

# Dane Gun - Machine Gun Nexus: The Local Hunter Strategy as a Tool for Modern Security Provision in Communities in Nigeria

Zems, Mathias

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**Abstract:** Since the early 2000s, the Nigerian authorities have been grappling with a dangerous and dramatic twist in both the rate, dimensions, and forms of act of insecurity particularly the rising cases of terrorism, kidnapping, armed banditry, oil bunkering, and piracy. A point appears to have been reached that the known conventional strategies of combating the dreaded scourge of violent criminality appear to have proved most ineffective, particularly where they are left to operate alone. This paper, therefore, employed the methodological approaches of review of related literature and content analysis to examine the role a form of informal security structures (ISS) known as local hunter strategy could play as part of an evolving security architecture in Nigeria. The paper made a number of findings chief among which was that right from the pre-colonial era, the various pristine communities across what later came to be known as Nigeria at independence had evolved for themselves various efficient systems for fighting crime of all types; that during the colonial era (between the 1930s and 1950s) local hunter known as di-nta, sode, sode or ode and yantauri among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa respectively was adopted in fighting violent crime across the country; and that the strategy (the local hunter system) has been popularized, abandoned, and re-adopted time and time again by various communities across the country. The paper also found that the said strategy (the local hunter system) which was built on very strong reliance on such local implements as Dane guns, bows and arrows, machetes, torch lights, whistles, and above all, various assortments of anti-criminal charms or occult medicine had proved very effective in fighting crime during the period. It was also the revelation of this paper that quite recently a number of States in both Northern and South-western parts of Nigeria have re-adopted the local hunter system as a tool for fighting crime. In certain instances in North-east Nigeria both the military and police formations currently engaged in fighting terrorist insurgency in parts of the region are successfully deploying the local hunter strategy not only for intelligence gathering and surveillance but also for special direct physical confrontation with the heavily armed terrorist insurgents. Finally, a number of recommendations were made for the way forward in the concerted assault at the scourge of insecurity across the country prominent among which was a clarion call for the remaining State Governments across the country to embrace the said strategy as part of their official security architectures, recruitment and training greater number able-bodied youths, practising hunters, retired military personnel and police officers with a view to strengthening the fast emerging local-hunters unit of the state security system.

**Keywords:** security, informal security structure, local hunter, police, community, (di-nta, ode, yantauri).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Peace, safety and security are both necessary and indispensable requirement for development and the attainment of good quality of life for any human society. They provide the requisite enabling environment for citizens to live and work towards social, economic and political development of the society (Groenewald and Peak, 2004).

By the same token, their absence stifles the human capacity to develop and heavily compromises the dignity and quality of life of both individuals and society. Furthermore, insecurity impacts negatively on all citizens through loss of property, life and limb, or through loss of confidence from fear of violence. It is against this backdrop that the delivery of safety

and security is considered a justifiable public good and the very essence of the state (Lubuva, 2004). Human safety and security are indeed human rights having a value of their own and serving an instrumental function in the construction of human contentment and prosperity (Odinkalu, 2005).

Unfortunately, social life in Nigeria has remained largely characterized by fear and insecurity (Odekunle, 2005; Odinkalu, 2005; Bach, 2004; Alemika and Chukuma, 2004). In a manner that suggests that the country lacks the capacity to discharge its security functions especially that of policing, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, an erstwhile Inspector General of Police, told the National Assembly on August 6, 2006 that the mobile police are ill-equipped to match the sophistication of the modern day robbers in the country (Jamiu, 2006).

Crime has become as complex as human nature, (Zems, 2011). The modern technological advancement and tremendous progress in communication have facilitated emergence of criminals in every corner of the world to commit a crime using sophisticated equipment in one place and then escape to another place. The present-day world faces the grim problem of illicit drug trafficking, smuggling, hijacking, kidnapping, terrorism, (Felson, 2002) etc. In spite of vigorous and vehement national and international efforts towards combating such crimes, it is quite disappointing to note that the crimes are rapidly growing in various forms. Crime has adversely affected the societies of both developed as well as developing countries by impairing the quality of life, threatening human rights and fundamental freedom and posing a serious challenge to the community. Crime, therefore, is also getting more sophisticated and deadlier with every passing day.

