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Repositioning the Nigerian Police Force for Sustainable National Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to appraise the Nigerian Police Force as a law enforcement agency of the federal government of Nigeria, which is saddled with the mandate of ensuring internal security. The research adopted a multi-dimensional approach of research by employing the use of participant observation and historical research approaches. It highlighted the historical development of the Nigeria Police Force, and also gave a comprehensive overview of the force. Some of the problems bedeviling the force were enumerated, and strategies that should be implemented to surmount these problems were also rendered.

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, Police, Force, Development, National, Sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is the federal government department which has the sole responsibility of coordinating the activities of the police and policing in Nigeria. According to section 214 (1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Police Acts and Regulations (Cap 359) part II subsection 3, it stipulates that there shall be established for Nigeria a police force to be known as the Nigeria Police Force. Therefore, the Nigeria Police Force is a legitimate creation of the constitution, and the force has monopoly over the internal security of Nigeria. In other words, there is only one Nigerian Police Force in Nigeria. In other countries, there are state and even private owned police. This is however not obtainable in Nigeria. The primary function of the police everywhere in the world is for the maintenance of public order, prevention and detection of crime. The police also have the sole responsibility of the protection of lives and property of its citizens. Therefore, the role of the police in the society cannot be over-emphasised.

Odekunle (1981) pointed that what metamorphosed into the Nigeria Police Force started as far back as 1861, following the taking over of Lagos by the British colonial government. At that time, the British colonial masters found it expedient to float a security group that will provide the peaceful and secured environment which is needed for their smooth operation. The British Consul who administered Lagos deemed it fit to establish a Consular Guard

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

by the Police Act of 1861 which helped to maintain law and order. A Consular Guard which comprised of 30 men was established in 1863. The guard was made up of mostly people from the Hausa speaking tribe, hence, it was renamed Hausa Guard (Alemika, 2003). According to Obaro (2014), it was further regularised in 1879 by an ordinance creating a 'constabulary' for the colony of Lagos. This led to the Hausa Guard been known as the Hausa Constabulary, and was mainly military in character, though it performed some police (civil) duties. An Inspector- General of Police headed the Hausa constabulary recruited mainly from the Hausa ethnic group.

Another force called the Lagos Police Force was created in 1896 and armed like the Hausa Constabulary (Obaro, 2014). While the developments were taking place in Lagos and part of the Yoruba heartland, the geo-political area which is today known as south-south, which includes the states of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers states were declared the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1891 with Headquarters at Calabar where an armed constabulary was also formed (Obaro, 2014). And in 1893 the Oil Rivers Protectorate was proclaimed the Niger Coast, and a constabulary modeled on the Hausa Constabulary was floated to maintain law and order. It existed for six years and featured prominently in the British expedition to Benin in 1896. In the Northern parts of the Country, the Royal Niger Company which was granted a Royal Charter in 1886 by the British government set up the Royal Niger Constabulary in 1888 with Headquarters at Lokoja to protect its installations along the banks of the River Niger (Obaro, 2014).

It was reported by Obaro (2014) that the Royal Niger Constabulary was instrumental in British campaigns against Bida and Ilorin. In 1900, the British government after proclaiming the Northern and Southern Protectorates split the Royal Niger Constabulary into the Northern Nigeria Police Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment; while in the Lagos Police Force and part of the Niger Coast Constabulary became the Southern Nigeria Police Force in 1906, while the bulk of the Niger Coast Constabulary formed the Southern Nigeria Regiments (Obaro, 2014). The mandates of the new police forces were to carry out normal civil police duties, and to combat internal disturbance and external aggression. It should be noted that the police forces operated separately and independently, even after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914. Not until 1930 when they were merged to form the present Nigeria Police Force with Headquarter in Lagos (Obaro, 2014).

The numerous police forces during the colonial period were supervised by the local governments or what is then called native authorities. In 1943 the Northern and the Western regions of Nigeria established their own regional police. In the 1960s, under the First Republic, these forces were first regionalized and then nationalized. In 1968, all the police forces under the native authority were all merged into the Nigeria Police Force (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000). The Nigeria Police Force performed conventional police functions and was responsible for internal security generally (Obaro, 2014).

