

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY POLICING AND THE PLACE OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT: A STUDY OF THE HARMONISED SURVEILLANCE GUARD

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### Abstract

Provision of adequate security is a social obligation for the survival of any society. States ensure that proper measures are taken to protect people's lives and properties within their geographic spaces. Security's critical importance explains why states from time to time make efforts to safeguard their neighbourhoods to police themselves from harm. Security involves the act of prevention and protection which ensures that lives and properties are safe. Issues concerning security and safety have been a major challenge in Nigeria. The poor and inadequate security personnel to protect citizens highlighted the need for critical intervention. The Harmonised Surveillance Guard, a renowned local community policing outfit, emerged in response to the increasing wave of armed robberies and insurgency in many parts of the country. Its emergence was also necessitated by the need to complement the shortfall in police officers and to adequately guard and protect citizens. Using historical and analytical approaches and drawing from primary and secondary sources, the article examines the activities of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard in maintaining internal security in Nigeria. The article also examines the way by which the legislature can address the lack of implementation of community policing by the Nigerian Police through strict oversight. Although the Harmonised Surveillance Guard exist to adequately complement the Nigerian Police in the policing of Ede and its environs, the article notes that local communities welcome this outfit's crime-fighting strategies and are strongly in support of its coordinated security arrangements. The article concludes that the presence of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard has put in check on several cases of criminal activities in communities where they are located which the Nigerian police have hitherto failed to prevent satisfactorily.

**Keywords:** Security, Harmonised Surveillance Guard, Nigeria police, community policing, crime

### Introduction

Safety and security are important nuggets for attaining quality of life for citizens. They provide the needed environment for citizens to achieve socio-economic and political development in the society.<sup>1</sup> Lack of safety and security, by the same token, stifles human capacity to grow and

heavily compromises the quality of life of citizens and society. Insecurity harms all citizens as it leaves in its wake destruction of property, loss of life and limb and loss of confidence caused by fear of violence. Policing is, thus, necessary as it helps to preserve order, safety and communal relations.<sup>2</sup> Its importance cannot be overemphasised and is

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<sup>1</sup> Hesta Groenewald and Gordon Peake, *Police Reform through Community-based Policing: Philosophy and Guidelines for Implementation* (New York: International Peace Academy and Saferworld, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

even more evident in modern societies marked by diversity and contradictions created by population heterogeneity, urbanisation, industrialisation conflicting ideologies on appropriate socio-economic and political forms of governance. Thus, the creation of the police, an agency of trained personnel employed and paid to enforce the law and maintain order by the state, has been an age-old exercise in human history.

Traditionally, all adults were responsible for policing the community. In medieval times, all adult males were duty-bound to be part of the prevention and control of crime and disorderliness under the instrument of “hue, cry and pursuit” and the “watch and ward” that antedated the origin of specialised police forces as an agency of the state. However, with the rise of states and their large bureaucracies grounded on centralisation, hierarchical authority/power structure and professional staff,<sup>3</sup> changes occurred in the traditional policing framework linked to the idea of policing as everybody’s concern. The formation of the state as an entity that claims a monopoly over the means of legitimate violence resulted, therefore, in the formation of specialised entities like the police to aid in the control of the use of violence by individuals and other groups.

This article centres on the neighbourhood or community policing outfits which are formed or created by street associations in the rural and urban centres, to guard their communities at night. They are also involved in foot patrols at night to reassure residents of the community of their personal security. These policing outfits are not licensed to carry weapons but hold whistles used in arousing the neighbourhoods to unwelcome guests.<sup>4</sup> The Harmonised Surveillance Guard (HSG) falls under

this group. This study is limited to Ede and its environs which comprise Owode-Ede, Osogbo, Sekona and Akoda, all located in present-day Osun State, Southwest Nigeria. The activities of the HSG are restricted to the provision of internal security services such as personal guard, community guard, and day and night guard. As the study will show subsequently, one of the major reasons for establishing the HSG is as a result of the incessant robbery cases and other security challenges in the town. The article also examines the way by which the legislature can address the lack of implementation of community policing by the Nigerian Police through strict oversight.

