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## Cultural Correlates to Community Policing in Disoriented Society: The Case of Isu-Ebonyi Folks of South Eastern Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*Disparate formal policing bodies in Nigeria merged in 1930 to form a monolithic Nigeria police force. Taking cue from all the post independence constitutions, section 214, CFRN 1999, provides for the Nigerian police force and "...no other police force shall be established for the federation or any party thereof". The import is a solitary body to police the entire country. Policing involves ethical and legitimate efforts to secure the people's lives and property in a defined territory. But the Nigerian police force has not been able to achieve this overall security mandate leading to vociferous calls for police reforms. In that direction, the then president, Olusegun Obasanjo launched the community policing plan for Nigeria in 2004. Following the approval, the Nigerian police force drew up a plan specifying five target areas for reforms. One of the areas is functional partnership between the police and the communities' christened community policing. Nearly twenty (20) years after, policing has worsened rather than improved. This paper is a search for the impediments to community policing in rural Nigeria. It takes an ethnographic approach analyzing behavioral texts and focus-group discussion with the indigenous Isu-Ebonyi folks of south eastern Nigeria. It is found that the people are disoriented as their normative values are disintegrated and psyche disfigured by emergent oddities perpetuated before and by timorous and unethical police officers in the folks own community. The result is disillusionment, distrust, and blasé attitude to state institutions. The study recommends cultural training for the police to understand the normative values of the task environment and use the knowledge to win support for community policing.*

## Introduction

Since independence, the problem of insecurity in Nigeria has progressively grown inspite of the equally spawning security agencies to tackle the issue. The Nigeria police force is the most mocked for its ineffectiveness because it is directly charged with the protection of the citizens' lives and property. Insecurity does not respect residence but often the rural communities are the most vulnerable. Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen/farmers clashes, banditry, kidnapping, unknown gunman attacks occur more in the rural communities. Threats to the people's liberty and normative structure continuously increase in dimensions and ferocity in the spite of numerous existing police operational strategies.

The police for long have used to no avail such strategies as random routine patrol, rapid response calls, retroactive investigations of past crimes by detectives. These are strategies, Sheehan and Cordner (1989) called traditional approach. Other operational strategies in use are direct patrol, split force patrol, differential response to call for service, cold cases squad, repeat offenders programme, decoy operations, stake out and sting operation (Bouza, 1990; Sheehan, Shaw & Rogan, 1994; Lewis, 2002). These strategies are adjudged modern and universal "best" practices but crimes have grown upon their operations in Nigeria. The intimidating operations are apparently targeted at the South-east of Nigeria judging by the ubiquity of police check point at every road, paths and corners of the South eastern communities. Operational failures of these strategies are evident by the incessant attacks on the communities to the chagrin of the police and other security agencies.

In the situation, the folks develop a siege mentality and disorientation. Outsiders (the police, state institutions, strangers) are perceived as enemies out to destroy the community. Insiders (the folks themselves) are suspected collaborators to harm one another. It created a mistrust of everyone by everyone and a disoriented society emerges. It is in the midst of the police ineptitude and the folks disorientation that the community policing is expected to operate as an alternative to the failed operational strategies earlier mentioned.

The questions this paper addressed are:

1. Whether community policing can function productively in a disoriented society?

2. What are the cultural values that can help or hinder a productive partnership by the police with the folks?
3. How can a productive and functional community policing be achieved in the community?

The thrust of the paper is to find a productive pattern of policing where the police and the folks can work with mutual respect and efficiency to protect the limbs, lives and livelihood of the people. It is futile to desire community policing but continue the traditional police operations that treat the South-east community folks as a thing.

### The setting: Isu-Ebonyi Folks

The study is an ethnographic research and the setting is Isu-Ebonyi people of south-eastern Nigeria. Isu community is at the extreme north of Ebonyi south senatorial zone of Ebonyi State, south east Nigeria. It is bounded in the North, South and East by **Ezzagu, Onicha and Agba Communities** in Ebonyi State and in the West by Nara community of Nkanu East in Enugu State. Isu has nine villages: **Agbebor, Isuachara, Umuniko, Amanator, Mgbaleze, Mgbalaukwu and Obegu** held together as one kin-based entity by an incoherent story of mythical fatherhood of a legendry Ezentum. Two other settler villages of Agba Isu and Ogboji Isu became part of the community by suffrage. The population is uncertain but estimated heuristically at 50,000 persons. Isu folks are agrarian with largely subsistence economy. All her social institutions are traditional in content and weak in expression. They lack cohesion as a common people and live without a clear hierarchy.

