more proactive approach to crime prevention and public safety. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was the primary organisation that spearheaded the implementation of community policing as a response to calls from many non-governmental agencies like the CLEEN foundation (Alemika & Asiwaju, 2008). Various state governments also played significant roles by establishing local initiatives and training police officers to empower community members and police officers (Alemika & Asiwaju, 2008). International organisations and NGOs have also contributed to the development and support of community policing strategies in Nigeria by emphasizing the importance of community involvement in policing efforts (Alemika & Asiwaju, 2008).

On the part of the Lagos State government, she inaugurated the Lagos State Neighbourhood Watch Programme, officially known as the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC), a community-based security initiative established to enhance public safety and support law enforcement agencies (Balogun, 2024). The programme was created to improve community security by encouraging active participation of residents in crime prevention and intelligence gathering. It serves as an important support system to formal security agencies by helping to maintain peace and order at the grassroots level.

Historically, the concept of neighbourhood watch in Lagos began in 1996 when the state government introduced local neighbourhood security groups to assist in crime prevention across communities (Ogunsanya, 2021). These early efforts laid the foundation for a more structured system of community security that came many years later. In 2016, the programme received legal backing when the Lagos State House of Assembly enacted a law establishing the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Agency and formally creating the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC). Following this legal framework, the corps was officially launched in 2017 to strengthen community policing, enhance intelligence gathering, and improve the overall safety of residents throughout Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that community policing presents a public safety and community relations designed to create strong, collaborative relationships between law enforcement and the community, thereby being proactive in problem-solving, various state governments inclusive of Lagos, have not fully domesticated the initiative thus, the gains of the initiative have not been fully realised. Previous studies have shown varied outcomes of community policing in different contexts. In some regions, such as parts of the United States and the United Kingdom, community policing has led to positive results, including reduced crime rates and increased community trust. However, the perspectives of the community members in Lagos is different. The trust which is the bedrock of community policing has not been realized in Lagos State. This has impeded further implementation and effectiveness of the initiative especially after the incident of the EndSars protest in 2020. With little degrees of success reported in different parts of the state, a comprehensive analysis of the perspective of community members on the effect of community policing initiatives in their neighbourhood become sacrosanct.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of CP may vary, but all share the idea that the police and the community must work together to identify problems affecting the community and to develop solutions. This is a departure from the era of traditional policing in which police claimed a monopoly of responsibility for crime control. In this new dispensation of CP, communities need to develop a partnership with the police (Paterson, 1995). For this partnership to work two main things need to happen: citizens must understand the dynamics in their communities and how the police functions; and the police have to understand the inner workings of the community. Communities also need to be empowered. Empowerment is the processes by which people organize, attain a collective objective, and learn about their own personal power. An empowered community is structured in a way that provides members with the opportunity to participate in community activities and to be responsible for the community, and its members are willing to use that structure (Ogunsanya, 2021).

The effectiveness of community policing mechanisms in Nigeria holds promise for averting the multiplying effects of insecurity and fostering sustainable development and democracy (Oluwafemi, et al, 2023). Despite the statutory responsibility of the Nigerian police to prevent and address crime their effectiveness has been compromised by various obstacles such as insufficient financing, type of training and qualification, lack of adequate personnel, lack of appropriate equipment, unethical behaviour, general lack of cooperation, Language barriers, constitutional issues, moral character deficit, brutality and harassment of helpless citizens as well as inadequacies in resources management (Salami, et al, 2019). Since the community policing is not one consistent thing, it is difficult to say whether it works or not. Likewise, there were limited evidence of effectiveness because community policing is diverse in both the intention and practise. Furthermore, the effectiveness of community policing are affected by other factors, like organisation, operational and personality factors.

