

Article

Nieghbourhood Watch: A Vehicle For Combating Crime In Port Harcourt Urban Of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Today, Nigeria is facing unprecedented threat to her National security, which is occasioned by the high rate of crime that pervades the length and breadth of the nation with adverse impact on the psychosocio economic development of Nigerians. Combating this menace using state security agencies alone has been a huge challenge. A close observation of the phenomenon shows that most Nigerians do not see crime as a collective responsibility that requires joint effort. This paper argues that the indifferent attitude showed by Port Harcourt in Rivers State, Nigerians to crime control is one challenge that is undermining government efforts in checking menace. The aim of this paper therefore, is to x-ray measures this will help to strengthen our National security through improved crime control. The paper suggests that crime can be better managed with the cooperation of the populace, through Neighborhood Watch schemes.

Keywords: Nieghbourhood Watch, Panacea, Combating, Crime, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Combating crime in Nigeria is an uphill task. Thus, no week passes by without the emergence of gruesome reports that some Nigerians have been bombed, gunned down, robbed, insulted and/or assaulted due to massive security lapses. Insecurity in Nigeria has no doubt led to massive loss of human and material resources which has in turn impinged on the psych socioeconomic growth and development of our Nation (Business day news editorial comment paper, April 24th 2014).

The world crime denotes a conduct that is disapproved by law and reproved by punitive sanctions. Okpo (2012) illumined that; crime is any specific act of omission or commission that violates the laws of a state which a punishment is specified for such a violations on conviction by a court of competent jurisdiction. Fackayode (1997) in Iwundu (2007), advanced that, there are four categories of crime against public order and crime against a State. Crime against persons includes: manslaughter, assaults and sexual offences. Crime against property, includes: theft, burglary and criminal damage. Crime against public order subsumes; riot, affrays and incitement to racial hatred. While crime against the State includes treason and sedition (Iwundu, 2007).

In Nigeria, it is widely believed that poverty breeds criminality. This concatenates with the opinion of criminologists psychologist and sociologists that the enormous gap between the rich and the poor engenders indecent resentment and indecent acts (Awake, 8 2005). Corroborating this fact, a 1995 human development study espoused that a sizeable

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number of Nigerians living in urban areas do not have enough money to meet their needs. In fact, about 21% of the urban population (85 million people), were estimated to be living below poverty line owing to the fact that their income is insufficient to cater for the rudiments of life, such as; food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care and schooling (World Bank Report, 1995). Since then, the pathetic situation has remained palpable and so deteriorating daily. a condition that drives to commit crime for survival purposes. This is evident in the upsurge in crimes against persons and properties being perpetrated in urban areas.

There is therefore, an urgent and cogent need for the establishment of neighborhood watch scheme under which members of a community can safe guard their environment, lives and properties themselves. This paper examines the involvement of urban residents in checking crime. It is also aimed at improving national security.

Conceptual Clarifications

Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood watch is a communal security structure. It involves the use of home grown personnels to mount surveillance for the protection of lives and properties. Neighborhood can be packaged as a civil security architecture were members of a given neighborhood take it upon themselves to safeguard their valuables. Neighborhood watch can be packaged as a scheme of system able local vigilance by house holders to discourage crime, especially bulgary corroboratively, Palmer (2012) disclosed that neighborhood watch synonym using known as crime watch is security structure made up of organized group of civilians devoted to crime and vandalism prevention in a residential area. Neighborhood watch is geared towards educating residents of a community on needed security and safety measures and how to handle criminal emergencies.

Crime

Crime is a punishable offence. Iwundu (2014) espoused that crime is a conduct disapproved by law and backed by punitive sanction. Ashworth and Hoder (2013) elucidated that a crime is an unlawful act punishable by a country or state. The term crime does not have any single universally acceptable definition. Head (2016) conceived crime as a dangerous act that violates established rules and regulations. Prohibited acts such as murder, rape, and theft constitute crime the world over. Roth (2014) elucidated that for something to qualify as crime, it must involved, the "act of doing something criminal" (actus reus) and an intention to do something criminal (mens rea). Shoham et al. (2010) submitted that crime is a malicious or mischievous unlawful act.

Statement of the problem

It appears that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is no longer capable of protecting lives and properties of her citizenry. This is so because of the colossal destruction of lives and properties by Boko Haram suicide bombers, armed robbers, Fulani herdsmen, militants, sectional killers, rapists, cultists and trigger manic security agents who shoot innocent citizens at will. Hence, most Nigerians sleep with both eyes open, watching and praying for safety and security in futility.

