



Crime Dynamics and the Imperatives of Instrumentalising Community Engagement for Sustainable Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, crime has significantly evolved since the beginning of the 21st century. Factors like rapid urbanisation, economic disparity, political instability, and technological advancement have been reported to influence the menace of criminality. The evolution of crime in Nigeria poses significant challenges to sustainable development and social stability, as conventional infractions like theft and armed robbery have been replaced by more complex and organised criminal activities, such as terrorism, cybercrime, kidnapping, banditry, and human trafficking. These legal breaches present substantial threats to national security and socioeconomic equilibrium. Despite several efforts to mitigate crime, traditional techniques of law enforcement have proven insufficient in tackling the complexities of criminality in Nigeria. The global crime intricacies prompt the demand for a more comprehensive approach that requires community involvement for sustainable security and human development. This paper analyses the dynamics of crime in Nigeria, focusing on factors underlining the growth of criminal activities. It underscores the increasing prominence of organised criminal networks, the ramifications of terrorism—particularly from Boko Haram and banditry in northern Nigeria—and the proliferation of cybercrime. The prevailing criminality undercurrents seem too overwhelming for Nigeria's security architecture, thus necessitating a re-evaluation of the prevailing crime prevention tactics. The study concludes by suggesting an integrated model, combining formal security institutions with community-driven initiatives, as a feasible approach towards attaining enduring security, national growth and social stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Crime dynamics, socioeconomic factors, community engagement, sustainable security, Nigeria.

Introduction

The trend of crime illustrates a dynamic evolution in the types, causes, and intensity of criminal behaviour (Osawe, 2015; Okechukwu, 2012). Since the 1980s, Nigeria has become noticeable on the global crime charts (Damachi, 2001). The era, extending to the last decade of the 20th century, represents a period when armed robbery reigned as the major threat to secured life, while other forms of crime were at their lowest ebb or nearly non-existent. From the twilight of the 20th century, Nigeria began to experience considerable shifts in its socioeconomic settings, political climates, and security challenges that

culminated in the shaping of its crime landscape (Ojo, 2000). From the hazards of armed robbery and kidnappings to the emergence of terrorism and cybercrime, the trajectory of crime in Nigeria reflects a broader systemic challenge. In the early 2000s, communal clashes resurfaced to rival armed robbery in the category of violent crimes. The speedy expansion of major cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano, Abuja etc. worsened socioeconomic disparity and unemployment, thus fuelling the rise of armed robbery, car thefts, and burglary (Aghedo, 2015). These criminal events were mostly urban-centred, with organised gangs exploiting the ineptitudes in law



enforcement. During the time, communal violence was equally on the increase, particularly in the Niger Delta region, where local communities were in frequent clashes with oil companies and government forces over resource control. The environmental squalor caused by oil extraction and the perceived neglect of host communities activated the reported protests, militancy, and organised crime (Okonta & Douglas, 2003).

As Bassey's (2014) recorded, by the mid-2000s, militancy in the Niger Delta had intensified into a substantial security threat. Organisations such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were involved in oil bunkering, the abduction of expatriates, and assaults on oil infrastructure. These unlawful acts were largely fuelled by grievances about environmental degradation and demands for local governance over oil resources (Ajiboye, 2023; Akpan, 2010). The Nigerian government reacted with military force, resulting in temporary reductions in violence subsequent to the amnesty program for militants in 2009. The emergence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria in 2009 signified a new era in the country's criminal trajectory (Igboin, 2022). Boko Haram, formerly a radical Islamic faction promoting Sharia law, evolved into a full-blown terrorist organisation. By 2011, Boko Haram had executed lethal assaults against governmental infrastructures, marketplaces, and religious sites, culminating in the 2014 abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok (Onuoha, 2014). The group's strategies, such as suicide bombings, mass abductions, and assaults on civilians, established terrorism as a dominant criminal concern in Nigeria during the 2010s (Amao, 2020).

Since 2015, cybercrime has become an increasing concern in Nigeria, especially among the youth. The proliferation of internet scams, commonly referred to as "Yahoo-yahoo," illustrates the convergence of economic difficulties, youth unemployment, and enhanced technological accessibility (Akinyetun, 2021; Abokwara et al., 2021). Cybercriminals partake in many activities, including phishing and more advanced tactics such as business email hacking (Owolabi, 2019).

