UNDERSTANDING THE PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE COMMUNITY POLICING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE NIGERIA POLICE AND VIGILANTE GROUPS IN IKORODU, LAGOS.

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Abstract

Community policing is presently considered by most Police organizations and scholars as the latest model of Policing. Despite this wide spread acceptance, there is still no clear agreement on what Community policing actually entails. The only area of agreement is the fact that community policing entails a partnership between the Police and organized groups of members of the community that the Police is serving. Previous researches had focused on the effectiveness of this partnership but had not looked in detail into the principles guiding this community policing partnership. Using an unstructured face-to-face interview, questions was posed to members of the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group in Ikorodu. The data gathered reveals that the community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante Group Ikorodu were guided by the following principles of partnership, defines roles and functions, community involvement in crime prevention, clear communication between both partners and respect for human rights and rules of engagement. These principles help not only to better understand the nature and scope of community policing but it also helps fashion out a community policing policy direction for Police organizations, scholars and government policy makers.


Introduction

With the increasing numbers and attendant negative effects of crime in society (O'Block et al., 1991:8), there has been a continuous attempt at evolving policing strategies that will position the Police to combat these negative effects. One of such policing strategies is Community Policing. This strategy is gaining momentum among law enforcements with a 1997 survey estimating that about 85% of Police Departments in United States of

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America had adopted or were in the process of adopting community policing (Skogan, 2004).

Despite the widespread adoption of community policing, there is still a huge disagreement among law enforcement practitioners and academics on what community policing entails and how it should be practiced. While community policing is sometimes viewed from the perspective of being a philosophy to explain police work, some view it as an actual policing technique (Trajanowicz & Buquerox, 1998). Some scholars adopt an applied perspective that seeks to explain community policing by explaining what the role of a community Police officer is (Manning, 2003). Others approach it from an institutional perspective of what the relationship between the Police unit and the community should be. (Diamond & Weiss 2009). Despite the diverse attempts at explaining what community policing is, there is a unison on the fact that community policing involves: multifunctionality, community, co-production, partnership, decentralization, flat hierarchy, service deserialization, grass roots policing, proactiveness (Skogan & Harnett, 1997; Skogan, 1990; Ponsaers, 2001). According to Cordner (1998) “Community policing strives for both citizens and law enforcement to be equal partners in the construction and implementation of policies aimed at ameliorating the neighborhood”.

Community policing was formally launched in Nigeria on 7th April 2004 to “provide an atmosphere in which the Police and law-abiding citizens can work in partnership to solve problems; share resources; prevent crime; promote inter-agency collaborations; bring offenders to justice; reduce conflict and improve the overall quality of community life”. (Department for International Development. British Council. Nigeria’s Security, Justice and Growth Programme. Community Policing Frequently Asked Questions, 2010)

Before the advent of modern-day Policing in Nigeria, communities had their own peculiar means of security and crime prevention. This means was the vigilante system and it consisted mostly of groups of men who were primarily hunters. Among the Igbos, such Vigilante group were known as ndi-nche, among the Hausas as yanbanga, and the Yorubas referred to them as olodes, among other names. (Ogbozor, 2016).

The Nigeria Police started in 1861 in Lagos when the then Consul Sir John Beecroft, requested and got the permission of the British government to set up a 30-man Consular Guard. Two years later in 1863, this Consular Guard was renamed the Hausa Police after its strength was increased to 600 men made up mostly of run-away slaves captured in Jebba by Lt. R.N. Glover. The Police during this time were used mainly to break up
labor strikes, suppress riots among disgruntled populace, and harass political opponents and unpopular elements of society. According to Iwar, 2018), between 1861 and 1960 the Police in Nigeria was used for the brutal suppression of indigenous people. The colonial administration used the Police to exploit and repress labour. According to Tamuno (1970), “in some cases, the Police used batons, rifles and revolvers to suppress, maim and kill persons who opposed colonial rules and policies” Tamuno further noted that “the Police earned the displeasure of some trade union leaders and members, a factor which did not promote good public relations as far as workers were concerned”. Alemika (1988, p161-164) further explained that the “colonial police force in Nigeria were organized and orientated to behave as occupational force – ruthless, brutal, corrupt, dishonest, prone to brutalizing the colonized people and vandalizing their properties.”