Insecurity in Nigeria owing to criminality is predominant in urban areas. Urban areas are the hub of criminal activities, because of the hubris of urban dwellers. In addition to that, most urban dwellers are egocentric and as such, individualistic. Hence, criminals easily attack their targets because they rarely cooperate or collaborate to repel criminals and/or rescue a victim of criminality, even if he/she screams off his/her head.

Cognizant of the pitfalls or flaws of how religiosity, mentoring, security agencies and individualized crime control technique, the researcher is aimed to investigate for Neighborhood watch as a panacea in combating crime in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Review of Related Studies

Otuya's (2015) writing on the challenges of managing urban crime in Nigeria investigated the constraints in managing urban crime, the paper discovered that, inadequate funding, bad working conditions, poor urban setting, corrupt and unintelligent security personnel as well as weak public confidence as some of the major challenges militating against the fight against urban crime. The paper recommended improved welfare package as a panacea for managing urban crime in Nigeria.

In a related study by Okpo (2012) on communication: A tool for effective crime control in Nigeria. The paper traces the various challenges confronting crime control and discovered that lack of modern crime control gadgets in the state security system hampered effects at crime control, the paper recommended that the use of surveillance cameras, and security sensors will aid crime control.

Obasola (2013) investigated religious imperative as a panacea to criminality. Obasola's findings showed that religious individuals are less likely to commit crime, due to the preachings and teachings that they receive. However, daily events compound the findings of this study, as most crimes are committed by highly religious people. Thus, religiosity remains a questionable means of combating crime in Nigeria.

Most Nigerians are of the view that social learning through observation or imitation of a model (mentor), is an effective means of combating or curbing crime. To validate or invalidate this view, Welsh and Hoshi (2002) in Ross, Smith, Inyess and Schoon (2010) examined the influence of mentoring on crime control. Their findings showed that mentoring is highly effective in the control of crime. However, recent events indicate that most mentors commit heinous crimes using their mentees. Suffice it to say that mentoring is a questionable means of combating crime.

Angaya (2020) x-rayed community – police partnership and crime prevention in Rivers State, the study in its investigation adopted a mix method, analytical tools employed were qualitative and quantitative, the crime triangle was applied, data from oral interview, observation and questionnaire support the findings that there is positive outcome from partnership policy in combating crime.

Okpo (2022) writing on traditional rules and curbing insecurity in Rivers State of Nigeria examine the role of traditional rulers in preventing crime in their domain, the study noted that the traditional rulers as custodian of the people's culture are highly revered and if integrated into crime control mechanisms can be a huge asset in the war against crime. The related literature review shows that scholars concentrated on the obstacles associated with combating crime to the neglect of common ownership of crime prevention. Crime affects all strata in human society thus the need for common ownership of crime prevention beginning with the neighbourhood watch.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Community Implant Theory. Community Impact Theory is based on the assumption that the main reason for high levels of crime is the lack of informal social control in community areas. Sociologists argue that informal social control can be implanted in a community by collective citizen action in neighborhoods where social control is naturally weak or non-existent (Rosenbaum, 1987). Mastrofski, Worden and Snipes (1995) have described this theory as 'Community building'. Community building, according to these scholars, is a process by which police strengthen the capacity and resolve of citizens to resist crime by building positive relationships with community residents. Accordingly, Lyons (1999) argues that innovative police strategies such as educational, recreational and occupational opportunities for youth, can mobilize the informal mechanisms of social control embedded within the community life (Lombardo and Lough 2007). Social control generally refers to the capacity of a particular group/community to regulate its members. It involves the use of rewards and punishments. Thus, while formal social control is always derived from certain written rules and laws and is enforced by the courts and the police, the informal social control is

based on customs and norms and is enforced by the citizens themselves through behaviors such as surveillance, verbal reprimand, warning, rejection, and other emotional pressures to ensure conformity. Generally, the arguments drive from community implant hypothesis is that crime and social disorder can be better controlled if both formal system, for example the police, and informal arrangement, for instance community's participation, are put together toward achieving that; this integration is what Neighbourhood watch broadly entails.

Neighbourhood watch has the capacity to solve the problems of deviant behavior in a society (Hussein, 2015) by handling the problem at the beginning stage itself with appropriate community-based programmes, fully involving the community groups at various stages of decision making. Denney, (2013, p. 78) planning and implementation of the programmes for the protection of the community. Such community based programmes can subsequently become the base for all neighborhood community watch projects which will in turn result in the promotion of mutual understanding and appreciation among the community members.