Nigeria's notoriety for cybercrime attracted global attention, leading the government to create agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to address these challenges. Simultaneously, kidnappings for ransom, formerly confined to the Niger Delta, spread throughout the nation, particularly in the previously quiet northern and central Nigeria. Criminal groups commenced the abduction of tourists, students, and affluent individuals, frequently focusing on rural areas and highways (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The kidnapping epidemic escalated to awkward levels, with criminal organisations exploiting ineffective law enforcement and slothful legal procedures.

The period from 2020 to date has witnessed increased incidents of crime, including banditry and organised crime syndicates. Bandit groups in northern Nigeria have intensified their activities, carrying out mass abductions, cattle rustling, and community invasions. Most of the attempts to curtail these activities via military actions and dialogue have produced few outcomes as the groups have waxed stronger and more sophisticated, deploying new ammunition and establishing partnerships with other criminal groups (Tanham, 1990). The economic repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic intensified crime patterns (Aristotle and Wakama, 2020). The increasing poverty and unemployment rates have resulted in a surge of petty crimes, including theft, with a rise in organised crimes such as drug trafficking and fraud. The pandemic worsened Nigeria's security framework, accentuating the lingering difficulties in governance and law enforcement. Thus, crime trends in Nigeria in the last two and half decades give a picture of a country contending with various forms of criminal activities, encompassing conventional crimes as well as emerging threats like terrorism and cybercrime. Daily life in Nigeria today, as observed by Arisukwu et al (2020), is deeply swamped with criminality. The trend, as previously acknowledged, is underlined by different factors such as socioeconomic disparities, political instability, the evolution of criminal networks, and technological revolution. Stemming the tide



will require an all-inclusive strategy that integrates economic improvements, political stability, and community involvement, as well as revamped and fortified law enforcement that can facilitate a sustainably secured existence.

Conceptual Review

Crime Dynamics

Crime dynamics describes the changes in the pattern, frequency, trend, and volume of crime occurrence over time. It denotes the intricate, ongoing connections among persons, circumstances, and societal frameworks that influence criminal behaviour. Understanding these dynamics requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from criminology, sociology, psychology, and economics. This, in other words, means that crime, as a social phenomenon, is shaped by various factors, including socioeconomic inequalities, urbanisation, legislative fluctuations, and law enforcement practices. Various theoretical frameworks have associated criminal behaviour with certain socioeconomic and ecological conditions that individuals face. This can be understood through the works of scholars like Wilson and Kelling (1982), Cohen and Felson (1979), Shaw and McKay (1942), Agnew (1992), and Britt (1994). Ecological criminologists, for instance, posit that crime arises not just from individual intent but also from opportunities afforded by particular environmental situations. Social disorganisation asserts that crime is more widespread in communities marked by poverty, residence instability, and ethnic diversity. These circumstances undermine the social connections and informal regulations that usually govern behaviour.

Moreover, economic inequality can intensify crime rates, as financial gaps foster relative deprivation, prompting individuals to resort to criminal acts to alleviate frustration or fulfil basic requirements. Research has consistently demonstrated that economic recessions and elevated unemployment rates correlate with rises in specific categories of crime, notably property crime (Akinyetun, 2021). Technological

innovations and evolving social norms are also observed to influence crime dynamics. According to Kirilenko & Alekseev (2021), the proliferation of cybercrime exemplifies the transformation of criminal conduct due to technological advancements. According to Wall (2007), with the increasing digitisation of society, novel criminal opportunities, including identity theft, hacking, and online fraud, have arisen. Temporal patterns, such as variations in crime rates during an individual's life or shifts in crime trends over time, further exemplify the dynamic character of crime. The age-crime curve, according to Hirschi & Gottfredson (1983), indicates that criminal behaviour typically reaches its zenith during adolescence and early adulthood and then diminishes in middle age. As Ebologu (2020) observed, crime dynamics are influenced by numerous interrelated elements that change over time.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a crucial strategy for forging and promoting collaboration between organisations and communities with the intent of tackling social problems and improving shared well-being. Community engagement essentially involves establishing significant, reciprocal relationships between organisations and communities to tackle common challenges (Brown et al., 2021). This strategy entails involvement, communication, and collaboration, highlighting the voice and agency of community members. Consequently, community participation is not only a transactional interaction but rather a relational and transforming process (Arnstein, 1969). The Arnstein Ladder of Citizen Participation clarifies that engagement levels vary from tokenism to complete citizen power, with the latter representing the most genuine and influential type of involvement. Effective community engagement constitutes a dynamic and continuous process rather than a singular occurrence. Continuous reflection and adaptation are required, as community needs and organisational objectives may change (Wallerstein et al., 2018). Effective involvement relies on shared respect, balanced collaborations,



and the potential to cultivate local empowerment and capability. In the absence of these components, engagement initiatives may exacerbate existing disparities and cultivate mistrust. Community engagement is a complex notion necessitating a dedication to genuine partnership, equity, and sustained collaboration. It is essential for generating sustained social change by utilising local knowledge and promoting empowerment within communities.