### **Vigilantism, Community Policing and Maintenance of Security in Ede**

Lack of internal security and safety has been a major challenge for Nigerians. This has given rise to community policing by local vigilante groups who, under the supervision of the police, help to detect potential crimes early and to prevent them from maturing into full-blown crimes.<sup>5</sup> In Nigeria, community policing is said to be a common response mechanism to the ambivalence and discontentment of state authorities towards citizens’ safety of lives and properties. Community policing is, hence, viewed as a reaction to the disappointments of the country’s decade-long neoliberal economic reforms and democratisation, a new order that empowers few people in the upper class.<sup>6</sup> Yet, inexplicably, one common justification for community policing is linked to the ideals of democracy and development. Vigilantism serves to conceal the state’s responsibility to maintain internal security which creates a forceful response by citizens to institutionalised injustice.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, vigilantism is culturally

<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Innocent Chukwuma, “Police Transformation in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects,” in *Crime and Policing in Transitional Societies*, Seminar Report No. 8 (Jan Smut House, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2000), 127-34.

<sup>5</sup> Okechukwu O. Nwaubani, Blessing E. Anyikwa and Dominic Azuh, Building Support for

Community Policing: Challenges and Implications for National Security in Nigeria, *International Journal of Educational Science and Research* 4, issue 3 (2014): 9-20.

<sup>6</sup> K. Adegbusi, Vigilante Groups and the Task of Policing, *Journal of African Crime Studies* 2, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Chukwuma, Police Transformation in Nigeria

specific and associated with various localised patterns and meanings. In Nigeria, the services of night guards and vigilante groups have often been deployed as a response mechanism to issues like petty crime and armed robbery. Vigilante groups have, therefore, proliferated since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, and have organised themselves at different levels in several locations (from village wards to rural/urban cities), and for reasons that include crime fighting and political lobbying. In the southwest region of Nigeria, crime fighting has been led by the popular Oodua People's Congress (OPC), while in the southeast was for many years led by the now defunct Bakassi Boys. In most parts of the North, it was championed by the Sharia Implementation Committees, better known as *Hisbah* (Islamic police).<sup>8</sup> Aside from fighting crime, these groups lead political contests that often emerge against the backdrop of the politics of identity and citizenship and represent divergent yearnings for Nigeria's future which include a pro-sharia movement in the north<sup>9</sup> and championing of ethnic nationalism in the southwest.<sup>10</sup>

In Ede town, three categories of vigilante groups existed in the past. The first includes able-bodied young men who reside in the wards or villages. They organise themselves in clusters and move at intervals to watch their community at night to protect members of their families and neighbours against criminals and armed robbers. They receive no payment or reward for their efforts. The second category of vigilante group is more of a communal effort whereby a community employs the services of people to guard and patrol the streets at night and is then paid by the same community based on the agreement in the terms of reference. The third group of vigilantes is

government-based, whereby authorities of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) employ people and equip them with uniforms, boots, torchlight, whistles and other paramilitary materials or gadgets. They patrol areas assigned to them, help in the prevention of crimes and arrest offenders within the LGA.<sup>11</sup> This study falls under the first category of vigilante groups discussed above.

The traditional vigilante in Ede town set up its own informal or, in some cases, formal structures to guarantee the safety, security and lives of residents. This group was usually made up of persons from the community<sup>12</sup> and drew their legitimacy and unofficial authority from the same community where they served. One of the main functions of these traditional vigilantes is to complement the role of the police in determining criminal suspects and handing them over to the appropriate authorities. There are also cases where other conflicts between individuals in the community are settled without involving the police. There are instances, however, where local leaders on several occasions often abuse their power by using these traditional vigilante groups for other purposes that are usually self-serving.

Apart from these classes of vigilante group activities, findings established that the traditional structures in checking crime in Ede town include the use of traditionalists such as spiritualists who are engaged in minimising victimization; the use of family courts which involve elders and family chiefs to adjudicate on; and the apex traditional court headed by the king of the town where cases such as land disputes, murder, adultery among others are heard and decided. Traditional extrajudicial course of actions require the conjuration of ancestral spirits at communal or family shrines.

<sup>8</sup> Adegbusi, Vigilante Groups

<sup>9</sup> Albert Anyia, Muslim Organisations and the Mobilisations for Sharia Law in Northern Nigeria: The JNI and The NSCIA, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 82-102.

<sup>10</sup> Abimbola O. Adesoji, Yoruba Ethnic Nationalism, Power Elite Politics and the Nigerian State, 1948-2007, *African Identities* 15, no. 2 (2016): 187-207.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Palmiotto, *Community Policing: A Policing Strategy for 21st Century* (Maryland: Aspen Books, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Etannibi E.O. Alemika and Innocent C. Chukwuma, *The Poor and Informal Policing in Nigeria: A Report on the Peoples' Perception and Priorities on Safety, Security and Informal Policing in the A2J Focal States in Nigeria* (Lagos: CLEEN, 2004).

