

1 **The Role of Leadership in Crime Prevention for Sustainable Peace and National Development in Nigeria.**

Heman Johnson

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution
Faculty of Social Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria
Email: hjohnson@noun.edu.ng

Introduction

The widespread impact of crime in Nigeria has led to severe loss of life and property, disrupting the nation's security framework and obstructing national development efforts. This damaging effect has made crime prevention a shared responsibility, not only for security agencies but also for leaders across various sectors. Arisukwu, Igbolekwu, Oye, Oyeyipo, Asamu, Rasak, and Oyekola (2020) define crime prevention as strategies and measures aimed at reducing crime risks, minimising their impact, and addressing root causes that lead to criminal behaviour. According to them, it involves proactive efforts by individuals, communities, and leaders to create safer environments, promote social responsibility, and support law enforcement in fostering sustainable peace and national development.

In Nigeria, for instance, Baba, Babajo, and Namahe (2017) note that the police and other security agencies, such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), immigration personnel, and customs officials, work closely with community, traditional, religious, and governmental leaders, as well as politicians, in crime prevention. Yet, the rate of crime continues to rise, hindering sustainable peace and national development. As Ivorgba (2024) observes, crime prevention is not solely the duty of law enforcement and security agencies; instead, it calls for leadership roles that promote security by safeguarding lives and property as well as expected to act transparently, govern with integrity, and build trust among followers, creating an environment conducive to sustainable peace and national development.

Ivorgba (2024) asserts that leaders must be vigilant in identifying criminal activities within their communities, thereby enhancing public safety by adopting intelligence-driven approaches that can offer crucial information to law enforcement for proactive crime prevention strategies whether at the community, local government, state, or federal level with responsibility of promoting integrity actions that encourage followers to share intelligence that can prevent crime. This approach of crime prevention can be achieved by leaders through providing empowerment mechanisms, ensuring equal distribution of resources, and fostering inclusivity in decision-making to build a safe environment for peace and development (Onwudiwe 2024).

Onwudiwe (2024) added that leaders have a social responsibility to distribute resources fairly, address grievances, and avoid marginalisation or segregation along ethnic or religious lines through reduction of poverty, empowerment, skills acquisition, and resource allocation towards essentials like food, education, healthcare, and housing, ultimately helping followers improve their circumstances and break the cycle of poverty to foster crime prevention and create sustainable peace for national development. Samuel, Julius, and Abiodun (2024) argue that effective leadership in crime prevention aligns with principles of good governance, incorporating human rights, rule of law, multi-actor partnerships, and values of equity, transparency, and accountability as well as promotes participation, knowledge-sharing, and political empowerment, all of which contribute to sustainable peace and national development.

Furthermore, Nsirim, Clement-Abraham, and Ajie (2024) in their perspective explain that the role of leadership in crime prevention is a processes of upholding human rights and ensuring access to necessities such as health, education, and justice support by establishing guidelines that hold citizens, government bodies, and social actors accountable through legislation, policies, and budget allocations that respond to societal needs prevent crime and create stable environment for peace and national development. Abang, Abang, and Eshiotse (2024) suggest the role of leaders in preventing crime should be engaging the public in policymaking, whether through formal institutions or consultations, and including diverse social groups in decision-making processes, enables local communities to voice their concerns and collaborate in crime prevention efforts for lasting peace. Oluwalogbon (2024) further highlights that the role of leaders can enhance crime prevention by empowering followers to contribute to the public good, thereby safeguarding lives and property and actively discouraging activities that may threaten peace and national development.

In addition, the role of leadership in preventing crime must address corruption, utilising principles of accountability, transparency, and inclusivity to shape anti-corruption measures and strengthen mechanisms that expose institutional corruption across public and private sectors, builds trust, encourages information-sharing, and enables communities to monitor the government's use of public funds and policy implementation, benefiting society (Oluwalogbon, 2024) However, as Muhammad (2024) points out, leadership faces persistent challenges in crime prevention, including corruption, ethnic tensions, economic inequalities, and governance failures. To him, these issues manifest in the inability of some political leaders to tackle systemic risks such as election fraud, terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, and police brutality, as well as a general lack of political will contribute to infective crime prevention by leaders. Given these challenges, this book chapter examines the connections between leadership, crime prevention, sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria. It explores various types of leadership involved in crime prevention, key responsibilities, challenges faced by leaders, and effective strategies in preventing crime.