Sustainable Security

Sustainable security is a nascent paradigm in international relations and security studies that prioritises tackling the fundamental causes of insecurity instead of solely reacting to acute threats. Sustainable security diverges from conventional security methods that emphasise state-centric defence strategies and immediate conflict resolutions, instead prioritising long-term stability by tackling systemic vulnerabilities like economic disparity, environmental deterioration, and social inequity (Brauch, 2008). This framework promotes the idea that enduring peace and security can only be achieved by tackling the underlying factors that create instability, which often transcend national borders and require cooperative, multi-level governance. The notion of sustainable security encompasses various dimensions — environmental, economic, and human security. Environmental security underscores the effects of climate change and resource depletion on global stability. Research indicates that climate-induced resource scarcity, including water shortages, might intensify conflicts, especially in susceptible areas such as sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel regions (Barnett & Adger, 2007). Sustainable security enhances the long-term resilience of society and diminishes the probability of conflicts by lessening environmental threats.

Economic security is a crucial element, focussing on the impact of poverty and inequality in inciting unrest. An increasing amount of material contends that economic marginalisation facilitates the recruitment of individuals into extremist organisations and the continuation of

violence (Duffield, 2010). Sustainable security promotes inclusive economic policies that reduce gaps and empower communities to enhance stability. Human security, which emphasises the safety and welfare of individuals rather than state-centric issues, enhances the sustainable security system. It emphasises the significance of human rights, governance, and social cohesiveness in conflict prevention. When states emphasise human development and effective governance, they moderate frustrations that may otherwise spiral into violence (Paris, 2001). Sustainable security embodies a comprehensive and proactive strategy for addressing global security concerns. It underscores the necessity of tackling fundamental issues such as environmental degradation, economic disparity, and social injustice to establish a basis for enduring peace and security.

Theoretical Framework

Social Disorganisation, Routine Activity, and Social capital theories provide the analytical framework for this paper. Articulated by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942), social disorganisation theory explicates the correlation between community systems and criminal activity. This proposition posits that criminal activity flourishes in areas characterised by weakened or disorganised social institutions, such as educational systems, familial structures, and neighbourhood organisations. Similarly, Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979), in their postulations on Routine Activity Theory, assert that crime transpires when three components intersect: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the lack of a capable guardian. Analysing crime dynamics from this perspective illustrates how alterations in community patterns—such as increased urbanisation, weakened social bonds, or absence of community guardianship—can create environments conducive to criminal behaviour (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Social capital theory asserts that relationships and networks within a community are essential resources that promote cooperation and social support (Putnam, 2000). Engagement, consequently, depends on the establishment and utilisation of trust, shared standards, and



networks that enable communities and organisations to collaborate towards mutual objectives.

Contemporary Crimes in Nigeria

Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria

The evolving nature of crime in Nigeria has warranted a shift from traditional forms of crime to more sophisticated and organised criminal activities. Thus, the dynamics of violent crime have evolved, with the rise of kidnapping for ransom becoming one of the most pervasive criminal activities. At its inception in the early 2000s, kidnapping activities were rampant in the Niger Delta region as a form of protest by militants, demanding resource control and compensation for environmental degradation. The act has, however, spread and become a lucrative criminal enterprise across Nigeria. Kidnappings are now targeted at individuals ranging from wealthy people in business to school children, often with huge ransom demands (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The criminal act is particularly rampant in the northwestern and northcentral axis of Nigeria, where bandit groups operate with unrestricted impunity. The escalation of banditry movements in northern Nigeria represents a distinct pattern of contemporary crime. Driven by the primary desire to plunge the natural endowments of the targeted rural communities, bandits operating in the troubled regions engage in mass abductions, cattle rustling, and village raids. These criminal groups have adopted guerrilla tactics, making them difficult to combat with orthodox law enforcement (Carter, 2015; Moghadam et al, 2014). The rise of banditry has created a new security challenge for the Nigerian government as these groups become increasingly organised and well-equipped. In Nigeria, criminal activities have today expanded beyond the common practices of armed robbery, murder, rape, car theft, and burglary to large-scale breaches like fraud, bribery and corruption, food and drug adulteration, gambling, smuggling, human and drug trafficking, kidnapping, insurgency, terrorism etc. Some of the prominent crimes in contemporary Nigeria are briefly examined hereunder.

