

THE CONCEPT OF “PROBLEM-SOLVING ORIENTED POLICING” IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT*

by

Professor ‘Femi Odekunle †

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¹ Invited presentation to the **POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION RETREAT ON RE-POSITIONING THE NIGERIA POLICE TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF POLICING A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND**, Le-Meridian Hotel, Uyo, Akwa-Ibom State, 1-4 November, 2010.

†Professor of Criminology: **formerly**, pioneer Director of the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime (UNAFRI) **and** Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; **currently**, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Abuja.

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OUTLINE of PRESENTATION

I. INTRODUCTION

- I am happy to be here to participate in this Retreat on repositioning the Nigeria Police to meet the challenges of policing in a democratic and modern society. And perhaps needless to say, the present invited contribution on “problem-solving oriented policing” is only the latest in my formal and informal invited inputs towards improvement of policing in the country since the late nineteen-seventies.
- The centrality of “repositioning” in the phrasing of the theme of this Retreat is an indication, if not admission, that the existing “position” of the NPF may not be helpful to its desirable objective of optimal policing. Consequently, new policies, strategies, operational mechanisms or techniques may be called into play.
- However, a rational consideration of any “new”/repositioning policy/strategy/ mechanism/ technique has to be preceded by (on predicated upon) an adequate examination of the existing situation, even if only briefly. Hence, my contribution is organized and presented along the following lines: the basic objectives and importance of policing; the yardsticks for the measurement of successful policing and the performance of the Nigeria Police on such criteria; identified obstacles/problems in the way of effective/efficient or optimal policing in the country; and considerations of the meaning/tenets of the expectation and limitation of the policy/strategy of

“problem-solving oriented policing” in the contexts of the identified inherent obstacles and problems.

II. BASIC OBJECTIVES AND IMPORTANCE OF POLICING

- The basic objective of policing is to provide **security**, or at least a social and psychological feeling of **security**, for a majority of citizens, in a majority of places, and for the most of the time. And this basic objective is a summary of the following sub-objectives **which are prerequisite to that of security**:

- To prevent, control and combat criminality wherever and by whoever;

- To maintain public order and peace;

- To render assistance and service to all citizens needing or requiring these; and

- To favourably symbolize the law and the government by always upholding the rule of law.

- From these objective and sub-objectives of policing, the importance of policing to society and to citizens’ perception of the government (which the Police Force is seen as representing) cannot be overemphasized. This importance becomes clearer when one considers the following:

- Policemen are the government officials most proximate to crime, temporally and procedurally, and are the leading figures in crime-prevention/control and in the law-enforcement process;

-Policemen's honesty, integrity and observance of procedural laws in handling offenders and non-offenders have deep implications for the citizen's perception of fairness and justice and for the degree of respect the average citizen has for the law;

-Being highly visible (compared to courts or prisons) and being the only government authority legally authorized to use force on citizens, policemen's behaviour affect the citizen's opinion about their government.

III. PERFORMANCE OF THE NIGERIA POLICE ON THE MAJOR YARDSTICKS FOR MEASURING SUCCESSFUL POLICING

- In a social-scientific context, the criteria for measuring successful policing include the following:

-**EFFECTIVENESS** (e.g. fewer or reduced criminal victimization; increased return of stolen property; higher rates of arrests which result in conviction; lower traffic accident rates; faster response time to reports/complaints).

-**RESPONSIVENESS** (e.g. higher citizen perception of safety from crime; higher citizen ratings of police performance ratings of specific police activities; higher citizen ratings of specific aspects of police conduct such as honesty, integrity, courtesy and fairness).

-**EQUITY** (i.e. with reference to egalitarian distribution of “protection” to all sections of the population).

-**EFFICIENCY** (i.e. with reference to cost and benefit analysis of “protection” output relative to monetary, human and material in-put).

- However, when these criteria are translated into their combined and meaningful implication, the value, worth and performance of a police force can be determined by:
 - The amount and quality of protection it offers the generality of citizens as a whole; and
 - The degree of confidence and cooperation it enjoys from the average citizen.
- Judged by the criteria, and their implications in particular, it has long been clear to a majority of Nigerians that the Nigeria Police falls far short of optimum performance.
- At this point, it should be helpful to identify problems and obstacles in the way of optimal policing in Nigeria, **in order to (among other purposes) determine the possible role of “problem-solving oriented policing” in their remediation and, thereby, in the enhancement of policing.**

IV PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF OPTIMAL POLICING IN THE COUNTRY.

