

Age grade system and effective community policing in Igboland

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Abstract

Conflict prevention involves proactively addressing underlying causes of tension to avoid the escalation of disputes or violence. Diplomacy, dialogue, intelligence gathering and addressing root issues can contribute to fostering stability and peace in a society. The Igbo has well structured political and administrative institutions that can perform the above highlighted responsibilities if well infused with modern political and administrative structure for curbing insecurity in Igbo land. The age grade system is one of those Igbo political and administrative institutions that are deeply ingrained among the people. Usually, a typical Igbo community is stratified into sets known as Ogbo or Egu in Nkanu dialect. The leader of an age grade is one who possesses outstanding qualities in leadership, dexterity in diplomacy; command the respect of his mates, and to some extent, strongly built for combat. Members of younger age grade in a community serve(d) as the law enforcement agency of the society. This paper, using historical and descriptive methods and relying on primary and secondary sources; will extensively discuss the security roles of age grade in a typical Igbo society and how such roles can be utilized for effective community policing in modern Igbo society and Nigeria in general. In the course of the research, it has been observed that the rate at which

kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, insurgency, etc has permeated the society can only be solved through local policing method and effective grassroots human development. This can easily be achieved through proper integration of Igbo communal living style where every member of the community is known and every land owned by an individual, family, kindred (umunna), or community is effectively and constantly monitored. The Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory which advocates for the use of institutions available in a society to tackle security issues in such society was adopted for the paper.

Keywords: *age grade, insecurity, community policing, Igboland, human development*

Introduction

The Igbo is one of the ethnic nationalities in the African continent with well structured political system. The failure of the indirect rule system by the British colonial authorities was as a result of lack of adequate knowledge of these administrative systems. The argument that the people did not govern themselves effectively prior to the arrival of the British colonists cannot hold water, because as identified by E. Nwaubani (2006; 7); three types of acephalous systems exist in Igbo land: (a) Segmentary Lineages, (b) Age Grades, and (c) Political Authority by Associations. These performed their responsibilities diligently without conflicting and/or encroaching in the activities of the other. It is on this basis that a number of Igbo scholars have argued that they had a well-structured democratic governing procedure before the arrival of Europeans.

An administrative system consists of the laws, rules, regulations, procedures, values, principles, customs and practices that govern administrative behaviour within a given society. However, one certainty about the administrative system in Igbo land before the arrival of the British was its lack of professionalism according to the description of Max Weber. He asserted that a career civil service would consist of permanent officials recruited by merit or through patronage to execute the decisions of a political community. Such a career service would be characterized by hierarchy of authority, division of labour, permanency, fixed salaries, and promotional prospects (Gareth and Mills: 1958; Pp. 196 – 244). But in Igbo land, administrative functions were performed, though there was no permanent career and salaried body which was charged with administrative functions. Rather, these administrative functions were performed by such institutionalized structures as traditional ruler/king, titled societies, elder statesmen or council of elders, age grades, and other individuals according to the customs and traditions of the society.

The age grade system is one of these Igbo political and administrative systems practiced in almost every community in Igbo land. The leader of an age grade is one who did not only possess outstanding qualities of leadership, but one who is also strongly built and could exercise legitimate authority over other members of the group. He liaised or serves as a link between his peers and other age grades on one hand, and the leaders of the community, such as the titled men, traditional ruler, elder statesmen, on the other. It was from these leaders of the community that members of the age grade take instructions and directives. The members of younger age grades serve as law enforcement agency of the society. Through them, the laws and

customs and traditions of the society are enforced and order is maintained (Nwosu: 1998; 239). In effect, the members of the age grade not only enforced the societal laws and customs, they also performed police and defense functions. They regulate the behaviour of their members and helped the community leaders to ensure that individuals and groups maintain public order. They also at all times defended the territorial integrity of the community.

This paper is poised to extensively discuss the security roles of age grade in a typical Igbo society and attempt to bring to bear such experiences in modern day Igbo society of Nigeria, with an increasing clamour for State and Community Policing amidst epidemic insecurity in the land. Not minding the level of sophistication and advancement in the societal modernization, the typical Igbo communal living style among the people are still relevant and observed; even among urban dwellers. The people still pay close attention to new members of their community for inclusive planning, growth and development of the community and society at large.