After independence, there was a gradual attempt at professionalizing the Police. The Police received professional trainings and had better equipment. Many foot patrols were replaced with patrol vehicles. There were also better communication equipment and almost all Police stations were linked with wireless communications systems. The focus of the Police at this time became the need to respond to crimes, faster and more professionally. Specialized Police departments were also set up such as the Police Mobile Squad otherwise known as MOPOL in Nigeria. The downside to all of this was that almost involuntarily, the Police began to alienate the community which it was meant to serve. The Police became reactionary and concentrated mainly on solving crimes, apprehending offenders and quelling riots and civil disobedience. The Mobile Police Squad (MOPOL) often used to quell riots and disturbances would do such with so much excessive force that they became notoriously known as “kill and Go”. The Police were not seen as being part of the community that they were serving rather they were perceived as dubious, corrupt, inept and brutal (Afolabi et all 2015). To fill the gap created by this negative impression of the Police, communities resorted to relying on Vigilante groups to provide policing function in the communities.

With the adoption of community policing in Nigeria, the Nigeria Police focused on partnering with these Vigilante groups as a means of policing communities. One of such Vigilante group is the Onyabo Vigilante group in Ikorodu community of Lagos State Nigeria. Much as it appears a desirable partnership, it was initially a marriage of two contrasting parties. Members of the Onyabo Vigilante group were composed of same members of the community who had hitherto held the Police with distrust and who now felt that the Police were coming to usurp a function they had hitherto been successfully carrying out. The Police on the other hand felt it was time that they played their policing roles closer to the community. (Elumeze 2020). Over time, this partnership between the
Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group has navigated tumultuous times and has become a strong force in the fight against crime in Ikorodu community of Lagos state Nigeria. (Elumeze 2020).

This study examines the principles that have guided the community policing partnership of the Nigeria Police and Vigilante groups in crime prevention. Using a face to face unstructured interview research method, this research explains these principles in light of the Broken Window and the Community Implant theories. These theories are discussed in the theoretical framework which comes later in the paper.

**Community Policing in Nigeria.**

Many police services all over the world have moved from traditional policing practice to a community-based system of policing or what Ponsaers (2001) refers to as the “real postmodern model of policing”. In Nigeria, the idea of community policing was formally launched by former President Olusegun Obasanjo on 27th April 2004.

The Community Policing project in Nigeria was facilitated by the British Department of International Development (DFID) through its Security, Justice and Growth (SJG) programme in 2003. It was one of the assistance programmes given by the British government to support Nigeria’s transition to democracy. Seven Police officers were sent to understudy how Community Policing was implemented in the United Kingdom (UK). The Policemen also undertook study tours in the Houston Police Departments, this time facilitated by the McArthur Foundation. On returning to Nigeria, these Policemen formed the Nigeria Community Policing Project Team. The Project team formulated a Community Policing Project Plan with the following aim:

“Provide an atmosphere in which the police and law-abiding citizens can work in partnership to: solve problems; share resources; prevent crime; promote inter-agency collaboration; bring offenders to justice; reduce conflict; and improve the overall quality of community life”.

The desire was that, the Nigeria Police Community policing model would be based on the following key principles:

- Community Policing relies upon active partnerships between the police and their communities
- It requires the police to be committed to high quality service delivery
- Community Policing emphasizes that appropriate skills, attitudes and behaviours of police personnel must to be developed and maintained to achieve
high quality service delivery, through a student-centred problem-solving approach to training, mentoring and re-training

- Community Policing requires the police to involve their communities in agreeing policing priorities
- It also entails the police to adopt a proactive problem-solving approach


The core values of the Nigeria Community Policing model are that the police will:

- Respect and protect human rights
- Be transparent and open in their policing functions
- Demonstrate commitment at all times to deliver best quality service
- Empower and communicate with all levels of police personnel, so that decision making is devolved as closely as possible to the point of service delivery
- Be willing to seek, listen to and act upon public opinion and perception
- Be accountable and answerable for what they do