National security is a treasured value linked with confidence in the safety of individuals, groups or states, along similar safety of other most treasured values.<sup>13</sup> In other words, security implies freedom from all forms of threats, fear or danger. Security can be seen as a value related to confidence as regards physical safety and other most treasured values.<sup>14</sup> As a statutory requisite, provision of security is the primary responsibility of the state through the Police among other various government security agencies whose duty is to maintain law, order and protection of lives and property. The role of the police in maintaining security cannot be overemphasised within the context of a civil environment. Not only is the police the most statutory or constitutional body/organ tasked with the preservation of law and order, but it is also responsible for the protection of citizens in the course of the exercise of their legal rights.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, relevant sections of the Nigerian constitution as amended show that the police and other law enforcement agencies are tasked with the operations of security of public safety and order across the federation,<sup>16</sup> including the town of Ede town.

Undoubtedly, security is an essential subject which requires the cooperation and collaboration of all levels of government, security agencies and citizens. Among the stakeholders involved in security issues, the community or public is the most critical to impelling security. Why is because the absence of cooperation of the community or public can cause a lack of optimal performance by the police which, therefore, calls for a police-community framework to the detection and prevention of crime. This co-operation is crucial in that criminals are primarily

part of the community and if their activities are detected early, they could easily be prevented from carrying out any form of nefarious activities. This approach, thus, guarantees that community residents are duly informed on the need to provide intelligence to the police about crimes and criminal activities within their domains and ways in which the police could be reached in times of emergencies, reinforcing the necessity for community policing.<sup>17</sup>

Nigeria currently operates a centralised police system. The Nigeria Police Force was established in 1930. This followed the dissipation of local police forces in the year 1966. The 1979 and 1999 constitutions clearly prohibit the establishment of police forces except the Nigeria Police Force. According to Section 214(1), it is stipulated that: "There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section, no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof."<sup>18</sup> In Ede, the Nigeria Police Force is under the State Command headed by the Commissioner of Police has been active and functioning in the maintenance of peace and security. As a collaborative effort towards maintaining peace and security in Ede, the Nigeria Police Force through the Police Training College has been involved in training registered and recognised vigilante groups under the direction of Superintendents of Police. The vigilante groups have been participants in this hand of fellowship through rigorous training, commissioning members, workshops and meetings alongside the Nigeria Police Force. The Nigeria Police also approve the vigilante groups before they can embark on any operation.

<sup>13</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli, *National Security in Africa: A Radical New Perspective* (Enugu: PACREP, 2006), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nnoli, *National Security in Africa*

<sup>15</sup> Thomas A. Imobighe, *Nigeria's Defence and National Security Linkages: A Framework of Analysis* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2003), 78-84.

<sup>16</sup> *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Amended)* (Abuja: Government Press,

2011), 140.

<sup>17</sup> Chukwunye C. Njoku, "Community Policing as a Strategic Option and Benchmark for Combating Kidnapping in Nigeria: A Development Perspective for Nigeria at 50," in *Nigeria at 50: Issues, Challenges and Agenda* eds. Agozie S. Ezeudu, Onyebuchi E. Ezeani, Joseph Onuoha and Stella C. Nwizu Vol. 2. (Enugu: Timex Publishers, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> *The 1999 Constitution*

In Ede town, the police have been involved in activities such as the dispersion of rioters and other violent assemblies, interposing to prevent any attempt to damage movable and immovable properties, and ensuring that proper measures are taken towards safety and crime prevention. The benchmark for evaluating successful policing in Ede town includes the following:<sup>19</sup>

- i. Effectiveness: in terms of reduced or fewer criminal victimisation; increased proportion of crimes known to the police permitted through arrest; higher recovery of stolen properties, increased rates of arrests resulting in conviction; reduced traffic accident rate; higher response time to reports/complaints among others.
- ii. Responsiveness: this has to do with increased citizen knowledge of safety from crime, increased citizen ratings of police performance across the board; increased citizen ratings of key police activities; and increased citizen ratings of key aspects of police conduct like honesty, integrity, courtesy and fairness.
- iii. Equity: regarding the equal distribution of “protection” to all citizens.
- iv. Efficiency: regarding cost-and-benefit analysis of “protection” turnout relative to monetary, human and material input.

