

GOOD POLICE PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP: AN ANTIDOTE TO CRIME CONTROL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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***Abstract:** The Nigerian police interact with all members of the public at different levels; individually, groups, organizations among others. The police represent the government official agents of crime control by setting in motion the criminal justice system. When they represent the interests of the public in which they serve; there is general harmony and gratitude from members of the public. But when they act in otherwise they received insults and condemnations from members of the public. This paper has made a useful contribution that will enable the Nigerian police to have a good relationship with members of public in order to fight crime in Nigeria. Structural functionalism was adopted as a theoretical perspective to guide the paper. It was positioned that without good police public relationship, the role of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals cannot be achieved by the police in Nigeria. It was recommended that for effective policing in Nigeria the police should cooperate with members of public in order to illicit information about criminal hideouts in their localities; this will go a long way in reducing criminals in the society. The police should treat every citizens of the country according to the rule of law. All human beings are equal in the sight of the law. If a rich man/woman commits crime he/she should be treated like when a poor man/woman commits the same crime. The paper concluded that lack of communication between the police and the public is envisaged as the widespread lopsided relationship. Police depends on safe public relationship that is more transparent as public engagement in police affairs is crucial in tackling the problem of crime in contemporary society.*

Keywords: Police, Public, Relationship, Antidote, Crime, Control and Society.

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INTRODUCTION

All over the world the importance and relevance of the police institution have been acknowledged. The acknowledgement is predicated on the need to secure society's interests in terms of rights, duties, and obligations which are the different facets of the contractual nature of the human society (Smah, 2003). The security of any nation is a beacon of hope and pride at any point in time. They own the duty to protect the territorial integrity of the nation, maintain peaceful co-existence and protect the citizens in all ramifications. In the development of the society different interests aroused in the

process of attaining political, economic, social and cultural goals, challenge arouse in the course of achieving this aims. The African culture generally puts premium value on the existence of law and order. The absence of such tends to threaten the stability of the society. In a society in which citizens see crime as an immediate threat to the wellbeing, the police play the most visible and strategic role in justifying the system. Their central mission is to control crime and preserve peace in fashion that the constitutional rights of the individuals is not violated (Adesina 2003).

In contemporary Nigeria, the police are enviable institutions in the minds of social problems such as rising crime rate, civil disturbance and riots, student demonstrations; among others. The unenviable trend is the way and manner members of the public relate with the police as such denying them information that would aid in crime control and prevention in contemporary society. The state of the police force continues to be a reflection of the social consciousness of Nigerians. Unfortunately, the police public relationship has been neglected. Aver (2011) maintains that, the police cannot succeed in the role of crime control, prevention and enforcement of law without having a good relationship with the community in which they dwell. Police are employed for the detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals. They protect lives and property of citizens in the course of their duties. They also maintain and enforce laws, rules and regulations. They even go to the extent of performing military duties if so requested by the Head of State (or the country's president) in time of war (Ogundipe and Ibabor 2003).

In performing these duties there exists a huge gap between the police and the public on how the public wants to be policed and how the police want to police the public. This often results to conflicts that adversely affect the freedom of a large proportion of population. This result to hostility between the police and the public and this often occurs at check-points and stations where they demand and receive bribes from members of the public. This also leads to public condemnations of the police in the country. In fact, the wide spread of extortion, incivility found at several quotas corruption and brutality have eroded the public cooperation that would have enhanced police efficiency. There is no mutual relationship between the police and public as such denying the police sensitive information that would lead to crime reduction. It is against this backdrop that this paper is designed to unveil police public relationship as an antidote to crime control in contemporary society.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Police

Anderson (1983) defines police as a civil force entrusted with the task of monitoring public order and law enforcement for the prevention and punishment of its breaches. Adejipe (1965) defined police as an organ of government that is charged with public safety. They are responsible for the civil society security. ...Act Cap 359 and Section 4 laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1960 defined police clearly in terms of prevention and

detection of crime, preservation of law and order, protection of lives and property, and enforcement of law and order. To crown it all, the Constitution of Nigeria (1999:83) defined the term police as an agent of the state which is embedded under criminal justice system whose official function is to maintain law and order and enforcement of same (see Constitution Federal Republic Nigeria, 1999:83). Section 214(1) stipulates that the Nigeria Police Force shall be the only police force and subject to the provision of the section, no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof. Section 215 (3) and (4) of 1999 Constitution and the Police Act empowered police to carry out the following functions:

Provision and detection of crime, apprehension and prosecution of offenders, preservation of law and order, protection of lives and properties, due enforcement of rules and regulations. The performance of military duties within and outside the country as the case may be.