The Nigerian Police Force had evolved from a humble and crude beginning of about 30

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

staff into a multi-force system comprising of a staff strength of about 371,800 (Wikipedia, 2015). Presently, the Nigerian Police Force is responsible for internal security generally, and also supports other sister security agencies like the prisons, civil defence, road safety, immigration, drug law enforcement agency and the custom services. The force also performs military duties both in Nigeria and elsewhere. The Nigeria police personnel have participated in various peacekeeping efforts in Africa and other parts of the world. Also, the force is prominent in the fight against insurgency and militancy that has ravaged some parts of Nigeria.

With the progression of the Nigerian society, especially with the advent of the current democratic system of government, novel and sophisticated forms of violent crimes have emerged and the society has become more insecure with many people getting involved in diverse sophisticated criminal activities (Otto and Ukpere, 2012). This phenomenon has affected the Nigerian Police Force because it is not able to cope with the bulk of its constitutional responsibility. This has led the government to establish other law enforcement agencies such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) which is charged with the responsibility of protecting public property and government installations. They are also to assist in the process of law enforcement and maintenance of law and order in the country. Also, the Economic, Financial and Crime Commission (EFCC) is established and empowered to fight financial crimes; while the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) to tackle corruption and its perpetrators. Others like the National Drug and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) is saddled with the responsibility of combating illegal drug business; the National Agency for Trafficking in Persons (NATIP) tackles human trafficking, and so on. There are also Private Security Companies which have been given constitutional approval through the Private Security Act to assist in the security business and their activities are supervised by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (Inyang and Abraham, 2013). These sister security agencies complement the functions of the Nigerian Police Force in the provision of internal security, and maintenance of law and order in the society.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopted the multidimensional approach of research. Hence, the research made use of the ethnographic research survey which involves participant observation and historical methods. The observational technique provides the researchers with the ability to perceive events as they occur in an experiential manner. Again, this approach provides the researchers with the chance to accurately summarize; systematize and simplify the discourse at hand.

The historical approach on the other hand enables the researchers to engage in critical analysis and scrutiny of the events and developments in the Nigeria Police Force across time and space. It evaluates past and current developments in the Nigerian Police force and allows the researchers to chart a better course forward. It is in this context that the participant observation and the historical approaches are adopted as appropriate tools and instruments for appraising the Nigerian Police force (Berger, 2000).

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

AN OVERVIEW OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE

The Police Service Commission and the Ministry of Police Affairs oversee the control and supervision of the Nigerian Police Force. The Ministry of Police Affairs oversees the budget and expenditure of the force, while the Police Service Commission is responsible for appointment, promotion and discipline of all police officers except the Inspector General of Police. There is also the Nigeria Police Council which is headed by the President. The council is solely responsible for policy making.

According to the Wikipedia (2015), the Nigerian Police Force maintains a three-tier administrative structure of departments, zonal and state commands who are under the supervision of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP). The Inspector-general of Police is the operational and administrative head of the Nigerian Police Force. He or she is appointed by the President and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to maintain law and order. The headquarters of the Nigerian Police force is located in Abuja in the popular Lious Edet house. The Inspector General is supported by seven Deputy Inspectors-General of Police (DIGs) who head the seven (7) departments of the force namely; Finance and Administration, Operations, Logistics and Supply, Criminal Investigation, Training, Information and Communication Technology, as well as the department of Planning, Research and Development.

