

Community Policing And Grassroots Security Initiatives For Sustainable Development

Anthonia Chidiebele Okeke, and Clement Emeka Ikezue

Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Corresponding Author: clemikez@yahoo.com

Abstract

The primary duties of the Nigeria police force are detection and prevention of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order and protection of lives and property. It appears that this formal security agency is lacking in discharging of these duties effectively and efficiently. Consequently, community policing and grassroots security initiatives have emerged in response to the seemingly failure and limitations of the Nigeria police force and other law enforcement agencies to provide adequate security for citizens and maintenance of order in communities. This is a theoretical paper which utilized secondary sources such as journals, international organization reports, and news articles, books, and others to examine the roles of community policing and grassroots security initiatives in providing security and sustainable development in different communities in Nigeria. The broken window and structural-functionalist theories provided theoretical framework for this paper. It was shown in this paper that community policing and grassroots security initiatives are pertinent for enhancing public safety, protecting human rights, and fostering sustainable community development. The paper concluded that Police-Public partnership and collaborations will be of immense help in addressing the challenges faced by formal security agencies in carrying out their basic functions. The paper recommends that community policing and grassroots security initiatives should be encouraged, adequately funded, and provided with sophisticated equipment, logistics and modern technology to enhance their effectiveness in fighting crimes, providing security and contributions towards sustainable development.

Keywords: Community Policing, Grassroots Initiatives, Police, Law Enforcement Agency, Security, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Nigeria is currently battling with myriad of socio-economic, political, and security challenges. According to Akeem and Shitu (2025), Nigeria has been grappling with various security challenges with terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and banditry ranking among the most reported offences. Crime and social disorder significantly impact the quality of life as well as sustainable development, necessitating that law enforcement institutions should work closely with communities to maintain security (Alehegn *et al.*,

2025). It appears that the Nigeria Police force and other security agencies have failed in their responsibilities of providing adequate security for the lives and property of citizens, especially at the community level. This has led to the establishment of community policing in several communities to supplement the efforts of the Nigeria police force and provide security at the grassroots level in most communities. This is with the intent of protecting lives and properties, preserving cultural heritage, and maintaining social cohesion within their communities (Onyishi, 2019; Nweke & Nwankwo (2023).

Community policing and grassroots security initiatives are partnership approaches between community members and law enforcement working together to identify and combat local crime and disorder issues, as well as improve safety through shared responsibilities. It encompasses grassroots initiatives such as neighbourhood watch programs and vigilant groups, which have become more prominent due to the constraints faced by formal security agencies (Zabur *et al.*, 2025). According to Uwenbor (2024), it is the systematic involvement and inclusion of credible local guards, vigilance groups, able-bodied civilian youths, and traditional rulers and chiefs. Community policing and grassroots security initiatives shifts policing from a reactive, law-enforcement-focused model to a proactive, problem-solving approach aimed at bridging the gap between police and citizens, building trust and collaborative relationships with the community, tackle insecurity via enhanced intelligence gathering, and address the root causes of crimes. Skogan (2019) maintained that community policing operates on the principles of proximity policing, problem-solving, and community partnership to improve trust and enhance local safety. Furthermore, it has been effective in reducing crime and fostering cooperation between police and residents in many countries.

The Nigeria police community policing project was launched on 27 April, 2004 by former president Olusegun Obasanjo. According to Akpa *et al.* (2024), this presidential initiative introduced community-oriented policing in 18 out of 37 state police commands including Abuja federal commands. From these 18 state police commands, community-oriented policing exists in 129 out of 1,579 police stations in Nigeria. In 2020, the Federal Government launched a new community policing framework aimed at recruiting and deploying thousands of constables from within local communities to complement conventional policing efforts (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2020). Alehegn *et al.* (2025) observed that this initiative is now being implemented throughout Nigeria especially in societies facing complex social, political, and economic challenges serving as a vital mechanism for strengthening security, maintaining social stability, and supporting community development in diverse urban and rural settings. The expectation was that community policing would serve as a bottom-up mechanism for addressing insecurity by leveraging local knowledge, fostering public trust, and improving intelligence gathering (Gassol, 2025). More so, Abiloye *et al.* (2024) discovered that there is noticeably decline in crime rates when communities actively engage in their own security. Hence, policies that encourage cooperation and mutual assistance, stressing the importance of a strong partnership between community groups and law enforcement agencies should be strongly advocated

for (Uzochukwu, 2022). Aliyu and Lawal (2020) also stated that these initiatives offer prompt responses and have played a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with kidnapping and similar crimes. They further highlighted that these groups are able to act swiftly and effectively because of their familiarity with local areas and social networks.

