

The Role of Local Government towards Crime Prevention and Control in Nigeria

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Abstract: Local government by hierarchy of superiority, has the lower rank among the three tiers of government, but invariably the most significant unit. This is because local government is more closer to the people at the grass root level. The closeness to the people in the society create an avenue to have the full knowledge of each and every family, which pave so many ways of improving the personal lives of the people and have quick access to solutions of the problem affecting the society. Crime prevention and control can only be successfully accomplished with the help of the local government authorities. This paper shall seek to examine the roles local government plays in preventing and controlling of crime in the nation, and lastly proffer solutions to them.

Keywords: Autonomy, Crime Prevention, Crime Control.

INTRODUCTION

Crime prevention and control is an issue of concern to almost all societies in the globe, due to the frequent rise in the commitment rate of crime. Research has shown that, Africa and Americas are highest continents with crime rates in the world [1]. This is because, in these continents, the murder rates is higher when compared to other regions. For example, Americas murder rates, according to UNODC [1] report stand at 16.3 per 100,000 people, and Africa is 12.5 per 100,000 which is quit greater than the worldwide average of 6.2 per 100,000 people. The most disturbing issue is that, the rates of crimes are still increasing in most of the countries within these continents [4]. Furthermore, It is projected that nearly a third of the world killings committed in 2012 happened in Africa [1]. Six African countries – Nigeria, South Africa, South Sudan, Libya and Kenya are ranked among the twenty nation-states with the highest number of crime rates in the world as of 2015 and in that same year, Africa was ranked the second in terms of regional murder rates [2].

According to Dambazau [3] Nigeria has been on the world crime map since 1980s. The types of crimes that are very common in country ranges from homicide, armed robbery, rape, housebreak, car theft, fraud, drug and food abuse, bribery and corruption, gambling, kidnapping, smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, cyber crime, money laundering, advanced fee fraud (419) and more recent ones including oil bunkering and the Boko Haram killings. 16 Available statistics from UNODC [1] reveals that, the rate of murder in Nigeria stand at 20 per 100,000 people

in 2012. Based on the data from the law enforcement agents [5] the number is on the rise, especially in crimes like homicide, corruption, kidnapping, theft and other forms of ferocity [5]. A recent 2015 investigation carried out by Afrobarometer [6] discovered that 39 percent of Nigerians felt insecure in their neighborhoods and 33 percent had some anxiety about crime happening in their households.

The high number of crimes in Nigeria can be explained by the instability and failure, as well as historic dynamics which include inter-ethnic, intra/ inter religious prejudices. Other factors include poverty, corruption, unemployment and the effects of improved successes of anti-drug law enforcement in Europe and the Caribbean also increased drug trafficking in West Africa sub-region [7]. Crime weakens the social fabric by corroding the sense of protection and security. It affects the society in many ways depending on the nature and degree of the crime committed. It creates a problem when its occurrence is so rampant in the society as it constitute a menace to the security of people and property, as well as social order and harmony [8]. Crime constitute a threat to the economic, political and social security of a country and a major factor related to underdevelopment; because it discourages both local and foreign investments, decreases the quality of life, destroys human and social capital, damages relationship between citizens and the states, consequently undermining rule of law, democracy, and the ability of the country to uphold development [9].

The Nigerian government has put in place various safety and anti-corruption mechanisms such as the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the State Security Service (SSS), the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps [10]. Other measures employed by the Nigerian government to address issues of crime include safety programs and schemes in the Nigerian Police Force, which consist among others, Operation Lafia Dole, Operation Burst, Operation Crocodile Tears, Operation Sweep to mention but a few [4]. Although there is a reduction in the number of killings by the Boko Haram, notwithstanding, there is still need to intensify efforts to prevent and control crime in the country.

