

Nigeria at 50

Politics, Society and Development

Edited by

Babatunde Sofela

Victor O. Edo

Rasheed O. Olaniyi

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Published for the
Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

By

JOHN ARCHERS (Publishers) Ltd.
40 Ojerinde Quarters
Jiboye, Apata
GPO Box 339, Dugbe, Ibadan

© 0803 4476 916, 0805 833 6156

e-mail: johnarchers@yahoo.co.uk
archers_books@hotmail.com

www.johnarchers.org.ng

© Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 2013

First published 2013

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ISBN 978-978-52024-0-3

Editors' Acknowledgement

Many people and institutions contributed in helping to make this book publishable. Our gratitude goes to the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Professor O.A. Bamiro; former Dean of Arts, University of Ibadan, Professor P.A. Ogundeji; the Dean of the Postgraduate School, University of Ibadan, the Director of the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan and the former Executive Secretary, Education Trust Fund (ETF), Professor Mahmud Yakub. We acknowledge the support of the keynote speakers during the conference – Professor O.B.C. Nwolise, late Professor K.A. Olu-Owolabi, Professor Bolade Eyinla and Professor Akin Alao. Professor Adigun Agbaje, Professor I.O. Albert, Professor B. Okunade, Professor A.T. Simbine, Dr. O.B. Olaoba and Dr. I.E. Ukpokolo used their wealth of experience to enrich the intellectual debates that emanated from the presentations. We thank all the contributors for their invaluable input and perspectives.

The successful hosting of the conference would not have been possible without the commitment of all the members of the **Ibadan School of History**, University of Ibadan. We specially acknowledge Professor O.C. Adesina, Professor O.A. Lawal, Dr. C.B.N. Ogbogbo, Dr. S. A. Ajayi, Dr. P.K.N. Ugboajah, Dr. O.G. Muojama and Mr. M.O. Muritala.

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Issues in Nigerian Security and Policing

R.A. OKUNOLA, A.D. IKUOMOLA and K.A. ADEKUNBI

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INTRODUCTION

Security of life and property is a fundamental human right guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution. Efforts have been made by successive administrations, especially since 1999, to provide this. However, growing poverty, wide income disparities, high level of unemployment, social dislocation caused by massive rural-urban migration and the breakdown of societal values leading to business frauds (419, drug abuse, etc.), and community unrest account for the growing concern about the level of uncertainty and security in parts of the country. The institutions that were established to guarantee security to the ordinary citizen are incapacitated by limited manpower and skills relative to society's demand, poor funding, poor equipment and general lack of proper orientation and commitment by some operatives. A weak economy can only aggravate the situation (Rotimi, 2001, Otubu, and Coker, 2006). In its effort to improve on the situation, the Government has taken several measures among which

are the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices Court, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the implementation of the recommendations of the Justice Kayode Eso Commission of Inquiry, strengthening of institutions such as NAFDAC and substantially raising the manpower strength, equipment and mobility of the Police. However, a lot still remains to be done to attain the level of security and the administration of justice, which Nigerians deserve. There are several legislations and regulations put in place to assist the police at carrying out this duty of protection of life and properties of the citizen and the provision of internal security of the nation. One of such legislation is the Police Act. By virtue of the provision of section 4 of the Police Act:

The police shall be employed for the *prevention* and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulation with which they are directly charged . . .¹

Arising from the above provision and in line with the topic of this paper it can be said that there is a bit of silence on the way and manner policing should be done regarding information gathering.

Recent happenings in community based violent crimes have shown the ineffectiveness of the Nigeria police in security and intelligence-information gathering in nipping criminal and deviant activities in the bud. Contributively, capacity building and the failure of the state to qualitatively invest in modern policing strategies with regards to the socio-cultural characteristics of the nation have not helped matters. Similarly, investment in police intelligence has not been taken seriously. This paper examines the Nigerian police and policing strategies especially in relation to intelligence-information gathering since independence. Major findings revealed that despite modern and community policing strategies, changes are still being described as combative and reactive rather than proactive. Also, over the years investment in policing has dwindled and mainly responsible for the continuous breakdown in law and order. Therefore, this paper suggests among others, that the concept of true federalism should be incorporated in the Nigeria policing structure in line with the American model of policing.