The Nigeria Police Force is often censured by citizens given its institutional failings, yet the importance of this agency cannot be underestimated in matters of internal security. On several occasions, the Force has risen to the challenge of dealing with vehement criminals, kidnappers, armed robbers and murderous

herdsmen who pose a very serious threat to the lives of citizens and the country in general. This suggests that the point of success and accomplishment already exists within the Force. Despite this, there is a clear unanimous conclusion among citizens on the weakness of the current centralised framework of policing and the hapless performance of the Nigeria Police. Based on this, multiple studies have shown that the NPF is one of the most corrupt and inefficient government agencies in Nigeria.

Despite the establishment of local policing outfits prohibited by the constitution, community-based informal policing groups and networks can be found throughout Ede town and have become an integral part of its security landscape. These local policing authorities, seemingly constitutionally prohibited by the government, are tasked with the responsibility of providing security services in Ede’s large ungoverned spaces. Some of these community-based policing bodies collaborate with the Nigeria Police, a gesture which helped to champion a Community Policing Policy Framework in 2004.<sup>20,21</sup> A vivid example is the Harmonised Surveillance Guard. Community-based police groups/networks in Osun State can currently be divided into four broad categories:<sup>22</sup>

- i. There are structured national community policing networks which are commanded by the Vigilante Group of Nigeria and have representation across all local governments in Nigeria.
- ii. There are ethnic-based networks that also operate as policing units, an example of which is the Oodua People’s Congress.
- iii. There are also state government-financed community policing networks established paradoxically by state laws despite the

<sup>19</sup> Femi Odekunle, “Overview of Policing in Nigeria: Problems and Suggestions,” in *Crime and Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Options* eds. Etannibi E.O. Alemika and Innocent C. Chukwuma (Lagos: CIEEN Foundation, 2004).

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<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel C. Onyeozili, Obstacles to Effective Policing in Nigeria, *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* 1, no 1 (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Patrick N. Udefuna, Magnus E. Madu, Chiedo Akalefu and Fadila Jumare, Effective Community Policing: A Panacea to Inefficiency and Impunity in Nigerian Police, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 4 (2014): 260-267.



constitutional prohibition of such. For instance, Man O War, COMSIDS and MAMSA (war against indiscipline) all work hand in hand with the Harmonised Surveillance Guard.

- iv. Lastly, the ambiguous and more or less integrated community organised and funded policing services.

These community policing agencies emerged in response to Nigeria's weakened capability to protect citizens' lives and properties, on one hand, and the prevalent criminal activities with their accompanying encumbrance on communities, on the other hand. Community members who decide to mount informal policing structures, no doubt, point to an indictment of the general security network in Nigeria and Ede in particular. It should be noted that the OPC and VGN are usually not in a cordial relationship with the Harmonised Surveillance Guard because of their profit-making mission which invariably allows them to leave behind their core aim of looking into security issues.

Community policing necessitates a viable partnership between the police and the community working to "co-produce" public safety and communal well-being. The primary philosophy associated with community policing is that the police, on one hand and the community, on the other hand, jointly share the responsibility for safeguarding public safety and that each has a crucial role to play. A division-wide commitment to community policing is an essential step toward promoting trust and legitimacy which improves the quality of police-citizen relations and addresses unrelenting public safety concerns in Ede and its environs.

### **The Origin and Emergence of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard**

The HSG, initially known as Yah Salam Vigilante Group (YVG), was formed by Mr. Rilwan Hussein, a security expert, in 1989, following the incessant cases of armed robbery and social unrest in Olurogbo, Ile-Ife (in present-day

Osun State, Southwest Nigeria), where he resided.<sup>23</sup> This increased level of crime is attributed to the pervasive and persistent level of deterioration in the socio-economic conditions of the citizens which gave rise to poverty, inequality, disenchantment and frustration. The presence of the YVG suddenly created fear and a rethink for criminal elements because attempts to target communities or locations where the HSG operate, guard, or extend their activities appear suicidal.

As pointed out previously, the YVG was created in 1989, but it was not able to fully intervene or extend its mandate to communal crises as a result of the extant laws that prohibited Vigilante Groups from engaging in such crises. The YVG's mandate was, therefore, limited to minimal communal policing for much of the 1990s until 2001, when Hussein was made the Vice President of his home town association. This required him to return to his native Ede, where he was able to fully establish his security outfit, now known as the HSG, in 2009.