There are reports about armed robbers now using dynamites and hand grenades to blow up the doors of bullion vans conveying money with full police escort and using rocket-propelled grenades to attack helicopters (Soyombo, 2009). Similarly, kidnapping which used to be a localized problem of the Niger Delta area targeting expatriate oil workers, has assumed a national character, targeting the rich and powerful especially, in the society and making them to live in grave fear and uncertainty.

The profundity of the country's security problem is heightened by the daring disposition of the dreaded criminals as evidenced by their temerity to take their trades to the door-steps of the men of the agency that is charged with the responsibility of protecting lives and property in a manner that suggests that they have *conquered the territory*. The climax of the said rise in criminality was the recent incidents of throwing of bombs and armed attacks by insurgents and religious fundamentalists in parts of Northern Nigeria leading to loss of several lives and property. As a response to the security challenge in the country, many communities and neighbourhoods have made increasing recourse to informal security providers or what are sometimes called community based security structures in a bid to improve their safety and security particularly since the country's return to civilian rule on May 29, 1999.

It is thus the increasing proliferation and visibility of these structures that recommend them for a rigorous interrogation in order to determine their effectiveness in crime control and whether they can serve as viable platforms that could be leveraged upon for a more inclusive and holistic response to the problem of insecurity in the country. This is especially so in the light of concrete evidence from other parts of Africa to the effect that community based security arrangements have very rich credentials and amazing public acceptance that recommend them as part of the wider strategy of law and order (Banker, 2005).

The object of this study, therefore, is to examine the local hunter band system with a view to determining their effectiveness in crime fighting and possible integration into the holistic response to the problem of insecurity in Nigeria. This paper is based on data collected through extensive review of related literature.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

**Security:** Security is a state of resistance to any type of behavior that causes harm or damage to a person or property. Security can also be described as protection against criminals, thieves, and threats. The level of security is smooth according parameters such as safety, reliability and more. The security alignment should take under consideration actions of intent aberration, and demolishment from subjective point of view. The purpose of security is to release people from their apprehensions and aversions and by that to give them a feeling of safety, (Locke, 1690; Zedner, 2000; Zems, 2013)

Security is the degree of protection against danger, damage, loss, and crime, it is also as a form of protection consist of structures and processes that provide or improve security as a condition. Security is defined as "a form of protection where a separation is created between the assets and the threat". This includes but is not limited to elimination of either

the asset or the threat. Security as a national condition was defined in a United Nations study (1986), so that countries can develop and progress safely. Security has to be compared to related concepts: safety, continuity, reliability, etc. This relates to the condition of freedom from fear of threat against one's life or property or protection of the human person against victimization or avoidable harm or death; or destruction of one's property. The term is most often used interchangeably with the term 'safety' (Adejoh, 2008; Zems, 2013).

**Informal Security Structures (ISS):** This concept is used in this study to refer to all forms of unconventional security groups organized by people to protect lives and property in the community. It ranges from neighbourhood watch groups, communal guards, age grades, hunter guards, and other forms of vigilante groups that are formed to enhance the safety and security of residents especially in neighborhoods where the formal police are unable to effectively guarantee. They are called different names in different communities and also vary structurally and organizationally from community to community (Adejoh, 2013).

**Local hunter system:** This refers to the special form of informal security structure whereby men who are engaged in the local hunting profession of tracking and killing wild animals as game for both domestic use and sale are deployed for purposes of gathering intelligence and conducting surveillance for use by the formal security formation and direct battle with criminals as part of security provisioning in the local community where they operate (Fourchard, 2008; Olaniyi, 2005; Tamumo, 1993). These professional hunters rely heavily on their natural endowments or acquired skills of accurate shooting or marksmanship, vast expert knowledge or familiarity with the various terrains, routes, bushes, forests and other spots that serve as hideouts for criminals that exist in their community, use of such less sophisticated weapons like dane guns, bows and arrows, machetes, daggers, torch-lights, whistles, and above all, anti-criminal charms of various types and levels of efficacy.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper was anchored on the twin theories of relational cohesion and community participation. The *relational cohesion theory* is associated with E.J Lawler and David Apter and argues that social groups, networks or communities are formed and maintained through social *interactions* and repeated exchanges by members. Such interactions foster shared sentiments, beliefs, values and shared activities, and provide a basis for attachment and commitment to the group based on shared identity and interest.

The attachment to informal security structures is thus to be understood from this notion that they are part and parcel of the communities and therefore share similar sentiments and aspirations with the rest members of the community. Their commitment is also defined by their membership of the community and identification with its collective interests. This position approximates Orator's (2005) argument that the informal security structures endure because they are rooted in the traditions, customs, and native practices of the people. By the same token, the public police have failed thus far because they are detached from the people and are not bound by their sentiments and values.