The police perform these functions through proactive and reactive policing. It is the police that mediate between law and other institutions of social control in the society. They also construct crime data in a given society. Police as regard to this work is defined as public agents concerned with the enforcement of law, maintenance of peace and order and prosecution of breaches of the law.

Public Relations

Public Relations refers to a management function of a continuing and planned character, through which public, private organizations and institutions seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate, as far as possible, their own policies, and procedure, to achieve by planned and widespread information more production cooperation and more efficient fulfillment of their common interests (IPRA at The Hague, 1960 in Keghku 2005). Public relation entails the management function, which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Denny Grisworld, 1977 in Keghku 2005). Black (2011) defines public relations as a practice and art of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization's leadership, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest.

Antidote

It refers to something that relieves, prevents, or counteracts the effects of a terrible occurrence (crime) in the society. In this regard police public relationship counteracts the effect of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals.

Crime Control

Crime control is defined as a reconfigured complex of interlocking structures and strategies that are themselves composed of old and new elements, the old revised and reoriented by a new operation context (Garland 2001). Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia looked at crime control as methods and strategies taken to reduce crime in a society. In respect to this paper crime control refers to both formal and informal strategies and techniques put in place by government or other social groups aimed at reducing crime in the society.

THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

Structural Functionalism

Functionalism draws its inspiration from the ideas of August Comte (1798– 1857), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), Talcott Parsons (1920–1979), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Robert Merton (1910–2003). Functionalism, is a theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability (Macionis, 2010). This perspective looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole, and believes that society has evolved like organisms (DeRosso, 2003). The theory is of the view that both social structure and social functions are performing in the society. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as “organs” that work toward the proper functioning of the “body” as a whole (Urry, 2000). For example, each of the social institutions contributes important functions for society: Family provides a context for reproducing, nurturing, and socializing children; education offers a way to transmit a society’s skills, knowledge, and culture to its youth; politics provides a means of governing members of society; economics provides for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; and religion provides moral guidance and an outlet for worship of a higher power; while police provides for security lives and property.

The functionalist perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts. For example, the increase in poor police public relationships will increase the level of crime in the society and vice versa. The basic terms, it simply emphasizes “the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system”.

Functionalists use the terms *functional* and *dysfunctional* to describe the effects of social elements on society. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if they disrupt social stability. Some aspects of society can be both functional and dysfunctional. For example, crime is dysfunctional in that it is associated with physical violence, loss of property, and fear. But according to Durkheim and other functionalists, crime is also functional for society because it leads to heightened

awareness of shared moral bonds and increased social cohesion. "So police public relationship plays a crucial role in crime control. Police public relationship allows people to volunteer information to the police about criminal hideouts as such enabling the police to carry out their functions of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals effectively therefore, maintains a functioning society.

The view of functionalist theoretical perspective, on society and its institutions is that the primary units of analysis. Institutions are significant only in terms of their places within social systems. Functionalist are of the opinion that the function each part plays in the functioning of the society is very significance to the development of the entire system (Hughes and Kroehler 2008). They point out that, unlike human beings, society does not have needs; society is only alive in the sense that it is made up of living institutions. By downplaying the role of institutions, functionalism is less likely to recognize how individual actions may alter social institutions. Critics have argued that functionalism is unable to explain social change because it focuses so intently on social order and equilibrium in society. Following functionalist logic, if a social institution exists, it must serve a function. Institutions, however, change over time; some disappear and others come into being. The focus of functionalism on elements of social life in relation to their present function, and not their past functions, makes it difficult to use functionalism to explain function of police public relationship in the society might change in the face of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals. In spite of the shortcomings the functionalist theory has been accepted as a theoretical guide for the study due to its relevance in the topic.

Brief History of Nigeria Police Force

What is today known as the Nigeria police force is the brainchild of the British colonial government and it date back to 1861, following the annexation of Lagos (Tamuno 1970). Although various nationalities all had their local ways of policing before the advent of the British colonialist, but such arrangements were based on part time basis. Most of these police were not paid formal salary; they got their rewards from gifts and gratification in an informal way and they were natives of the area they policed. Dambazau (2004) noted that the Nigeria police, from inception, was not put in place to protect the interest and well being of the people. The Nigerian police was borne out of the desire by the British colonialist to protect themselves, their interest and their trade. The British consul charged with the administration of Lagos established a consular Guard in Lagos by the police Act of 1861 to maintain law and order. In 1861, the 30-members consular guard was renamed Hausa guard. It was further regularized in 1879 by an ordinance creating a constabulary for the colony of Lagos thus the Hausa guard became known as Hausa constabulary and was mainly from among the Hausa ethnic group. The constabulary was mainly military in character, though it performed some police duties (Tamuno 1970).