The HSG was necessitated by the increasing wave of armed robberies and insurgency in many parts of Ede town. It emerged as a reaction to the lack of sufficient police officers to adequately guard and protect life and property in the same community. The security outfit also sprang up in Ede as an addendum to the security provided by the Nigeria Police Force. Its rise as a community volunteer guard attests to a genuine desire to curb criminality and insecurity in the town. It is argued that the emergence of the HSG points to the failure of the state security apparatus to adequately protect residents' lives and properties in Ede. This position is also shared by Emmanuel Onyeozili who observes that the formation of vigilante groups is catalysed by the security vacuum created as a result of the government's failure to protect citizens' lives and properties. This failure demanded the need for the provision of security outside the formal security entity of the state.<sup>24</sup>

The HSG is saddled with the

<sup>23</sup> Much of the views in this section are drawn from the authors' personal communication with Mr. Rilwan Hussein in his home in Ede in March 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Onyeozili, Obstacles to Effective Policing

responsibility to intensify the maintenance of security in their respective communities and, in particular, to provide all lawful assistance to the police in the prevention, detection and arrest of crimes. They are also required to provide relevant information on criminals along with taking measures that ensure that hoodlums are not allowed to freely operate in their communities. Also, they are duty-bound to preserve law and order as well as to protect lives and property. The HSG are enshrined with the power to arrest persons who commit crime, patrol the streets or areas both in the day and especially at night, mount security barricades at night at hot spots, interrogate and hand over to the Police any person with questionable behaviour or of suspicious movement. They also have the power to enter and search any compound where a questionable person runs or hides while being pursued.<sup>25</sup>

The aims and objectives of the HSG are mainly within the frame of crime prevention and detection, promoting community policing and crime control, preventing and protecting lives and properties in Ede and neighbouring towns and also to arrest offenders who are instantly handed over to the police together with items recovered. The HSG was officially registered in 2015 in the area of Public Security. As a national private security outfit, membership is spread in 21 states in Nigeria with its headquarters in Ede Town and Command Offices in the country's six geo-political zones. The group is highly structured and collaborates with both the police and the Nigerian military. With an understanding of the local communities in which they work, the HSG has been highly successful.

#### **Harmonised Surveillance Guard and Maintenance of Security in Ede**

Nigeria's transition from military rule to elected civilian rule in 1999 led to a surge in crime and social disorder that threatens to undercut citizen support for democratic governance. Despite several promises made by the government to tackle insecurity, armed robbery, political assassinations, ethno-religious killings and other

forms of violent crimes remain prevalent. Like in many areas across the country, Ede and its environs have had their fair share of unrest and violence. As seen over the years, armed robbery and incessant theft have made Nigerians feel unsafe. Frustrated by the poor showing of the police in responding adequately to the safety and security needs of citizens, self-help measures have been resorted to. One of the responses to this increasing act of insecurity is the formation of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard.

The HSG emerged in Ede as a security framework to complement the policing effort of the Nigeria Police Force. Their rise as community volunteer guards illustrates a genuine desire to curb hoodlums and armed banditry in the town. The emergence of the HSG in Ede suggests that the country's security apparatus cannot sufficiently protect the lives and properties of citizens. While the Nigerian government is known to have faced security challenges over the years, the collapse of military rule in 1999 and the adoption of a liberal democracy, thereafter, witnessed a dramatic increase in security problems. The emergence of the HSG could, therefore, be considered an outcome of the worsening security situation in the country. As a result, several vigilante groups and militias slowly emerged during this period. According to Ero, vigilante groups were formed in response to the security vacuum following monumental lapses in the protection of citizens' lives and property by the police.<sup>26</sup> The lapses necessitated the rush for security from outside the formal security structures provided for by the state.

The residents of Ede and its environs accept and welcome the presence of vigilante groups into their community and are assured of their effectiveness in controlling crime. During fieldwork conducted for this study, residents disclosed that the rate of crime in their area before the emergence of vigilante groups was very high. While some residents considered the performance of the vigilante groups as both "very good" and "excellent", opinions were diverse regarding who

<sup>25</sup> Constitution of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard (2011).