Also considered relevant to the understanding of informal policing structures is the theory of community participation. The theory underscores the need to give control of affairs and decisions to people most affected by them, in this instance, community people. The advocates of community participation believe that besides serving as a means of getting things done, involving people in solving their own problems also brings many lasting benefits to people. First, it allows for the redistribution of power that in turn enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included (Arnstein, 1969). It also brings people together in making decisions about their environment. Therefore, participation brings about individual empowerment, as people gain (Kreuter, Lezin, and Young, 2000). In as much as the involvement by community members is a way to incorporate local values and attitudes into any programme and to build the layman's perspective into the programme. Community member involvement can also provide access to local leaders, resources, and technical skills not otherwise available (Bracht, and Tsouros, 1990). Above all, participation engenders a sense of identification and continuing responsibility for any programme, often referred to as the principle of ownership. (Carlaw, et al., 1984)

The aptness of this theoretical orientation is underscored by the increasing realization that no government or authority has the means to solve all the public problems adequately, and in the case of security, that the local people as stakeholders in their communities not only understand their neighborhoods better but also share the common aspiration of promoting and protecting it. It is also this realization that explains the increasing demand for state police, and arrangement which proponents believe would bring policing closer to the local people.

#### 4. CRIME FIGHTING IN PRE-COLONIAL NIGERIA AS THE ORIGIN OF THE HUNTER GUARD SYSTEM

Historically, policing in Nigeria can be traced to three epochs, that is, the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. In the pre-colonial era, crime prevention was the duty of indigenous institutions responsible for crime control. The absence of codified laws and social structure provided the necessary basis for the regulation of behaviour which was largely enforced by various institutions responsible for crime prevention in different parts of the country e.g. secret societies, messengers and palace guards (Marenin, 1985 cited by Ikuteyiyo and Rotimi, 2010).

Crime was committed in various Nigerian communities before colonial time. As a social phenomenon, crime cannot be totally eliminated in any society. As societies develop, incidence of crimes take different shapes hence the twenty-first century African states have witnessed new forms of crime such as cybercrimes, kidnapping, terrorism, etc. The essential thing is that as these forms of crime occur, the agencies statutorily empowered to curtail them must be prepared to check and prevent them. Crimes were committed in pre-colonial Nigerian societies. In such societies, as a way of avoiding the wrath of gods and goddesses that were venerated, crimes were not only checked but prevented in order to attain what the ancient Romans referred to as *pax decorum*, the favour of the gods. The coming of Christianity and western education gradually changed all of these. Before colonialism, both human and supernatural agencies were involved in the prevention and detection of crime. Whether in what came to be known as Northern Nigerian and even in Southern Nigeria, crimes were traditionally detected and prevented.

In the Southern part of what later came to be known as Nigeria, communities had their own ways of detecting and preventing crimes. Among the Okrika, Kalabari, Nembe and Akassa Ijo, according to T.N. Tamuno, there was the *Sekiapu* club. This group, also called *Sekeni* or *Ekine* enforced payment of debts, investigated and generally acted as police in each village, just like the *Ekpe* society did among the Efik (Tamuno, 1993:134). Women were involved in carrying out police duties in some communities.

Among the Aku group in the Igbo culture complex in the old Nsukka Division of the present Enugu State, crimes such as poisoning, theft, burglary etc were detected by the use of the services of detective herbalist known as *onye-odu* whose art was also known as *ima odu*, *local deities*, *diviners or fortune-tellers etc*.

Also among the Ete group in the present Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State of Nigeria, women “acted as police to collect women’s “*Awha*” (elders) to meetings and bring women who had committed offences before their council (Tamuno, 1993:137).

Among the Mbama Ibo in Okigwe and Owerri Divisions, the same thing happened (Tamuno, 1993:131), just as in Iddo district, Ekiti Division, in present day Ekiti State of Nigeria where the *Elegbe* held sway. Similar functions were performed by the *Ilari* (Oyo), *Odi* (in Ijebu), *Emese* (Ife and Ijesha) in present Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti states respectively. While, the *Inotu* (in Uromi Village of Ishan Division) in the present Edo State Also, in pre-colonial Ughievwen (Jeremi) and Ewhu clan of present day, Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, the “*Aden*” and “*Igbun*” groups performed what amounted to police duties ( Johnson, 1932). Among the Isoko people of Uzere, Delta State of Nigeria, the Eni-lake trial by ordeal also showed that the people had their own means of detecting crimes (Oghi, 2013:132-144).