The effectiveness of community policing practise depends on the jurisdiction and approaches adopted by the implementers. It can have a positive effect on community attitudes such as fear of crime and neighbourhood satisfaction. Due to the complex nature of community policing evaluations provide limited evidence of either success or failure. Furthermore, the evidence of effectiveness has been largely anecdotal (Yanusa, & Usman, 2022). Measurement has tended to focus more on traditional indicators such as crime statistics even though the objectives are more specific than to reduce crime. Many of the community policing evaluations completed in some jurisdictions have been criticised for failing to determine whether practises were effective. One of the difficulties obstructing the implementation of community policing is the vague definition of success has also hindered identifying the effectiveness of community policing. In addition, the lack of concrete definition of community policing leaves it open to his- interpretation (Skogan,et al, 2021).

The effectiveness of community policing becomes obstructed when community policing is operated as specialised units. Specialised units can create an environment of isolation or cause friction between staff. More successful community policing initiatives have incorporated a ‘whole of organisation’ approach. However, the implementation of a ‘whole of organisation’ approach is problematic (Salami, et al, 2019). The problem-solving and crime prevention responsibilities are assigned to specialised units without fundamental changes in policing will affect the performance of the police in the implementation of the model. Respondent points out that in some cases, specialised community policing units have caused major friction between the beat officer and the community police officer and this friction is due to the differences in practices (Yanusa, & Usman, 2022; Salami, et al, 2019).

Due to the negative public perception about the Nigeria Police and its inefficiency in addressing crime at the local level, the former Inspector General of Police Tafa Balogun in 2003, undertook different measures to improve the police and citizens’ relationship (Ikuteyijo & Rotimi, 2012). He established in all states commands the Police Complaints Bureau and the Human Rights desks, and with the help of the British government, he introduced a pilot community policing project in Enugu State and presented eight points agenda that will address the following: massive onslaught against robbers, gruesome murder, assassination and other crimes of violence against the backdrop of which operation fire for fire was adopted as a methodology (Gash, 2011). Fast decisive crime/conflict management was adopted, a serious anti-corruption crusade, both within and outside the Force was launched.

The British colonialist’s recognition of the need for local police prompted the replacement of earlier Hausa police in Lagos with indigenous Yoruba recruits in 1895. We recommend a three-tier police structure without any prosecutorial power: the federal police, the state police, and the local government police (Ogundipe, 2021). While the federal and state police departments deal with federal and state law enforcement matters, the local government police (supervised by a civilian board) will be organised in keeping with a community policing model in which officers are embedded in the communities they serve, deployed solely to deal with matters of law and order that are best handled at the local level. Not only will this bring people closer to their police, it will prevent the hijacking of the police command by corrupt and tainted absentee politicians in Abuja (Akinlabi, 2022).

All these are done to curtail the heightening of physical insecurity around the country. The aim is deter or disrupt potential attacks, strengthening of security agencies through the provision of security facilities and the development and broadcast of security tips in mass media. Despite these efforts, the level of insecurity in the

country is still high. This is shown by the consistent low ranking of Nigeria in the Global Peace (Abubarkar, 2022). The efforts of government have not yielded enough positive result. With the lingering security challenges and the inability of the security apparatus of the government to guarantee safety and security in the country (Chukwuemeka, et al, 2021). The question that borders everyone in Nigeria today is “can there be safety”? “Is security of lives and properties achievable”? These questions are necessary due to overwhelming challenges faced by the Nigerian Police.

Security has several dimensions but human security seems to be the foundational principle of the United Nations. Human security as the protection of individual and communities from a range of existential threats. To her, human security is the ultimate form of security, thus, only when human is protected from threat and anxiety that they can be said to be secured. So also, the protection of lives and properties from destruction as security (Makhubela, & Mdluli, 2023; (Miller, 2022). Thus, it becomes imperative for Nigerian government to institutionalise community policing mechanism for the protection of citizens lives and communities. Insecurity on the other hand, has no universally accepted definition of what exactly constitute it. However, there is general consensus that insecurity is associated with anything contrary to peace and security (Chukwuemeka, et al, 2021).

Insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. It refers to lack of freedom from danger and attack which pose as a threat to human existence. Insecurity in Nigeria has developed into a phenomenal plague with security challenges such as kidnapping, suicide bombing, militancy, ethnic related conflicts, armed robbery and politically induced violence which has significantly impacted the development of communities in the country (Nkemakolam, 2024; Merenda, et al, 2021). It is estimated that over 2 million persons have been displaced as a result of insecurity in the country. This state of affairs has destroyed the very foundations of national unity and as such fear, suspicion and apprehension have become the order of the day in today's society.

This lack of trust in the police often leads to a resolve by the public not to cooperate with them in crime fighting, and sometimes resort to lynching of suspects by angry mobs. In fact, the relationship between the police and the public is very often characterized by brutality, confrontation, and exploitation (Adebayo, et al, 2023). As a result of the public distrust of the police, the federal government, in 2003 undertook a number of measures to improve the police and citizen relationship. The federal government established in all state commands the Police Complaints Bureau and the Human Rights Desks, and they introduced a pilot community policing project in all the 774 local governments in the country (Adebayo, et al, 2023; Onwudiwe, 2024).

Community policing is a paradigm shift established at the bedrock of community partnership in creating safe and secure environment for all. Community policing offers and improves community participation in securing the neighborhood. It places emphasis on the decentralization of power of policing in which the community members are involved at the grass-root and improves the relations with citizens in the community . As a result of this decentralization of policing, members of the community are expected to form group to collaborate and partner with the regular police in securing lives and property. These groups are known as vigilantes or neighborhood watch. Violent crimes in the society, led to the advent and formation of informal policing called the vigilantes otherwise known as neighbourhood watch.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an explanatory research design and was carried out among community members living in the places that the Police Community Relation Council identified as having established community policing in the state. These places have implemented the community policing initiative and it spread across the three senatorial districts of Lagos State, (Lagos West, Lagos East and Lagos Central). Sample size was determined at the saturation point and participants were interviewed using In-depth Interview and Focused Group Discussion guides. Purposive sampling procedure was used in selecting participants who have specific knowledge, experience, or involvement in the programme. Other secondary data included Newspapers, Police Annual Report, Textbooks, Press releases, Police Act and Regulations, Journals on Policing, Publications from Police College and training schools and individual police publications. Data collected in Yoruba language were interpreted into English language and codified before content analysed and verbatim quotations were employed in order to bring out salient points in the conversation. Oral and written ethical approval was gotten from

participants before the start of the interviews and they were informed of the right to pull out of the study if they feel threatened in any part of the study.

Result Presentation

Gathering insights from local residents, the study sought the understanding on how these initiatives are perceived and whether they have led to improvements in public safety and crime reduction. The study examined varying opinions across different communities, focusing on both positive and negative experiences with community policing efforts. It also explored the level of trust and cooperation between the police and the community, as well as the challenges faced in implementing this initiative. The goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how community members view the effectiveness of community policing in their neighborhoods so focused group discussions were arranged with members of the community development associations in many of these areas (Adebayo, et al, 2023).

In the Lekki axis, participants agreed that the initiative has been very positive in maintaining order in the area. They were asked to describe the experience with community policing initiatives in the area. Excerpt;

Generally, our experience with community policing initiatives in this area has been positive. Since the police have started working more closely with us in the community, we have noticed a reduction in petty crime and an increased sense of security. We can boldly go out of our house and be sure that what we left at home will be safe. There are regular meetings where we can discuss issues openly, which has really helped build trust between us and the officers that usually come to meetings with us. We believe it's a step in the right direction, and hopeful that the relationship will continue to improve. (FGD, Dorchellview Estate, Victoria Island/07/12/2024)

