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NIGERIA POLICE FORCE AND OGBA/EGBEMA/NDONI SECURITY AND PEACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (OSPAC) COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS IN SECURITY MANAGEMENT IN ONELGA, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.

By

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Abstract

The insecurity in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria reached its climax in 2016/2017 leading to wanton destruction of lives and properties worth millions of naira. The situation degenerated to a level where socio-economic, political, cultural and even academic activities were brought to a halt. The study therefore examines the roles of the personnel of the Nigeria Police Force and the Onelga Security Peace and Advisory Committee (OSPAC) in their collaborative efforts in nipping the degenerated security situation in the bud, thereby restoring law and order in the Local Government Area. The study which is a qualitative study was guided by two objectives and was anchored on Routine Activities Theory (RAT). The study found out that the State backed security agencies (especially the NPF) were overwhelmed because of poor knowledge of the terrain, trust deficit between the locals and the security agencies, and superiority contest among operatives of sister security agencies among others. The coming of OSPAC to join other security operatives changed the ugly narrative because the locals now saw them as their own while the OSPAC viewed the locals with an empathic disposition when they were formed. The outfit was properly funded initially by the Local Government authority and there was an unhindered flow of credible information that aided the operations of the security operatives. Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made including; proper funding of security agencies, emplacement of an adequate reward system and enhanced judicial system that will be not be the unfailing hope of the rich and affluent but actually be seen as the last hope of the common man.

Keywords: *OSPAC, Crime, Security, ONELGA.*

Introduction

The core mission of the police globally is to control crime. No one disputes this. Indeed, professional crime fighting enjoys wide public support as the basic strategy of policing, precisely because it embodies a deep commitment to the objective (Olong, & Agbonika, 2013). In Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force has been the primary institution responsible for internal security in the country. Unfortunately, the police as presently constituted is structurally and ethically deformed and would not be able to fight crime and criminality unilaterally without the collaborative efforts of both state and non-state actors. Over the years, the police have shown an attitude of seeing the security of lives and property of citizens as their exclusive constitutional mandate that should not be interfered with by any other individual or organization. However, complexities of modern security challenges and often the perennial trust deficit between the police and the citizens have made collaborative policing an inevitable and the only viable option in ensuring that citizens live in a secured environment (Tankebe, 2013). This synergistic relationship will ensure that the members of the public volunteer credible and actionable intelligence while personnel of the security agencies will protect their sources of information to achieve optimal results. The Nigeria Police Force's failings have been attributed specially to the failure of the citizens to trust the police and avail them with the necessary information that will aid in the course of their professional duties Olong, & Agbonika, 2013).

Effective security management is a critical component of modern policing. The police play a vital role in maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and protecting citizens (Alemika, 2007). However, the complexity of modern security challenges requires a more nuanced approach to security management. Security management could mean the

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process of identifying, assessing and mitigating potential security threats to an organization, community or even an individual. It involves the development and implementation of strategies, policies and procedures to protect people, assets and information from harm or unauthorized access (Poroma & Oparaka, 2025). For effective security management, the planners must assess the risk involved, analyze threats, develop strategies and plans to mitigate security risks. These plans must be implemented, monitored and evaluated. The goal of security management is to create a safe and secure environment that protects people, assets and information from harm or allowing people unauthorized access (Goldstein, 1990).

Nigeria, like most other third world countries is battling with criminal activities of various shades including kidnapping, armed robbery, child-trafficking, murder, corrupt practices among others that have been threatening the continuous existence of the nation. The result has been the loss of faith on the security agencies especially the police. Properties of citizens have also been wantonly destroyed while life have become brutish, nasty and short (Tankebe, 2013). Nigeria's federalism has been the source of its many problems ranging from insecurity, underdevelopment, unemployment among other maladies. Globally, federalism means the devolution of power to the federating units. Nigeria operates a centralized security system that makes crime fighting especially in the Local Government Areas to be problematic. Nigeria has 36 States and 774 Local Government Areas and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja.