What happened in the Southern part of Nigeria was not different from that which took place in the Northern part of the country. In areas like Bata and Nbula in Yola Province, the *Mbamto* which was a virgin priestess was also instrumental to the detection of crimes just as in Tivland where the council of elders, the *Mbavesen*, performed useful quasi-police functions (Tamuno, 1993:132) Basically, pre-colonial Nigerian communities had persons who were entrusted with police duties. These ranged from men of valor, repute and those of military acclaim, but certainly not strangers, rather, those who had local knowledge of the area. Even though messengers and bodyguards were used, emphasis was on physical fitness and character.

Techniques of investigation and detection of crimes in the pre-colonial times differed when compared to the colonial and post colonial times. Whereas colonial and post colonial method of investigation involved the use of ‘finger-prints’, pre-colonial traditional method of investigation made use of house to house or village to village inquiry and even “foot-marks”. In the Argungu Division of Sokoto Province, writes Tamuno, “a person who had committed theft, highway robbery or adultery, could be detected once one of his footmarks was covered with calabash (Tamuno, 1993:140) and

thereafter people were invited to authenticate whose footprint it was. Among the Uzairue group, Afemai Division, Benin Province, similar thing was done. It is important to note that even though for most Nigerian communities the criticisms could bother on issues of fairness and accuracy; it nevertheless helped in the detection and control of crimes. There were cases of abuse, yet the norms worked (Oghi, 2013). It is also essential to draw attention to the fact that even though Native Authority Police as it were, had their peculiar problems, they were more effective because they had knowledge of the culture and norms of the people. The Nigerian state as it is today needs to take a cue from the past. Policing can only be effective where the actors are familiar with the area being policed (Oghi, 2013.)

From the foregoing, three things have become clear and significant and therefore worth highlighting. First, it is obvious that even before the advent of the colonialists with their idea of a colonial police formation that gave birth to the modern police force, the peoples of the various communities or enclaves in the pre-colonial Nigeria had already evolved for themselves their own home-grown methods of crime prevention, crime detection and meting out appropriate punishment for convicted offenders. Such methods were, of course, based on reliance on religious institutions, deities, diviners, and social control mechanisms, among others. Second, there was discernible attempts to deploy the potency of local charms, herbalism, or occult medicine as part of the crime fighting repertoire, which as we shall soon learn was and is still one of the pillars of the hunter guard system and local vigilantism. Third, there was also indiscernible absence of the use of physical guarding, keeping watch or patrolling by a special selected guards carrying such weapons like guns, machetes, batons, torch lights, and their likes. Be that as it may, notwithstanding the foregoing distinguishing features of the methods of crime fighting in the pre-colonial Nigeria, their relative success stories and efficacy must have served as the origin of the hunter guard system and local vigilantism which had prevailed between 1930s, 1950s, and 1985-1987 respectively, later abandoned, and recently resuscitated across many states in the present Nigeria.

## 5. THE HUNTER BAND SYSTEM

Previous research efforts on the colonial and the post-colonial police in Nigeria have hardly informed non-state forms of policing under colonial rule. Private guards used by Native Authorities in Northern province and one former Yoruba city are mentioned but not the institution of hunter guards which became however central between the 1930s and the 1950s in Western Nigeria. The movement was initially unofficial before being authorized by the colonial administration during World War II and then legalized in some parts of the Western province in the 1950s. The Lagos newspapers and the colonial administration have used quite indifferently two expressions, i.e. 'night guard system' and 'hunter guard system' probably the latter could designate both an organization specifically composed by hunters and an organization in which night guard activities could be assumed by various community members.

Hunters from the country were often used as night guards in many Yoruba cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before being forbidden by the British administration (Tamuno, 1993). The district officer suppressed them in Ibadan in 1903, where they were considered too dangerous, and replaced them with a civil police force (Watson, 2003:76-8). Some community soon re-introduced hunter guards in areas where criminal activities were important and the police absent on the border area between Dahomey and Nigeria, as early as the 1920s and in Ikeja district (North of Lagos) in the early 1930s. In Mushin, a small locality within the district, migrant leaders banded together, formed seven Village Group Councils, asked for more police protection and finally set up night patrols using themselves and hiring hunter guards (Barnes, 1986:39-40).