Terrorism and Insurgency

Terrorism, as manifested through the Boko Haram insurgency, has transformed the criminal scene in northern Nigeria since its initial attack in 2009. Its strategies include bombing, killing, and abduction, all of which have instilled fear among the public, government agencies and institutions. The group upholds a radical ideology which rejects and castigates Western education and governance as undesirable and, as a result, inflicts assaults on educational institutions, marketplaces, and military installations (Onuoha, 2014). Despite the wearying of Boko Haram due to counter-insurgency measures, the organisation, together with its breakaway organisation, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), remains a considerable threat. The continuing presence of terrorism in the northeast exemplifies the broader security issues in Nigeria, characterised by poverty, corruption, and weak governance. The government's initiatives to combat terrorism have produced erratic outcomes over the years, while insurgency constitutes a significant source of insecurity in Nigeria.

Cybercrime

The increase in cybercrime in Nigeria demonstrates the global transition to digital criminality, enabled by technological evolution and the extensive utilisation of the internet. Cybercrime has emerged as a dominant form of criminal activity in Nigeria, with a growing number of young individuals participating in internet fraud, commonly referred to as “Yahoo Yahoo” (Tade, 2013). This category of cybercrime includes phishing, identity theft, and internet fraud aimed at individuals and organisations both domestically and internationally (Owolabi, 2019). The rise of advanced cybercrime methods, like business email compromise (BEC) and ransomware attacks, underscores the increasing intricacy of digital criminality in Nigeria. Nigerian cybercriminals have grown progressively structured, operating in networks that collaborate with global crime syndicates (Ibikunle & Eweniyi, 2013). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and several governmental agencies have strived to mitigate



cybercrime, yet the problem persists, heightened by youth unemployment and economic privation

Human Trafficking and Smuggling

Human trafficking remains a prevalent crime in contemporary Nigeria, with the nation serving as a source, transit point, and destination for trafficked persons. Nigerian women and children are daily subjected to trafficking for forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic slavery both within Nigeria and in nations in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa (Akor, 2011). The traffickers manipulate the weaknesses of victims, many of whom are enticed by assurances of improved prospects elsewhere. Prior to the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003, amended in December 2005, Nigerians lived in denial; they did not recognise human trafficking as a problem. The Nigerian government has achieved headway in addressing human trafficking via the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). The magnitude of the issue remains high, fuelled by poverty, unemployment, and ignorance. The open borders and inadequate law enforcement in Nigeria exacerbate the difficulties in effectively combating human trafficking.

Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime

Nigeria serves as a crucial transit hub in the worldwide drug trade, facilitating the movement of substances like cocaine and heroin to Europe and North America. Nigerian drug cartels have developed enormous networks that enable the trafficking of illegal substances, with local gangs participating in distribution and production (Alemika, 2013). Nigerian criminal syndicates' participation in the international drug trade exemplifies the transnational character of modern organised crime in Nigeria. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's (NDLEA) initiatives to counter drug trafficking have resulted in significant arrests and narcotics confiscations. The omnipresence of organised crime networks persists in posing challenges to law enforcement organisations. The convergence of drug trafficking with other organised criminal

activities, including money laundering and arms smuggling, exacerbates the challenges in addressing this issue. Crime patterns in modern Nigeria illustrate a complex security landscape influenced by socioeconomic inequalities, political turmoil, and technological progress. Violent crimes, including armed robbery, kidnapping, and banditry, prevail, while terrorism, cybercrime, human trafficking, and drug trafficking highlight the increasing sophistication of criminal behaviours.