Conceptual and theoretical clarifications

The need to adopt and apply home grown solutions to the mirage of problems bedeviling Nigeria, especially the security situations is the first step towards inclusive development in the country. Nigeria's developmental trajectory fashioned by successive Governments is modeled after Westminster system and later from the 1980s, with the prescriptions from the Bretton Woods institutions towards extreme capitalism. It seems as if Nigeria security question from the second decade of this 21st century has defiled all known solutions proffered. Yet, the much desired inclusive and sustainable grassroots development remain elusive;

with insecurity deteriorating to its lowest ebb and the increasing clamour for State and Community Security architecture by the various federating units and stakeholders. This researcher tries to analyze Igbo age-long system of safeguarding their society, and attempts an effort towards applying same system in modern day Igbo society and Nigeria. The concepts to be highlighted in this work are: age grade, insecurity, and community policing; in order to deepen our understanding of the arguments postulated by the author.

Age grade

The age grade in a traditional Igbo society is the most important agent of socialization apart from the family. It has different terminologies according to localities and dialects; however, the general ones are *uke*, *ogbo* or *egu*. It consists of people of the same age bracket, usually 1 – 5 years differentials in birth or more. For instance, persons born from 1990 – 1995 are classified as age mates and therefore, should be in same age grade. It can even be extended further to accommodate someone born in 1996 or 1997 or more. Each set of age grade has definite role(s) it performs for the society and these responsibilities change as they advance in age. Generally, age grades functioned in relation to service to pertaining to security, sanitation, welfare provisions, and general administrative enforcement. In all, it serves as avenues for social intervention among members and agents of development.

In pre – colonial era, the newly formed age grades had to prove themselves to be matured enough by defending the community against hostile neighbours or enemies. They can only be accepted to adulthood and honoured with a name if they performed such task meaningfully with success (Ugiagbe &

Ugiagbe: 2015; 369). As it is being practiced in Igbo land till this day, a newly initiated age grade is expected to choose a well-respected elder who performs leadership role for the group by facilitating the recognition of the group among the elders and leaders of the community.

For a well stratified Ohafia society, there are five age grade systems. The two most junior in this system are respectively known as *Uke* and *Uke-ji-ogo*. The age range of the members of the former is 16 – 25 while that of the latter is 26 – 35. It was from within these two age grades that the fighting forces of the community were drawn. Here, a man must prove himself an honourable warrior or forever wallow in the degradation of a coward's life. From the *Uke-ji-ogo*, various age sets passed into the third age grade – *Akpan* – where they performed police duties. From here; the age of whose members ranged from 26 – 45, that is the hardcore of seasoned warriors who served as generals in the wars of the heroic age were drawn. The next age grade – *Umu Aka* – age ranged 46 – 55, was the only one with a female counterpart known as *Ikperikpe*. This was the source of the wise elders who served the community as political leaders, judges and public orators. As a result of power and privileges of its members, recruitment into it was only by selection from those members of the *Akpan* grade whose services to society were considered most meritorious. Those who were not selected to serve in the *Umu Aka* grade stayed on in the *Akpan* grade until they attained the age of 55, if they survived alongside the *Umu Aka* grade, passed into the most advanced grade – *Ndi Ichin* – where they play the role of senators and advisors to the younger generations.

Chukwuma Azuonye (1979; 22) highlighted the enviable role the age grade system played in the social organization of a society like Ohafia when he stated that

it constituted a means of ensuring that the eye of the society focused on its members to evaluate their progress and achievements, in accordance with the established heroic ethos, at every stage of their lives. In this way, men were made more acutely conscious of the necessity for personal success and of the pains of failure... every child was groomed right from the cradle for his future role as warrior and in the course of his achievement in the junior age grades was expected to join the rank of noble warriors by performing deeds of valour. Thereafter, the way lay open for him to enjoy the respect of his fellow men and to wield power and influence in the upper echelons of the age grade system. Survival into the venerable grade of Ndi Ichin was the supreme goal of life; for in this grade, the individual could now be looked upon as a living ancestor – addressed by the same title – Nna or Nne – which is also applied to the deified ancestors in the spirit world. Here, one could look forward with pleasure and satisfaction to death and to the prospect of reincarnation to continue the life of glorious achievements in the human world.