The Link Between Leadership, Crime Prevention, and National Development

The connection between leadership, crime prevention, and national development is both fundamental and deeply interwoven. According to Uwa, Aisedion and Adi (2022) explain that effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping policies and practices that prevent criminal activities, fostering an environment where peace and safety can thrive through the tone for governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law which are essential for crime prevention. Thus, Opatunde and Oredein (2023) stressed that when leaders are proactive in addressing the root causes of crime, such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, to create stable societies less of prone to criminal behaviour. In turn, Opatunde and Oredein (2023) added that crime prevention is vital for national development where leaders ensure safe environment encourages investment, both local and foreign, and enables individuals to pursue economic and social opportunities without fear and supports education, health, and infrastructure development, which are pillars of sustainable growth. Given this, without focus on crime prevention, however, development efforts are undermined by crime and reduced public trust, making it difficult for communities and the nation as a whole to progress. Thus, strong, ethical leadership directly influences the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts, establishing the security and stability needed for a nation to achieve its developmental goals that underscores sustainable peace, national development is closely linked with the quality of leadership and the measures taken to maintain law and order (Muhammad, 2024). Given the relationship between leadership, crime prevention, and national development, several scholars have defined these concepts. For the purpose of this discussion, we will adopt the definitions provided by Opatunde and Oredein (2023), who outline the concepts of leadership, crime prevention, and national development as follows:

- i. Leadership: is the ability to inspire, guide, and influence individuals or groups towards achieving a common objective, setting a vision and motivating others to work towards it, often by example and through effective communication. To him, a true leader is not only focused on personal success but is committed to the growth and development of those they lead, nurturing their potential and fostering a supportive environment.

Leadership involves making strategic decisions, showing resilience in the face of challenges, and maintaining integrity and accountability. A good leader is adaptable, able to respond thoughtfully to changing circumstances while remaining grounded in core principles and values. Additionally, leadership is not limited to formal authority; it often emerges naturally in individuals who can inspire others, show empathy, and act decisively for the greater good.

- ii. Crime prevention: is the strategy of reducing or eliminating criminal activities by addressing their causes and implementing measures to deter

potential offenders. Rather than simply reacting to crime after it occurs, crime prevention focuses on proactive steps to create a safer environment for all. To him, this can involve a range of approaches, such as strengthening social services, improving education and employment opportunities, and fostering community engagement to build a sense of shared responsibility. Furthermore, he states that effective crime prevention also includes designing public spaces that discourage crime, encouraging neighbourhood watch programmes, and implementing policies that support rehabilitation rather than solely punishment as well as addressing the root social and economic factors that often lead to criminal behaviour such as poverty, lack of education, and social exclusion. Ultimately, crime prevention is essential for sustaining a peaceful and national development because it requires collaboration among governments, communities, and individuals to foster an environment where everyone feels secure, which in turn supports overall development and well-being.

- iii. National development refers to the process by which a country improves the well-being of its people and strengthens its social, economic, and political structures that encompasses a wide range of initiatives aimed at raising living standards, providing access to quality education and healthcare, creating job opportunities, and developing infrastructure with strong economy that provides resources necessary for social programmes and infrastructural improvements.

Equally important, Kovalenko, Ierusalymov, Chernetska, Filashkin & Savitskyi (2024) in their study highlight that national development are efforts to promote social equality, environmental sustainability, and good governance, all of which are essential for long-term stability and progress. National development thus, is about building a resilient nation that can adapt to challenges, empower its people, and foster a sense of shared purpose which requires a sustained commitment from both government and society to create conditions in which everyone can thrive, making it a fundamental goal for any forward-looking country through effective leadership and active community participation to create inclusive opportunities that benefit all citizens. On the aspect of national development, Onwudiwe (2024) posit that leaders create policies that foster economic growth, ensure social justice, improve education and promote a stable political environment that in turn, contribute to reducing the root causes of crime, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality and offering opportunities for social mobility and community prosperity are element for national development.