<sup>26</sup> Onyeozili, Obstacles to Effective Policing

should take responsibility for crime control in the area. Many residents favoured vigilante groups while a few supported the police. Furthermore, this group of residents argue that by increasing the activities of vigilante groups, the problem of crime in Nigeria would be fully addressed, while critics argue that increasing the number of police officers in the community is the best way to tackle the recurring challenge of insecurity.

### **The Relationship Between the Harmonised Surveillance Guard, the State Government and the Nigeria Police**

The HSG has experienced a close relationship with some state governors and other government officials in Osun State. This relationship has been of mutual benefit as both the state government and the HSG engage with each other on areas that could further deepen the security of residents' lives and property in the state. The HSG have exclusive and direct access to some state governors and other key state government officials. The Commander General of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard is of the view that "relations with state governments are cordial but they do not support our activities."<sup>27</sup>

The founder of the HSG noted that there was support for its activities in the past but many state governments claimed this support was no longer possible given the state's lean resources, although they counted on the services of the HSG to complement her in the fight against crime in the state. The founder observed that while there were no financial long-term commitments from the state government, sixteen members of the HSG were, nonetheless, employed and paid a lump sum monthly to motivate the group. According to Alhaji Yasalam;

Governor Oyinlola, in his own time, was a security man; he motivated us and ordered all Local Government Chairmen to buy us a car each which they bought. I am not a politician; I am testifying to what I know. Then we had 31 vehicles and those vehicles must be fuelled every month for operation...It is what

Oyinlola built that the administration of Aregbesola is now enjoying. He said that he has been using his personal money to fuel and maintain the vehicles and guards so that the Harmonised Surveillance Guard would not go into extinction.<sup>28</sup>

During Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola's administration, the HSG received financial support from the Local Governments in Osun State. The governor also ensured that members of the Osun State House of Assembly procured motorcycles for patrol services. This is, however, not the case in recent times as politicians prefer to empower hoodlums rather than security agencies which has in many ways strengthened the resolve of criminals against the security outfit.

Considering the critical role of the HSG in improving security, the State government recently urged its citizens to recognise and promote the HSG in the maintenance of security, prevention of crime and general enforcement of the law to complement that of the police. The government argued that rather than the use of an anti-terror policing plan of action, increasing the paramilitary or the use of expensive high-tech gadgets (although crucial), the ground-level plan of action (triggering the security agencies to work better with the citizens) will help to deepen the detection of crime and insecurity. It will also ensure adequate intelligence gathering and will help to develop partnerships and confidence among citizens.

Since its emergence in Ede, residents have shown deep trust in the HSG and its activities which they consider to be highly effective at detecting and preventing crime. They are seen by many people as more effective and better than the police whose personnel are generally unpopular among residents and believed to be prone to fraud. Incidentally, crime has been noted to reduce in communities where the HSG are active. Armed robbery remains the largest reported case of crime in Ede but the situation continues to be managed better by the HSG. Since the HSG cannot perform

<sup>27</sup> Personal communications with Mr. Riliwan Hussein on March 22, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Personal communications with Mr. Riliwan Hussein on March 22, 2018.



the task of securing lives and properties alone, residents of Ede have recommended that the activities of the HSG should be supported fully and carried out with the active backup of the state security service and the police. It was further recommended that the government of Osun State should support HSG's activities, particularly in the area of incentives and logistical support.

The HSG has been an active partner with many host communities in crime control. Residents demonstrated a keen awareness of the HSG operating in their area, illustrating the far-flung operation of the HSG within Ede and its environs. Public assurance in the police remains at its decline, as residents point to the police as inefficient and corrupt. The performance of the police in combating crime was rated low by most residents who argued that police ineffectiveness was responsible for the formation of vigilante groups. It was observed that residents did not trust the police to handle crime directly, but that the HSG generally turned in captured criminals over to the police for prosecution. From close observation, the activity of the HSG drawing on some police mandates for support shows a promising sign that could enhance collaboration between the HSG and the police.

Since its formation in 2009 in Ede Town, the HSG has grown from obscurity to the limelight. It has proved to be a force to reckon with as far as security is concerned in Ede and its environs. The HSG is involved in community policing and has effectively carried out its mandate to the satisfaction of the populace. The HSG liaise with the Nigeria Police to carry out its community policing and vigilante duties. It is not part of the duties of the HSG to prosecute criminals but to arrest and transfer any suspect to the police. The activities of the HSG do not entail taking the law into their own hands. Factors that determine the likelihood of the HSG's activities are the nature of the crime a person is deemed to have committed, how serious the crime is, the detected dangerous

nature of the target and the sense of the likelihood the target would carry out the crime once more.