Meanwhile, it is instructive to highlight that punishment in the pre – colonial indigenous Igbo society was meant to unite members together in a collective conscience. This is because individuals attained their full stature only in perfect harmony with

nature and their community. Hence, whatever happened to the individual was believed to happen to the community, and whatever happened to the community, happened to the individual members. So, the activities of the various age grades, especially those charged with security are in the real sense of it, corrective measures to accommodate all and develop all in unison. The Igbo legal systems were mainly ad hoc; matters are raised, interrogated, discarded and/or condemned, and society moves on.

In espousing this further, Ogechi E. Anyanwu clarified that “Igbo morality emphasized the innate harmony between human beings and the universe; it respected the mechanism of the interaction among beings, and most importantly, it had as its centerpiece the community or the group” (Nwauwa & Onwudiwe: 2012; 51). Simply put, the age grade system provided supportive services to the entire political system in the absence of permanent administrative machinery in its modern form, for the attainment of an egalitarian society. The age grades ensure that peace and harmony is guaranteed amongst members of the community.

Insecurity

Insecurity is a complex psychological and emotional state characterized by feelings of doubt, inadequacy, uncertainty, or vulnerability. It is a phenomenon that can manifest in various aspects of life. One interesting question concerning the dynamics of this phenomenon is: “how does insecurity influence people and their relations in the society?” In answering this question, Riita Vornanen and colleagues, quoting Berki (1986; 23) analyzed that personal security was closely connected to society and to personal reciprocal relationships as well as to those people who they do not know. He pointed out that the social paradox of security

means that people are vulnerable in their relationship, but in its extreme form, people may also see each other as threats and enemies. They also went further to point out that security issues also present moral questions on how society is organized and how laws and rules govern security.

Nigeria is bedeviled with plethora of insecurity that has defiled all Government's solutions – leaving many Nigerians and the international community with more questions than answers. Issues leading to the level of insecurity in the country can be traced to the proliferations of arms and light weapons during and after the civil war, some of which got into the hands of civilians (Ishola: 2022; 57). After the civil war, these arms and light weapons were used by civilians and ex-military personnel for mischievous purposes such as armed robbery, burglary, theft, etc. Also, the resultant huge unemployed youths, some of whom lost their jobs during the civil war made use of what they have to get what they want by force; especially as the increased unemployment led to rural – urban migration without defined destination and ready job placement. Ubong King (2014; 79) in his treatise observed that peer group influence and other psychological factors associated with adolescent period can influence insecurity in a society. He went further to emphasize the impact of political and economic factors such as ethnic agitation, political agitation, unemployment; the effects of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as harbingers of violent reactions among the youth.

Igboiland is not insulated from the general insecurity in the country. However, a different dimension was added to it from the second decade of the 21st century – kidnapping for ransom, banditry, human sacrifices and cannibalism, herdsman and farmers clashes, amongst others. This was made difficult as one

couldn't separate secessionist agitators and people poised to perpetuate criminality; and the effect of climate change that has forced pastoralists down south in search of green vegetation for their herds. Without over flogging the level of security degradation in Igbo land, it is important to observe that the once bursting region with its mutual communal living is now faced with suspicion, fear, anxiety and cruelty among the people. That notwithstanding, the people still maintain the basic political unit of administration – umunna – which comprised a group of families that traced their descent to a common ancestor (Ndukwe: 2015; 178). What this entails is that no matter the level of crime perpetuated, the perpetrator(s) is known and has a background for easy traceability; both by indigenes and strangers/settlers alike.

Community policing

This leads us to the issue of community policing, which can be termed as a proactive approach to law enforcement that emphasizes building strong relationship and partnerships between security agencies and communities they serve. It focuses on collaboration, problem-solving, and crime prevention rather than just responding or reacting to incidents after they occur. This system gets the community directly involved in solving both criminal and civil disorders and makes the community involved in judicial settlements of societal problems and/or punishment of a guilty person.