In 1940, the *Nigerian Daily Times* asserted that 'an organization of armed night guards composed of native hunters has been adopted in most of the Yoruba towns for many years (*Nigerian Daily Times*, 1940). Similarly, *Yoruba News* indicated that 'the best measure to protect Ibadan is to entrust the job to hunters as it is done in other towns', a measure which was taken a few weeks later (*Nigerian Daily Times*, 1940).

Other articles and administrative reports state that a similar system was operating during World War II both in Lagos and in many other smaller towns of the region and notably, Oshogbo, Ede, Ogbomoso, Ife and Oye (Fourchard, 2008:10). Quite similarly, in Lagos, Chief Ashogbon gathered heads of Lagos Island households in his place in 1941, to organize night patrols supplied with armlets, whistles and torches to get rid of shop breakings and burglaries, an 'unofficial institution' known by Lagosians in 1946 as 'Ashogbon's Police Force' (Fourchard, 2008:10).

Initially, this solution was seen as conjectural by local administrators who authorized the people to defend themselves against crime in the peculiar context of the war. After the war, many comments from the press and the administration were critical towards the night guards and their tendency to harass or kill innocent people, but instead of banning them, most of the examples indicate that night guards were either tolerated or even given a legal status. In Lagos colony, the government only forbade wearing police uniforms but tolerated 'night watchmen, customarily known as Night Guards.

In Benin City, a petition circulated in 1953 asking restriction of movements after 2200hours pm in the whole city, control and search of lorries and cars coming into or leaving the town after midnight, repatriation of non-native thieves (Falola, 1995:18). If the Resident did not answer favourably, many dwellers engaged however a large number of night guards. One best informed case was however Oyo province where the resident, after some hesitations, decided in 1948 to approve the use of night guards provided the following rules were adhere to:

- (1) That a roster of Night Guards is kept.
- (2) That a head hunter is appointed whose duties are to supervise the arrangements made and be responsible to the local bale (chief) for the conduct of the guards.
- (3) That each hunter guard is clearly informed that firearms must only be used in self-defense. They must never be used against a suspected person merely because he runs away and does not answer a challenge;
- (4) If a hunter guard catches a thief or suspect, he should take him to the nearest Police station at once and hand him over to the police;
- (5) That no form of uniform is used by hunter guards' (Fourchard, 2008:11). This was clearly a response to former abuses as well as an attempt to organize the system under responsible elders.

In one particular pre-colonial enclave formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Ibadan when the ancient city developed as a war camp, night guard was sode *sode*. In Yoruba it is the contracted form of the verb *se* (which means to do) with its object *ode* (which means hunter). If *ode* originally means hunter, by extension, the term came to designate both a guard and a hunter. Today, an *ode* could be both a Yoruba hunter in a village and a night guard in the city (Fourchard, 2008:13).

Hence, *sode sode* can be approximately translated by 'to keep watching'. Their date of apparition corresponds to a period of time in between the 1930s and the 1950. There was a chain of transmission of orders coming from the Olubadan and from heads of powerful lineages associated to the Olubadan (The Mogaji) who transmitted information to heads of compound (baale). 'The mogaji were in charge of *sode sode*; they will call the head of each household then will tell them about the need to keep watch on the surroundings'. In each household, the bale will volunteer at least one or two (Fourchard, 2008). Such demand could also extend to the country where many members were living as farmers the larger part of the year.

Interestingly, the usual word used by elders to describe such organization is 'volunteer' whereas the system was clearly imposed from above. Elders decided for younger members who were not paid, because 'it was for the benefit of the community'; money collected by baale was used only to buy battery and torch light. The number of people involved within the neighbourhood varies strongly from one person to another (4, 8, 10 or even 20 by night). So different estimates are not necessarily contradictory, the number of guards depending probably on the period referred to. At the beginning, the system may have functioned well but the stress of night guard activities, some people may have found a way of escaping their duties. Once the 'volunteers' were designated they used to gather at a meeting point where they decided to go watching the surrounding generally between 11 pm and 5.30 or 6am. Simultaneously, the system imposed a self restriction of night movement, a practice that was apparently accepted by most members of the neighborhood:

Volunteers go around with a bell saying 'Konile gbele' (people should stay in their houses), meaning that the guards are outside and people should stay indoor This also discouraged thieves around by the sound of the bell'.