It is on the above backdrop that, this paper is designed to find out what possible role the local government being the third tier and the level that is closest to people will play in preventing and controlling crimes in the country. The paper is therefore structured into six sections. Section one is the introduction, section two is the conceptual clarification, section three discusses the role of local government in preventing and control of crime in Nigeria, while part five deals with the challenges faced by local government in preventing and control of crime. The last section highlighted on the policy implication, way forward and conclusion.

Conceptual clarification

Crime

Like other concepts in social sciences, it is very difficult to define. In some cultures, crime means any act that causes a disturbance of order and a deterioration of public safety. In other societies, crime constitutes a steady descent into social disorder because it rests on the society [8]. Sociologically, crime is seen as anti social conduct or behavior that disrupts the norms of society. A norm is any normal or rule concerning what human beings should or should not think, say or do, under given circumstances [8]. In criminal law, crime refers to any act or omission which entices sanctions such as imprisonment, fines, or even death [9]. This definition concurred with that of Dambazau [11] who views crime as an act or omission contrary to public interest, and which is prescribed by act passed by the parliament in the general interests of the society, and to which prescribed penalty is attached in the occasion of violation and it involves four basic values which are moral wrong, public wrong, law and punishment for the criminal. Criminologists conclude that crime has two major features (1) A criminal action which is either a commission or an omission and (2) mental element which is known as the criminal intent/committed. The two features may pose serious danger to the physical life and property and mental health of the people. Therefore, crimes must have these

two features because in the absence of one, then there is no crime [8].

Crime Prevention

Australian Institute of Criminology AIC, [12] define Crime prevention as the variety of approaches that are applied by individuals, societies, industries, non-government institutions and all tiers of government to target the numerous social and ecological influences that upsurge the danger of crime, disorder and persecution. Crime prevention is those actions that are intended to prevent or reduce the incidence of a particular type of crime. This can be done through altering the environs in which they happen, or by superseding more approximately to alter the social or other circumstances which are supposed to have fundamental implication with respect to them. According to [5] decreasing rate of crime also stresses a process of analysis to control the source of specific types of criminal activities as well as the harmonization of resources and abilities of a variety of role players to implement and develop suitable interferences [13]. Crime prevention also refers to the distraction of instruments, that causes crime. Crime prevention is also defined as the design of attitudes and actions directed at both decreasing the danger of crime and improving the sense of protection and security to definitely influence the quality of life and to develop situations where crime cannot commit [9] Criminologists have outlined three perceptions of crime prevention which are primary, secondary and tertiary preventions [9].

(1) Primary Prevention: Under this approach, societies try to alter ecological circumstances that provide chances for the incidence of criminal actions. At this phase, the main focus is police are the and three major issues involved are (a) increasing the determination, increasing the danger of committing crime, and decreasing the reward for the likely offender.

(2) Secondary prevention: At this stage, effort are intensify to change people, particularly those at high risk of getting on criminal occupation before they do so. The agents of this secondary crime prevention include; The mass media, various agencies and organizations like Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and public enlightments. (3) Tertiary Prevention: At this phase, the actual offender is the main focus. The aim is to prevent future occurrence of the criminal acts. It also aimed at total eradication of the criminal acts. Prisons and probation homes are the agents involved in this stage.

Causes of Crime

According to Archibong et al [8] Crime results from a mixture of various factors. He said the commitment of crime is generally based on three features: (1) those of the offender (2) those of the potential victim, and (3) those of the environs where a crime is expected to be committed. The environment

here, consist of the inhabitant of the area, physical location, and happenings in an area that might discourage or inspire the offender in his or her activities [14]. argued that crime are caused by unemployment, poverty, poor shelter as well as other social features such as poor social interaction and socialization in which the adolescences try to imitate to the existing norms of their that exist either in their households or peer-groups. Dambazau [11] also posits that criminal activities was learned, not an hereditary trait. In addition, disclosure to crime, both through relations or peers, give a youth unfulfilled with his or her societal status a choice to partake in crime. These bad effects could be reduced by good relations with parents, teachers/ lecturers, community or an employer. Archibong *et al.* [8] argued that social changes taking place in Nigeria such as an industrial industrialization and urbanization as well as its associated family and social unsteadiness have influenced crime levels. They further claim that such a poor society, family and economic setting could lead to all kinds of crime.