In 1861, the Lagos police force was created and armed like the Hausa constabulary. With the proclamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 until 1930 when they

were merged to form the present Nigeria police force with headquarters in Lagos (Tamuno 1970). In 1943 the northern and western regions of Nigeria established their own regional police forces. All the northern and southern protectorates police forces were merged with the Nigeria police force in 1968 and with the creation of Abuja as Federal Capital Territory in 1976 the headquarter of Nigeria police force shifted from Lagos to Abuja (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000). Currently, the headquarter of Nigeria Police is located at Central Police Station Wuse, Zone 3 Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Since 1976, the Nigeria Police Force has been undergoing series of structural changes. Like promotion, establishment of departments, more zonal and state commands, divisions and special branches to check mate its public relations and consequently upsurge of crime in the country.

THE NATURE OF POLICE PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA

Crime management is the hallmark of every successful society. Many authors and commentators have written on the subject from various stand points. Thus, the main thrust here is the unfolding views of various scholars on the subject matter of the study. Police cannot perform their duties without having a good relationship with the community wherein they dwell. Similarly the community will live in absolute anxiety and fear of attack without police. There is need to maintain and sustain a mutual relationship between the police and public in the society. Akpotu (2003) contends that Nigeria police have a very poor relationship with people right from time. This is as a result of corruption, envy and brutality that they meted out to the people in any rally or demonstration they turn to fuel the event by shooting the public. Mbachie (2005) lamented that the practice of the police does not help matters in promotion of cordial relationship with the public. The police cause many accidents that claimed lives through their checkpoints on the roads. Ehon (2003) also asserted that the culture of monetization and the tendency to get rich quick among members of the police force have affected their relationship with the public. He further expressed his feeling that police do not believe in hard work, they have thrown the values of the society into the dustbin. With the above stated problems the public seem to perceive the police as enemies. This has made the police to come out with some programmes aimed at establishing a cordial and friendly relationship with the public. Yecho (2005) maintains that the police enforce law in a way that is essentially indiscretion. According to him they seek to favour culprits who are highly influential in the society to the detriment of the common masses. They appear blind to justice and equity and consequently twist the law to suit their self interest. By implication the police rather than functionally controlling crime are actually in the habit of violating the laws of criminal justice system in order to protect those in position and control of power and resources (Yecho 2005). Adesina (2003) sums up that, police-citizen relationship in Nigeria has been a poor one. The police are disliked instead of liked, distrusted instead of trusted, hated instead of loved, they cause disharmony instead of harmony and this has resulted to total loss of confidence by the public in the Nigeria police. This has become evident of the poor police-public relationship in Nigeria.

POOR POLICING TREND IN NIGERIA

The expected role of Nigerian Police has not been met to a large extent. The police have failed in carrying out their various roles of preventing and detecting crime as well as maintaining law and order. This has attributed to the incidence of corruption, which has eaten deep into the Nigerian police (Okumagba 2003). In August 2006 when the students of Benue State University, Makurdi were protesting against accident that claimed the lives of two students, police were deployed to arrest the situation but they rather aggravated it by arresting people arbitrarily (The Sun, 6 August 2006). Human Right Circle (2004) condemned the Nigerian Police under the leadership of Tafa Balogun for committed a lots of atrocities. There were both local and international condemnations of the Nigerian Police by human right agencies on the abuse and indiscriminate killings of innocent citizens in the country (News Watch Magazine, January 31, 2005). Oseghele (2014) asserts that a businessman, Adewale Akinade, has sued the Kano State police command for allegedly detaining him illegally and torturing him. In his word Adewale Akinade, maintained that:

I was detained for a month during which the police tried to get me to pay Hassan ₦4.8 million. When they saw that the money was not forthcoming, they hung me upside down in one of their torture chambers and beat me all over my joints and manhood with a bicycle spoke. I bled to the extent that I passed out and had to be rushed to the General Hospital in Kano. After I was relieved, the police men took me to court that same day.