The system was based on the capacity of elders to mobilize youth and to propose them some security guarantees. People did not use guns but *sticks, canes, whistles* and more especially various *anti-criminal charms*. People had faith in charms because they were believed to be efficient in providing a large range of protection. 'Local dane guns by the thieves don't used to have effect on sode sode because they had charms to control them 'what our fathers did was not to beat thieves but to put some charms in their hand that will lead to their death'. Once the robbers are ambushed, they could be 'charmed' and then arrested.

These anti-criminal charms were then supposed to be more efficient than the one used by robbers. Like the warriors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thieves believed in the efficacy of charms to succeed in their operations (Falola, 1995:10). Thieves used charms to turn invisible when detected, resist gunshot, machete cut and to even escape from police cell. Burglars operating by night were generally using two kinds of charms: the most common one to prevent people from waking during the night; the other one prevented burglars from being arrested. Both of them were declared illegal by the British Law. In the 1930s, in Ikeja district (northern Lagos), not less than forty offenders were brought to court because of illegal possession of criminal charms (Fourchard, 2005:305).

In Bere, *sode sode* was abandoned at a non-determined date to be replaced by paid guards. Different reasons militated for the change of the system. The idea that charms were not working anymore is largely shared by elders. 'Before charms were functioning, they were very efficient nowadays; people are *so deceitful* that charms don't work anymore?' (Fourchard, 2011). 'Old people who had the charms to prevent the invasion of armed robbers are all dead and we don't have people like them again instead of the government to support traditional practices, they are even suppressing them. The development since the 1960s of more violent criminal practices have considerably diminished the power of ancestor's charms: The local *dane* guns used by the thieves don't used to have effect on the *sode sode* because they had charms to control it but with foreign guns, it is difficult, it kills'. Consequently, armed robbers became a more real menace for members of the community and especially for the youth who were in the front line during night patrols. Then the idea of hiring guards came to light.

The change of criminal practices are however not the only reason why people changed from *sode sode* to paid guards. The process of individuation in African cities has accelerated all along the 20<sup>th</sup> century in African cities and especially in Ibadan with the development of cocoa culture and salary work, massive conversion to Christianity, the weakening of the powers of the head of families and increasing individualization of housing units.

Also among the Igbo of the Southeast Nigeria, similar practice of using guards composed mainly of professional hunters or at least led by them was also used in fighting crimes both in the rural communities and cities during colonial rule. These hunters known as *di-nta among* the Igbo were equipped mainly with *dane* guns, kegs of gun powder, dangerous charms, machetes, and torchlight, among others and would be deployed to pursue and apprehend criminal raiders and burglars who soon after raiding a community disappear into nearby bushes. Investigations and previous researches reveal that quite unlike in Yoruba land, those *di-nta* who were deployed as security guards in Igbo communities were not paid a dime, instead they were recruited mostly on the basis of personal volunteerism and compulsory communal labour as an integral part of self-help community development efforts which was already embedded into the Igbo community development culture and tradition (Tamuno, 1993; Achebe, 1964; Afigbo, 1995).

Even in Northern Nigeria, the hunter band system was also used in fighting crime right from the pre-colonial, through colonial periods up till this date. Apparently blessed with expansive landmass that is dotted with thick forests like the Sambisa forest in Borno State, thick bushes and various animal species historically the people of Northern Nigeria had over the years developed on excellent hunting expedition. This hunting expedition was, of course, backed up by use of bows and arrows, machetes and dangerous instrument and very efficacious charms of all types acquired through the instrumentality of the famous trans-Saharan trade that flourished during the pre-colonial and colonial eras in Africa. As crime increased or began to take violent disturbing dimension, the people soon began to deploy their professional hunters known as *Yantauri* to fight the menace (Tamuno, 1989, 1993; Last, 1989). Rasheed Olaniyi (2005:55) also documented that the vigilante groups that rose and became official in most parts of Northern Nigeria, particularly Kano in 1980s, were offshoots of the *yantauri*. As a matter of fact, the metamorphosis of the pre-colonial or colonial hunter bands from what they were before into vigilante groups that rose in the 1980s, did not took place only in Northern Nigeria, but also in most parts of Southern Nigeria.