The area of study is among the 774 Local Government Areas of the country. Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria was created in 1991 under the military presidency of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. The indigenes of the Local Government Area with headquarters in Omoku claimed to have migrated from the ancient Benin kingdom and speak three slightly different dialects with Ogba language being predominant. The Local Government Area is located at the heart of the Niger Delta region and is rich with crude oil and gas deposits. Omoku, the industrial hub of the LGA, the State, the region and even the country at large is home to multinational oil companies and other subsidiary companies employing thousands of indigenes and non-citizens in their work force (The Punch, 06/4/2025).

In late 2016, the Local Government Area was engulfed with unprecedented insecurity leading to loss of lives and properties worth several millions of naira. Businesses and other means of livelihood were brought to a standstill while there was massive displacement of both indigenes and strangers alike. The security agencies especially the police which is the lead internal security agency was overwhelmed, while orgy of violence went on unchallenged. Crime became a lucrative venture that several groups emerged with the sole purpose of perpetuating criminal activities in the area.

Review of Related Literature

Several studies have been carried out by scholars on the Nigeria Police Force and crime fighting generally. While some have blamed the police for inefficiency and ineffectiveness, others sympathized with police insisting that the force is poorly funded and its personnel are lacking the basic tools for their job. The work has viewed some of these studies including: Poroma and Oparaka (2025) in their study observed that one of the defining characteristics of most developing countries especially in the continent of Africa in the past two to three decades is violence, crime of various shades, and destructive conflicts leading to avoidable deaths of several thousands of citizens and destruction of properties worth billions of naira. Nigeria and Nigerians have had their own fair share of these conflicts in every nook and cranny of the nation with those saddled with the responsibility of managing security seemed overwhelmed. They found out there is a collapse of value system especially among the young men and women with a systematic decay that has affected the reward system which has eaten deep into the very fabric of our development trajectory. They recommended that socio-political and economic leaders should re-orientate their followers and encourage a reward system that will punish deviants and handsomely reward hard work, probity and discipline.

Olong and Agbonika (2015) in their study found out that the Nigeria Police needs some form of decentralization. They believe that since human beings are not static, policies relating to them especially their security should not be tied to a constitutional provision that seems not to be in line with the letters and spirit of the constitution. They found out that globally leaders of nation-states take decisions that ensure the provision of adequate security of lives and property for its citizens. Nations practicing true federalism ensure that the police as the nearest security institution to the citizens are brought closer to the people for easy access in times of trouble. They recommended a decentralized security architecture that the citizens will own as theirs and cordially work with the operatives to volunteer credible and actionable information to aid their professional work while personnel can be held accountable for unprofessional conduct. They strongly recommended a policing system in line with the professed federalism Nigeria is claiming to practice.

Deekam (2024) did a historical review of the role of the disbanded Bakassi Boys and the fight against crime and criminality in Anambra State, Nigeria. He averred that the successes of the outfit were short-lived because there was no synergistic working relationship between the outfit and other security organization especially the police. They became lords to themselves and later became foot soldiers for politicians to use to settle political scores with their opponents. They were later seen by both the police and members of the public as a group of young men who are gullible, anti-people, selfish and were tools in the hands of politicians whose interests and purpose are always anti-citizens.

He recommended that although the police cannot claim to have omnipotent knowledge on issues of crime and criminality, the collaborating outfits must be men and women of proven integrity, verifiable means of livelihood and willing to subordinate their bloated egos to the police who are

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constitutionally empowered to lead internal security in the country. These reviewed literatures have given us the insight into the need for collaboration in the fight against crime and criminality which Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area earlier experimented. The study will also x-ray the challenges that negatively affected the collaborative efforts of the Police and OSPAC in the area.

Statement of Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate how the collaborative efforts of the Nigeria Police Force and the OSPAC helped in security management in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government area, Rivers State, Nigeria. To achieve the above, the following specific objectives will be considered:

i. Examine the strategies/methods used by the NPF and OSPAC in the security management of the area.
ii. Identify the challenges in the collaborative efforts between the Nigeria and the OSPAC in the security management of the area.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Routine Activities Theory (RAT) propounded by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979 in order to explain how crime occurs when three essential elements converge in time and space. They opined that when there is a motivated offender (criminal), a suitable target (victim of crime) and the absence of a capable guidance (security agencies), then crime is inevitable. They believe that whenever a criminal encounters a victim of crime without those that will stop him or her or them, then crime is definitely bound to occur. The daily economic and socio-political activities of a people increase the likelihood of crime and criminality especially in the absence of properly trained security agencies with the right equipment, then crime is bound to occur.