From all indications it shows that the regular meetings with police officers provided a platform for members of the community to discuss issues openly, fostering a sense of transparency in one of the tenets of community policing initiative. These meetings have played a crucial role in building trust between the community and the officers. This also means that the officers who attend these gatherings are approachable, and this have created an environment where concerns can be freely shared (Oluwafemi, et al, 2023). Over time, this open communication strengthened the relationship between the two parties. The trust developed in these meetings has led to better collaboration and mutual understanding. There was a general consensus on the opinions pertaining to the effect of community policing in the areas visited. All members of the CDA believed that crime rate in the area has reduced due to the community policing initiative

In the Ogba/Agege area, another FGD session that was conducted with members of the CDA, reflects a mixed feelings on the progress that was recorded in conversation with the police. Here, participants' opinion was that;

Our experience in this area with the police community policing strategy has not been so convincing that they can handle the rate of crime that are been committed in this area. On the one hand, there has been an increased presence of police officers, which makes us feel safer. In some areas like Ogba, the officers are very proactive and seem genuinely interested in understanding the community's needs. On the other hand, in certain parts of our neighborhood, it feels like there's a lack of coordination between the police and the residents. While some people are embracing the initiative, others are still skeptical because of past negative experiences with law enforcement that has to do with extortion and unwarranted arrest of innocent young members of the community. (IDI, Landlord/Age 57years/Itesiwaju Estate, Ogba/21/12/2024)

Despite the positive effect of the initiative, some residents remain doubtful due to past negative experiences with law enforcement. These experiences often involved incidents of extortion, brutality and wrongful arrest of innocent people (Ogunsanya, 2021). They made mention of situations where members of the community would come in the aid of the suspect, informing the police that the suspects were locals, but their concerns are usually ignored. As a result, this has fueled a sense of mistrust toward the police in certain areas especially, in the Agege, Abule-Egba area of the state. The lingering effects of these past actions continue to contribute to skepticism about the initiative.



Focusing on the positive effect alone members say

Community policing has definitely had a positive impact in our neighborhood. One of the biggest benefits is the improved security. We've seen a decrease in the number of crimes, like pickpocketing and street robberies, which has made people feel safer walking around, even at night. Also, the police are more approachable now, so when we have concerns, they actually listen and take action. We have noticed that people in the neighborhood are more likely to report crimes or suspicious activities, which makes everyone feel like they are part of the solution. (FGD, Ikeja GRA, Ikeja/28/12/2024)

Another FGD session at the Surulere area shows that there are truly positive effect but if police relent those good effects will be overturned in no time.

We think community policing has brought about some great changes in our area. For one, it's helped reduce tensions between residents and the police. The officers are now seen as part of the community rather than outsiders, which has created a greater sense of trust. There's also been a stronger sense of unity among residents, as we work together with the police to tackle issues like drug abuse and youth violence. Community policing has helped to keep some of our local infrastructure in place, as some of the funds that we have are no more for rehabilitation of damaged infrastructures but are now used for community development projects, which has made our environment more pleasant to the eye and safer. (IDI/Member of PCRC/Age 66years/Adeniran Ogunsanya/28/12/2024)

We can also say that community policing has played a key role in maintaining local infrastructure, because previously, funds that were allocated for infrastructure repairs are now being redirected towards community development projects. This shift has allowed for improvements that enhance the overall appearance and safety of the environment. The surroundings have become more visually appealing and secure (Balogun, 2024). The focus on development has made the area a better place for residents to live and work. This is one of the very scarce effect of community policing and it is laudable.

Participants were further asked of their concerns and challenges in relation to the implementation of community policing in their areas. Responses gotten from the FGD shows that there are still concerns on the initiative and the following are the excerpts,

Yes, one of the main challenges we have observed is the lack of consistent follow-through. Despite the fact that community policing aim to build trust, sometimes promises made by police officers during meetings or engagements are not always fulfilled. This has led to frustration among residents, especially when they do not see immediate results in addressing issues like petty crime or drug abuse. Some people still feel the police are not as responsive as they should be when it comes to handling local disputes or community concerns. Without visible action, it's hard for us to fully embrace the initiative. (FGD, Ikeja GRA, Ikeja/28/12/2024)