Local government

As mentioned earlier, local government is the third tier of government, which is more closer to the people. According to Adeyemo [15] local government is the act of diffusing power, in form of devolution or Deconcentration. Devolution means the handover of authority to local government entities or special statutory bodies. While Deconcentration has to do with the delegation of power to field units of the same department. From this background one can view local government as a smaller unit in the national polity. It is an administrative mechanism through which authority and control relate to the people at the periphery or the grassroots. Awa [16] defines local government as an administrative authority set up by a state or nation as a sub-ordinate authority in a view to disperse or decentralized political power. In Nigeria, we have about 775 local governments cut across the 36 states and expected to perform a range of functions which includes among others administrative, economic, social and security functions.

The Role of Local Government in Prevention and Control of Crime

Local government in Nigeria suppose to play a dominant role in the plan, organization and delivery of crime prevention and control programs and policies just as was in the case in Australia. In a research conducted by an Australian Instiutte of Criminolgy [12], it was discovered that, Local government is the central agency in the development of local crime prevention and control plans, which recognize and prioritize anxieties about community safety and crime prevention and control in a local government area, and recognize key action areas and responsibility for these activities. Local crime prevention and control plans offer a valuable framework to better organize various creativities directed at the causes of crime, enable improved

Collaboration and cooperation between main stakeholders, and ensure an all-inclusive approach to local crime problems [17]. The report further argued that, they are vital mechanisms for engaging the local community in plans and policies to address local crime and safety problems. The report supported its arguments with the following facts;

1. That, research has revealed that a great deal of crime is very local in nature, and there is every an indication about the increased efficiency of crime prevention and control activities initiated at the local level;
2. That, Local government stands the chance to manage and coordinate crime prevention and control responses within the community through its existing machineries such as community counseling processes;
3. That, Local government is the closest level of government to and reflective of the needs and aspirations of the people. So, there is a great expectation from the community that local government will shoulder some level of responsibility for directing or initiating plans for social problems that are seen to be affecting the community safety.
4. That, Local government often has the most suitable management substructure and skill base for conveying the multi-agency programs that are often required.

In a related development, the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime prevention and criminal justice [7] posited that, governments are gradually associating with communities and civic society organizations to prevent crime and control due to their information and experience of local crime issues and the ability to reach out to susceptible, vulnerable sections of the society. Therefore, community participation has become an important element of crime prevention and control in all types of partnerships concerning metropolises, schools, the law enforcement agents, the private sector, health and social services. Local communities can participate in the handling, reintegration and rehabilitation of criminals through programs under which the criminals are provisionally released or after they rejoin the society. This shows that, local governments are important avenues through which plans and strategies of crime control and prevention can be directed, in order to achieve the desired results.

In their contribution to the debate, Achu, Owan, Uyang and Francis [18] submitted that, local communities can play a very significant role toward prevention and control of social due to the facts that, the local communities posses various networks used in combatting crimes. Such networks include; the councils of elders, village /district heads, chiefs, religious heads etc. whose functions was to explain and impart the community's code of conduct and behavior

to younger once as pass down from generations to generation. They further disclosed that, although the local communities are not civilized when compared to the western societies, but notwithstanding they have a well reliable traditions for preventing and controlling crime and maintaining peace. The above view concurred with that Akintola [19] who argued that, the traditional approaches of crime prevention and control, although primitive but nonetheless were very useful in its true sense. According to him, urbanization and industrialization were the factors the led to the disengagement of local communities from taking active part in crime prevention and control.