Several scholars have dissected the concept of community policing, however quoting Van Rooyen, Ernest Aniche (2016; 3) highlighted that community policing is a philosophy and strategy based on partnership between the community and the police to find creative solutions to community's problems, especially crimes. The Explanatory Memorandum of the 2020 Nigeria

Police Act document is in agreement when it states that it “creates an enduring cooperation and partnership between the Police Force and communities in maintaining peace and combating crimes nationwide”. Section 117(1)(h) of the Act captures its duties vividly; “working with the community, schools, and young people, businesses communities, religious bodies, cultural groups, community-based associations, recreational centres and hospitality businesses toward crime control”. Therefore, community policing is a policing strategy or philosophy based on the notion that community interaction and support can help control crime and reduce fear, with community members helping to identify suspects, detain vandals and bring problems to the attention of the regular police (Friedmann: 1996; 4). The central theme of the concept is the collaboration of efforts between the police and the residence in combating crime and instill fear on criminals.

According to section 214 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended, “there shall be a police force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provision of this section, no other Police Force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof”. This provision forecloses anything operating as security or policing anywhere in the country without the express approval of the Nigeria Police. This policy is majorly manifested in the course of bearing sophisticated weapons which is the exclusive preserve of the Nigeria Police, Military and other Federal Para-Military agencies. This is because other forms of local security architectures are allowed to operate, like Forest Guards, Vigilantes, Community Guards, Private Security firms, among others; these are much closer to the people but lack the constitutional provision of

bearing commiserate arms and ammunition that can combat criminals, who also have access to illegal sophisticated weapons.

However, there is a renewed clamour for the democratization of the Nigerian policing system by major stakeholders in the security decision-making sector to curb the increasing rate and sophistication of insecurity. In 2024, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu announced a matching order to State Governors after their National Economic Council (NEC) meeting to draft modalities for the full implementation of State Police in accordance with their peculiarities, culture and tradition (Premium Times; February 15, 2024). He went ahead to set-up a committee, while expecting the National Assembly to set in motion constitutional amendment to accommodate whatever outcome of the policy. Hence, it is expected the various State Governments in the South East and Igbo land will tap in the structures of the Igbo system, especially communal pattern exhibited in the age grade system.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which is a crime preservation theory focusing on tactical design and the effective use of the built environment – structural, social, physical, political and cultural, which when applied, reduces both crime and the fear of crime. Timothy Crowe (2000; 46) asserts that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life”. What this entail is that the main objective of CPTED is to reduce/remove the opportunity for crime to occur in an environment, and promote positive interaction with the space by legitimate users or rather, among members of the community.

There are six broad characteristics to CPTED theory; territoriality, surveillance (informal and formal), access control, image/maintenance, activity programme support, and target hardening (Newman: 1973) and (Moffat: 1983). It means that by optimizing opportunities for surveillance, clearing defining boundaries and creating and maintaining a positive image, urban/rural design and management can discourage crimes and criminality. This is more elaborated by the fact that offenders are potentially more visible among law-abiding citizens and therefore perceive themselves to be more at risk of observation and subsequent apprehension (Cozens, et al: 2005; 328 – 356). Additionally, we can deduce so far that a well-maintained and appropriately used environment can signify that a sense of ownership and proprietary concern exists within the community.

In summary, CPTED focuses on the natural crime prevention strategies, making use of available facilities and systems within a locality and combining these local initiatives with modern mechanisms like sophisticated weapons and surveillance gadgets. If police expertise is engaged in the design and planning processes and the principles of CPTED applied, opportunities for crime and disorder, and consequent calls for criminality will be reduced, while safer communities are created. Imagine if a crime is committed, and one or two individuals within the scene are identified and traced to their domestic abodes, subsequent perpetrators will be averted. As observed earlier, despite the sweeping innovations associated with modern civilization, the Igbo maintained her traditional administrative and communal living system to be exploited for the advancement of modern society. This is because, according to A. E. Afigbo (1981; 283), “colonial rule transformed Igbo society in many respects, but it did not destroy Igbo identity or cultural soul”. The strengthening

of the traditional age grade system will provide available options described in the CPTED theory for curbing insecurity in the region and creating a platform of mopping youths out of unproductive activities.

Historicizing insecurity in Igboland and the role of age grades

Igbo land is one of the impregnable parts of Africa. This can be attributed to two varying reasons: (a) what A. E. Afigbo (1987; 3) highlighted when he quoted Sir Alan Burns that, “practically every village was independent, and so great was the isolation of each small community that the inhabitants of neighbouring villages speak in entirely different dialects”; and (b) none of the neighbours of the Igbo evolved a large scale centralized political system whose rise and expansion would pose a military threat (Afigbo: 1987; 6). Hence, one can deduce that the first successful foreign military incursion into Igbo land was the British formed West African Frontier Force in the Aro Expedition of 1901 – 1902 that conquered Igbo land for the British colonial authorities, and second being the Nigerian forces in the course of the Nigerian – Biafran Civil War, 1967 – 1970. This is not to conclude that Igbo land was without internal crisis in the pre – colonial and colonial era; but to state how those internal security issues were handled, curbed and/or averted to ensure relatively enduring peaceful society. Unlike what is obtainable in the present era where internal and external elements are raining havoc across communities in Igbo land.