There is a relationship between the theory and the present study. The three essential elements in the theory best described the situation in the area of study before the advent of OSPAC. There was a motivated offender (criminals) because crime became a lucrative business raking in millions of naira in ransom and sale of stolen properties. The citizens and their properties became vulnerable because of the lack of security agents both in quantity and in quality. The operatives of the lead internal security agents (police) and other security agencies were unable to protect the citizens as a result of poor welfare, were ill-equipped and were starved of credible and actionable intelligence because of absence of trust. So, from the foregoing, there was absence of capable guidance. Therefore, the theory has sufficiently explained what happened in ONELGA during the period and thus, is suitable to anchor the study.

Methodology

The study was carried out to investigate the Nigeria Police Force and the Onelga Security and Advisory Committee (OSPAC) collaborative efforts in ensuring effective security management in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria from 2016 to 2024. The study adopted the descriptive survey design because it was qualitative study aimed at identifying the characteristics of the population, frequencies, trends and categories to essentially establish the relationship between variables.

The projected 2022 population of the study is four hundred and seven thousand, four hundred (407, 400) persons while a sample size of four hundred (400) was gotten through Taro Yamane scientific formula. Respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. The entire Local Government Area was divided into three clusters including Ogba, Egbema and Ndoni. Further six (6) communities were randomly selected as follows: Ogba-3, Egbema-2 while 1 community was chosen from Ndoni being the smallest cluster. The sample size was distributed to respondents in these selected stakeholders of the communities, the police personnel and OSPAC operatives accordingly. While interview method was used in Ogba and Egbema clusters, the focus group discussion was used in Ndoni cluster. The police personnel and OSPAC operatives both had the interview sessions and focus group discussions.

Discussion

The discussion was guided by the two research objectives as follows:

i. Determine the strategies used by the Nigeria Police and OSPAC operatives in managing the security in the area.

a. Risk assessment and mitigation

The interview and the focus group discussion among selected members of the sampled communities, the police especially those who were under the period and OSPAC operatives revealed that the police and OSPAC operatives were able to identify, evaluate and prioritize potential risks or threats to the people, assets and organizations. The coming on board of OSPAC operatives serves as a bridge between the police and the communities, and they were able to gain access and minimize the potential danger and ensure the safety and security of both the operatives, villagers, assets and organizations. The findings are in line with the views of an earlier study carried out by Borum (2010) who posited that identifying potential security threats and vulnerabilities, and implementing measures to mitigate or eliminate them enhances the security management of an area.

b. Intelligence-led policing

Security in the area of study defied all known conventional strategies until the stakeholders came together in what later became historic gathering to initiate, incorporate and operationalized the OSPAC with the clear mandate to rid Omoku and its environs of criminal elements of any guise. The people assured the operatives of their protection from the land. With the coming of OSPAC operatives, the police who were now energized and re-enforced, using covert operational strategies with the backing of the OSPAC operatives were able to gather credible and actionable intelligence from the

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natives, who, hitherto, were unwilling to give out information to the police for fear of being exposed to the criminals. This paid off as officers were using the credible information to track the criminals and bringing them to justice. This enhanced the security management strategies of both the police and OSPAC operatives in the area of study. The above findings are in line with the earlier views of Ratcliffe (2008) who opined that the use of intelligence gathering enhances the ability of security operatives to prevent, detect and foil criminal activities before they can even effectively operate.