However, the people are beginning to embrace modern education, adjudication and Christian religion. There exists a magistrate's court, a divisional police headquarters, Onicha Local Government secretariat and a fledging Federal Technical College of Education. The admixture of these modern state institutions and traditional practices in the area provide the recipe for anomic normative structure among the folks. The community is in transition with crippling crimes and criminality.

Between May and November, 2022 criminality surged in the area. Many were kidnapped, maimed or killed without trace of the perpetrators. Since then criminality is the order, gangsters and non-state actors prowled the community. The police appear helpless and often go into hiding and take evasive

actions rather than brace up to the challenge of insecurity. The people lost faith in the police, state institutions and even in themselves. They lack the clout to organize any internal vigilant group to protect themselves and their community. The folks are cowed, timorous, disoriented, and currently dwell in limbo.

## **Literature**

### **Community policing**

Community policing is one of the contemporary strategic practices introduced by the Nigeria police to bolster its efficiency in security upkeeps. Dambazau (2007) traced the origin of community policing to the United States of America who had in the early 1970's recognized the need for synergy between the police and its operating community in the provision of security.

Friedman (1992) outlined the principles of community policing to include special kind of relationship between police officers and citizens, creation of community policing officers (CPO), police working with volunteers, and decentralization of police activities. Community policing is more than and different from mere police-community relation. Inherent in the community policing concept are accountability to both the police as an authority, and the community as a task environment, articulation of civic-oriented values and shared decision making between the police and the community (Michealson, 1988). Thus conceived, community policing is both a strategy and a philosophy. As a strategy, it is directed to achieving more effective crime control, reduce fear of criminality, improve quality of life, police services and legitimacy through a proactive reliance on community resources. As a philosophy, it indicates the idea of our security by ourselves and dismantles all myths surrounding any crime, its persona and its ecology.

This informs Janish (1981), and Wiatrowski and Zazzi (1987) assertion in Okorie and Worlu (2015) that community policing combines formal and informal tactics to prevent, control, detect and arrest crimes on self-help efforts.

The object of an efficient policing had been recognized long time ago as the maintenance of law and order and protection of lives and property. To achieve this object, the citizens of the community must play a role. Cooperation must exist between the police and the citizens, and cooperation with the

police requires the police to be in co operable form. Policing in a community must recognize the norms and values cherished in that community. Paradoxically, community policing is introduced as a strategy for a police organization whose culture, according to Brown (2001) and Walker (2003), extols isolation from public, secrecy, honour, loyalty, and individuality as articles of professional ethics. Can there be a productive union between police aloofness and community interaction. The balance can be seen in community deceit and intimidations which breed disorientation and despondency among the folks.

### **Police and social disorientation**

British colonialists came as plunders. Mc Cooksey, a British merchant who later became an acting Governor established the first colonial police in Lagos colony in 1861. In 1862, it became "armed police force" meant to protect colonial commercial interest by force and in disregard to indigenous socio-cultural values. The colonial police were organized and oriented to behave as occupation forces-ruthless, brutal, corrupt, dishonest and prone to brutalizing the colonized. (Alemika, 2000).

At independence and ever since, the police and its policing strategy have been anti-people. The political elites used the police against one another and against the people. Rotimi (2001) recalled the manhandling of M.I Okpara, the first republic premier of Eastern region by the police in the West at the behest of the western region government. During the TIV uprising in the 1960s, the police went with a marching order to brutalize the people (Abeghe, 2005) instead of quelling the riot. The reasoning was inferred from the fact that in the expedition, no Tiv police officer was included in the detachment. Kpara and Hagher (2001) accused the police of taking side with the Jukun to exterminate the Tiv during the 2001 Tiv- Junkun civil crisis. The historical gory experiences of Odi massacre in Bayelsa, Zaki Biam pogrom in Benue State, the Gbamaturu blood bath in Delta state and the Igbo ethnic cleansing that precipitated the Biafra war were some of the cases of police actions that wounded deeply the psyche of indigenous communities of Nigeria. Policing is essentially behavioural. Where a police officer is known to be bias, reckless and unethical in his duties, the people abhors him. If the behavior is pervasive the police as a body is abhorred. The people get disoriented and partnership with the police is impaired. Community policing operate on human relations, public opinion,

public and community relations (Brown, 1999; Cox & Fitzgerald, 2006) which cannot be achieved with unethical police body.