- As I have maintained for nearly three decades, the problems and obstacles in the way of successful policing in the country can be grouped into three broad categories: material inadequacies; human problems; obstacles external to the organization.

- Material inputs in terms of crime prevention/control detection, investigation, communication, data-gathering/research needs, etc. have never been adequate, relative to the demands of policing in the country.
- Human problems aggravate the material inadequacies of the police and exert tremendous adverse import on its performance from day to day—and most of such problems emanate from the following; among others:
 - Improper, inefficient and sometimes corrupt and nepotistic methods of recruitment;
 - Insufficient length of training-time and attention in training recruits for the “rank and file”
 - Lopsided emphasis (in training curricula) towards “drill”, para-military work, and “mechanistic” teaching of law and police-work;
 - Existence of “deviant” but durable “police sub-culture” which moulds the “working personality” of new constables;
 - Discourtesy, non-challant attitude to reports and 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;
 - Organizational 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;
 - 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);
 - The adverse effects of some of these factors in producing a negative public-image for the Force;

-The adverse effects of the same set of factors in fostering a poor police-community relations;

- Certain factors external to the Police also adversely affect its performance. Some of these are:

-Political interference/influence and the feeling of accountability by the Police to the “government of the day” rather than to the rule of law and the people;

-A materialistic, greedy, corrupt and indisciplined socio-economic environment (i.e. a society gets what police force it deserves); and

-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”.

- Having identified the problems and obstacles in the way of optimal policing in the country, it is now appropriate to consider the possible role of “problem-solving oriented policing” in mitigating them.

V. MEANING/TENETS, EXPECTATION, AND LIMITATION OF “PROBLEM-SOLVING ORIENTED POLICING”

- First publicized in 1979 by Herman Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin, “problem-oriented policing” is one of many concepts that have been advanced in the last three decades to improve policing e.g. neighbourhood policing, community policing, intelligence-led policing, zero-tolerance policing, etc.

- In terms of meaning /tenets, problem-oriented policing is an alternative policing strategy that involves identification and analysis of specific crime problems in order to develop effective response strategies in an ongoing fashion. It relies on the identification of problems by “rank-and-file” on the basis of repeated crime/disorderly incidents, occurring in the community and with related characteristics (e.g. behaviour, location, people, time, pattern), and are of concern to both the community and the police.
- As a strategy, problem-oriented policing encourages the policemen to discover the root cause of a problem and come up with possible solutions, having in mind the “cure” of the “ailment” rather than the treatment of the symptoms. In the process, policemen are expected to work closely with community members developing tailor-made responses which may focus on the offender, the community, the environment, other agencies, or on the need for some other kind of intervention. Importance is placed on creativity and discretion. It also places emphasis on research and analysis as well as crime-prevention and the engagement of both public and private stakeholders.
- With a “bottom-up” philosophy that places street-level or rank-and-file policemen at the forefront of problem-identification and resolution, the expectation is that successful or optimal policing would be enhanced via pro-activity, increased communication with the community/public, and creative discretion, all at the “street-level” of policing.
- To start with, whatever the merits of the strategy, it has certain already-observed limitations in those City Police Departments in the USA where it had been put into practice from the early eighties e.g. conflict with “incident-driven”/reactive policing or abuse of discretionary authority. **Most limiting in our situation however is the virtual absence of the requisite conditions for the introduction of such a policing**

strategy at this time. Consider the following “disabilities” of the Nigeria Police **relative** to the characteristics of problem-oriented policing **as conceptualized** above (by Goldstein):

-Unitary and hierarchical authority structure;

-Relatively rigid law-enforcement structure;

-Poorly trained “street-level” policemen, in terms of ability to analyse or exercise rational discretion;

-Inadequate material and/or funding provision, for “street-level” policing in particular.

- Before “problem-solving oriented policing”(**as conceptualized**) can be introduced into Nigeria, **most of the material inadequacies, human problems and external obstacles identified earlier have to be remedied, first and foremost.**
- In my considered opinion, what the Nigeria Police urgently needs today (as it did yesterday) in order to optimize its performance is due and effective attention to the indicated shortcomings. Otherwise, whatever new or fresh policing strategy or technique is not likely to add the expected or desired value.
- Finally, it is to be noted that, in any case, esoteric labeling aside, all policing are by implication problem-dictated or problem-solving oriented.