Although community policing and grassroots security initiatives have been suggested and established in various regions of Nigeria, these initiatives are hampered by various obstacles ranging from insufficient funding, inadequate training, to limited collaboration with official security forces and lots more. As such, it is necessary to implement an improved and well-coordinated community-based security strategy that addresses these issues to ensure the safety and welfare of members of the community (Zabur *et al.*, 2025). Also, Brown and Keating (2020) were of the view that report have shown that community policing can improve security outcomes by fostering collaboration between law enforcement and civilians.

Owing to the remarkably high level of insecurity in Nigeria, this paper examines community policing and other grassroots security initiatives in regards to its effectiveness, challenges and role in sustainable development. The paper also aims to proffer relevant recommendations that can be useful to both federal, state and local governments, community members, traditional rulers, stakeholder, foster police-public partnership between members of communities and law enforcement agencies in enhancing community policing and grassroots initiatives in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The paper is anchored on the broken window and structural-functionalist theories. Both theories are used to explain police-public relations and the roles of informal policing structures in communities. This broken window theoretical orientation was first studied by Philip Zimbardo in 1969 and was later introduced in a 1982 article by James Wilson and George Kelling. It is a criminological theory of the norms setting and signalling effect of urban disorder on additional crime and anti-social behaviour. This theory states that visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour and civil disorder create an environment that encourages further crimes and disorder including more serious crimes. In other words, visible signs of disorder and misbehaviour in an environment invite criminals. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of the security agencies like the police and their obvious corrupt practices are signs of weakened institutional capacity. The theory however further posits that monitoring and maintaining urban environment in a well-ordered condition may stop further crimes as well as the escalation of the crimes into more serious crime. In his contribution to this theory, McGinnis (2003) maintains that if people in the community appear to care, their potential criminals will believe that they do care and will respect their rights and their property. Thus, community policing in this regard is community involvement and partnership with law enforcement officers. This is linked to the idea that visible involvement brings results in the sense that collective efforts by both the law enforcement agencies and members of the community are partners that can aid in

ameliorating crime rates in the community. The broken widow theory posits that crimes in the community are mostly committed by offenders who reside near the victims. Crime therefore is primarily a local problem which can best be solved locally. The theory therefore focuses on the control and prevention of crime from within the community and how community policing and other grassroots security initiatives can be both efficient and effective in controlling crimes in their communities.

Scholars have however questioned the legitimacy of the theory concerning the subjectivity of disorder as perceived by persons living in the neighbourhood. They concentrated on whether citizens view disorder as separate issue from crime or as identical to it. They noted that crime cannot be the result of disorder if the two are identical. Scholars have also critiqued the premise, upon which the theory operates, that social disorder and crime are always connected as part of a causal factor is faulty. They argue that social disorder could birth collective effort to curb crime rather than leading to crime all the time. However, the theory links disorder and incivility within a community to subsequent occurrences of serious crime.

Structural-functionalism is deeply rooted in the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. Early structural functionalists focused almost entirely on the functions of one social structure or institution for another which collaborate to foster solidarity and stability in the society. The core assumption of the theory view society as a complex system made up of interconnected and independent parts that work together to promote solidarity, stability; equilibrium and social order. According to this perspective, society is a system, that is, a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. These various parts are interrelated and interconnected and are understood primarily in terms of their functions and relationship to the whole. Thus, a functional prerequisite of society therefore involves a degree of integration between the various parts that contributes to the maintenance of the whole.

From the perspective of structural functionalism, community policing and other grassroots security outfits perform functions of maintaining social order and security within communities. By partnering with the police, performing various functions such as apprehending criminals, resolving disputes and enforcing local norms, they contribute to the overall stability and well-being of the community. They bring about a sense of social cohesion among community members who unite against perceived threats for the stability and maintenance of order in their communities.