Research Questions

1. To what extent will neighbourhood watch scheme be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
2. To what extent if any will gates mounted in between neighbourhoods be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
3. To what extent will bombs planted along the road be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?
4. To what extent will regular street lights be reliable in checking crime within our neighbourhood?
5. To what extent, will the engagement of night and day watchmen be reliable in checking crime in our neighbourhood?

2. Materials and Methods

The study is a descriptive survey. The population of the study encompassed all the residents of Port-Harcourt urban. Port-Harcourt urban has an estimated population of 1,383,592 (NPC, 2006). A sample size of 250 respondents, representing 0.018% of the population was selected for the study using systematic random sampling technique. A validated instrument, entitled "Neighbourhood watch crime control scale (NWCCS)", was used to generate data from the respondents. The instruments comprised five item statements well graded on four point likert scale of: very reliable (VA) reliable (R), unreliable (UR) and very unreliable (VUR). It was administered to the respondents by the researcher in the company of his aide. The filled copies of the instrument were retrieved on the spot. Descriptive statistical models such as: tables, frequency counts and sample percentages were employed in data analysis and synthesis.

3. Results

Research question 1: To what extent, will neighbourhood watch scheme be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?

Table 1. Frequency counts and percentages of respondent's responses on the extent to which neighbourhood watch scheme is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages %
Very reliable	80	32%
Reliable	70	28%
Unreliable	60	24%
Very reliable	40	16%
Total	250	100

Table 1 depicts that: 80 respondents representing 32% are of the view that neighbourhood watch scheme is very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. Concomitantly, 28% of respondents professed that neighbourhood watch scheme is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. On the other hand, 60 respondents representing 24% and 40 respondents representing 16% are of the view that neighbourhood watch scheme is unreliable and very unreliable in checking crime.

Research question 2: To what extent, will gates mounted in between neighbourhood be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?

Table 2. Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	85	34
Reliable	80	32
Unreliable	50	20
Very unreliable	35	14
Total	250	100

Table 2 evinces that: 85 out of 250 respondents representing 34% of the view that gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. Concomitantly, 80 respondents representing 32%, averred that gates mounted in between neighbourhoods are reliable in checking crime. Conversely, 50 respondents representing 20% and 35 respondents representing 14% of the sample believe that gates mounted between neighbourhoods are unreliable and very unreliable respectively in checking crime within a neighbourhood.

Research question 3: To what extent, will bombs planted along the road be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Table 3. Frequency counts and percentages of respondents response the extent to which bombs planted along the road are reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	80	32%
Reliable	70	28%
Unreliable	60	24%
Very unreliable	40	16%
Total	250	100

Table 3 shows that 80 respondents representing 32 percent of the sample are convinced that planting bombs along or around neighbourhoods is very reliable in checking crime. Concomitantly, 70 respondents representing 28% of the studied sample, believe that: implantation of bombs along a neighbourhood is a reliable means of checkmating crime. On the other hand, 60 respondents representing 24% and 40 respondents representing 16% of the population affirm and reaffirm that planting bombs along or around a neighbourhood is unreliable and very unreliable respectively in checkmating crime.

Research question 4: To what extent will regular street lights be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?

Table 4. Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which the provision of regular street light is reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood.

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	85	34%
Reliable	80	32%
Unreliable	35	14%
Very unreliable	50	20%
Total	250	100

Table 4 illustrates that; 85 respondents representing 34% and 80 respondents representing 32% of the studied sample, believe that the availability of street light is very reliable and reliable respectively in checkmating crime. On the other hand, 35 respondents representing 14% and 50 respondents, representing 20% are of the view that the installation of street light is unreliable and very unreliable in checkmating crime.

Research questions 5: To what extent, will the engagement of night and day watch men be reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood?

Table 5. Frequency counts and percentages of respondents responses on the extent to which the engagement of night and day watchmen will be reliable in checking crime.

Scale	Responses	Percentages%
Very reliable	85	34%
Reliable	80	32%
Unreliable	35	14%
Very unreliable	50	20%
Total	250	100

Table 5 shows that 80 respondents representing 32% and 85 respondents representing 34% of the sample size believe that the engagement of night and day watchmen is very reliable and reliable respectively in combating crime in a neighbourhood. Non the other hand, 35 respondents representing 14% and 50 respondents representing 20% of the surveyed samples are of the view that the engagement of night and day watch men is unreliable an very unreliable respectively in checking crime.

4. Discussion

Combating crime in Nigeria is not a child's play. It is also not an individual affair, because; it requires concerted effort. Table 1 gives credence to this assertion. If the individuals living in a neighbourhood come together and synergize their security measures, they will be invincible and their neighbourhood will be formidable. This is so, because they will harness their experiences and resources to combat criminality. More so, their solidarity and communality will scare criminals away, because; there is power in unity. This result confirms the findings of Ekpeyong (1999) regarding the efficacy and exigency of neighbourhood watch scheme.