Given this definition, leadership plays a crucial role in crime prevention, sustainable peace, and national development, as it shapes the direction and effectiveness of policies, initiatives, and societal values that is essential in creating a vision for a

crime-free society, implementing laws and policies that prevent crime, and ensuring that these measures are enforced effectively as well as responsible for establishing a sense of justice and fairness, which helps in reducing grievances that often lead to criminal behaviour (Samuel, Julius & Abiodun, 2024). In the context of sustainable peace, Musa, Hasley, and Bamanga (2023) states that leadership is pivotal in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution. To them, leaders who are committed to peace can guide their communities or nations through periods of tension by fostering understanding and cooperation between different groups, thereby reducing the likelihood of violent crime.

How crime impacts sustainable peace and national development

According to Fernandez (2021), state that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that *“sustainable peace and national development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without national development. To him, achieving sustainable peace and national development are the two sides of the same coin, representing the two pillars of the UN system. “No peace, no development”, “no peace, no justice” and “no development, no security” are commonly used slogans that illustrate the impossibility of separating one from the other.”* Given this adage, Nigeria for instance the high rate of crime such as kidnapping for ransom, banditry, terrorism, Boko Haram Insurgency, farmers-herders conflict, reemergence of separatist agitation among other crime has significantly weaken internal security that affect sustainable peace and national development. As a result to this crime, has significantly hinders sustainable peace and national development by creating an environment of insecurity and instability with fear and distrust grow within communities, weakening social cohesion and limiting individuals' willingness to participate in economic activities or civic engagement that will foster sustainable peace and national development. However, Zikhali (2019) reveal that the prevalence and high rate of the crime that affected sustainable peace and national development are multifaceted but are related to poverty, unemployment, porous border control, corruption, proliferation of weapon and lack of political will to overhaul the security architecture to prevent crime before it occur has impact sustainable peace and national development.

Types of Leadership in Crime Prevention

Scholars have identified various forms of leadership that play significant roles in crime prevention. In this section, however, the focus will be on four key types: Government, community, traditional, and religious leadership. Each of these will be explored in detail, highlighting their contributions to fostering sustainable peace and promoting national development.

- i. **Government Leadership:** government leaders are policymakers responsible for formulating strategies aimed at preventing crime, reducing

poverty, and creating employment opportunities through empowerment initiatives by fostering a stable environment, they enable socio-economic activities to flourish and attract foreign investment. Bassey and Onyema (2021) further argue that government leadership extends to law enforcement agencies like the police, who are entrusted with the duty of safeguarding citizens' lives and property. It also includes customs officials who enforce compliance with customs regulations, legislators who enact laws guiding public conduct, and the judiciary, which interprets these laws, making them accessible and understandable to the general public.

- ii. **Community Leadership:** Community leadership involves individuals or groups within a community who guide, influence, and mobilise collective action to prevent crime shared challenges, improve local conditions, and promote the welfare of community members to foster sustainable peace and national development(Bassey & Onyema, 2021) To them, such leaders often work collaboratively with various stakeholders to identify crime, community needs, inspire participation, and foster a sense of peaceful coexistence to drive community development and unity with efforts are typically grounded in a deep commitment to social responsibility and are driven by the vision of sustainable peace, national development and positive change at the grassroots level by active engagement, responsiveness to community issues, and the ability to bridge differences to achieve sustain peace and common goals.
- iii. **Tradition Leadership:** Traditional leadership are indigenous leaders such as chiefs, village heads, and community elders who serve as custodians of cultural values, local norms, and communal laws, and in maintaining order and promoting peace as well as acting as a bridge between formal governmental structures and grassroots communities. These leaders often use culture, tradition, custom in mediation, conflict resolution, and upholding moral standards that foster an environment of mutual respect and harmony, reducing the likelihood of crime to create enable ground for sustainable peace and national development. (Okonkwo, Onuigbo, Eme & Ekekwe, 2019). In this way, Dance, Suleiman, Sani and Ibrahim (2024) added that traditional leadership contributes to sustainable peace by promoting social cohesion and providing an accessible system for settling disputes through local approach as a result to efficient trust by community members on informal mechanism than formal, especially in areas where governmental presence may be limited. To them, traditional leadership supports the foundations of national development by ensuring stability, encouraging participation in communal activities, and reinforcing a culture of lawfulness, which collectively fosters a conducive atmosphere for growth and progress.
- iv. **Religion Leadership:** Traditional leadership are seen as moral guides and community influencers with unique capacity to shape values, foster ethical conduct, and discourage criminal behaviour within society through sermons,

