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The Nigeria Police Force: Predicaments and Possibilities

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This research is based on Doctoral research funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, with the kind permission of the Inspector-General of the Nigeria Police Force. It results from a five-year participant observation fieldwork study, combined with historical, analytical and interview research with officers serving and retired. The research, which was centred on one Division in the North-Central Nigeria, also visited 33 other police formations. The locations and names have been pseudonymised to protect participants' integrity. This briefing is intended to present selected findings in a non-academic format to all stakeholders in policing in Nigeria – development partners, governmental and nongovernmental bodies, the interested public, and not least the Nigeria Police Force itself. Its purpose is to invite discussion. Feedback is welcomed, and can be sent to the author at oliver.owen@geh.ox.ac.uk

Summary of findings

General

- The Nigeria Police is working to reorient itself but is doing so amid serious security challenges and institutional limitations.
- The performance of officers and their sense of professionalism depends on their morale and sense of self-worth. Both internal management and external recognition can have positive impacts on this.
- The performance of the Nigeria Police Force is stretched by operational challenges and issues of resources; but the human and material resources which do exist tend to be concentrated towards the centre.
- The paramilitary culture inherited from the past inhibits public trust and partnership.
- The independence of the police needs to be protected, so that politics and lobbying can be kept from affecting police performance.

Structural

- There is a tension between the centralised structure and operational demands. State governments already create special task forces, but do not work to full effectiveness with the Nigeria Police.
- The continuing debate over state police obscures other options for enhanced accountability, such as regularisation of the Police Council provided for in the constitution, which offers State and Federal Governments a joint forum for oversight.

Recruitment

- Recruitment embeds a tension between ensuring quality recruits and those wishing to subvert the system. Regularisation of standards and the involvement of the Police Service Commission have been positive.

Training

- Police training needs to be addressed at the level of training institutions, short-term skills deficits, and ongoing relationships with partners.

Pay and conditions

- Officers recognise that pay has improved but allowances and accommodation remain prime concerns.
- Upgrading facilities and accommodation and other outlay requires careful monitoring to ensure best fit and best value.

Promotions and postings

- Frustrations in promotion can affect morale but regular expectations of progress and the Police Service Commission provides some recourse and outlet.

Working practices

- Technological constraints mean lots of police work relies on officers' craft and practices to be effective.
- Police work is most effective where the public consider it most legitimate; this can be seen especially in the mediation work the police frequently engage in effectively, and such success can be reinforced.
- Reactive policing is the dominant frame, but active and preventive policing work has even greater value.

Morale, motivation and management

- Issues internal to the police have a strong carry-through to interactions with the public.
- Blame culture seriously inhibits police performance overall, and formal and predictable accountability mechanisms offer potential to defuse this.

Professionalism

- Best results are achieved when officers are respected as professionals. Specialised officers often exhibit higher morale and professionalism than many general duties officers.
- Successful performance needs to be recognised and promoted by both internal and external partners.

Discipline

- Although positive reinforcement has stronger potential for change overall than discipline, a strong culture of inspection also helps, and excesses like drunkenness need to be checked.

Torture

- Police use of torture is closely related to lack of other means to obtain evidence. Therefore better training in simple evidence-gathering and scene of crime techniques, as well as technologies such as CCTV and forensic evidence, are part of the solution.

Summary Punishments

- Summary punishments remain popular with the public, and this requires police to lead a culture change.

Corruption

- Blaming the police for corruption ignores the supply-side in the wider environment.
- The most damaging corruption is that which affects officers directly, and exemplary punishment would have positive effects.

Communal violence and terrorism

- Large-scale threats to public security are usually treated as public order interventions, followed by political processes. Orchestrators and ringleaders are rarely prosecuted, and this impunity acts as an encouragement to others.
- Use of extra-legal methods undermines, rather than strengthens, the wider aims of the fight against radicalism and insurgency.
- Peacebuilding efforts rarely involve the police, but police can be of huge value in reconnecting communities and in detecting and preventing early signs of conflict.

Policing and politics

- Political interference undermines cohesion, effectiveness and performance of the police. In the 2011 elections, the police in general performed well, with breaches documented and followed up by the Police Service Commission. The task for 2015 will be to consolidate that achievement.

The research project

This briefing is based on the findings of a doctoral research project funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (a non-political public body) and conducted in Oxford University's Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology between 2007 and 2013. Research access was kindly granted by the Inspector-General of the Nigeria Police Force and enabled by 'F' Department, Force Headquarters. The motive for this project was the lack of existing research on actual conditions and factors affecting the Nigeria Police Force, its personnel and their performance. There is a huge public debate on policing in Nigeria, but little of it is based on actual evidence. In the little research that exists, the voices of police officers themselves are usually silent.