Factors Promoting Crime in Nigeria

Both social and economic factors significantly influence Nigeria's crime patterns. This scenario, in turn, has implications for social stability. In 2020, the unemployment rate among Nigerian youths was recorded as 42.5% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020), resulting in a cohort of disillusioned persons with constrained opportunities for lawful work. The heightened youth unemployment rate has been associated with the increase in internet fraud, informally termed "Yahoo-Yahoo" (Ayllón & Ferreira-Batista, 2017), as young individuals resort to cybercrime for financial sustenance (Owolabi, 2019). Economic deprivation aggravates criminal conduct by fostering a survivalist mentality, prompting individuals to engage in illicit activities to meet the necessities of life. The socioeconomic conditions of several Nigerians—characterised by deficient infrastructure, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare—create fertile ground for criminal enterprises to thrive. These factors have a cyclical link with crime, as criminal behaviour subsequently impedes economic development, deters foreign investment, and intensifies poverty.

Political corruption in Nigeria has also served as both a catalyst and a result of crime escalation. Corrupt propensities of political leaders undermine institutions and empower criminal elements who exploit weak authority structures for personal gain. The connection between politicians and criminal networks manifested through election manipulation or misappropriation of public funds. This situation



undermines public trust in key institutions of society and fosters a culture of impunity (Alemika, 2013). The perception of leaders as complicit in crime or someone immune to prosecution engenders a moral threat, encouraging further criminality within society. The inadequacies of Nigeria's law enforcement authorities have worsened the nation's crime dynamics and undermined social stability. The police and judiciary frequently suffer from inadequate funding and training; they are extremely vulnerable to corruption, thus hindering their capacity to tackle crime efficiently. Accordingly, crime perpetrators function with considerable impunity, while the victims lack sufficient protection or remedy (Aghedo, 2015). The inability of law enforcement to maintain order or administer justice intensifies tensions within communities. This gave rise to the emergence of informal security mechanisms, such as vigilante groups, which further undermined social order.

Crime Dynamics and Social Stability

While studies have established strong connections between security and social equilibrium (Uzonwanne, 2015; Nweke, 2014; International Social Security Association, 2010; Aderinto & Akinwale, 2008; World Bank, 2005), the changing face of crime in Nigeria constitutes a major threat to social stability (Alade, 2021; Opata, 2013), as the country faces numerous crime-related issues that undermine harmonious communal living. The continuation and evolution of criminal activities have aggravated Nigeria's fragile socioeconomic and political structures. The prevalence of armed robbery and ransom-related kidnappings has threatened social existence in both urban and rural areas, undermined social trust and cultivated a widespread sense of disquiet. These illegal activities weaken local economies, instil fear in the populace, and challenge the state's capacity to maintain law and order.

In northern Nigeria, banditry has escalated significantly, with organised criminal gangs involved in cattle rustling, mass abductions, and village invasions. Banditry, particularly in the

northwest, has displaced thousands, worsened regional instability and resulted in considerable social dislocation (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2020). The violent actions of these bandits have undermined confidence in the government's capacity to safeguard security, thereby diminishing the social contract between citizens and the state. Terrorism, particularly the insurgency orchestrated by Boko Haram and its affiliate, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has severely undermined social stability in northeastern Nigeria. The group's assaults on educational institutions, places of worship, and military facilities have disrupted daily life and education while simultaneously deteriorating the economy in the affected areas (Onuoha, 2014). The psychological ramifications of terrorism, coupled with socioeconomic disruption, have deepened poverty and unemployment, thereby escalating insecurity and criminality.

Crime Prevention Strategies in Nigeria

Numerous crime prevention measures are presently implemented in Nigeria, yet they are frequently deemed insufficient due to a range of structural and operational obstacles. Nigeria's principal crime prevention strategy is centred on traditional policing, with law enforcement agencies like the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) responsible for upholding law and order. Regrettably, the NPF, as the principal institution for crime prevention, suffers from insufficient training, inadequate financing, and corruption, which impede its efficacy (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004). Law enforcement agencies frequently lack the requisite resources to conduct comprehensive investigations or respond promptly to crime incidents, thus facilitating the proliferation of criminal activity, particularly in rural areas (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004). Community policing, introduced about two decades ago, seeks to enhance cooperation between law enforcement and local communities to identify and resolve criminal situations. Nonetheless, this initiative has not been effectively executed or institutionalised. Some of the challenges facing the programme include poor training of community police officers, a deficit of



confidence between law enforcement and the people, and insufficient money, which have compromised its effectiveness (Odo, 2020). The program is frequently regarded as an extension of traditional policing, which many citizens fear owing to a history of corruption and brutality.