Igbo political administrative system made it possible for any form of security breach to be detected before they happen. For emphasis and clarification, the basic political unit in Igbo land is the *Umunna* – comprising a group of families that traced their descent to a common ancestor. While the highest platform for

political decisions and actions in the village or town is the General Assembly – comprised of the Paramount King/ruler for those with kingship system, Council of Elders and every other male member of the village who must belong to one age grade. When any security issue is brought up – internal or external; the people respond appropriately. If for instance, it's an internal security breaches, all is required is the mentioning of the perpetrators or describing their postures, the discovery will be made in the fastest possible time because either they are fished out by their *Umunna* or by their age grade members and appropriate sanction will be meted out. But if it's an external security breaches – land grabbing, extra judicial killing, marriage disputes, etc; the community leaders send emissaries for diplomatic settlement and at the same time activate the right age grade to prepare for war, in case diplomacy fails.

Chieka Ifemesia (1979; 16) had described the administrative traditional Igbo society as based on “human being”. This he clarifies to mean “a way of life emphatically centred upon human interests and values, a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, consideration and compassion for human beings”. Hence, George Emeka Ekwuru (1999; 7) summarized it as a situation where “the social order and character of traditional Igbo society guaranteed honest living and maximum security of life and property”. Consequently, citizens or members of a community tried as much as possible to avoid crime or responsible for security breaches; because they are aware there will be no escape.

What constituted crime in traditional Igbo society was not codified like it is in the modern era. But any act or conduct that violated the cherished norms and values of the community, and which after trial was visited with severe sanction; can be referred

as a crime. A crime could also be minor or serious depending on the circumstances of the community's customs and traditions. However, there were some major offences which amounted to serious crimes – referred to as abominations; due to their propensity to arouse strong indignation and condemnation among the people. In offering further clarification, Emmanuel Igbo (2007; 143) explained that “traditional crimes which were generally regarded as abominations include murder, theft, adultery, rape, incest, and suicide”. He went further to classify crimes in traditional Igbo society to three – offences against individuals, offences against the community, and offences against the gods of the land.

In preventing these crimes from happening or apprehending perpetrators of those offences, every community in traditional Igbo society has its own vigilantes or guards, especially in the night. They are brave men selected from among various age grades, usually between the ages 20 – 50 with adequate knowledge of the community and its surrounding vicinity – land, forests, and water. They are charged to effectively wade off internal and external criminals who attempts to commit atrocities like head-hunting, kidnapping for slave trade or rituals, arson, vandalism, rape, discretion of customs and traditions, among others. Some of the members of the age grade were also drafted to play the role of the secret police through the masquerade system. They played the role of supernatural beings with the mission to inflicting severe punishment to an avid criminal and/or eliminate perpetual offender after investigation. Elizabeth Isichie (1976; 23) attested that “the anonymity of the members and their supernatural aura, made the secret agents a potent sanction against crime”. While Chieka Ifemesia (1979; 80) agreed that they were “powerful factors in the observance of law and order”,

in that their ability to detect crime, penalized culprits and enforced harmony in the community is outstanding. Consequently, people strived to be law abiding, behaved themselves and tried not to incur their wrath.

The age grades were also involved in the collection of dues, fines and meting out punishment to defaulters as directed by the Council of Elders and Village Assembly. Invariably stated then, the functions of the age grade are mainly implementation and enforcement of laws which include execution of laws and policies as directed and/or deem fit. It is instructive to note that being part of the security apparatus in the community is voluntary. Hence, an individual can be a member of an age grade from where the local vigilantes and secret agents are drawn, but not part of the system. However, in societies like Ohafia where distinction was made between classes of men, people tend to volunteer for pride and protection of family prestige as well as in anticipation of its attendant benefits and lose.