### **Need for ethical Police Operations**

Police operations are socially based and have social and moral effects. The police therefore must carry civil virtue and ethical principles. Unfortunately cases demonstrating police moral deficiencies abound and disfigure the people's psyche and orientation. The police should act in accordance with the law; confine itself to its duties fairly and justly to win community support. But Bowden (1998) has observed the operation of police as repressive against the poor to protect the rich. Brodgen (1982) portrays the police as structured to act against the marginal. Ugochukwu (1995) itemized police abuse of power to include torture for confession, discriminatory arrests, corruption and unwarranted denial of bail etc. The incivilities erode police reputation and deny the police usual public support for community policing. Similarly, CLEEN foundation (2006) presents a chronicle of extrajudicial killings in Nigeria, and other despicable and brutal acts of the police which traumatize the people and caused them disorientation.

### **Theory**

#### **Consequentialism and Deontology**

Consequentialism is one of the end-based theories of morality. The tenet is simple as summarized by Amstutz (2005) "the morality of an action must be ultimately judged by the good results that are realized". The end is the consideration but it does not invariably justify the means. The end rather judges the means. Whether actions of the individual or organization, the end result must have some utility. So utilitarianism inheres in consequentialism. It was Jeremy Bentham who developed utilitarianism and more espoused by John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1957). Bentham (1748) had defined utilitarianism as the "greatest good for the greatest number of the people." Applied to policing, actions of the police should be directed to the overall good (happiness) of the citizens. Any police operation should strike a balance between human dignity and morbid sense of duty. Where the two conflicts, the preservation of human dignity and happiness prevails, after all, it is properly said that it is better that one hundred offenders are let go off the hook than to punish one innocent person.

When policing indulges in reckless crackdowns, mass arrest, torture of suspect, open bribery, extortion, releasing a culprit and detention of the innocent, non-responsiveness to call to duty, aiding the escape of criminals, etc; the people get disoriented by police imbroglio. Police partnerships with community can be achieved only if the community sees the police reputably working for the greatest good of the community not for a selected member of the community.

Deontology is derived from the Greek word "deon" meaning duty or obligation. The belief is that actions are good or bad in themselves and not by their outcomes. The intention of the actor should be judged and not consequences of the action. An actor is to be driven by moral obligation for duty. It should not be duty for duty sake. A duty is for the people and must be ethical. Ethical duty must be based on Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. Kant (1981) explained categorical imperative as a requirement that one acts only according to that maxim by which one can at the same time will that it should become a universal law, and acts so that one treats humanity always as an end and never as a means only. Categorical imperative thus implies universal just actions that promote human dignity. Kant advocated for reasons as a way to discover moral principles.

To the police, deontology requires that it does its duty as the law prescribes but modulated by categorical imperative. In any case, the rule of law inheres in Kant's categorical imperative. Policing should be gained towards creating an environment for the protection and promotion of human dignity. Man is a rational being but the reasonableness of every man should not be taken for granted. For the police to act reasonably there should be effective training and reorientation.

It does appear that consequentialism and deontology are projecting different aspects of drive to morality end or duty. Both end and duty are virtues to be pursued not as alternatives but conjunctively. Where the circumstances dictate, virtue lies in the middle. A virtuous man would have good intentions, act morally and would perform his duties to achieve good results. Thus, a police agent who wishes to partner the community must breed trust, show care, honesty respect for human dignity and sympathetic impartiality and services.



## Method

The study is an ethnographic account of community policing impediments in the Isu-Ebonyi Community. It is a cross-section survey of Isu folks and police officers to elicit their attitude and predispositions to community policing. Data are obtained from Isu folks by focus-group discussions and from the police by in depth interview. The village heads of the nine constituent villages formed a group, the chairman of a youth organization in each of the nine villages, and the heads of one women organization in each of the nine villages formed two other groups. Focused group discussions were held with each of the three groups separately. The Divisional Police Officer, the Divisional Crime Officer and the Station Guard were purposively selected and deeply interviewed respectively at their offices in the Onicha Police Divisional Headquarters, Isu.

The unit of analysis is categorized into respondents' attitudes, dispositions and perceived challenges to community policing in the area. Analysis is qualitative and entirely descriptive.

## Results and Discussion

### Challenges to community policing among the Rural folks

The result of the study is presented and discussed under the following heads; Existence of, attitudes/dispositions and dialectical problems of community policing in Isu area.

### Existence of Community Policing in Isu Community.

The policemen interviewed asserted that community policing was desirable but regretted that the strategy was not operational at Isu community. They attributed the non-existence to the unwillingness of the community folk to partner the police.