Collaboration has played a key role in fostering trust and understanding between different parties. This has led to the development of stronger and more constructive relationships. However, the concept of community policing to some communities, making it difficult to fully embrace. While some residents have responded positively to the initiative, others remain cautious due to past experiences with law enforcement (Salami, et al, 2019). This hesitation stems from a lack of trust, and until community policing proves its long-term effectiveness, many are reluctant to fully engage with the police.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The essence of the research findings on community policing initiatives lies in the mixed but evolving perception of their effectiveness in enhancing public safety, strengthening trust, and reducing crime across different communities. The study revealed that community policing has contributed positively in some areas, particularly where strong collaboration exists between residents and law enforcement officers. In places such as the Lekki axis and Ikeja GRA, participants reported noticeable reductions in petty crime, improved security, and increased confidence in their environment. These improvements were largely attributed to regular meetings

between police officers and community members, which created platforms for dialogue, transparency, and shared problem-solving. Such engagements helped to humanize the police, strengthen communication channels, and foster a growing sense of mutual trust and cooperation. In these areas, community members increasingly viewed themselves as active partners in maintaining security rather than passive recipients of policing services.

However, the findings also revealed significant challenges that limit the full effectiveness of the initiative. In areas such as Ogba, Agege, and parts of Ikorodu, participants expressed skepticism and frustration, largely rooted in past negative encounters with law enforcement, including allegations of extortion, brutality, and wrongful arrests. These experiences continue to weaken trust and reduce willingness to fully cooperate with the police. So also, issues such as inconsistent follow-through on promises made during community engagements, limited inclusion of residents in decision-making processes, and fears of retaliation for reporting crimes were identified as major barriers especially in the Ikorodu axis. These challenges have created a gap between policy intentions and community realities, making the implementation of community policing uneven across different neighborhoods.

Despite these difficulties, the study highlights that community policing remains a valuable approach for improving security when properly implemented. It has the potential to foster unity, encourage shared responsibility, and even support community development initiatives, as seen in some of the places around Surulere where collaboration contributed to improved local infrastructure and environmental conditions. Nevertheless, for the initiative to achieve its full potential, there is a clear need for greater accountability from law enforcement, sustained community engagement, and efforts to rebuild trust in areas where it has been weakened. Studies suggest in line with our findings that community policing is effective, but the success is highly dependent on consistency, transparency, and the quality of relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

CONCLUSION

Community members in Lagos have varied perspectives on the effect of community policing initiatives. While many express appreciation for the increased police presence and improved communication, some remain cautious due to past negative experiences with law enforcement. The overall sentiment reflects a mix of hope for better security and a desire for more consistent follow-through from police officers¹². Trust has been built in certain areas, particularly where community members feel more engaged and listened to by the police. However, skepticism still exists in neighborhoods with a history of tension, where some residents feel that the initiative has yet to address their concerns effectively. Despite, there is a general recognition that community policing has the potential to foster safer environments when implemented fully¹³. Continued collaboration between police and residents is seen as key to making this initiative more effective and inclusive in the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore recommends that;

- **Strengthen Community–Police Communication Channels:** Regular and structured communication platforms should be established between community members and police officers. This may include periodic town hall meetings, community forums, and feedback mechanisms that allow residents to report concerns, share information, and evaluate policing activities.
- **Increase Community Participation in Policing Activities:** Community members should be actively involved in planning, implementing, and monitoring community policing initiatives and not only the other way round. This can be achieved through the formation of neighbourhood watch groups across Lagos state as the present ones are inadequate, community safety committees, and volunteer programmes.
- **Provide Continuous Training for Police Officers on Community Relations:** Police officers should receive regular training focused on human relations, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement strategies.



- Improve Resource Allocation and Logistics for Community Policing: Government and relevant authorities should ensure adequate funding, equipment, transportation, and communication tools for community policing initiatives.

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