POLICING IN NIGERIA AND SECURITY SERVICE REFORMS

There is no doubt that since the mid-70s, Nigeria has been experiencing what is referred to in criminological literature as a crime-problem (Odekunle, 2004). This has been highlighted in various dimensions raging from incidence and seriousness, which lingers from the usual to the unusual creating a monstrous atmosphere for the people and security agencies in fighting crime. The reportage

of assassination, armed robberies and big-time fraud only serve to undermine the required appreciation of the enormity of the burden on the average citizen regarding thefts, burglaries, and assaults. The cost and consequences of crime for the population are pointers to the inefficiency of the Nigeria police. These are realities that must be curtailed. In this regard various ethnic groups in the country had to seek for alternative means of security. For instance the Oodua people's Congress, among the Yoruba, Egbesu boys for the Igbo, and Arewa Youth Vanguard for the Hausa, among others, became involved in security business. The height of some of these alternative security measures was also embedded in the agitation and popular support for Sharia in some northern states. According to Olaniyi (2005), the outburst of the agitation for a strict implementation of Sharia law in Nigeria with reference to the (Northern Nigeria, was motivated by general disenchantment, deteriorating social conditions and ineffective policing. These have been attributed to the continuous attachment and redeployment of police officers to private individuals, top government officials and companies for security purpose to the detriment of the populace, irrespective of the low staff strength of the police force in the country. The police have been described as alien to the people because they are usually deployed to regions they know little about and sometimes to areas that are completely strange to them, a factor attributed to the militaristic behaviour of the most security agents in Nigeria (Heap, 2000; Ismail, 2008).

From an examination of police reform in the post-colonial states of sub-Saharan Africa it is clear that African police forces evolve, not in the sense of a linear progression towards a Western model of catching criminals and being publicly accountable but through adapting to political developments and accommodating regimes. As a result, historical inheritance, socio-political pressures, personal ambition, political contingencies, and institutional resilience have shaped them much more than any aid programme. Based on this record, Hills (2001) notes that security sector reform programmes have yet to engage with the nature of the political power inhibiting effectiveness of the police. There is no doubt that, since the mid-70s, Nigeria has been experiencing what is referred to in criminological literature as a "crime-problem" (Odekunle, 2004). A situation where crime, in terms of incidence and seriousness, passes from the normal or tolerable level to the pathological state is worth calling a social problem, which requires a multiple task on the part of the police, the community and government. The task of crime prevention is a hazardous and tedious exercise. Not only must the police officers be intelligent, brave and assiduous at duty, the organisation must provide the wherewithal with which the police officer must do the task. In carrying out crime prevention tasks, the Nigerian police have availed itself of all of the following mechanisms:

Beat Patrols

A beat is the area which a particular constable or group of constables is detailed to patrol during a single tour of duty. It may be a precinct in a city or town, as small as a couple of streets, depending on the density of the population, the known rate of crimes, the economic or administrative importance of the establishment or building in the area. In the rural areas, it may be a collection of villages or hamlets or a stretch of kilometres of our national borders. Depending on the size, nature and extent of the beat to be covered the concerned police officer may trek, go on bicycles, horsebacks, or vehicles, and where necessary with the assistance of police trained dogs (this has become rare and non-existent after independence). The primary object of the beat patrol system is to disperse policemen in a way that will possibly eliminate or reduce the opportunity for misconduct and to increase the likelihood that an offender will be apprehended while he is committing an offence or immediately thereafter. The strong likelihood of immediate apprehension, no doubt, has a strong deterrent effect on potential offenders (Ismail and Abiodun, 2007).

Going by this, most crime would have been nipped in the bud and the attendant cost of prosecution, and incarceration would be avoided. A corollary effect of the beat system was the moribund policy of posting Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) to their locality in the 70s and 80s. The situation was such that Otubu and Coker (2000) laud the policy, as well as highlighting the so-called Nigerian Factor in the body polity for its demise. The policy would have gone a long way at assisting the police in their crime prevention duties and stem the tide of official corruption in the institution. Arguably, a police officer working within his locality is more likely to know the dark spots in the area and probably the criminals and potential criminals in his neighbourhood. As an indigene he will be circumspect at collecting bribes from members of the community as victims can easily trace his roots in the community and thus become stigmatised.