The Project Team then went about sensitizing all ranks of the Nigeria Police through workshops and engagement sessions both in the state and Federal levels. It was estimated that 5000 participants attended these sessions and more than 50 Community Policing Developers (CPDs) were trained (Iwar, 2008). The CPD officials were then sent to selected Police divisions in Enugu State to train both the Police Station personnel and their community members on attitudinal change to community policing. The programme received strong support from the Enugu State Government, The Presidency, Senate Committee on Police Affairs, the Police Council, the Police Service Commission, The Senate Committee on Police Affairs, the Police Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives and the Nigeria Bar Association (Stone, Miller, Thornton & Trone, 2005).

When the programme was assessed as successful in Enugu, the then Inspector General of Police Sunday Ehindero gave approval for the programme to be replicated in five other states namely Benue, Jigawa, Kano, Ondo and Ogun States. President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2006 inaugurated a Presidential Committee on the reform of the Nigeria Police Force. The Committee headed by retired Deputy Inspector General of Police
Alhaji Muhammad Dan Mandami, had as its Term of Reference VII: To Examine the issue of Community policing and recommend how best it can be adapted and adopted in Nigeria.

The Committee observed the following:
“Community policing or problem-oriented policing has been evolving in the past two decades, as a response to the perceived inadequacies of the traditional model of policing. Growing crime rates have been blamed, in large part, on the ineffectiveness of the traditional policing method. Besides, a new economic framework that stresses less government role and more private initiatives in the economy, and private-public sector partnership in public administration has evolved, thus making a new policing model virtually imperative. The new model, community policing, emphasizes that effective prevention and control of crime can only be achieved through a strong partnership between the Police and Public. (Chukwuma, 2008)

At a meeting on April 2019 with Northern Traditional Rulers in Kaduna, President Muhammadu Buhari approved the adoption of community policing as a measure to check the increasing number of crimes in Nigeria. Based on the President’s approval, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammadu Adamu, introduced a new twist to community policing in Nigeria with the announcement that 40,000 Special Constables would be employed. The Nigeria Special Constable model is patterned after the Police Community Support Officers Standard in the United Kingdom. According to the Inspector General of Police, Such Special Constables would be drawn from communities where they reside, they would be expected to carry out functions like regular Policemen, including wearing same uniform and would be paid allowances by the Federal Government. They would be between 20 and 50 years old and can only act as special Constables within the community that they are employed in. They will be at each Police Station within their community and would help the Police in carrying out various duties as may be assigned to them. This recruitment was actualized with the passing out of 9694 special community policing constables from 14 training centers Nationwide in November 2020.

The Place of Vigilantism in the Security Setup of Nigeria
Vigilantism according to Kowaleski (2003) “refers to the activities of private citizens, or government employees acting off-duty in their private capacity, designed to suppress deviance by other citizens. By deviance is meant the beliefs and behaviours of citizens which differ significantly from the established social norms of a community. By established social norms are meant those expected patterns of beliefs and behaviours professed by the ruling elites of a community” Kowaleski further explained that the
deviance against which vigilantes mobilize may be of three types: criminal (e.g., neighborhood drug-dealing); cultural (e.g., hippie communes); or political (e.g., labor strikes) (Kowalewski, 1996a, 1996b). Vigilantism might be a lone person, who feels passionate about the need to correct a social deviance and so arms himself against the perceived deviance or a group of people who bands together to fight perceived deviances in their community.

Historically, Nigerian communities had groups of men who functioned as Vigilante groups. The groups were mostly hunters and who were charged with the responsibility of policing the communities. (Ogbozor, 2016). The hunters used the fear of retribution by the gods and the fact that they were quite conversant with the topographical layout of their community, to deter individuals who might be considering deviancy. Individuals who belonged to the hunter groups were expected to be mostly men, who were fearless and bold and possessed some level of “juju”.