There are 12 zonal commands headed by Assistant Inspectors General (ACG). The zones are in Kano, Lagos, Yola, Makurdi, Benin, Calabar, Abuja, Lokoja, Umuahia, Sokoto, Osogbo, and Bauchi. The zonal headquarters comprises of two or more state commands. The state commands are headed by Commissioners of Police (CP). There are 36 state and FCT commands. The state commands are made up of the different area and divisional commands. There are other specialized units of the Nigerian Police Force which cannot be overlooked. One of them is the Mobile Police Force, which was established as a strike force. It is an anti-riot unit which is under the control of the IGP to counter civil disturbances and major crisis which the conventional police personnel can surmount. There are also the Police canine unit, the traffic unit, the anti-terrorism unit, medical unit, education unit and other specialized units that serve as supportive staff.

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) also has training institutions for staff training and development. Recruits are trained in the Police colleges in Enugu, Maiduguri, Kaduna, and Ikeja. There is also a Police Staff College for the training of senior officers in Jos and the Police Academy in Wudil, Kano. There are also in-service training schools, including the Police Mobile Training Centre in Gwoza near Maiduguri, the Police Detective College in Enugu, the Police Dogs Service Training Centre, and Mounted Training Centre in Jos (Wikipedia, 2015).

PROBLEMS OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE

The problems of the Nigerian Police Force are numerous. They include, but not limited to the following:

Corruption: Police corruption is a major problem of the Nigerian Police Force. Police

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

personnel are known to demand stipends as bribe from commuters and drivers on the highways. Armed officers of the Nigerian Police Force are seen openly extorting money at checkpoints, while top officers of the force embezzle public funds. Infact, corruption has been institutionalized in Nigeria. Corruption and extortion are widespread among the members of the Nigerian Police Force and have soiled the image of the force. This is the major problem of the Nigerian Police Force and it has really affected policing and security generally in Nigeria. Criminals and law breakers get away with their crimes as long as they are able to bribe their ways.

Poor funding: The Nigerian Police Force is grossly underfunded and this has taken a huge toll on their operational efficiency. Funding of the police is the exclusive responsibility of the federal government. A visit to any police station in Nigeria will reveal the decay inherent in the force. Most police stations have no patrol vehicles, and when such is available, they are poorly maintained. It is reported that the Nigerian police have only 5900 serviceable vehicles as against the over 40, 000 recommended vehicular need of the force (Osun Defenders, 2011). At present, there is a shortfall of about 35,000 vehicles. The Nigerian Police Force has only four helicopters in its fleet, three of which are operational. One is reserved for use at the police headquarters in Abuja. This is grossly inadequate. Nigeria is a very large country, and only four choppers cannot cover its entire land mass. Again, in terms of arms and ammunition, the force is nothing to write about. While the Nigerian police rely on AK47 rifles, bandits use more sophisticated weapons. Worse still, policemen in other countries make use of magnetic vests that can divert bullets from other parts of the body, but their counterparts in Nigeria do not have them.

Poor intelligence gathering
Modern policing relies heavily on intelligence gathering to combat crime. For any police around the world to be successful, it must be proactive. It must be one step ahead of the criminal. With the sophistication of crime, it is only basic that the police must rely heavy on intelligence gathering. However, the Nigerian police force is lacking in this regards. The force still operates from a very crude form. There are no equipment and trained personnel to gather information on crime.

Lack of Modern security and forensic gadgets
In the advanced countries, police use modern technology to combat crime. Elsewhere, police has graduated from the use of crude equipments to the use of modern gadgets like the closed circuit television (CCTV) and hi-tech scanners that can identify and/or foul crime at a snap of the finger. Also, there are no forensic laboratories and data banks which can aid in combating crime. In Nigeria, however, the police are not equipped with these gadgets thereby making them handicapped. This results to a prolonged investigation which may never be concluded. And that is why in some instances, foreign experts are invited to carry out investigation on some crimes committed herein.

Faulty recruitment process
This is one of the major problems bugging down the Nigerian police Force. The recruitment process into the force is marred by horse-trading and sentimentalities.

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

People are recruited based on who are their godfathers, thereby recruiting misfits and bad eggs into the force. Police is a noble profession, and policemen are supposed to have high level of integrity, and be moral as law enforcers. However, the reverse is the case in Nigeria, as policemen display crass hooliganism and many of them born criminals. This is because many of them do not go through the rigours of proper recruitment.