The station officer lamented that "the police are loathsomely labeled as betrayers by the folk."

Most of the focused group discussants expressed ignorance of community policing programme. A woman discussant stated that even if she knew about the programme neither she nor any of her relations would work with the police as that would amount to being a police officer. "A police officer's mother is childless" she derided. It could be said that the non recognition of community policing in the area is due to the folks' abhorrent attitude to the police as an institution of the state.

## Attitude of the Folks to Community Policing

Among the issue folks, the police are seen as utter strangers who were to limit the people's liberty and security. The sight of police officer creates siege mentality in the people. The folks are suspicious of the police as an enemy out to destroy the community and cannot cooperate with them. Police interviewees confirmed the lack of rapport between the people and the police. No folk, therefore is disposed to partner the police in community policing strategy.

The police unethical action created negative attitude against the police. People perceive the police as untrustworthy, suspicious, sly and greedy. The police openly collect bribes, torture the natives, extort, intimidate and detain the folks. With these acts, hatred forms. Unknown gunmen often wallop the community killing people and the police alike. The police with all their pretensions would not protect the people. The people's vulnerability to unknown gunmen undermines community solidarity because it signals that the police are either complicit or inept. In any case, the police lose respect and attachment.

All the discussants expressed their value for freedom, justice, openness, discussion, sincerity, mutual respect, courage and understanding which are cherished components of their culture. If community policing must be productive, relationships between the police and the folks must incorporate these cultural values. As one of the discussants retorted, "how can one partner the police, who treats the folks as a parish."

### Police Aloofness to community policing

The police do not see members of the community as equal partner in security affairs. The station officer bluntly said that "no police officer can take an untrained civilian as a partner to share security information. The result is that the police may receive information/reports from community vigilante and act as they please with the report. A case was cited when a man who machete his own elder brother to death in one of the villages studied was caught by the community vigilante and handed over to the police. The community expected justice but the police released the culprit without a known reason or recourse to the community authorities".

The police see themselves with an air of superiority and so can not relate productively with community members with regard to policing. It was gathered from the station officer of Onicha Police

Headquarters at Isu that no training had ever been organized for the police on the rudiment of community policing. As the police stand aloof to community policing the members of the community react with reluctance to get into what one of the community vigilante called “police business”.

### **Dialectical Problems of Community Policing**

Community policing requires collective efficacy from the side of the community. Mutual trust, social integration, interpersonal ties and willingness to intervene in community security, will help develop collective efficacy, without which the police works alone. The folks should be committed to preserving their immediate environment by confronting and destabilizing forces such as teen gangs, armed invaders, cult groups, petty thieves and rapists but they will not do that without collective efficacy.

The police interviewed were in agreement that nothing could make community policing work with unwilling folks. The police created the conditions for their mistrust and their apparent indifferences or ineptitude to the challenges of unknown gunmen in the neighborhood got the folks disoriented. The result is distaste for the police and nonchalance to community policing. These are dialectical issues that need to unearthed, planned and managed if community policing can achieve its expected results.

### **Conclusion**

Community policing is one of the latest strategies by the police to tackle the state of insecurity in Nigeria but the strategy appears to be non existent or unproductive in the rural communities which are most vulnerable to sporadic criminal attacks. This study inquires into the cultural correlates of productive community policing in rural communities. The setting is Isu-Ebonyi Community which appears to be in a transition. An admixture of traditional and modern values provides the folks the recipe for disorientation. However, their cultural values are fast fading as very great influences of their actions and inactions. Literature reviewed explains the meaning, imports and dictates of community policing; how police conduct can bring about disorientation among the folks, the need for ethical policing and attitudinal challenge to effective policing. The study is birthed on the interpretation of consequentialism and deontologism which emphasize end and duty as moral route to win support in a task environment.

The study found most rural societies disoriented but the police still engaged in long-wolf operations that do not recognize the cultural values of the folks. The folks got suspicious of the police. So community policing cannot work in the South-eastern Nigeria where there is disorientation and siege mentality rather than collective efficacy.

### **Recommendations**

Community policing is necessary to achieve the security of rural communities. For it to function effectively, the following suggestions are provided:

- The police should be courageous in their duty to win the admiration of the folks.
- The police should be open in their operation to help the folks develop collective efficacy and give support to the police.
- The police should demonstrate their respect for the folks to win the peoples’ confidence.
- Police operations should be fair, just and non-selective.

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