For clarity, Ohafia society consisted of two classes of men. The first called *Ufiem* – consisted of men who proved their manhood by defending the community in times of crisis, fighting against enemies, procured heads in encounters with the enemy, raiding neighbouring areas for food, and other heroic acts. While the second class of men was known as *Ujo* – consisted of cowardly and dishonourable men who shirked their responsibilities to the community by failing to risk their lives in its service. The action of such men created huge gaps in the defence of the land giving the enemy the respite he needed to increase attacks (Azuoonye: 1979; 14). The institutionalization of the distinction between these two classes of men was essential because it enabled the society to operate a system of rewards and punishments by means of which it succeeded in a remarkable way

in holding members of its younger generations from deviating from the established heroic norm.

It is worthwhile I mention mechanisms of crime investigations in traditional Igbo society, because not all cases of criminality were caught while in the act; which as we know, would ultimately eliminate the question or the necessity of looking for evidence against the perpetrators in an era of no technology. This mechanism of proof revolves around myths based on traditional religious belief; its applicability cuts across various societies in Igbo land even till this day, and they include: divination, invocation of the gods, trial by ordeal, and intelligence gathering. Divination is the practice of consulting oracles and supernatural forces to explain what happened in the past or what will happen in future. Invocation of the gods of the land is where a community usually invoked the powers of the gods with a petition to go after a perpetrator(s) of a crime. Trial by ordeal is a form of oath taking to prove one's innocence against accusation. While intelligence gathering is the situation where members of the society placed themselves on alert, expecting that in the course of discussion or conversation, those with knowledge of a crime will say it; albeit unknowingly.

Insecurity in Igboland and constitutional role for local community administration

As we have observed from the foregoing in this research, the pre-colonial Igbo society did not distinguish between policing and fighting crime with the overall role of the society. Consequently, the role of policing in the traditional Igbo society was diffused in that there was no specialized institution whose specific role or primary purpose was to police or fight crime and criminality. It was rather the responsibility of the entire community spearheaded

by the age grade – of which every adult male member of the community must belong to. Thus, long before British colonialism, the traditional Igbo society had devised means of policing its communities and curbing crime using her traditional institutions like the age grade. Now, the questions are: can there be a fusion of these traditional institutions with modern policing system? What should be the role of local community administration, especially in policing?

At the dawn of colonialism, the British created layers of administrative system – Provinces, Divisions, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Native Authority. Our focus here is the Native Authority or Court which can be referred to as a Local Government – where the real practice of indirect rule system occurred. In underpinning the argument, A. E. Afigbo (1981; 314) highlighted that “the Native Court comprised the traditional chiefs of the communities which fell within its jurisdiction. It was a multi – purpose governmental institution in the sense that it exercised judicial, legislative and executive powers”. He added further that the Native Court was to be a medium through which “what was best in Igbo civilization would combine with what was best in British civilization to give birth to a new culture”. Thus, in exercising its legislative and judicial powers, for instance, the Native Court was to apply Igbo customary law modified to agree with British sense of justice and natural law.

In complementing British Native Authority system for local administration, the Federal Military Government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a uniform system through the 1976 Local Government reform. In his forward to the Guidelines for Local Government Reform (1976), then Chief of Staff, Supreme Military Council (SMC), Brig. Gen. Shehu Musa Yar’Adua highlighted that “in embarking on these reforms, the

Federal Military Government was essentially motivated by the necessity to stabilize and rationalize government at the local level”. However, these lofty dreams cannot be actualized without collaboration from the various traditional institutions within that local government. This is the reason J. U. J. Asiegbu (2003; 44 – 61) in his treatise; *A Political Survival Agenda for Nigeria*, suggested the establishment of “Indigenous Village Autonomous Communities (IVAC) with constitutional backing; where traditional rulers and native administrators will be in charge of physical development, conflict resolution, peace and security, managing public utilities, community welfare, citizenship education”, amongst other responsibilities as may be determined by the central Government.