Inasmuch as this system is cheap on the long run and desirable in its import, it will not work well in an environment of distrust, ethnic bias, nepotism and corruption. The system will also fail except and unless there is adequate logistic and institutional support both from the government and the private sector in the country. Since the system rests strongly on prompt, efficient and effective communication network, it may fail where there is no support system like good roads reliable communication system and efficient energy backup. Also, the initial capital outlay for the implementation of the system nationally may be outlandish. In spite of this, one may also agree that crime detection and prevention task has improved since the introduction of GSM telephony in the country.

Anti-Vice Squads

This is a surveillance squad operating in disguise and carrying out intelligent surveillance of areas that are potentially breeding grounds for various vices such as gambling, prostitution, rioting, etc. They operate at large gatherings, public places, and motor parks, etc. where theft and affray have been found to be rampant. The objective of the squad is to gather information and provide proactive measures to prevent the commission of crime and where that fails, to at least immediately apprehend the criminals at the point of commission of the offence. This measure has been used at various times, with varying degrees of success, by the police authorities to carry out raids on these breeding places of crime. Such raids have led to the arrest and prosecution of drug users and peddlers, arms dealers and robbers, etc. Through the system is good as a measure of crime prevention, its use over a long period of time is doubted. Not only is it expensive to run on a long time basis but it also imparts negatively on the public image posture of the police; for it implies a fire brigade approach to crime prevention and management. The system can also be easily abused by overzealous police officers.

Stop, Detain and Search

By virtue of the powers conferred by the provision of section 25 of the Police Act, a police officer on beat is expected to be vigilant and on his suspicion being aroused, entitled to stop, detain and search any person whom he reasonably suspects of having in his possession or conveying in, any manner anything he has reason to believe has been stolen or unlawfully obtained or with reference to which an offence has been committed. This mechanism, when sedulously employed in a police jurisdiction, yields tremendous results for detecting offences, as much as preventing them.

Specie Escorts

Armed policemen guarding large sum of money, valuables or explosives in transit is a service rendered free of charge to government and quasi-governmental agencies, but on payment of fees, to private organisations and individuals.

Static Guards

This was a time honoured important anti crime prevention model adopted in Europe and the US, partially in Nigeria during the colonial era and the first and second republic, through this model, police guards are provided at public sphere to check ingress and exit of customers and clients etc and prevent crimes in relation to such establishments (Laitin, 1982). It is true that this crime prevention method is gradually fading with the development, private

guards, and the use of close-circuit monitors, it is, however, been used with respect to public institutions and installations. The recent damage to oil pipelines and gas stations by militants and hoodlums readily comes to mind (Kialagee, 2005; Ahmed, 2006; Ikporupo, 2007).

National Security

The police in collaboration with the relevant state security agencies also provide surveillance network on the activities of persons considered security risks in order to prevent sabotage and subversion of the nation and its established institutions internally. Nevertheless, internal security over the years have been described as pathetic as notable as well as unknown individuals have lost their lives, and till date these a lot of these deaths have not been resolved based on either the slow pace of investigation processes in the Nigeria force notable murder cases that have not been resolved such as that of the killers of Bola Ige, former Minister of Justice in December 2001 at Ibadan; Barrister and Mrs. Igwe in September 2002 at Onitsha; Alhaji Isiaku Muhammed in September 2002 in Kano, Sir Theodore Agwatu in February 2003 in Owerri; Chief Ogbonna Uche also in February 2003 and Dr. Harry Mashall in March 2003 among other attempted cases of murders and theft cases. Situations like these have called the Nigerian police and policing strategies especially in relation to intelligence information gathering since independence to questions. Accounting for these is the dismal image of the police overtime which has also led to the non-cooperation by the public who are often reluctant to volunteer useful information to the police (Olujinmi, 2004; Bruce and Neild, 2004.). Yet, the tasks of crime prevention and detection as well as prosecution of offenders cannot be successfully performed without the cooperation of the public. It is in this regard that Odekunle (2004) highlights the challenges facing policing under four major yardsticks:

- (1) Effectiveness (fewer or reduced criminal victimisation; higher proportion of crimes known to the police cleared by arrest; increased recovery of stolen property; higher rates of arrests which result in conviction; lower traffic accident rates; faster response time to reports/complaints).
- (2) Responsiveness (higher citizen perception of safety from crime; higher citizen ratings of police performance in general; higher citizen ratings of specific police activities; higher citizen ratings of specific aspects of police conduct such as honesty, integrity, courtesy and fairness).
- (3) Equity (with reference to egalitarian distribution of "protection" to all sections of the population).
- (4) Efficiency (with reference to cost-and-benefit analysis of "protection" output relative to monetary, human and material input).