Review of Relevant Literature

Community Policing

Community policing also known as police-public relation has gained so much attention as members of community and stakeholders search for a more effective way to promote the welfare and safety of lives and properties in their community (Uwenbor, 2024). Aneke and Fayomi (2024) defined Community policing as a collaborative approach to public safety

that involves partnerships between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. This initiative according to them has gained prominence as an alternative to traditional, top-down policing models. Kielek (2024) noted that this initiative is facilitated through various mechanisms, such as neighbourhood watch programs, community policing forums, and participatory decision-making processes

Erhurhu (2017) defined the concept of community policing as the active participation of community members in crime prevention and the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the community. He further stated that it comprises the local vigilante groups, community volunteers who take on security responsibilities, play a vital role in enhancing security at the grassroots level. These groups typically function as part of community policing efforts, collaborating closely with the police and other security agencies to tackle security issues at the local level. Put differently, they are community-based groups established and financed by community members with the goal of combating crime and safeguarding the lives and property of residents. Onuoha (2018) also noted that local knowledge and the trust of community members are placed in these groups, a trust that is more often than not absent in state security organizations. Community policing is built on the philosophy of promoting organizational strategies that support systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, which allow for increase in public trust in the police (Olomi & Oji, 2022).

Partnership building involves establishing and nurturing collaborative relationships between police agencies and various community stakeholders, problem solving adopts a proactive, problem-oriented approach to addressing crime and disorder. This also involves identifying underlying issues that contribute to crime, rather than simply reacting to individual incidents, while strategies and ongoing engagement with the community is paramount to understand community concerns, gather feedback, and ensure that policing strategies are responsive to community needs.

There are several community policing and grassroots security initiatives in Nigeria that have emerged as significant actors in the realm of community security, playing a role in addressing crime and providing a sense of protection within their respective communities (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2019). Some examples of these initiatives include organizations such as the civilian joint task force (CJTF), State Hunters Association, and Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) which assert that their own operations to serve the greater good and protect communities from issues such as militancy and roving herdsmen (Onuoha and Kwaj, 2018). They also include Hisbah, religious police committees in some northern states that enforce Sharia law, Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps (Udoh, 2025), the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), also known as Operation Amoteku. In south eastern Nigeria, there are Neighbourhood Watches, Ebube Agu, Anambra State Vigilante Group (ASVG), Udo-gachi, Homeland Vigilante Service (HVS), Imo State Security Network Agency and other variations (Okoli *et al.*, 2020).

These groups known as vigilante associations or local security outfits according to Akpan (2021), operate based on community-based policing models, where members are drawn from the local population and are familiar with the intricacies of their respective communities. Nweke and Nwankwo (2023) also maintained that they make use of local knowledge, traditions, as well as social networks to gather intelligence, prevent crime, and respond to security incidents promptly, and by collaborating closely with community members, they bridge the gap between law enforcement agencies and the community, fostering trust and cooperation.

Factors Impeding Effective Community Policing and Grassroots Initiatives in Nigeria

Although community policing and grassroots security initiatives have been introduced in Nigeria as a strategy to improve security and foster police-community collaboration, they face numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness and operations. One of the major challenges of community policing and grassroots security in Nigeria according to Human Rights Watch (2022) is public distrust and fear of police brutality. There lingers a high level of mistrust between the police and the public as a result of police corruption, extortion, bribery, human rights violations, abuse of power, extrajudicial killings, and police brutality as many citizens are reluctant to engage with law enforcement due to fear of victimization or harassment, which weakens the effectiveness of grassroots security (Amnesty International, 2020; Yusuf, 2019).

Another factor affecting community policing and grassroots security is inadequate funding and support. Adebayo (2020) opined that these initiatives require substantial financial investment for training, equipment, logistics, and community engagement programmes. However, insufficient funding to support the effective operation of community policing initiatives limits the overall effectiveness and efficiency of grassroots security initiatives.

Political interference and the absence of a well-defined legal framework to regulate the structure, roles, and responsibilities of community policing units across states is another factor affecting effective community policing and grassroots security initiatives in Nigeria (Gassol, 2025). According to Ogundiya (2022), the absence of a strong legal and institutional framework to guide its implementation, as well as weak institutional framework hampers nationwide enforcement and sustainability.