teachings, and communal gatherings, that promote principles of compassion, honesty, and respect, which directly contribute to social cohesion (Ezeani, Akov and Okoye, 2024). They added that religious leadership plays a vital role in crime prevention, particularly in promoting peace and advancing national development by addressing root causes of conflict such as intolerance, inequality, and moral decay as well as create a culture where crime is less likely to flourish. Thus, Ibrahim-Olesin, Ogunlade, Adefalu, Ayandeji and Njoku,(2024) posit that religious leadership serves as a powerful force in guiding communities towards constructive behaviour and fostering a secure, harmonious society by establish steps to mediate conflicts, offering a trusted platform for dialogue and reconciliation that aligns with the values of peace and unity that strengthens the foundations of sustainable peace, thereby contributing to the stability essential for national development.

Key Leadership Responsibilities in Crime Prevention

Ezeji (2020) states that key leadership responsibilities in crime prevention involves establishing policies and frameworks that deter criminal activity with key several responsibilities that collectively work to promote peace and support national development through creating systems and structures that uphold the rule of law, support rehabilitation, and address the root causes of crime, such as poverty and social inequality. Also, this responsibility includes advocating for social services, education, and employment opportunities, which help reduce factors that can lead individuals into criminal activities.

Additionally, Zikhali (2019) pointed out that another leadership key responsibilities in crime prevention are fostering trust and cooperation between the community and law enforcement agencies as well as building strong, transparent relationships with the public to improve reporting of crimes, encourage community vigilance, community engagement with clear communication that play a significant part in cultivating a sense of shared responsibility for public safety and ensure that law enforcement efforts are better targeted and effective. Given this key leadership responsibilities in crime prevention, Ibrahim-Olesin et, al., (2024) requires promoting a culture of integrity and accountability by demonstrating ethical conduct and inspire community to reject corruption and criminal behaviours.

Challenges Leaders Face in Crime Prevention

Leadership face significant challenges in crime prevention, particularly due to issues like political interference, corruption, societal challenges, such as unemployment, poverty and lack of education. These challenges not only complicate efforts to prevent crime but also undermine trust in leadership and the rule of law, hampering the progress towards crime prevention that can enhance sustainable peace and national development are discuss below;

- i. **Political Interference:** Muhammad (2024) assert that political interference often disrupts effective crime prevention efforts by political figures who exert pressure on law enforcement agencies or judicial processes, often to protect allies, personal interests, or maintain control over certain states. To him, this interference can manifest in multiple ways, such as influencing police appointments, suppressing investigations, or redirecting law enforcement priorities to serve political agendas. For example, in cases of electoral violence or public protests, political leaders may instruct security agencies to act in ways that prioritise their interests rather than public safety (Muhammad, 2024).
Similarly, Shodunke (2024) supported this assertion that interference in security operations by influential figures in areas affected by farmer-herder conflicts where in some instances, local or regional political leaders have allegedly pressured law enforcement to favour one side, often in alignment with their ethnic or regional affiliations, leading to uneven enforcement and further tensions. As a result, to this selective approach disrupts crime prevention efforts, as communities lose trust in the fairness of the system, making it difficult for leaders to gain public cooperation in maintaining peace.
- ii. **Corruption:** corruption is another critical challenge that severely affects crime prevention by weakening the law enforcement agencies, judiciary, and other leadership structures as well as the entire justice system, allowing criminals to evade punishment and promoting a culture of impunity (Raphael, 2021). According to him, corruption is a widespread issue that affects crime prevention at nearly every level including the Police officers may accept bribes to avoid arresting offenders or drop charges, while judicial corruption can lead to cases being dismissed, weakening the deterrent effect of law enforcement.
- iii. **Unemployment:** According to Alabi (2014) unemployment remains a pressing concern, as a large segment of the population, especially young people, struggle to secure meaningful jobs. To him, this lack of economic opportunity often pushes individuals into criminal behaviours, such as theft, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities, as a means of survival which create a fertile ground for criminal activities, undermining efforts to establish sustainable peace and security. He added that leaders are thus burdened with creating employment opportunities in an environment constrained by economic instability, poor infrastructure, and limited investment in industries that could absorb the workforce.
- iv. **Poverty:** poverty exacerbates this challenge by deepening social inequalities and fostering resentment within communities with individuals are unable to meet their basic needs, they are more likely to resort to crime out of desperation hinder crime prevention that foster sustainable peace and

national development (Arisukwu, Igbolekwu, Oye, Oyeyipo, Asamu, Rasak & Oyekola, 2020). They suggest that leaders should be tasked with not only alleviating poverty through effective social welfare programmes but also addressing systemic issues such as corruption and mismanagement, which often hinder the equitable distribution of resources that pose challenges in crime prevention which hamper sustainable peace and national development.