For much of its history, the HSG has created a very cordial working relationship with other security agencies which include the Nigerian military, the Department of State Security and, of course, the police. One thing that sets them apart from the other security agencies in Ede town is their grassroots connection. The performances and impacts of the HSG have been felt by the Nigeria Police in the past which resulted in the latter's decision to embrace the HSG in Ede which then extended to other parts of the State and even beyond. The HSG reports to the Nigeria Police and seeks its consent and permission before embarking on any operation. The Assistant Inspector General and Commissioner of Police are always well informed when the Commander General of the HSG wishes to travel outside Ede town. The police engage members of the HSG in training at their Police College every 4-5 months. The HSG is also a respectable professional agency whose deep knowledge of its local community places it as being capable of carrying out the job of securing residents' lives and properties.

### **Community Policing and the Need for Full Compliance with Section 15 of the Police Act of 2020**

In 2000, the Nigeria Police Force (Establishment) Act 2020 was passed by the National Assembly and shortly assented to by President Muhammadu Buhari. Among other provisions, the Act made a case for the promotion and set-up of community policing arrangements across the country. The need for a review of the Police Act of 2004 emerged in response to several calls to repeal the 1943 Colonial Police Act some of whose provisions had become obsolete in tackling Nigeria's current security challenges.<sup>29</sup> Calls were also made by citizens, civil society groups and other concerned stakeholders on the need to overhaul Nigeria's security architecture which critics argue does not satisfy the security demands

<sup>29</sup> Grace A. Ahiakwo, "The Police Act 2020 and Governance Reforms in Nigerian Policing System," in *Law and Good Governance in Nigeria: A Text in Honor of Rt. Hon Mohammed*

*Umaru Bago*, eds. Michael C. Ogwezzy, Linus O. Nwauzi and Chinenye J. Mgbeokwere (Zubic Infinity Concept, 2023), 145-175.

of the citizenry. This said, experts have hinged on the need to form a strong police-community relation as a veritable avenue to address insecurity bedevilling the country which explains the idea behind the bill that deepens community-participatory policing.<sup>30</sup> Under this framework, citizens in their respective communities work closely with the police in prevention, detection and addressing crimes.

What makes the Police Act 2020 interesting, particularly Sections 113, 114, 116 and 117 dealing with community policing is the fact that it gives room for the formation of community policing across Nigeria. In Section 113 (1), for instance, the Commissioner of Police of a State is required to create a Community Policing Committee that consists of representatives among the police and members of the local communities in such a state to ensure effective and efficient policing. Going further, the state's Commissioner of Police is required to form a Community Sub-Policing Committee at every Divisional Headquarters in such a state or the nation's capital. In Section 114 (1), the Commissioner of Police of a state, in collaboration with the key stakeholders in the community, is mandated to set up a Divisional Community Policing Committee in all Police Divisions in such a state.

Despite promising interventions made by the National Assembly which include an approval of ₦13.3 billion by President Buhari for the take-off of the community policing committee as well as training of new constables as part of plans for the initiative to revamp Nigeria's security architecture and complement efforts of the police toward enhanced security, its implementation has stalled. To complement the sections on community

policing under the Police Act 2020, the House of Representatives went further to pass into law a bill for the establishment of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN).<sup>31</sup> The VGN has the mandate to provide community policing services, maintain law and order, as well as community service for all.<sup>32</sup>

Nigeria's security situation has, no doubt, worsened before and since the Police Act 2020 was signed into law. Renewed atrocious killings in Plateau, the volatile situation in most parts of Eastern Nigeria attributed to separatist agitations in the region, the farmer-herder crisis in Benue among other crises, have shown that the Nigeria Police remain inadequate to stem the country's security challenges due to their overwhelming nature.<sup>33</sup>

In early 2024, the House of Representatives enjoined the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Kayode Egbetokun, to ensure the full implementation of community policing across the country in line with the sections that address the situation in the Nigeria Police Act 2020.<sup>34</sup> The House pointed out the fact that despite the assent of the Police Act 2020, the aspect dealing with community policing had not yet been fully followed through. It is important to emphasise that the Nigerian legislature has a responsibility to act, compel and even sanction the Nigeria Police should it continue to pay lip service to the total implementation of community policing across communities in the country. At a time when most communities are threatened mostly by non-state actors with the inability to defend themselves, community policing will, no doubt, help to bring relative peace to the country. Scholars note that the Nigeria Police is poorly equipped and funded to

<sup>30</sup> Ahiakwo, "The Police Act 2020 and Governance Reforms."