In areas like the northeast, where insurgency and terrorism (Boko Haram) are prevalent, informal security organisations such as vigilante groups and Civilian Joint Task Forces (CJTF) have arisen as means of crime prevention. Although these groups have rendered essential assistance in combating crime in regions with less governmental presence, they function beyond the established legal framework. This raises issues over human rights violation, absence of accountability, and there is the possibility of these groups becoming criminalised or politicised (Ali, 2021). On regular basis, Nigeria utilises military and specialised task groups, such as Operation Safe Haven and Operation Crocodile Smile, to address insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping in areas profoundly impacted by conflict. Nonetheless, military-led crime prevention measures are intended for combat zones rather than for the regular prevention of crime in civilian environments. These forces, according to Abrahamsen & Williams (2014), are deficient in community participation and local information necessary to avert routine crimes, resulting in excessive dependence on force instead of tackling the basic causes of crime.

Corruption and inefficiency are among the factors contributing to weakness of the prevailing crime prevention regime in Nigeria. The prevalence of corruption in law enforcement agencies, where officials may solicit bribes or prioritise personal interests over public safety, undermines the efficacy of crime prevention initiatives (Amnesty International, 2020). Financial deprivation, low level of motivation and poor infrastructure hinder crime prevention initiatives in Nigeria. As Alemika & Chukwuma (2004) assert, Nigeria's law enforcement agencies are deficient in finances and infrastructure, leading to inadequate personnel, obsolete equipment, and deficient working conditions. These influence the efficacy

of preventive measures. The over-centralisation of authority and control represents additional causes of deficiencies in crime prevention. Nigeria's security structure is undeniably extremely centralised. The uniformity and rigidity hinder local communities from customising crime prevention programs to their particular requirements (Odo, 2020). This consequently complicates law enforcement's ability to respond effectively to localised criminal dynamics. The previously mentioned absence of trust between the public and law enforcement agencies impedes community collaboration, which is essential for effective crime prevention (Amnesty International, 2020). Although Nigeria employs various crime prevention techniques, it is disheartening that these initiatives are frequently underfunded, inadequately executed, and plagued by corruption, which diminishes their efficacy.

Trust Deficits and Crime Prevention Efforts

The lack of trust between the public and law enforcement agencies is a major obstacle to effective crime prevention. In numerous societies, including Nigeria, the absence of trust between residents and security services hampers crime prevention measures, resulting in ineffective collaborative security projects. Trust is essential for the efficient implementation of community-oriented policing, crime reporting, and other preventive initiatives necessitating strong community participation. A lack of faith in law enforcement diminishes individuals' willingness to cooperate, provide critical information, or report crimes, hence undermining the efficacy of crime prevention initiatives.

The principal sources of trust deficit encompass the pervasive perception of police corruption, abuse of authority, and ineffectiveness in addressing criminal activities. Several reports suggest that law enforcement officials in Nigeria are often involved in bribery, extortion, and violations of human rights (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2013). These difficulties engender profound distrust among members of the public, especially within marginalised communities, who frequently perceive the police as instruments of



oppression rather than guardians of public safety. As a result, residents become hesitant to interact with law enforcement agencies, apprehensive of either victimisation or the ineffectiveness of police interventions. The deficiency of trust transcends the police and impacts the judiciary and other criminal justice institutions. Smith (2020) records that prolonged justice delivery, cases of wrongful detention, and perceived favouritism towards the affluent and politically influential undermine public trust in the court system. This institutional distrust cultivates a culture of non-cooperation, prompting community members to utilise informal judicial systems or vigilantism instead of depending on formal institutions. Restoring communities' confidence in the law enforcement is crucial for effective crime prevention. Community policing programs, operational transparency, and accountability measures are essential for restoring trust. Besides, engaging local leaders and civil society organisations in security dialogues helps foster a more inclusive and credible atmosphere for crime prevention (Tankebe, 2013).

The Role of NGOs in Community-based Prevention

Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) are essential in facilitating community-based crime prevention efforts through their abilities in lobbying, outreach, and resource mobilisation (Aghajani, 2020). Their capacity to function autonomously from governmental frameworks allows them to connect communities with formal law enforcement authorities, promoting confidence and collaboration in crime prevention initiatives (Omofonmwan & Odia, (2009). Initially, NGOs can facilitate crime prevention by advocating for public awareness and educational initiatives. They can educate community members on crime prevention techniques, advise them of their rights, and raise awareness about the risks and consequences of criminal behaviours. For instance, NGOs can conduct outreach initiatives directed at vulnerable groups, such as at-risk teenagers, by offering educational and training programs designed to diminish their vulnerability to criminal activity. Research