## 6. THE RECENT RESURGENCE OF ROMANCE WITH THE HUNTER BAND STRATEGY

Most unfortunately, for reasons beyond that of religious fundamentalism, popular dissatisfaction with widening inequality, poverty, unemployment, corruption, insurgency or inept leadership, the Nigerian landscape had begun to witness surprisingly new dimensions to insecurity right from early 2000s, till date. These new dimensions to insecurity include terrorism, kidnapping or hostage taking, piracy, smuggling, and cattle rustling, among others.

At a point, this new wave of criminality particularly terrorism and kidnapping got increased in both intensity, sporadic spread, and sophistication so much that the conventional police formally charged with the responsibility of domestic crime fighting and prevention became completely overwhelmed. In response to that worrisome situation, the Federal Government was compelled to draft the military (army, navy, and airforce), perhaps on the strength of the sophisticated nature of their weaponry and obvious fighting power, to tackle the ugly development at times without much success. In the alternative, the authorities particularly the affected State Governments began to look inwards in search of a more effective and result-oriented strategy to deal with the said rising wave of insecurity in their respective domains.

In place of the strategy that is anchored on sophisticated weaponry and sheer fighting power, these authorities, as it were, became convinced that the best way to fight any local criminality like domestic terrorism and kidnapping is to use a strategy that is built on intelligence gathering, surveillance, and deployment of persons well versed or highly knowledgeable with the terrains or surroundings of the theatres of insecurity. Based on the foregoing, the said authorities including the various state governments, the military and formal police began to re-adopt the hunter guard system that was abandoned by 1950s across the country as a means for fighting acts of domestic criminality (Fourchard, 2008).

Worthy of note also is that this newly adopted hunter guard system also exists in its old structure and operational mechanism which are anchored on use of professional local hunters (*ode, di-nta, or yantauri*) with their vast knowledge of their community terrains, hide-outs, and hunting ranges, less sophisticated weapons (locally made guns, machetes, bows and arrows, torchlight, etc), and above all excellent charms or magical occult medicines.

For example, Dare Akogun (2015) had pointed that many state governments in Northern and Southern Nigeria including Zamfara, Borno, Plateau, Benue, Niger, Yobe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Kaduna, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ogun had since re-adopted the hunter band system for fighting insecurity by procuring and distributing large caches of guns and other weapons to local hunters in their respective local communities. He also reported that this re-adoption has been proving successful with these local hunters apprehending and killing thousands of terrorist insurgents in many parts of Northeastern states, and kidnapers in Oyo, Osun, and Ekiti states.

Yet in another account, Sayeed Aliyu (Punch, May 21, 2015) had reported how the military and police personnel fighting the terrorist insurgency in Borno state relied on the instrumentality of local hunters (*yantauri*) who had provided the lead to successfully break into the dreaded Sambisa forest to destroy several camps and hideouts of the terrorist insurgents and got over three thousand (3000) kidnapped victims of both women and girls released from captivity. What is then the nature of this new re-adoption of the hunter guard system by both the military and police authorities and the various state governments in the present efforts to fight the rising wave of insecurity in parts of the country?

As opposed to what prevailed in the period between 1930s and 19950s whereby the hunter guard system was allowed to operate alone without any synergy or in counter-productive competition with the formal police formations, under the present re-adoption strategy, the military and police personnel have decided to drop their usual psychology of mistrust or lack of confidence in any local and informal outfit in fighting crime in place of cooperation and information sharing with the local hunters.

Where they (the local hunters) do not provide the lead in the battle onslaughts that usually involve them alongside the military and police designed to hunt down the local terrorist insurgents or kidnapers, the local hunters have been reported to have provided invaluable criminal intelligence to their conventional security personnel counterparts. So far, this new – found practice or strategy of cooperation, synergistic relationship, and trust has been widely reported to have been working and efficiently and effectively (Kwajah, 2014).

## 7. CONCLUSION

There has been a global gravitation towards the decentralization of policing functions lately. In the West especially, the buzzword is ‘community policing’ wherein policing becomes a collaborative effort between the police and the community to identify the problems of crime and disorder and to develop solutions from within the community. However, in most of Nigeria as in the rest of Africa and many parts of non-western world, informal security actors have remained very prominent part of society’s entire security landscape (Kantor and Persson, 2010).



Indeed, rather than being the monopoly of the formal or public police, the policing function is being carried out by formal and informal agencies outside the realm of the state such that from the citizen's point of view, the formal and informal security actors are part and parcel of a complex pattern of overlapping actors rather than appearing as incompatible alternatives. As Baker (2008:27) argue that, what obtains in most of African societies is that a people move about their daily business or as the time of the day changes, people also move from one sphere of security agency to another one, which may be better suited for their protection at that very moment.

