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POLICY BRIEF

COMMUNITY-BASED CRIME PREVENTION: OFTEN EFFECTIVE BUT NEEDS REGULATING



University of Ibadan

NIGERIA

This brief was developed by the authors as part of the ELLA Programme. It was developed based on a Regional Evidence Paper [Explaining the Effectiveness of Community-Based Crime Prevention Practices in Nigeria](#) by the same authors, which contains an overview of regional evidence, as well as original data collection and analysis, on a particular research topic. All publications can be found in the [ELLA programme website](#).



Community-based Crime Prevention: often Effective but needs Regulating

Highlights

Community-based crime prevention can be very effective when the community plays a dominant role, taking on some individual and state roles.

As such, these practices should be strengthened and formally supported where the state's capability to respond to crime is weak.

But attention must also be paid to regulation to ensure that individual human rights are not violated in these community-based approaches.

Summary

Weak criminal justice and policing systems often necessitate the introduction of complementary, community-based crime prevention models. In Africa, such community models are common, but their effectiveness and legitimacy is the subject of debate. This Policy Brief uses new research by the University of Ibadan to explore these issues in one of Nigeria's largest metropolitan areas, Ibadan.

Community-based crime prevention (CBCP) was found to be prevalent in all 18 communities studied. In many, the CBCP was effective – particularly in those able to deploy a “communitisation” strategy, whereby communities often manage ‘private spaces’, take the lead on representing individuals’ concerns, and support the functions of the state police.

At the same time, there are risks that these communitisation strategies can infringe individual human rights. Policies seeking to strengthen community-based crime prevention must be sure to protect human rights without weakening the community associations.

Introduction

Most African nations are yet to come up with effective criminal justice and policing systems (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004). Crime rates are high and state apparatuses are often incapable of reducing crime. Governments and international donors are aware of this failure and are actively seeking ways to tackle the problem. In doing this, they are finding that communities themselves are often very active at dealing with crime and violence through community-based crime prevention (CBCP) practices. These include a mix of strategies such as personal security, vigilante groups and community watch. Tanzania's *Sungusungu* and *ulinzi shirikishi*, South Africa's Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, South Sudan's Police Community Relations Committees and Nigeria's Vigilante groups and Neighbourhood Watch are examples of CBCP in Africa.

The university research sought to explore the effectiveness of CBCP practices, and the reasons for their effectiveness or otherwise. Academic research shows that such factors as citizens' active involvement in the community affairs (community participation), mutuality, trust and



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cooperation among community members (social capital), ability of a community to control behaviour of individuals and groups in the community (collective efficacy), and communication resources for collective action among community members (communication infrastructure) form the pillars for community cohesion, contributing to the effectiveness of community projects, for example. But we wanted to see if they were also important for crime prevention, and if so, in what ways.

Methodology

We undertook our study in Ibadan, Nigeria, a multi-ethnic and multinational setting which provides an opportunity to harness diverse views and practices. The city straddles the wide spectrum of socio-economic statuses and population densities that are prevalent in Nigeria (Fourchard, 2003, 2008): two factors that influence crime levels. We screened 18 communities — Sasa, Orogun, Agbowo, Oladele, Old Bodija, Apete, Mapo, Onireke, Alalubosa, Oja'ba, Akobo Estate, Jericho, Laaniba, Akobo Extension, Beere, Mokola, New Bodija, and Ojoo. And out of the 18, we selected to survey six communities – *Agbowo, Laaniba, Oladele II, Old Bodija, Onireke* and *Sasa* — taking account of socioeconomic status and population density factors, to identify the influence of 'community participation, social capital, collective efficacy and communication infrastructure' on the effectiveness of community-based crime prevention.

We then explored the case of Sasa and Oja'aba in more detail. These are both densely populated and have a comparable socio-economic profile. Most residents are petty traders and artisans, and the youth population is high in both communities as is the rate of unemployment (slightly higher in Oja'ba).

Evidence, Results and Conclusions

Community-based crime prevention practices are prevalent in the communities we studied in Ibadan. Residential associations, which are also called community associations, community-development associations, residents' associations or sometimes, landlords' associations, organise and manage the CBCP practices. This kind of association is present in almost all communities in the city. The responses to our survey with 95.8% of the respondents affirming that they knew about the neighbourhood association in their community reflect the wide prevalence of these associations.

These associations combine a number of different elements such as paid security, the formation of vigilante groups and neighbourhood watch programmes, while they also work closely with the police. However, the main strategy employed by the community associations that drive CBCP is what we call a 'communitisation' strategy (see below).