Sadism, Public brutality and Harassment

The relationship between the police and the general public in Nigeria is very poor. The public perceive the police to be hostile, brutal and sadists. There are numerous cases of extra-judicial killing of innocent citizens by the police. These repressive attitudes of the police have led to a cat-and-rat relationship between the police and the public which they are supposed to protect. This has hampered the divulgement of vital information to the police by the members of the public, owing to the fact that they are afraid of the police. According to Akuul (2011), the autocratic leadership (which Nigeria has practiced) and the repressive laws have made the police to act outside the rule of law. The police have in most cases been laws themselves, maiming innocent citizens, arresting and detaining persons arbitrary and with impunity. Political opponents of governments, workers, student's radicals and human rights activist have always suffered excessive waves of brutalities, abductions, unwarranted searches and violations of privacy, extra-judicial killings, bodily injury and intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of police (Akuul, 2011).

Lack of synergy with other security agencies

This is another serious problem bedeviling the Nigerian Police Force- the lack of synergy between the police and other sister security agencies. Most at times, incidences of face-offs between policemen and personnel of other security agencies occur. There is lack of camaraderie between the police and other military and paramilitary agencies. For instance, in 2013, following a face-off, two officers of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were shot dead by the police (Vanguard, 2013). Also in the same year, there was altercation between the police and personnel of the Nigerian Prisons Service in Owerri, south-east Nigeria (The Nation, 2013). In 2012, in Lagos, there was a bloody fisticuff between men of Nigeria military and the police (Daily Independent, 2011). There are also numerous of such incidence between the police and the Customs, Immigration and FRSC officials. The glaring fact is that most of these ugly and shameful incidence involve the police on one hand and the sister security agencies on the other hand. This is seriously hampering the operations of the Nigerian Police Force, as they often do not get the backing of other security agencies.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE

The following points are suggestions for an improved Nigerian Police Force.

1. The National Assembly should quicken the passage of the Police Trust Fund Bill which is before it so as to ensure adequate funding of the Nigeria Police Force for operational efficiency. It is only through adequate funding that the rot in the force can be corrected. Through

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 02 Issue 02
February 2016

adequate funding, the force will be provided with operational equipments and gadgets that would help it to combat crime effectively.

2. There should be a massive reorientation of police personnel in the aspect of public relation and communication. Presently, the relationship between the police and the general public is not cordial. The Nigerian Police Force should train its staff to be more receptive and friendly so as to restore public confidence in it.

3. The Nigerian Police Force should be demilitarized. It should be repositioned to be more civil in operation just like obtainable elsewhere. The Mobile Police Force should be restricted and shielded from the general public, and should only be seen when there is a civil unrest which is beyond the powers of the conventional police.

4. Corruption should be tackled head on in the Nigeria Police Force. To achieve this, the fight against corruption in the force should begin from the top. Erring officers should be fished out, adjudicated and punished accordingly. An avenue where members of the public can report police corruption should be floated, by so doing, policemen would be afraid to demand for bribe from members of the public.

5. The Nigerian Police Force should reach out to other security agencies so as to improve camaraderie, and by so doing, improve the synergy with them.

6. The Nigerian Police should be unbundled. The government should consider the establishment of state police. This will decentralize police management, and make it more efficient in fighting crime in their different locale.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian police force is a federal government which has gone through different morphological development since 1861. The force has gone through structural changes. The prolonged military dictatorship in Nigeria adversely affected the force, and the psyche of its staff. Hence, the force has been militarilized to a great extent. The force is faced with a myriad of challenges such as endemic corruption, brutality and harassment of the public, poor funding, faulty recruitment system etc. These challenges have negatively affected the operational capability of the force, and lost public confidence in it. With the present upsurge in terrorism, cybercrime and militancy, the Nigerian police force needs to be repositioned to face these challenges. Hence, the force deserves to be properly funded to meet up with the trend of modern policing.

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February 2016

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