To further buttress this argument, a 2022 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report highlighted that 52% of Nigerians live in the rural areas. Invariably stated then, it means the welfare and security of 52% of the country’s population is dependent on the proactiveness and responsiveness of traditional institutions at the various communities, while the remaining 48% who are presumed to live in urban and semi-urban areas are subject to the vagaries of State authorities – the second tier of Nigeria current federal structure. Also, Igbo land as the most densely populated region in the country with the least landmass, covering an area of about 76,358km² (Okali, et al: 2001; 12); making it the easiest to police. The Igbo land tenure system of communal ownership ensure that every land is owned by somebody, village or community. Access to this land for agricultural production or any economic activity is linked to the membership of a kin-group and is organized around a patriarchal system (Korieh: 2012; 173). Meaning that, if giving the responsibility, criminals will have no hiding place because someone must be held responsible for

whatever happens in a particular land; that is the owners of such land.

Insecurity in Igbo land can only be managed, not eradicated if the current policing structure and system is maintained. Total eradication of insecurity and instilling an endearing peaceful society can only be possible when local authorities are held accountable for any security breach in their domain. Local authorities cannot also be held accountable when they are not empowered to participate in persecution and seeking reparations from a guilty felon. A case in point was the dismantling of the Unknown Gunmen den in Akpawfu – an agrarian community in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. For more than two years, 2020-2023, unknown gunmen masquerading as members of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) used the community as hide out and safe heaven after striking, terrorizing and maiming Enugu urban dwellers and road users of the Enugu – Port Harcourt expressway. All efforts by the State Government and security agencies to eliminate and destroy their camp proved abortive until the local people (villagers) collaborated the efforts of the Government and security agencies to wipe out the criminals by making available information on their modus operandi and how to access the camp. The farmers-herdsmen crisis can be averted if every community take possession of their lands and forests; and be able to identify unwanted inhabitants and unapproved usage of the forest/farm lands. This is because youths who volunteered as local vigilantes through their various age grades will be on constant patrol in the community to fish out people occupying any part of the community illegally. What the youths require is the power to be part of prosecuting apprehended suspects and access to sophisticated arms to withstand the marauders.

Part XIV – Community Policing Committee of the 2020 Nigeria Police Act underscores the need for collaboration when in section 113(1) it states that “for the effective and efficient policing of communities in a state or Federal Capital Territory, the Commissioner of Police of a State shall establish Community Policing Committee which shall consist of representatives of the Police Force and local community in the State”. It went further in section 116(1) to list the objectives of the committees which are to:

- a. Maintain a partnership between the community and the police force;
- b. Promote communication between the police force and the communities;
- c. Promote co-operation between the police and the community in fulfilling the needs of the community regarding policing;
- d. Improve the police service to the community; and
- e. Improve transparency and accountability in the provision of police services to the community.

However, the problem lies in the implementation of the provisions of this Part of the Nigeria Police Act 2020. For instance, in practice, some few men and women are assembled and presented with certificate of Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC), leaving the core real local youths who mingle with those that perpetuate the crimes and knows how to gather intelligence and apprehend their erring peers. The Act did not make provision for bearing arm, rather the Committee’s functions of volunteering information that are not readily available. The Act did not also capture the case of urban dwellers – who has the responsibility of policing their streets, estates, and

business premises. Every security situation is local and hence, requires local solution to solving it. That is why the Nigeria Police Act, section 117(1)(d) itself included “maintenance of law and order” as one of the duties of community policing officers.

Conclusion

Solving the problem of any given society, especially security requires the involvement of indigenous application and methods. One of the problems of Nigeria federalism is the lumping together of varying customs and traditions together without recourse to their varying indigenous administrative systems and its applications in the society. We can deduce in the course of this research that Igbo land has available structures and mechanisms put in place by customs, traditions and cosmology to police and secure her society and communities. Igbo land is the easiest place to police because they don't rely on any external power or forces to implement policing as a result of the independence of every community. No stranger or foreigner knows a community more than its indigenes and inhabitants. If every community is mandated to safeguard its territories and the leaders are held responsible and accountable for any security breach, there will be sanity and a safer community in Igbo land and Nigeria in general. Also, communities should be allowed or empowered to negotiate or be part of negotiation before any economic activity will be transacted on their land. With this, the community knows who their tenants are; while the lessee on the other hand, knows who owns the land and understands the terms and conditions of acquiring the land. This calls for a review of the Land Use Act, to accommodate the fears and interests of indigenous communities. There is a serious lack of political will towards solving insecurity in Nigeria. Every community, especially in Igbo land already has

the structures through the age grade system. What is required is the backing and empowerment from the modern State structure for it to function effectively.

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