c. Community engagement and partnerships

The joint operation between the police and OSPAC operatives re-orientated the villagers who now believe that they are with them in the fight against crime and criminality perpetuated by their common enemies who are the cultists, kidnappers, murderers, rapists and the likes. The interviewees and those in the focus group discussion revealed that the coming of the OSPAC improved the existing relationship between the security agencies especially the police who now became willing to partner with them in the fight against crime and criminality. This finding is in line with the views of the community police handbook which stated that crime has become an increasingly complex and huge industry with the communities being the producers of the products (criminals). This being so, the producers (community) remains the best focal group to control what they have produced (criminals). This is a key principle of community policing which is built on police-community partnership, problem-solving and organizational transformation. It is in line with the views of Skogan (2004) who in his study found out that security management is enhanced when security personnel build a synergistic relationship with members of the community thereby enhancing collaborative efforts between the communities and the security agents. This improved relationship leads to a win-win situation to both parties as community members will be ready and willing to volunteer credible and actionable information to the personnel who will act on such and deal with the incidences of crime and criminality.

d. Technology integration

The interviewees, the focus group discussants, the OSPAC operatives and even the Nigeria police personnel were in agreement that though technological integration could aid in security management in other parts of the world, but in the area of study, the OSPAC relied so much on the efficacious powers of the African traditional religion. That the use of such black powers instill fears among the hoodlums and earned them respect among the law-abiding citizens. With such powers, they were able to identify a criminal, arrest him or her and take such arrested person to their operational base where he or she will confess to having committed offence(s.) This their uncanny ability to fish out criminals from their hideouts made many criminals to relocate to safer havens where they continued with their nefarious activities. This finding is in line with Oparaka & Dressman (2024) who believe that most symbols of the African traditional religion have the potentiality of instilling fear even to an innocent person, and over the years, has enhanced the traceability of conflict merchants.

e. Training and re-training

During the period under review, the interviewees, results from the focus group discussion revealed that OSPAC operatives were availed with training opportunities especially on human rights, inter-personal relationship and elementary police duties to enhance their knowledge of the law and ensure that they act within the ambit of the law. These trainings greatly enhanced their effectiveness, improved their working relationship with members of the public and also boosted their acceptability in the area. This is in line with the findings of Birzer (2008) who postulated that training and capacity building among security operatives enhances their capacity, ability and improve their inter-personal relationship with members of the public.

ii. Identify the challenges in the collaborative efforts between the Nigeria Police and OSPAC in security management

In the course of the interview and focus group discussion, the respondents were unanimous in identifying the various challenges which brought into five (5) broad headings. These include:

a. Absence of trust

Before the coming into operation of OSPAC, the citizens, both natives and strangers detested the police accusing them of unethical practices ranging from corruption, highhandedness, partiality, to incompetence and so, there was mistrust between the police and the members of the various communities. These assertions were agreed by all the respondents apart from the police officers and men who insisted the members of the various communities were shielding their criminal brothers and sisters and helping them to escape justice. Accusations the villagers asserted were false. Trust was at its lowest ebb and the police then, rather than having breakthroughs in their operations were overwhelmed by the security situation in the area of study. Some of them paid the supreme price while others sustained various degrees of injuries. The citizens became helpless and hopeless. The advent of the OSPAC was able to ameliorate this trust problem, though, it was short-lived. This was a huge challenge in the collaborative efforts of the police and the OSPAC. The findings are in line with the earlier views of Tankebe (2013) who found in his study that without trust, collaborative and intelligence sharing in the business of protecting lives and property will be in jeopardy. This was actually experienced in the area of the study.

b. Corruption

The word corruption is derived from the Latin word, '***corruptio'*** '***corrumpo' or vitium***' which means to spoil or vice. Corruption is conventionally understood and referred to, as the private-wealth seeking behaviour of someone who represents the state and the public authority. It is the misuse of public resources by public officials for private gains (Ibrahim, 2015). The urge to secure wealth or power through unethical

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means. In Nigeria, the police as an institution is described more in negative terms by major segments of the population. This negative stereotyping of the officers and men of the Nigeria Police cut-across ethnicity, religion, class or sex. Though, the OSPAC in inception tried to portray themselves as incorruptible, impartial and humane in their dealings with citizens. Such saintly behaviour was for a short while. Both the police and OSPAC became engrossed with professional misconduct with the citizens paying the huge price. Justice was bought and sold and was reserved for the highest bidder as the poor innocent citizens watched hopelessly as both the police and OSPAC compete in this infamous race for supremacy. Corruption serves as a huge obstacle to the collaborative efforts between the police and OSPAC in the fight against crime and criminality in the area. This is in line with the report of the Human Rights Watch (2010) which observed that corruption in any disguise undermine any collaborative efforts among groups, organizations, institutions, etc. and hampers their desire to fight crime and other social vices.