Our study shows that CBCP practices work effectively in most neighbourhoods of the city of Ibadan. In our early round of survey, nearly 63.0% of the residents considered their communities



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very safe while only 2.1% considered them very unsafe. They attributed the community safety and low levels of crime in their communities to CBCP practices.

In **Sasa**, most residents describe their communities as safe and crime levels as low. Seven out of ten people attribute the safety and low levels of crime to the specifically tailored community-based crime prevention practices in their neighbourhood. What we found was that community-based crime prevention were particularly effective in Sasa because of the ability of the community associations to deploy what we call a 'communitisation' strategy. This strategy plays out in three forms.

First, community associations have declared private spaces the property of the community, liable for community inspection and oversight. For example, the executive council often entered a house with or without the owner's consent to search it or inspect it. In some cases, this was quite a dictatorial process which could be said to violate basic human rights to privacy and personal property.

Second, the community concerns and problems of the complications that arise a matter to the police. In represented the concerned

“Seven out of ten people attribute the safety and low levels of crime in their neighbourhood to specifically tailored community-based crime prevention practices.”

associations took on the private their members, shielding them from in Nigeria each time a citizen reports doing so, the association directly or aggrieved individual members.

Third, the community roles of the state: they vehicles with fuel, police patrol vans and incentives so that and protected. They also the arrest of suspects.

associations 'communitise' some support the police by supplying their constructing police posts, repairing giving police officers monetary communities will be well patrolled supplied intelligence and facilitated Police officers reciprocated by

patrolling regularly and responding rapidly to distress calls from community associations.

In the case of **Oja'aba** in contrast, we discovered that a combination of cultural and contextual factors have weakened CBCP practices. Specifically we identified three major factors that prevented the community association from fully pursuing crime-prevention, through 'communitisation'. The first factor is kin-based settlement where reporting kin to the police or giving out intelligence information on him is seen as an offence to tradition and ancestral relationships. Instead of reporting offenders to the police, leaders resort to a poor alternative of 'calling them to order', during meetings.

The second factor is the tradition of violent street fighting among the natives. Various local festivals are traditionally accompanied by violent street fights which always overwhelm the community associations. The third factor is the existence of multiple lords or 'big men'. These are politicians, transport union leaders and gang leaders who have and maintain groups of followers who oftentimes break the law. These leaders, sometimes called godfathers, have



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constituted themselves into parallel authorities. They defy directives of the community association leaders and they have a lot of influence to quickly secure the release of their erring followers if they are arrested by the police.

Overall, the success of community-based crime prevention strategies depends crucially on the extent to which communities can legitimately take the lead in identifying and resolving local problems, managing public spaces and complementing state crime prevention activities.

Recommendations for Effective and Legitimate Community-based Crime Prevention

- a. The effectiveness of community-based crime prevention (CBCP) is determined by a number of factors, many of which fall outside the scope of existing regulatory frameworks and policies that deal with safety and security in Nigeria. Given that these CBCP models have been shown to work, specific legal frameworks and policies should be developed to support but regulate the process of 'communitisation', to ensure that human rights are being respected. An approach where citizens are supported to interpret their own rights and privileges will be important in drafting such regulations.
- b. Community-based crime prevention has been particularly effective, when members of the community take the lead on identifying and resolving local problems, managing public spaces and do not rely entirely on the state for support in these areas. In trying to promote community-based models in other parts of the country, the Ministry of Interior and its development partners should actively help facilitate the process of defining clear community roles and responsibilities so that groups can maximise their strengths and resources.
- c. Community-based crime prevention would be successful where community members are willing to obey and respect the legitimate power of community associations whereas presence of parallel authorities that defy directives of community leaders weakens community crime prevention efforts. Therefore, actions that neutralise the power of multiple lords should be embarked upon in particular. This should be one area where force and raids might be needed to protect CBCP practices.
- d. The Nigerian Government and its police service should organise regular training for community leaders in order to minimise the friction sometimes caused by the adoption of community-based crime prevention practices. Capacity building should focus on diplomacy skills and negotiation tactics as well as more general instruction on democratic ideals and the drivers of crime.



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References and useful resources

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This brief was developed as part of the Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA) Programme. ELLA is a south-south knowledge and exchange programme that mixes research, exchange and learning to inspire development policies and practices that are grounded in evidence about what works in varied country contexts. The programme has been designed and is coordinated by [Practical Action Consulting \(PAC\) Latin America](#), in line with the objectives agreed with the funder, the [UK Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#), [UK Aid](#). The [Institute for Development Studies \(IDS\)](#), [Sussex University, UK](#), supports on research design, methods and outputs. For other ELLA publications and knowledge products go to ella.practicalaction.org/



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