This co-existence of formal and informal policing groups has become reinforced by the grave security challenges of our time and the clear inability of the formal police to effectively arrest the situation in Nigeria (Adejoh, 2013). The independence of the country did not change this trend: non-state forms of policing shows historical continuity from the colonial period to date. Forms of policing exercised under the leadership of community members (hunter guards: *sode, sode, ode, di-nta, yantauri*) have mixed with community policing to initially formed state control vigilante groups in the late 1980s.

This paper is conceived against the above background, the main objective being to assess the performance and level of public satisfaction with informal security structures particularly the *local hunter* system in community crime control in Nigeria. This was coming against the background of the need to know if it could be strengthened and leveraged upon in the quest for an inclusive response to the current security challenges being faced across the country. The paper also established that informal security structures particularly the local hunter guard strategy and has become entrenched as they now form an integral part of the security architecture in communities across Nigeria.

The reasons for its (the local hunter system's) existence lie deeply in the obvious inability of the police to guarantee safety and security in the communities and the state at large, and even more so in the cultural root, closeness and accessibility of the ISS to the people. This paper established that there are aspects of the operations of the informal security groups that are cause for concern especially as it borders on abuse of suspects rights, bearing of arms and in some cases, the existence of unregistered ISS.

However, despite these problems, there were unanimity of views about the relevance and positive contributions of these organizations to the improvement of safety and security in the communities where they exist and in the state as a whole. Indeed many of them operate with the knowledge and silent consent and nudging of the formal police and will continue to do so in the light of a poor functioning police and criminal justice system.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

Based on the foregoing concluding remarks as encapsulated in the preceding section, it is hereby recommended that rather than dwell on the reported weaknesses and limitations of the informal security outfits, or even for that matter, castigating the fact that they do not conform to western standards, any genuine initiative that is committed to improving the human security of the local populations should instead acknowledge the centrality of these outfits in the security landscape of the society and work on their weaknesses with a view to strengthening and improving their performance.

It will also be needful to study and understand the ways in which the formal police and their informal counterparts inter-penetrate, mingle and merge with a view to enriching and strengthening this relationship in a manner that would enhance more robust security arrangement. In this era of terrorism and the need for more involvement of the community especially as it relates to intelligence-led policing, the existence of such on informal security group like the local hunter band presents an enviable platform that could be leveraged upon for more inclusive policing of our communities. Since it has been established that informal security structures work and satisfactorily so, focus should be on why it is working and how it can be supported and improved upon. This may as well be what is needed to come to terms with the prevailing insecurity across the country.

In this regard, it is hereby recommended that the examples already set by such state governments like those of Borno, Zamfara, Niger, Plateau, Oyo, and Osun, among other states and the recent incorporation of the local hunter in the ongoing war with the terrorist insurgents in Northeastern states into their battle strategy by the military should be copied by other remaining state governments, the Nigeria Police, local governments, and communities in and across the country.

It is lawful for citizens and communities to protect themselves against criminality and other forms of insecurity. Yet, in order to complement the formal security sector, an effort should be undertaken to regulate such activities under clearly

defined guidelines and within the context of mutual understanding and partnership. Attention needs to be focused on strengthening the citizens' confidence in the state's capacity to protect, as a means to reassert the legitimacy of the formal security sector. But informal security providers, particularly the local hunter system should also be recognized as an important security actor in their own right.

A major task for security sector governance is to create a symbiotic balance between the formal and informal security providers, in a way that leads to cooperation rather competition. In a sense, the informal security providers should recognize the limits of their operations in their delimited areas of prosecution. To ensure compliance, the Nigerian government through the NSCDC should provide effective monitoring and oversight of the activities of informal security providers. This should include concrete policies that have to do with their vetting and registration, as well as modalities for the recruitment of their personnel or volunteers. Pursuant to this, a standard operations and a code of conduct should be designed for the security providers and their staff.

The privatization of security in Nigeria will have significant implications for an effective and democratically accountable security sector. To address this challenge, one should strengthen the mechanisms and institutions of governance; to emphasize the democratic control of the security sector on one hand, and the professionalization of the security sector in responding to the security needs of the citizens on the other. In the final analysis, the proliferation of informal security providers represents a potential and real security challenge if they are not integrated within the overall framework of security sector governance (Kwaja, 2014).

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