Furthermore, the lack of proper training, low morale, and limited awareness of community policing concepts among both police officers and community members have created gaps in communication and coordination. Ekhomu (2019) argued that the lack of proper resources, inadequate training, and political interference have significantly hindered the implementation of community policing and grassroots security initiatives in Nigeria. Also, Ede (2017) stated that without substantial investment in training, equipment, and public awareness, community policing will remain ineffective in improving national security in Nigeria.

Eze (2021) maintained that resistance from formal Police Officers is another problem faced by these initiatives. According to him, there is often resistance from conventional police officers who view community policing as a threat to their authority and job security, leading to conflicts between police officers and community law enforcement personnel, hindering collaboration and effectiveness

More so, police-public partnership is limited by lack of public awareness and participation. Community scepticism and lack of unaware about the objectives and importance of community policing, has reduced its effectiveness (Afolabi & Hassan, 2021). In this regard, Adeyemi (2022) also discovered that as many as 60% of Nigerians have little or no knowledge of community policing initiatives in their communities leading to low public participation. That aside, Iwuoha and Aniche (2020) averred that the socio-cultural diversity and ethno-religious complexities is an additional challenge to uniform implementation of community policing.

Strategies for Effective Community Policing and grassroots security initiatives in Nigeria

To achieve effective community policing and grassroots security initiatives require collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the public, with a focus on building trust and shared responsibility. Governments must work in partnership with community members and civil society organizations. Partnerships and cooperation between the police and the public are an integral part of effective crime prevention, where wide ranging skills and responsibilities are required and civil society ownership of implementation must be ensured. This includes partnerships working across ministries and between authorities, community organizations, nongovernmental organizations, the business sector and private citizens (UNODC).

Also, for effective community policing, police accountability is essential for public trust. Vora *et al.* (2024) noted that Police transparency ensures accountability of officers, and developing lasting trust in law enforcement is beneficial for the community. Police accountability is essential for modern policing, requiring law enforcement agencies to adhere to ethical norms and procedures. That aside, crime prevention requires sustained resourcing for structures and activities, with clear accountability for funding, spending, implementation and evaluation and for the achievement of shared objectives.

Furthermore, better regulation, thorough training, adequate resources and integration into the formal security framework with robust accountability mechanisms should be put in place (Udoh, 2025). Also, community policing and grassroots initiatives should be adequately funded, and awareness created for everyone to provide useful and needful information (Ndakotsu, 2023). For effective community policing and grassroots security initiatives, members of communities should engage in planning, decision making, implementation and evaluation of the process. Through transformation of organizations which will involve recruitment of non-criminal minded people, as well as punish officers who violates the rules (Oji & Olomi, 2022).

JumaAgaya *et al.* (2021) were also of the opinion that members of grassroots communities and organizations should be educated on skills such as dispute management, positive interaction through dialogue, how to identify causes of overt and latent violence and how to respond and adapt them in their particular context. All these they noted can be achieved through workshops, participation network or intergroup or interethnic exchange visit.

Identifying and addressing potential security risks before they escalate, utilizing technology and data analysis to identify patterns and trends, and fostering partnerships between law enforcement agencies, local businesses, community organizations, and residents are measures that can also be adopted for effective community policing in Nigeria. Kiełek (2024) further stated that this approach should be supported by adequate resources and commitment from local government and law enforcement agencies to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives, investing in training and education for both law enforcement officers and community members to enhance understanding and trust.

Community policing and grassroots security initiatives for sustainable development

Sustainable development was defined by Aiya and Anetekhai (2018) as a form of recourses utilization that are aimed at meeting human needs in all ramification and preservation of the environment in a way that these needs could be met not only in the present, but also by generation to come. The United Nations Organizations member states at the UN Summit held in September 2015 set up some goals and it is expected that the United Nations member states used the set goals to meet the needs of people and bring about development and to achieve that, the police have an active role to play. The police are responsible for securing lives and properties, and ensuring a secured environment safe enough for activities and development to take place. However, due to the shortcomings of the police in performing these duties, police-public relations and collaborations help in addressing the challenges of formal agencies by capitalizing on their grassroots knowledge and community connections. Nwangwu and Ihuoma (2021) stated that these collaborations foster enhance coordination, information sharing, and capacity-building. Ratcliffe (2022) also stated that community policing and grassroots security initiative enhances trust, legitimacy, and cooperation between police officers and community members, which in turn enhances the capacity for crime prevention and intelligence gathering.