Challenges of Local government in preventing and controlling crimes in Nigeria

However, it should be understood that, the literature on crime prevention and control while admitting the important role of Local Government, also acknowledges Local Government's limited ability to effect change especially in countries like Nigeria. Research has shown that local government, has little or minimal control over the actions of the other levels of government working at the local level and even less control over higher level resource allocation or policies that may have an influence on crime in their communities. The Local government has more control over issues that affects the opportunities for crime to occur through its various responsibilities in areas of its jurisdiction, such as providing community recreational services and developing strategies that affect local issues [12]. Other challenges include;

Lack of autonomy

Autonomy might be referred to as 'a total or relative self control, or governance by a geographical unit'. It is a term found in ethical political, and biomoral philosophy. Within these paradigms, it is the ability of a rational person to make a well-versed, uncoerced judgment Bokovoy, Irvine, & Lilly [20]. According to Achu, Owan, Uyang and Francis [18], Local Government autonomy simply means local self government, local government independence or grassroots democracy. This local self government is mainly aimed at providing the enormous majority of the people the fullest chance to partake in deciding their own destiny. But it is clear that this cannot be possible especially in Nigeria and will hinderes the effective performance of local governments in terms of crime prevention and control.

Lack of adequate funding

This is a big challenge to local government in Nigeria. The local government are not adequately funded even though some times fund may be provided but it may be diverted. The issue of joint account also play a significant role in this direction.

Inadequate equipment

Equipment here refers to the tools that will be use to prevent and control crime. The local government lack modern equipment to effectively control and prevent crime. In a situation when the necessary equipment needed to carry out effective work of combating crime are lacking or obsolete it will very difficulty to achieve the desired goal and this will equally give room for increase in the crime rate.

Corruption

As we know, Corruption has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. The local government is known not to be excluded from this irresponsible behavior. Funds released to the local government for the purpose crime control and prevention may be diverted into private pockets. This can hinder the performance of local government toward discharging its duties [9].

Poverty

Poverty is the condition of an individual who lacks a certain amount of material properties or money [9]. It can either be absolute poverty or relative, absolute poverty is a state of one who lacks basic human needs, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, sanitation, and education. Relative poverty on the other hand, refers to the economic disparity in the society or location in which people reside [8, 9, 11]. In Nigeria, the level of poverty is very high, especially in the rural areas and this has led to an increase in anti social activities. Some of the criminals indulged in the act just to make ends meet and consequently, the local government is incapable of discharging this role due to the enlarge people involvement in crime acts.

Adaptation of traditional institutions to modern local structure

This a challenge to local government in Nigeria in efforts to prevent and control crime. Traditional institutions are being neglected because the constitution did not specified any meaningful functions to be plaid by the traditional rulers and this people command the respect of the citizens, especially in the rural areas they also has the experience on how to prevent and control crime in their domeins.

The Way forward

Traditional institutions should be integrated in the mainstream of grassroots administration, through given the traditional rulers a meaningful role by the constitution. This will motivate them to give their full contribution towards crime control and prevention.

One of the main problems of local government is lack of adequate finance, and the lack of accountability to the little generated revenue in the local units. Therefore, to implement crime prevention plans, there is the need for the local councils to have a strong

economic base, and have a stringent scrutiny in the local expenditure by the relevant auditory agencies and Financial Crime Commission.

Furthermore, Local government should have representation Revenue Allocation and Fiscal Commission, which determines and shares the federated revenue to the beneficiaries. The issue of joint account should be supervised by the relevant auditory units and other authorities such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Commission (ICPC).

Local government should promote integrated spatial and socio-economic development that is socially just and equal for entire people in the community.

CONCLUSION

Crime happens due to multiple factors, which may include; unemployment, poverty, poor shelter as well as other social features such as poor socialization and social interaction in which the adolescences try to emulate the obtainable norms of their households or peer-groups. However, criminal behaviors are learned, not a hereditary characteristic. This brings to the timely intervention by the parents and closer authorities which is local government. As the third tier of government, local government has a significant role to play, in the prevention and control of crime in the society from the grassroots.

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