Based on the above meanings and measurement of efficient policing, there is no doubt that policing in Nigeria is not where it was after independence. Judged by the yardsticks outlined, it has long been clear to a majority of Nigerians that the police short of optimum performance especially in the area of intelligence and information gathering.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CRIME PREVENTION

Public hostility and indifference are the most perplexing problems the police force is experiencing today. The Nigerian publics have come to demand so high an expectation from the police. The top hierarchy of the police does not begrudge them for doing so. No one is more sensitive to the great and urgent need for more efficient and effective law enforcement than the top brass of the force. They not only appreciate but also concede that without the full and in compromising support of the public, their efforts cannot fructify. The problem, however, is that the public do not direct their minds to the limitations placed on police capabilities by various factors not of their own making. The individual citizen fails to appreciate that he is equally responsible for law enforcement and that he has powers and obligations under the law to accomplish this task. If he was an eyewitness of a crime, he would rather decide to look the other way than perform what one may regard his civic, if not legal, duty to come forward to give the police necessary information in his possession.

Amongst the many criticisms that have been levelled against the police and quoted as responsible for the not too inspiring police/public relations are the followings:

- (i) The police are too corrupt.
- (ii) The police are high headed and prove too combative rather than proactive.
- (iii) The police delay members of the public unnecessarily at police stations, even when they are complainants or witnesses.
- (iv) The police are inefficient and hence continuous harassment of the public who ought to be partners in the investigative and crime preventive strategies.

Irrespective of these shortcomings of the police which is futile to deny, individuals and communities within the society owes the singular responsibilities, amongst others, to be conscious of their self preservative rights. This right is best exemplified when you try to anticipate and prevent yourself from being harmed by the action of others. By so doing individuals are carrying out their civil and legal duty of crime prevention in the society.² This task of crime prevention is not achieved through retaliatory actions or

pre-emptive violence but by promptly reporting such incident or fact to the law enforcement agency, the police or any closest agency depending on the urgency. In essence all hands must be on deck to achieve the task and we all have a responsibility and a role to play in the task of crime prevention. The situation at hand reveals the loss of interest in the police and, invariably, this has made a lot of people who hitherto knew their obligation to have either forgotten or deliberately ignore their self-preservation duty of reporting crime to the police by virtue of the provision of section 34(b) of the Criminal Procedure Act, which states that "every person is bound to assist a Police officer the preventive or suppression of a breach of the peace".³

Effective and Efficient Policing in Nigeria: Inadequacies, Problems and Obstacles

There is abundant official and research confirmation of this assertion, apart from information in the daily newspapers, and there is no need to "prove" the non-optimum performance of the police in the present contribution. Rather, what is needed is the identification of the major inadequacies, problems and obstacles that are responsible for the situation. And these may be grouped into three categories: material inadequacies; human problems; and obstacles external to the police.

Material Inadequacies

Material input in terms of funding, crime-prevention/control, detection, investigation, traffic-control and accident-prevention, communication and data-gathering research needs are not only inadequate but are unrealistic as well. The authorities of the police have always provided the technical details of these material inadequacies, even if sometimes exaggerated for obvious reasons. For example, between 1994 and 2003, the amount of funds actually released to the police relative to its request for capital vote ranged from 0 percent for 2003 to 9.5 percent in 1998; and for overhead costs, amount released ranged from 4 percent in 2003 to 5 percent in 1998 and 2002. Yet, the Force is supposed to cover a population of about 120 million Nigerians, spread over more than 926,000 sq. km. of land. Relatedly, as Okunola (2006) demonstrates, the Nigeria police is far from Nigerians whom they are supposed to police. Arising from the centre-periphery focus of development strategy in development, police stations and operational nerves are concentrated in centres and the police apparatus and operations thins off as you move father into the more remote areas. Thus, and consequently arising from this is that the police have little or no direct information about the grassroots especially. This in turn results in reactive operations rather than pro-active operations in terms of policing

Human Problems

Had the quality of the human or personnel resources of the Force been optimum, the material inadequacies might have been partially ameliorated. In other words, the police have human problems that not only aggravate its material insufficiencies, but are also of tremendous adverse import on its general performance from one day to the next. The following are the major factors responsible for this category of problems:

- (1) The colonial origin and heritage of the police which continue to influence the selection, training and orientation of a majority of policemen;
- (2) Improper, inefficient and, sometimes corrupt and nepotistic methods of recruitment (bad enough to require a re-vetting exercise for some recruited officers in 2002 and 2003 respectively);
- (3) Insufficient length of training-period and attention in training recruits for the "rank and file";
- (4) Lopsided emphasis (in training curricula) towards "drill", paramilitary work, and "mechanistic" teaching of law and police work;
- (5) Exposure of recruits to only "professional police officers" and only in exclusive police institutions;
- (6) Existence of "deviant" but durable "police sub-culture" which moulds the "working personality" of new constables;
- (7) Discourtesy, nonchalant attitude to reports of citizen complaints, dishonesty, corruption, abuse or misuse of the authority to arrest, detain or use force by a substantial number of policemen on the streets, in the station, etc;
- (8) Organisational emphasis on "episodic" raids and "temporary" successes instead of systematic beat; and the scape-goating of the so-called "bad-eggs" instead of engaging in systematic re-orientation of policemen;
- (9) Offensive aggression, potentially and actually, manifested by the reputation ("notoriety" is better word) and "macho" conduct of the Mobile Police (e.g., suppressing rather than managing riots and demonstrations);
- (10) The adverse effects of the last two factors in producing a negative public-image for the police;
- (11) The adverse effects of the last three factors in fostering poor police-community relations;
- (12) Discouraging salary, conditions of service, rank-mobility, promotion criteria and procedure for the "rank and file", recent efforts to improve the situation notwithstanding;

- (13) Insufficient usage, if at all, of outside help (e.g., research) because of police traditional obsession with “security” and a “know-all-about crime” mentality.
- (14) Absence of an overall crime-prevention/control policy, body and planning;
- (15) Political interference and the feeling of accountability by the police to the “government of the day” rather than to the rule of law and the people (i.e. a carry-over from the colonial period and the succeeding military regimes);
- (16) A materialistic, greedy, corrupt and indiscipline socio-economic environment (i.e. a society gets what police force it deserves); and
- (17) The burdensome character of our inherited legal system (from the substantive and procedural law through justice administration to offender-correction) which has never been meaningfully or social-scientifically reviewed to make justice “real” rather than “technical”, and speedy rather than delayed.

The Way Forward: A Systemic Approach

There are no quick fixes to the problem facing the Nigerian police. Improving training or salaries alone, or pressing criminal charges against selected individuals, will not produce more than shallow and short-term results if programs do not also correct broader institutional weaknesses that permit, enable, or encourage corruption. International experts agree that policing reforms are long-term, even generational, efforts (Uruena, 2003; Uzendo, 2006; Neild, 2007). While important results can be achieved in the short term, consolidating and sustaining those achievements over time remains a major challenge. Given constant opportunities for corruption in policing, it is important to take systemic and long-term approaches. Programmes that address police corruption as part of a larger focus on good governance across all state institutions may face less resistance than programs that make the police feel singled out. It is equally important to identify and address linkages across the criminal justice system as a whole.

At the simplest level, when police believe that judges are “bought off,” they have little incentive to pursue a serious investigation and every reason to take the bribe themselves before the case reaches the courts. In reality, a series of linkages exists in efforts to increase probity and professionalism across the criminal justice system. Efforts to enhance judicial independence and improve access to justice should be aligned with policing reforms: projects addressing judicial independence could undertake parallel initiatives to improve the operational independence of the police. Both police corruption and the conduct and success rate of criminal prosecutions may be addressed by strengthened prosecutorial and judicial oversight of police investigations.

Prosecutors and courts must hold the police criminally liable for acts of corruption. Projects that aim to improve the speed of trial processes through better case management could include systems to register and track detainees in police cells and help restrict abuse. Despite their potential efficiencies, these and other synergies between police and justice reform are too little explored. Major focal concerns in restoring a better policing system should therefore be on:

- (1) *Democratic Policing*: Within the police, reform strategies that emphasise accountability, transparency, and professional practices should produce overall gains in efficiency, as well as greater responsiveness to the communities they serve. Good democratic policing practices, such as improving standards, selection, training, and salaries, can contribute to improved conditions of service, capacity, professionalism, and morale. The introduction of performance indicators and well-defined job descriptions will support merit-based systems for assignments and promotions.
- (2) *Build Public Support*: In settings characterised by weak political will, building public awareness of the extent and dynamics of corruption and generating pressure for change may be essential first steps toward institutional reform. Strong demand-side pressure for performance enhancement is equally as important as institutionally focused initiatives. Ongoing public concern is especially necessary in the face of allegedly competing priorities, such as rising crime, which allow police to argue for increased powers rather than increased accountability. A more informed public and policy debate would benefit from reliable data. Public perceptions of corruption tend to be very general, and police corruption is often viewed as endemic even where specific dynamics are, in fact, more limited. Widely shared misperceptions can feed accusations of corruption when police conduct legal actions such as levying fees for certain services and issuing on-the-spot fines. Research and information campaigns can provide insights into practices and problems and identify constructive solutions that reform advocates can use to keep the issue on the public agenda even when reform efforts may be stalled. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised in building external strategies that focus exclusively on police corruption, particularly criminal corruption, but also politically biased policing. Civil society groups may be subjected to reprisals and even attacks in response to public revelations and criticisms. A risk analysis and careful consultation with potential civil society partners should be undertaken as part of the assessment and development of an external strategy on police corruption.

- (3) *Counter-Police Resistance*: Police have considerable capacity for resistance. Police are also keenly aware of the political impact that their action or inaction may have for a government, and can seek to temper official pressures by asserting the need for resources, powers, or political backing in order to deal effectively with social unrest, demonstrations, and other public order issues. Political pressures that challenge deeply vested police interests may compete with a government's need for effective police action, particularly in highly visible public order policing. In these settings, the clear ability of the police – through act or omission – to produce negative political outcomes can result in a softening of government support for reform.
- (4) *Recognise the Limits of Community Policing*: The introduction of community policing strategies does not necessarily address police corruption neither does it enhance intelligence-information gathering all alone. The police may as easily become embroiled in local power structures as national ones, and with greater distance from accountability mechanisms that are too often located only in capitals and large cities. Local needs policing was implemented to positive effect in the context of a holistic police reform as shown in Sierra Leone (Horn, et. al., 2006). This contrasts, however, with less positive appraisals of the impact of community policing in Uganda and Kenya, where recent human rights reports argue that community policing should only be implemented once systemic problems in policing have been addressed (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006). These latter experiences suggest that clear national standards and accountability mechanisms should be in place before implementing community policing to avoid the risk of reinforcing undemocratic local authorities and power structures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

With a total police force of about 110,000 in 1999, the number of the force has almost quadrupled in the last decade to about 410,000 in 2009 (Ismail, 2008). The challenge now is to make the police more effective. To enable the police meet the challenges of modern policing and crowd control, as well as eliminate the incidence of corrupt tendencies, a major thrust of policy will be to build capacity through training of police personnel, pursue paradigm shift in orientation of the police force and better equip the force to improve its image, responsive-ness to distress calls and adopting a more proactive approach to crime prevention and detection. Specific initiatives would include:

- (1) Re-orientation to improve the quality of service;

- (2) Increased use of scientific methods in policing – to enhance the quality of evidence and investigation;
- (3) Introduction of appropriate equipment and development of an exclusive communication system – to improve police effectiveness; and
- (4) Capacity building, training and re-training as well as involvement of communities in policing.

The police will be properly trained and equipped to enhance their effectiveness in combating crimes. The level of entry into the force will be raised to a minimum of OND, gradually rising to HND and degree level. With the advent of the GSM telephony, sophisticated gadgets and improved fleet of vehicles, the performance of the police should increase.

Lastly, inasmuch as the above mentioned initiatives are cheap, achievable on the long run and desirable in its import, it will not work well in an environment of distrust, ethnic bias, nepotism and corruption. The Nigeria police is part and parcel of the entire system; it can only get better if adequate logistic and institutional support from the government, community and the private sector are properly harnessed in the state. Since the system rests strongly on prompt, efficient and effective communication networks, it may fail where there is no support system like good roads reliable communication system and efficient energy backup. Also, the initial capital outlay for the implementation of the system nationally may be outlandish. In spite of this, however, you will also agree with me that crime detection and prevention task has improved since the introduction of GSM telephony in the country and much is still expected.

ENDNOTES

1. Section 4 Police Act Cap 359 LFN 1990.
2. Section 24(1) Police Act.
3. Sections 201 and 200 of the Criminal Code.

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