With the arrival of the colonialists, they set up systems of Policing that was far more concerned with the protection of property and with the maintenance of social order than with the prevention or detection of crime. (Pratten, 2008). The Colonialists also started to gradually authorize the activities of Night Guards as a means of combating crimes such as burglary. All these were however ‘to a large extent directed at strengthening the ability of the colonial state to coerce an increasing number of industrial, agrarian and political opponents more effectively’ (Anderson & Killingray, 1991).

Scholars are divided over the reason for the increase of Vigilantism in Nigeria and the period where the increase occurred. Some claim that Vigilantism increased as a result of the increase in criminal activities, but scholars are divided on the period in Nigerian history when violent crimes increased. Some claimed that the increase in violent crimes occurred after the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war (Tamuno 1989, Fabiyi 2004) but Fourchard (2006) was of the opinion that contrary to the popular opinion that violent crime spiked after the Nigeria Civil war of 1957-1960, violent crime actually started in the 1930’s onwards and increased in the 1950’s with the proliferation of arms and motor cars. The Nigeria civil war simply exacerbated an already inflamed situation of violent crimes in Nigeria. Nolte (2008) believed that in Nigeria, “vigilantism expanded in response to the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s, the military oppression of the 1990s and the ‘godfather politics’ of the post-1999 civilian government”.

The military era quashed much of vigilantism in Nigeria. The Military frowned on Vigilantism along ethnic or communal lines as they were considered as threats to the authority of the Military Government, who termed them as dissidents. A typical
example was the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), a Vigilante group whose leaders were hanged, and the organization proscribed by the military government of General Sanni Abacha. With the advent of democratization in 1999, many hitherto suppressed Vigilante movements, now had a voice and were seen. Vigilante groups such as the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in Western Nigeria, Bakassi Boys in Eastern Nigeria and the Hisbah in Northern Nigeria, became more vocal in their respective regions of Nigeria.

As democracy grew, the newfound freedom came with more strain on the conventional Police so much that in many communities in Nigeria, the Police became impotent in curbing the rising rates of crimes. States started patronizing Vigilante groups to maintain law and order and prevent crime. Eastern Nigeria states such as Imo, Anambra and Abia State enacted laws, legalizing the activities of Bakassi Boys within their states. Anambra State enacted a law and established the Vigilante Services Coordinating Committee to oversee the activities of the Bakassi Boys in August 2000. (Anambra State Vigilante Services Law, 2000).

In 1999, a Vigilante group known as the National Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) was formed as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Benue State, Nigeria. It aimed at being a Nationwide Vigilante group, successfully cutting off the image of Vigilante groups in Nigeria being tribal and communal in focus. Among the functions of the group, would be the “promotion and application of the ideals and principles of community policing, in furtherance of proactive policing in Nigeria.” The Federal House of Assembly has given an accelerated hearing to a bill legalizing their existence. The bill is presently awaiting the endorsement of the President.

**Onyabo Vigilante Group**

Onyabo Vigilante group operates strictly within Ikorodu community of Lagos State Nigeria. It started as one man’s personal action to rid a community of crime. Kamorudeen Bambata had his motorcycle stolen and, in his anger and quest to recover his stolen motorcycle, he and his sons formed a local vigilante group in his community of Ikorodu. At this time, it was common occurrence for local market women (Alajapa) on their way to buy goods early in the mornings to be confronted by thieves and their money forcefully stolen from them. Kamorudeen Bombata and his band of vigilantes, would wear masks, line the routes often taken by these market women and help provide security for these market women. They enjoyed spontaneous acceptance from the generality of the community so much that when the Late King of Ikorodu Land, Oba Salaudeen Oyefusi wanted to initiate a local security group that would augment the efforts of Government security agencies in Ikorodu, Kamorudeen Bombata and his band
of vigilantes were invited by the King. The king tasked them with the responsibilities of ridding Ikorodu area of Cultists, Robbers, and Killers and generally preventing crimes within Ikorodu Community. The Group officially started operation in 2002.

At inception, Onyabo Vigilante Group was known as Ikorodu Community Security Group and because when attending to security issues, the group would move in mass (Onyabo), the group soon adopted the name. Over the years, the Group has made outstanding successes in Crime prevention within Ikorodu. Such successes include the capture of EfunLadega, a notorious Armed Robber in 2009 and the arrest in 2010 of SP, a wanted cultist and killer.