Similarly in 2003 the US Department of States on Human Rights Practice (2002) indicted the Nigerian Police over cases of poor relationship with citizens ranging from forceful arrests, illegal detentions, torture to extra-judiciary killing of law abiding civilians. In addition the report also revealed that the Nigerian Police and Security forces allegedly use excessive force to apprehend suspects and quell several incidents of ethno-religious violence. The Punch (13, November 2007) reported that, police disrupted anti-Obasanjo rally in Kaduna. The paper further stated that the organizer of the rally Abiodun Aremu was arrested and quizzed by the police. Also the former governor of Kaduna State, Alhaji Balarabe Musa the chairman of the occasion was prevented from addressing the gathering. This is a glaring evidence of what the US Department rightly stated. Akinkuotu (2013) reported that policemen killed a teenager and others during Christmas party. He further reported that on the December 14, 2013, 18 year-old Ikenna Onyeizu and 21 year-old Moses Aiyenuro attended a Christmas party at Dele Hotel, Ijora Badia area of Lagos State where they were shot and killed by the police in the course of the party. The report also posits that another youth, Mike Banji, was also shot by the policemen but survived. The report further indicated that the two boys were killed by drunken policemen attached to Ijora Badia police station around midnight. However the police public relations officer, Ngozi Braide denied the allegation that the boys were stabbed to death by some hoodlums during a fight that broke out at the hotel. The police public relations officer claimed that when the police arrived at the scene, the boys were rushed to the hospital where they eventually died.

Also Ekpimah (2013) reported that four killed as police, community clash over celebration on Wednesday December 25, 2013. The report further confirmed that, four people from Okon in Eket Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom state, were killed on the 25 day of December 2013 during the town's annual celebration. The people blocked the Eket-Uyo Road, an attempt by the state security outfit, "Operation Thunder", to disperse the crowd led to the tragedy. The police opened fire into the crowd which four Okon people were struck by the police bullets; two died instantly while the remaining two, who were taken to the hospital, died on the way, other people who sustained various degree of injuries resulting from police bullets were receiving treatment in a hospital (Ekpimah 2013). Although the police public relationships officer, Akwa Ibom police command, Mr. Etim Dickson denied the allegations and revealed that none of the victims died from police bullets. He further maintained that two persons, who died instantly, were killed by Okon people who inflicted marched cuts on them. This situation aggravated the youths who marched to Eket police station to burn it down, but their attempt was quashed as the police from the divisions joined hands to protect the station. The Punch (February, 24, 2005) reported the shooting to death of Suleyol Henkyaa in Makurdi by the police. The police alleged that Suleyol and her boy-friend were making love in a moving vehicle. The Daily Sun (December, 20, 2007) also reported that the police shot a 15 year old secondary school student in Orile area of Lagos. More so, it was reported that police shot and killed a 14 year old boy in Minna, Niger State. This event attracted a violent mass protest in Minna in the course of protest the angry mob attacked and wounded men of the police force (Nigerian Television Authority, NTA News Extra June 18, 2008). Situations as these affect police public relationship in Nigeria. The problem with the Nigeria police is that their investigations are always ongoing without ever coming to an end; this ways the public finds it difficult to cooperate with the police. One of the problems of Nigeria Police Force is that they are always on top of crime situations without getting down whenever they get to the top of the situation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICE PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Nigeria Police Force swears an oath of allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to perform the functions of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals' to generally create a tranquil environment for sustenance of Nigerian society. Unlike many other Police Forces in the world, Nigerian police force was not intended to be servants of the state, but of the communities they serve. Their powers are personal, used at their own discretion and derived from the crown. This essential feature of Nigerian Police Force policing by consent is now in jeopardy. It is evident that no security formation can thrive without a good relationship with members of the public. Good police public relationship helps Nigeria Police to overcome complex of crime problem in the pluralistic society to reach it desired goals and functions of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals. Good police public relationship serves to bring police and public into harmony thereby enabling the public to volunteer information of criminals to the police for proactive policing. The police need to understand the attitudes and values of the public they serve in order achieve their objectives of crime detection, prevention and

apprehension of criminals. The process of crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals cannot be complete without the role of information from key informants; it is these informants that volunteer information to police on the where-about of criminals. The police need to understand the attitudes and values of the community which they relate to in order to illicit information from them.

A good rapport and goodwill between police and the public enable police to serve the public better and the public also feels better. Black (2011) maintains that under modern conditions, no government organization of any kind can operate successfully without the cooperation of its publics. These publics may be both at home and overseas, but mutual understanding will be a potent factor for success in every case. The police require knowledge on how the community operates in order to take full advantage of the facilities and services provided by the police. There is clearly need for good police public relationship to help citizens understand the responsibilities of Nigeria Police Force in the society. Good police public relationship, enables the police to have a better understanding of the public's concerns especially crime related issues, and citizens are more inclined to report crimes that occur to the police, provide tips and intelligence to the police willingly serve as witnesses, and happily participate in criminal justice system. Incidentally police also become more proactive, thereby preventing crimes before they occur or minimizing their impact, instead of simply reacting to calls for service from members of the public. Good police-public relations prevent the possibility that the public thinks that police are simply a mechanism for intelligence collection as such denying them vital information that would aid in crime detection, prevention and apprehension of criminals.