<sup>31</sup> Levinus Nwabughio, "Insecurity: Reps Approve Bill to Establish Vigilante Group," *Vanguard*, 18 November, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Chukwuma CC. Osakwe and Bulus N. Audu, "Understanding Contemporary Vigilantism: A Case Study of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN)," *KIU Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2019): 131-142.

<sup>33</sup> K. Adebayo and T. Ojo, "Security and Governance in Nigeria: A Social Contract Perspective," *African Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2023): 45-67.

<sup>34</sup> Gloria Essien, "House of Representatives Calls for Implementation of Community Policing," *Voice of Nigeria*, 15 February, 2024, <https://von.gov.ng/house-of-representatives-calls-for-implementation-of-community-policing/>.

achieve quality policing today, and with a manpower that is insufficient to secure the lives of over 250 million citizens,<sup>35</sup> the need to collaborate with officials of the VGN and also local community policing outfits scattered across the country would help minimise insecurity across communities.

### Recommendations

Given the Nigeria Police's lack of interest in commencing community policing as enshrined in the Police Act of 2020, and given that this is one key factor that could stem criminality and insecurity in the country, the following recommendations are provided;

- i. The National Assembly at the highest level should force the Nigeria Police to immediately implement the relevant sections in the Police Act of 2020 related to community policing.
- ii. The National Assembly should carry out proper and effective oversight functions on the Nigeria Police to ensure that the mandates for the implementation of community policing across the country are immediately carried out.
- iii. The National Assembly should work with relevant stakeholders, civil society groups and independent security outfits to ensure that the complete and total implementation of community policing is achieved, particularly in areas or communities with very serious security challenges.
- iv. A reporting mechanism between the Nigeria Police through the Office of the Inspector General of Police and the National Assembly's Committee on Policing should be opened to keep updated on how far the implementation has been carried out and challenges in the implementation identified for immediate correction.

- v. A reporting mechanism between the National Assembly and community policing outfits registered with the Nigeria Police should be opened for review if a review is required to be made or if challenges faced in its implementation need to be addressed.
- vi. The relevant sections on community policing in the Police Act 2020 need to be further reviewed and, if possible, expanded as a separate bill for consideration by the National Assembly.
- vii. The National Assembly should encourage separate funding for community policing outfits outside the powers of the Nigeria Police for at least five years which would make these outfits semi-independent and not easily influenced by partisanship.

### Conclusion

The prevention of crime and minimising fear of crime are closely related to rebuilding safe and secure communities. Given this, the federal government of Nigeria through the Nigerian Police embraced Community Policing to be a part of both the police and all the citizens in the fight against insecurity and crime. This study was embarked on to ascertain the fruitfulness of the Harmonised Surveillance Guard activities since its inception in Ede town and its environs. The result showed that residents of Ede and neighbouring towns strongly affirm the importance of Community Policing. The fear of crime has minimised since Community Policing was introduced in the town. The study also revealed that although the residents applauded the strategy and desired it to remain but suggested that employment of idle youth and jobless graduates would serve as a greater strategy towards reducing crime/criminality.

The research revealed some of the challenges experienced by the security agencies (police and other security agencies) which have denied them opportunities to live up to the

<sup>35</sup> Akeem A. Kenku and Shitu Shuiabu Umar, Localizing Security: The Benefits of Community Policing in Enhancing Safety in Nigeria, *Journal*

*of Public Administration and Social Welfare Research* 10, no. 3 (2025): 85.

standard required for effective Community Policing. These include recruitment of some unqualified personnel, insufficient crime-fighting equipment/patrol vehicles, inadequate remuneration of the security personnel and lack of trust of information to the security agencies by residents. The study argued that the lack of implementation of the relevant sections in the Police Act 2020 on community policing stems from the poor legislative oversight by the National

Assembly on the subject which has emboldened the Nigeria Police from carrying out its laws. Community policing can properly and effectively be achieved when legislative oversight is strengthened. The article concluded that the Harmonised Surveillance Guard complemented the Nigeria Police in the policing of Ede and its environs. Several cases of criminal activities such as theft, burglary among others, were prevented through their presence in Ede.

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