c. Communication breakdown

The study revealed that there was often breakdown of communication between the police and OSPAC because of minor squabbles in most cases involving quarrels over jurisdiction, women, OSPAC's propensity for illegality (because OSPAC in most cases acted ultra vires the law), money, superiority contest among others. This was a big challenge in their collaborative efforts in security management. Effective communication is crucial in crime fighting, as it enables law enforcement agencies to share intelligence, coordinate efforts and respond to distress calls timeously. However, communication breakdown can have severe consequences, hindering the success of crime-fighting initiatives. This happened in the area of the study. The findings are in line with Gill (2006) who believed that communication between two or more groups especially when such groups are involved in the fight against crime and criminality is key to success. The result will lead to delayed response to distress calls, intelligence gaps, increased risks to all parties involved and erosion of trust with its attendant negative effects.

d. Cultural and social barriers

The results of the interviews and focus discussion show that respondents were divided in their responses to these barriers. Because almost all OSPAC members are indigenes while about 82% of police officers and men serving in Omoku Area command, Omoku, Ndoni, Okwuzi, Egi and Obrikom divisions and even those on special duties, the community members seem to see the OSPAC operatives as their own and the police as strangers. Cultural and social barriers hampered the effective collaborative efforts between the police and OSPAC in security management in Obga/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. This finding collaborates with the views of Tankebe (2013) who insisted that cultural and social barriers promote distrust, and miscommunication, different values and priorities, community resistance and ineffective intelligence gathering, leading to fractured security management processes.

Conclusion

The study examined the collaborative efforts between the Nigeria Police Force and ONELGA Security and Peace Advisory Committee (OSPAC) in security management in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria from 2016 to 2024. The findings of the study highlight the imperative of collaborative security initiatives in enhancing security outcomes in the area. The study reveals that the collaborative efforts between the NPF and OSPAC have led to improved security outcomes in the area during the period. The partnership facilitated intelligence gathering, community engagement, and promoted joint problem solving initiatives. The study revealed that there was trust deficit between the Police and the citizens of the area during the period until the coming on board of the OSPAC. This made information gathering cumbersome and in some cases, the security agents were given false information leading to low morale of the officers.

The study revealed that investing in community policing initiatives and collaborative security programs, the government and the security agencies especially the Nigeria Police can promote and sustained safer and more secure communities not only in the area of study but in other areas in the country. The findings of the study have significant implications for policy and practice. First, they highlight the need increased investment in community policing initiatives and collaborative security programs. Secondly, they underscore the importance of training and capacity-building for police officers and community security stakeholders, and finally, they emphasize the need for effective oversight mechanisms to prevent corruption and ensure accountability among the officers of the Nigeria Police, personnel of the OSPAC and other critical stakeholders in the business of securing the people. The acceptability of OSPAC has weaned over the years.

However, the study identified challenges associated with the partnership, including limited resources, cultural barriers, inadequate training and corruption especially among the OSPAC operatives who see the opportunity as an avenue for making money. Because of their inadequate training, they exhibited lackadaisical attitude to work which threatened the synergy between them. They willingly submitted themselves to be used by politicians for their selfish gains. Infighting among them on who should lead and their highhandedness led to loss of trust between them and citizens of the area.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions/findings, the following recommendations were made;

i. The Nigerian government should ensure that the Nigeria Police Force is properly funded to enable them acquire the best crime-fighting equipment and provide adequate welfare for the officers and men while the Local Government Area should replicate

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the same for the personnel of the OSPAC in order to achieve sustainable results.

ii. The Nigeria Police and Local Government Authority should prioritize training, re-training and capacity-building programmes for their personnel to enhance their effectiveness in security management in the area.

iii. The government especially at the centre and the Local Government Areas should prioritize the fight against corruption especially among security agencies in the country and finally,

iv. The government especially must emplace encourage the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other organs to re-orientate members of the public to see themselves as one indivisible family and that they not see themselves as culturally and customary different from one another.

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