Administratively, Onyabo Vigilante Group is divided into 29 Zones all within Ikorodu Area. Each Zone has a Zonal Commander. Membership is restricted to Males only and there are over One thousand full time members and about 460 others employed as Local Guards all within Ikorodu. A direct line of partnership exists between the Group and the 6 divisional Police Stations in Ikorodu (Igbogbo, Sagamu, Owutu, Ipakodo, Ijede and Imota). This relationship has overtime yielded great successes; most notably was the curbing of the dreaded “Badoo” Cult Killings within Ikorodu.

Theoretical Framework

The guiding principles of the Community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and Vigilante groups is examined in light with the Broken Windows theory and the Community Implant Theory. In an article by James Quinn Wilson and George Lee Kelling titled “Broken Windows” in the March 1982 edition of “The Atlantic Monthly”. They postulated what became known as the Broken Windows Theory. The pair used a broken window as a metaphor for incubators of crime in a community. To them, disorders and incivilities in a community create a fertile ground for crime to breed in a community. In their words, “Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaird; all the rest of the windows will soon be broken” (Wilson & Kelling 1982).

The scholars suggested that one way of eliminating serious crimes in communities was to repair those “broken windows”. According to them, broken windows in communities include locations where the drunks and disorderly and youths often gathered. They postulated that people living in such communities expressed fear not because actual crimes had occurred in those locations but the fact that such areas bred disorderliness and incivilities. The scholars noted that the people living in such communities often called police to intervene and clear such dark spots but that the Police that came often arrived in patrol cars, arrested few erring youths and left. This fact that the Police did
not patrol these areas often, created a feeling of dissatisfaction against the Police. Wilson and Keeling suggested that foot patrols created a greater feeling of safety in the heart of the community members, because the Police now became closer to the people and established overtime, a sense of order and what is acceptable or not in a section of the community that they patrolled.

Rosenbaum (1987) first presented the Community Implant theory in his essay “Theory and Research behind Neighbourhood Watch”, where he argued that one of the major reasons why there is a high incidence of crimes in any community, is the absence of informal social controls within that community. He argued that informal social control can be implanted through a collective will of members of that community. He further stated that to prevent crime, there were two forms of control: Formal control, which are backed by formal laws and rules and enforceable by the police and courts, and the informal social controls which are derived from norms and culture and are enforceable by the members of a community through verbal warnings, surveillance, reprimands and other means of ensuring conformity. The issue of community policing then becomes a question of if the police can work with the community to implant social controls within communities where social controls are lacking. The theory calls for greater partnership between the Police and the community and suggests foot patrol of beats by Police as a means of strengthening community building and helping the police. Silver and Miller (2004), noted that attempts to “implant” informal social control in urban communities where social control is poor or non-existent, can be achieved by better Police-community relations. They also argued that a better strategy to ensure a crime free community was to convince members of a community that the Police were willing to work with the community in solving the issue of crime.

**Methodology**

The study adopted qualitative methodology. A total of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews held with Divisional Police Officers (DPO) of each of the Six Divisional Police Stations within Ikorodu (Igbogbo, Sagamu Road, Owutu, Ipakodo, Ijede and Imota) and the 29 Zonal Commands of Onyabo Vigilante Group within Ikorodu community. These population were purposively sampled given their knowledge of the subject of study. The sampled population are not just knowledgeable they are also key actors involved in decision-making in the partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo vigilante group in Ikorodu. Data gathered were qualitatively analysed using descriptive and narrative styles.
Findings and Discussion

Respondents demonstrated good knowledge of what community policing involves. Significant percentage – 93 percent – indicated they had received formal training in community policing. They claimed that the training was organized by the Nigeria Police through the Police Community Relations Committee. This produced a strong partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo at Ikorodu. Respondents – 100% - claimed that in the process of crime prevention, both organisations had partnered. Evidence suggested that various security challenges including the Badoo cult activities and kidnappings were addressed through the collaboration of the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante Group (OVG). On principles guiding community policing and crime prevention, respondents – 94% of respondents (6 Police and 27 Onyabo Vigilante group members) – suggested that such principles are clear and properly articulated in their activities. On the other hand, significant percentage of respondents demonstrated the principles in community policing partnership in crime prevention in the following ways: partnership (97%), defined roles and functions (97%), clear communication between both partners (94%), community involvement in crime prevention (88%), and respect for human rights and rules of engagement (80%).