Neighbourhoods, will be more secured if gates are erected strategically as shown in table two. This is so, because gates serve as barriers. They restrict access to a neighbourhood. Psychologically, gates deter criminality because they beef up security as explicated by Abodari (1981)

Table 3 demonstrates that planting bombs around a neighbourhood is very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is understandable because bombs are

weapons of mass destruction. Hence, their presence induces or instigates than atophobia. That is, fear of death or dying. Thus, no criminal will contemplate of operating in a bomb infested neighbourhood.

4 showcase that the installation of regular street lights will be very reliable in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is so, because most heinous crimes, such as; armed robbery, rape and assassinations are committed under the cover of darkness. Since darkness and light have no communication, the installation of regular street lights will fortify neighbourhood watch schemes and make watched neighbourhoods no go areas.

Table 5 shows that the engagement of night and day watchmen will go a long way in checking crime in a neighbourhood. This is so, because the watchmen will sense their environments day and night. They will search the people coming into a neighbourhood, interrogate strange faces, repel criminals and raise alarm if need be. It is necessary to engage the services of night and they watchmen in a neighbourhood, because they will make the neighborhood impregnable or impenetrable.

Operationalizing Neighbourhood Watch for Effective Crime Control

Registration Of Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

For effective operation of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, land lords and of tenants of a neighbourhood should legalize the association by seeking registration with relevant government agencies, such as; corporate affairs commission. This is to give the association legal recognition and composition such as board of directors, executive members, functional bank account.

Funding

Money is needed to sustain a neighbourhood watch scheme as a corporate entity having legal backing. Thus, members should seek internal and external channels of funding such as; donation of cash and equipment monthly or annual levies and soliciting for support from; corporate organization and other donor agencies, as to keep its operation afloat.

Documentation

To easily identify members of a neighbourhood, there is a dire need to take proper record of all the residents. The record should include their names, their addresses within the neighbourhood, and their business or office locations. This approach will easily spot out any strange person within the neighbourhood.

Security Education

The overriding objective of Neighbourhood Watch is to ensure public safety, therefore efforts should be made to inculcate security consciousness from time to time using security consultant/personnels. Such forum would educate the people on key security tips.

Sharing Of Telephone Contact

In the event of a resident being attacked, other residents should be able to mobilize other members of the neighbourhood and the state security agencies to challenge the attack, this can only be possible via a telephone directorate, that contains the telephone contact of all residents within the neighbourhood.

Recruitment Of Plain Cloth Watch Men

More so, the recruitment of plain cloth Watchmen to keep vigil is one approach that Neighbourhood watchmen schemes will adopt in checking crime. Despite interacting with people within and around the Neighbourhood, night and day watchmen should be encouraged to operate in anonymous modes to enable them disseminate information to both residents and non-residents of a Neighbourhood, and channel such information to appropriate agencies for prompt action.

Collaboration With State Run Security Agencies

Any security measure without effective collaboration with the state run security agencies especially, The Nigeria Police Force cannot succeed. Thus, Neighbourhood watch schemes will or should endeavour to establish a cordial relationship with the nearest Police station. This is to energize or synergize their efforts and guarantee their success.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the surge in criminal activities in Nigeria and evaluated the role of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) in addressing this challenge. Findings from the field study, as demonstrated in Tables 1 through 5, indicate that the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme is a viable solution for mitigating and managing the rise in crime. This community-based initiative leverages local vigilance, collaboration, and proactive measures to enhance public safety and foster collective responsibility in crime prevention.

To operationalize the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme effectively in Nigeria, the paper recommends several key steps. First, there should be robust community sensitization and engagement to ensure widespread participation and understanding of the scheme's objectives. Second, the government should provide legislative backing to formalize and regulate the operations of Neighbourhood Watch groups. Third, members of the scheme require comprehensive training in basic crime prevention techniques, conflict resolution, and emergency response to ensure effectiveness and professionalism. Fourth, the integration of technological tools, such as surveillance systems and mobile reporting apps, should be prioritized to enhance communication and real-time monitoring. Fifth, sustainable funding mechanisms should be established to support the logistics and operational needs of the scheme, including stipends for volunteers where necessary. Lastly, partnerships with law enforcement agencies must be strengthened to facilitate information sharing and coordinated responses to criminal activities.

By implementing these measures, the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme can serve as an indispensable tool in curbing crime and promoting a safer, more secure society in Nigeria.

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