- v. **The lack of education:** Nte, Nte, Featherstone and Eyengho (2024) posit that lack of education further compounds the challenges of crime prevention because it limits individuals' opportunities for gainful employment and civic engagement. To them, an uneducated population is more vulnerable to manipulation by criminal networks and extremist groups, which exploit ignorance to recruit followers. As a result, leaders must therefore prioritise investments in education, ensuring that both children and adults have access to quality learning opportunities that empower them to contribute positively to society.

Strategies for Effective Leadership in Crime Prevention

- i. **Community engagement and inclusive decision-making:** Dion (2008) posit that leaders who prioritise community engagement create platforms for dialogue and cooperation between authorities and the people they serve as well as involving community members in decision-making processes, leaders gain insights into the root causes of crime within specific local contexts and can develop tailored interventions. According to him, inclusive decision-making ensures that diverse voices, including marginalised groups, are heard and respected, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to crime prevention initiatives as well as it builds trust, making it easier for communities to collaborate with law enforcement agencies and report criminal activities.
- ii. **Building collaborative networks across sectors:** According to Santos and Santos (2012) state that crime prevention effectively requires a multidisciplinary approach through building partnerships across various sectors, including law enforcement, education, health, and civil society organisations. In their view, collaborative networks allow for pooling resources, sharing expertise, and implementing comprehensive strategies that address the underlying causes of crime, such as unemployment, poverty, and social inequalities. For example, partnerships between schools and community organisations can help identify at-risk youth and provide them with mentorship and skill-building opportunities, reducing their vulnerability to criminal influences.
- iii. **Fostering ethical practices and moral leadership:** Leadership rooted in ethics and moral principles lead by example, demonstrating integrity, fairness, and a commitment to justice builds public confidence in crime prevention because people are more likely to support initiative that uphold the rule of law and act transparently (Alabi, 2014).

Conclusion

The impact of crime in Nigeria has been devastating, leading to a significant loss of life and property while weakening the nation's security framework and hindering national development. Leadership plays an indispensable role in crime prevention, requiring proactive efforts to create safer environments, promote social responsibility, and support law enforcement. By doing so, leaders can foster sustainable peace and contribute to national development. However, crime prevention cannot be left solely in the hands of law enforcement and security agencies which call for leaders across various levels government officials, politicians, traditional rulers, and religious leaders must actively engage and collaborate in this effort to collectively enhances security, discourages criminal activities, and strengthens trust between leaders and their followers. Transparency, integrity, accountability, and inclusive governance are vital pillars for building this trust, ensuring that leadership inspires confidence and cooperation from the people. At all levels community, local, state, and federal leaders have a responsibility to act with integrity and adopt measures that encourage intelligence sharing and vigilance among citizens. This includes providing mechanisms for empowerment, equitable distribution of resources, and inclusivity in decision-making processes as well as formulate policies that should reflect the needs and opinions of the people, creating an environment conducive to sustainable peace and development.

Leadership's role in crime prevention also involves addressing social inequalities by ensuring fair distribution of resources, reducing marginalisation, and fostering unity across ethnic and religious divides to address underlying causes of crime and create empowerment programmes, skills acquisition initiatives, and investments in critical areas such as education, healthcare, housing, and food security can break the cycle of poverty, giving people an opportunity to improve lives and reduce the desperation that often leads to criminal behaviour To move forward, leaders must focus on building collaborative networks across sectors, engaging communities through inclusive decision-making, and upholding ethical and moral leadership as well as strengthening mechanisms to expose corruption, injustice, and inequality is equally crucial by creating job opportunities, eradicating poverty, and addressing systemic issues such as nepotism and tribalism that will establish a foundation for sustainable peace and national development. Only through such holistic and dedicated efforts can the role of leadership in crime prevention truly make a transformative impact on Nigeria's future.

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