Poor police public relations, enables the police to typically lack a basic understanding of public problems, goals, desires, and in turn the public also are denied access to the police especially those in need of the police services, they perceive police as an agent that occupies an out of touch force that does more harm than good to the public. In these situations, police rarely assume a reactive mode of response to public problems. It is evident that the Nigeria Police is highly and visibly subservient to the rich and powerful, even in the rendering of services and as such spoiled their relationship with the public.

The Nigeria Police have engaged themselves in much brutality on the poor masses. This way they hindering the desired public cooperation for instance Kunle (2014) reported that a 55 year old and Evangelist, Bose Basulaye, was dragged on the floor by the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) men after asking them about her arrested son and the dragging resulted to the woman's paralysis by stroke. The report further added that, "four months ago, the woman's son was arrested and taken to the Ojo Police Division, Lagos on the allegation that he stole a tricycle and sold it," 33 year old Joseph, indeed stole the tricycle though he confessed to have stolen the tricycle. The report confirmed that two officers Idoko and Baba Ngana who were aware of the case, threatened the woman and asked some policemen to drag her on the floor out of the premises after which it resulted to the woman's becoming paralysed by stroke. The situation appears to have significantly

deteriorated relationship between police and the public today. Finally, public participation involves members of the public taking an active role in trying to genuinely help the police to illicit information on the where-about of criminals in the society. Indeed, the failure of the police in Nigeria and other developing countries generally can be traced to ignorance, lack of trust by the public and the total uncooperative posture due to police insensitivity to the suffering of the people. The police should stop being snipers but learn to stop snipers in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective policing, the police should cooperate with members of public in order to illicit information about criminal hideouts in their localities; this will go a long way in reducing criminals in the society. The police should treat every citizens of the country according to the rule of law. All human beings are equal in the sight of the law. If rich man/woman commits crime he/she should be treated like when a poor man/woman commits the same crime.

In respect to police officers who involve in shady practices, such as brutality, corruption they should be made to obey the rule guiding ethical conduct to the latter. Sanctions should be meted on erring officers without delay as this would help instill discipline in the police and also serve as a deterrent to police officers that have the penchant to do such acts.

The police authority should carry out an awareness campaign about police public relationship as an antidote to crime control in contemporary Nigerian society. The enlightenment campaign should enable the general public to see police as friends indeed that could succeed in the discharge of their duties with public support. The public should be free to report crime cases and criminals as well as volunteer information about criminal hideouts to the police from time to time.

Police should strive to raise itself to the level of professional, by establishing a cordial relationship with the public, while succeed in doing so in, they should channel their energy in public relations work by conducting their activities in good manner. The national assembly should make laws that will bridge the gap between police public relations. This would increase public satisfaction and involvement with the police in all ramifications in the society.

The police should develop a good press and public relations, rather than their usual body language of unconfirmed reports when the evidence sounding such situation is obvious. There should be consultative meet between the police and the public at every interval in the society. The Police and public consultative aims at bring policing closer to the public at all level of the society.

CONCLUSION

It is on the record that no human endeavour can thrive without a having good relationship with the public. The police depend on the public as a veritable tool in the actualization or successful implementation of crime policies. It is incontrovertible that police awareness, understanding and co-operation on such public will determine the success or otherwise of the same. But the feeling of unaccountability by the police makes successive police administrations threats the public with levity; on turn around and seeks public cooperation and understanding when their policies are failing and become unpopular.

The Nigerian police force is an agent of law enforcement agency saddled with the responsibility of maintaining law and order, preservation of lives and property of the citizens among others. The police are constitutionally charged to carry out these roles. Without the cooperation of members of the public the police cannot perform these functions. Good police public relationship make people feel safe and secure as such people should report crime cases to the police this will go a long way in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour in their area. Lack of communication between police and public is envisaged as the widespread lopsided relationship. Police depends on safe public relationship that is more trans-parent. Public engagement in police affairs is crucial in tackling the problem of crime in contemporary society. The police force slogan "the police is your friend" support them to eradicate crime in Nigeria.

Whatever angle one looks at it, it is established here that good police public come in hardly to assist police for the successful implementation of policies and programmes that aim at eradicating crime. In whichever way one may come from Nigeria police needs good police public relationship in all facets of their crime control in techniques in Nigeria and beyond the country. No nothing is more important than security today, security of lives and property is vital to all human endeavours so the public should assist police in all sense in order eradicate crime in the society.

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