Communities with weak institutional capacity and limited community engagement hinder proactive policing efforts. Hence, strengthening the structure of police-public relations is crucial for enhancing public safety, protecting human rights, and fostering sustainable community development. According to Alehegn *et al.* (2025), community policing and grassroots security initiatives serves as a vital mechanism for strengthening security, maintaining social stability, and supporting community development in diverse urban and rural settings. More so, these relations emphasize deep community engagement, collaborative problem-solving and institutional reforms in policing practices. Police-public relations also strengthen the rule of law and promote of police legitimacy with the local

community, as well as in bridging the gap between the police and the public through such instruments. Community policing and grassroots security initiatives strives to restore trust in the people for a lawful and better ordered nation, a situation where more people will feel safe and the territorial borders will be well protected (Kovacich & Halibozek, 2019).

Pola *et al.* (2025) stated that police-public relations bring about trust and high performance as community programs revitalize peace and security while police visibility continues as a tool for effective peace and stability that fosters and ensures cooperation between the police and the community. Community Safety Strategy (2013) identified four main elements of effective security to include maintenance of law and order; protection against internal and external threat, safety of borders and punishing and rehabilitating offenders. They stated further that there will be economic growth and employment generation when these are guaranteed.

Community policing and grassroots security initiatives are also beneficial for the preservation of peace, providing economic sustainability, and development. Boller-Piol *et al.* (2024) stated that it enhances community organization, community information and education, community empowerment and mobilization, as well as the implementation of strengthening policies. Oikhala (2022) maintained that the roles of the police which includes peace keeping; enforcing laws and regulations; protecting life and ensuring a safer environment for people to co-exist and transact their lawful business; preventing wrongdoings, apprehending lawbreakers and arraigning them for prosecution in accordance with the law are pivotal for sustainable development not only in Nigeria but all over the world.

Conclusion

Community policing and grassroots security initiatives emerged as a response to the ineffectiveness of formal law enforcement agencies, especially the police in combating the incessant heightening crime rates and maintaining order in Nigeria. These initiatives comprising mostly of local community members carry out their operations in form of various informal structures, from neighbourhood watches to vigilante groups or a more organized state sponsored groups have become an effective approach in combating crime and providing security for various communities. Though police-public relations are faced with several limitations which challenge the effectiveness of their operations, policies and regulations which enhances collaborations between community members, as well as the cooperation of the government, traditional rulers and community stakeholders are required for adequate and successful implementation of community policing and grassroots security initiatives.

Recommendations

It is recommended that there should be concrete cooperation and partnership between community policing and grassroots security, members of communities, formal security agencies and the government to bring about local knowledge, resources, and trust building

and information sharing into the policing framework. This can be actualized through, joint training programs, workshops, and will ensure a complementary police-public working relationship that would further lead to coordinated efforts to address insecurity and crime rates. The police also need to come to the understanding that these community members who are involved in community policing are their partners in crime prevention and not competitors, rivals, or threat to their job security and authority.

There should be training of both community security and law enforcement agencies on conflict resolution, fighting crimes and insecurity, community engagement, volunteering based security programmes, conflict transformation, and human rights, standardized guidelines, codes of conduct to enable them perform their duties ethically. There should also be trained and equipped with knowledge and modern ways of fighting crime.

Some community members are not abreast about community policing and its framework. As such, public awareness through campaigns, educational materials, and local dialogues can be put in place to create orientations, educate, and sensitize members of the public about the roles and responsibilities of community policing and grassroots security initiatives and further strengthen the understanding, participation and collaboration of police-public relations.

It is also recommended that community policing and grassroots security initiatives should be adequately funded and provided with sophisticated equipment, logistics and modern technology to enhance their effectiveness in discharging their duties.

There is a deep seated lack of trust between the police and the public as a result of the public opinion of law enforcement agencies and the way they are perceived. As such, law enforcement agencies must prioritize rebuilding trust with the public through reforms centered on transparency, fairness, accountability, and sustainability. They should also be monitored and supervised to ensure they operate according to their code of conducts. This will go a long way in rebuilding trust and confidence between the community members and law enforcement agencies.

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