Following the above, findings of the study revealed that the community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group is based on five major principles. These principles have acted as the bedrock of how the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group have partnered in crime prevention. The principles are as presented above are further explained below.

On the principle of partnership, respondents suggested that the relationship was a partnership and not a rivalry. They claimed that both the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group are complimentary to the other, with joint goals. In their actions, even though the Nigeria Police are the constituted body charged with crime prevention, it recognizes the vital role that Onyabo Vigilante group plays in community policing and crime prevention within Ikorodu community. People within Ikorodu community still find it preferable to report local security issues to the Onyabo Vigilante group, who will assess such reports, resolve those that require simple mediations and those that cannot be managed through mediation or criminal complaints, are handed over to the Police.

Defined roles and functions: The Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group have defined roles and functions in community policing and crime prevention. For example, while Onyabo Vigilante group can perform local surveillances of the community, gather local intelligence and even arrest offenders, it cannot investigate crimes or prosecute
criminals. This principle of defined roles and functions eases the partnership of the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group and allows both party work as complimentary partners in crime prevention within Ikorodu community.

Clear communication between both partners: Another principle guiding the community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group Ikorodu, is open and clear communication between both parties. There is prompt sharing of security sensitive information. Each party had knowledge of how to communicate directly with the other. Also, both parties openly shared information and intelligence gathered.

Community involvement in crime prevention: Another principle guiding the community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group, is that individual members of the larger Ikorodu community are also involved in crime prevention. The Nigeria Police are aware that they alone cannot prevent crimes, while Onyabo Vigilante group recognizes that they are in more direct contact with individuals in the community and so can easily get such individuals involved in crime prevention. This community involvement in crime prevention has helped to a large degree in preventing crimes within Ikorodu community.

Respect for human rights and rules of engagement: Respect for human rights and strict adherence to the rules of engagement is a major principle of the partnership between the Nigeria Police and Onyabo Vigilante group. The bane of Nigeria Police inability to prevent crime in the past has been the people’s apathy towards the police because of the people’s perception of the Police as violators of human rights and who used excessive force in preventing crime. This negative image has changed gradually because the Police now have greater respect for human rights and rules of engagements are respected in crime prevention. This respect for human rights and rules of engagement has been retained and adopted as a guiding principle of the Nigeria Police’s partnership with Onyabo Vigilante group.

Findings from the study corroborates the assertions of James Quinn Wilson and George Lee Kelling (1982) “Broken Windows” theory and Rosenbaum (1987) Community Implant theory. Both theories called for a community policing partnership between the Police and the community the Police serves in order to rid such community of crimes. Both theories also advocated for a defined partnership between the Police and members of the community. Wilson and Kelling (1982) called for the adoption of foot patrols of communities and that it is only by so doing that the community would partner with the Police in pointing out dark spots within the community while such partnership would
aid the Police to establish their authority in crime prone areas of the community. Rosembaum (1987) also called for a partnership between the Police and communities in order to implant social controls.

Conclusion
The community policing partnership between the Nigeria Police and members of the Onyabo Vigilante group is guided by some principles, which has defined how both parties in the partnership relates in preventing crime in the Ikorodu community. These guiding principles are partnership, defines roles and functions, community involvement in crime prevention, clear communication between both partners and respect for human rights and rules of engagement. The Nigeria Police and scholars are continually researching to fashion out policy directions that would help tailor community policing to achieve its primary aim of carry along the community the Police serves. An observance of these principles would in a great way, help achieve this objective. The efforts of the recently graduated 9694 community policing special constables from 14 training schools across Nigeria would be further complemented if these guiding principles are observed and respected. Community policing is still an emerging policing model in Nigeria as such, further researches would be needed in areas such as its administration, impediments and methods of implementation.

References