indicates that well-informed communities are more inclined to engage in crime prevention efforts (Weisburd et al., 2016). Also, NGOs can foster collaborations between law enforcement authorities and local populations. In some instances, a substantial mistrust exists between law enforcement and the population, impeding crime reporting and collaboration. Non-governmental organisations can function as intermediates, facilitating venues for conversation and collaboration between the two parties. As Brown (2020) notes, through the promotion of community policing activities, NGOs facilitate trust-building and guarantee law enforcement that is attuned to the particular security requirements of the community. Beyond these, NGOs can provide mental and economic assistance to communities as a contribution towards crime prevention. NGOs facilitate the creation of economic opportunities and skills training for at-risk populations by instituting programs that tackle the fundamental causes of crime, including poverty and unemployment. These interventions diminish the incentive for criminal behaviour, especially among youth demographics (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). The NGOs play a crucial role in lobbying, advocating for policy reforms and the execution of community-oriented security frameworks. They interact with lawmakers to advocate for legislation that improves community participation in crime prevention, ensuring that government policies are attuned to actual conditions (Kelling & Coles, 2017).

Community Engagement and Crime Prevention in Nigeria

In light of the changing dynamics of crime in Nigeria, there is an urgent necessity for a more proactive and comprehensive strategy for crime prevention. A highly effective method for tackling this situation is through community engagement which entails cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities to tackle the underlying causes of crime and enhance public safety. This approach recognises that the job of crime prevention should not be left with the police or government but necessitates active involvement from all stakeholders.



Community engagement can mitigate the socioeconomic factors contributing to crime by enhancing social cohesiveness, advancing economic development, and creating possibilities for youth involvement. Initiatives that emphasise skill development, education, and employment generation help redirect youth from criminal behaviour, especially in areas with higher unemployment rates. Thus, engaging community people in the design and execution of security programs guarantees their alignment with the distinct demands of the local populace (Adamu, 2021). In essence, community policing is a crucial component of crime prevention as it promotes cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities to identify and resolve security issues. Community policing fosters trust between law enforcement and the community; it facilitates the exchange of information that can preempt criminal activity (Uzochukwu, 2018). The strategy is especially vital in regions impacted by terrorism, banditry, and other types of organised crime, where local expertise and collaboration are essential for effective crime prevention.

Including religious and traditional leaders in crime prevention initiatives might bolster social stability. In some areas of Nigeria, religious and traditional organisations significantly influence communal values and conduct. These leaders possess the capacity to act as key advocates for peace, deterring violence and cultivating social responsibility. The growing nature of crime in Nigeria—from conventional criminal acts to increasingly intricate and organised criminal enterprises—necessitates an adaptation in crime prevention tactics. Socioeconomic dynamics, technical improvements, and political corruption have transformed crime, complicating its resolution by conventional law enforcement methods alone. Consequently, community engagement is vital for tackling the underlying causes of crime and enhancing social stability. By engaging local communities, religious and traditional leaders and foster economic prospects, Nigeria can establish a more comprehensive strategy for crime prevention, thereby enhancing societal safety and security.

Conclusion

Human life in contemporary Nigeria is intensely drenched with criminality (Ojo & Ojewale, 2019). Several factors were noted to have combined to shape Nigeria's crime landscape. The crime trend is underlined by factors ranging from socioeconomic disparities to political instability, the evolution of criminal networks, and improvements in technological revolution. Community engagement has thus been recognised as essential for restoring social order and tackling the fundamental sources of crime, especially in marginalised communities. By actively participating in grassroots development and public safety activities, communities may restore confidence, reduce disorder, and establish sustainable security outcomes (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Adopting a Community approach to security provision is highly essential for facilitating sustained security as it strengthens the “capable guardianship” aspect of Routine Activity Theory. When communities engage in security initiatives, they serve as guardians that inhibit criminal activity (Clarke, 1997). A critical component of this rethinking initiative involves fostering collaborations between law enforcement agencies and local communities, enhancement of intelligence gathering, strengthening of social bonds, and reduction in the exclusion tactics that fuel crime. Therefore, community policing, partnership with community and religious leaders, and designing and implementing socioeconomic programmes targeting at-risk populations - particularly unemployed youths- are key strategies for promoting sustainable security. By empowering communities to take an active role in security provision and crime prevention, this approach addresses the root causes of crime while building trust between citizens and security agencies.

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