This output is not intended as a criticism of the NPF, but to maintain a frank and constructive conversation. Neither is it intended to negatively compare the Nigeria Police Force with other countries or forces. The UK (for example) has recently encountered problems with corruption, cover-ups of abuses, politicisation, and resource shortfalls. Nigeria's problems are not unique for a developing country. Colleagues who work in India, for example witness many similar challenges but far greater in degree. The author is not a professional police officer, but recognises that it is a difficult and unique job which those who have not personally undertaken may find hard to fully understand. What is intended instead is to present an analysis based primarily upon views from the frontline, from officers who are a long way down the institutional ladder and whose voices are not often heard.

The significance of the Nigeria Police Force

The problems of public security are perhaps the biggest challenges to Nigeria's consolidating democracy. Since 1999, the Nigeria Police Force has been central to managing and responding to those challenges. Without an effective police force, the wider state, society and economy will find it difficult to function effectively and maximally. Today, challenges to policing Nigeria include rapid urbanisation, population growth, rising inequality, unemployment, mass migration, breakdown of older systems of social order, neighbouring weak states, and the opening of new economic arenas, which give rise to a huge range of criminal challenges including robbery, kidnap, corruption, fraud, terrorism, sexual assault, domestic violence, communal strife, and criminality in politics. Although specialised bodies exist to deal with some of these, the primary agency in the frontline of these challenges is the Nigeria Police Force. The NPF is also of globally important in scale – it is both one of the world's largest employers, and a major presence in Nigerian society: if the force's approximately 377,000 officers are each assumed to have an average of four dependants,

this would mean 1.88 million Nigerians belong to police families – to put that number in perspective, that is more than the population of some of Nigeria’s constituent states.[†]

Although police-style forces existed in some precolonial polities, formal policing began in the colonial era as a para-military system with very limited public accountability, and this has impacted its legacy and status. From beginnings as constabularies in new towns founded by the British, formal police forces spread slowly to rural areas, where their coverage is still weakest. Many other pre-existing community-based ideas and institutions of security, justice, law enforcement and dispute resolution competed with the police for legitimacy, and still do. Local accountability of the police was further limited when the force was centralised after the 1967-1970 civil war. Nearly 30 years of military rule also held back the development of policing by degrading the NPF’s capacity as an institution, leaving it weakened by the end of the 1990s.

Public representations of the police in Nigeria, as captured in surveys and in popular culture, are strongly negative. But this research also identifies a contradiction – Nigerians make frequent use of the police, despite the misgivings they express. We find a difference between the views people express of the police in general, and the ways they actually access the police using particular routes and connections. In this research, the author tried to look at the world of policing in Nigeria from the officer’s point of view, and to understand the ways rank and file officers see themselves as part of Nigeria’s present and future. The research discusses morality and ethics as constructed in a relationship between professionalism and self-interest, looks at the ways in which officers are forced to handle contradictions in the challenges of their everyday life and work, and examines the effects this has on them.

Methodology

- Based on participant observation fieldwork study, with supporting historical, analytical and interview research with officers past and present, from Constables to AIGs, including veterans back to colonial era.
- Original focus on introduction of donor-supported Community Policing strategy, but changed focus because of need to produce baseline data on everyday policing practice and techniques.
- Visited 33 sites (13 Divisions, four stations and posts, two Federal operational units, two mobile squadrons, two training colleges, one state Headquarters, six specialist units, barracks and messes).

[†] Four dependents per officer is likely to be a conservative estimate, as although some officers are unmarried or without offspring, others have more children, are in polygamous marriages, or have large extended families who rely on their income.

- Centred on 16 months of work in one Division of around 130 officers in a medium-sized town in North-Central Nigeria between December 2009 and May 2011. The research site was an urban centre in a largely rural state, covering elite suburbs, the old commercial centre, slum areas and informal settlements, and large rural hinterland areas with three satellite posts. The population of the area was highly diverse and ethnically and religiously mixed.
- The research observed recruitment rounds, donor-supported training, case investigations, everyday policing in rural and urban settings, but not major operations.
- Research ethics and protocol – pseudonymised locations and names to protect participants' integrity.
- Timing – the study was conducted before the Boko Haram insurgency targeted police officers and facilities in northern Nigeria, which might have changed the research environment significantly.

The central challenge

There is no effective substitute for a professional police force. The challenge is to keep the NPF at the centre of law, order and security management, in the face of five main limiting factors:

- New severe challenges to peace and security, across many regions of the country, of which persistent problems in many states of the Niger Delta, Middle-Belt, South-East, North-East, are only the most high-profile. Terrorism, communal conflicts, political conflicts, and new types of crime are also reshaping the policing landscape.
- Human resource, skills and motivation problems widespread within the force
- Limited resources to achieve mandated tasks – the Federal Government cannot afford to fund the Nigeria Police Force adequately to achieve all tasks before it.[‡]
- Multiple other overlapping agencies taking on specialist policing duties, including the National Security and Civil Defence Corps, Army, State Security Service, and others.
- Structural constraints – the Nigeria Police remains a centralised force operating in a federalised polity and the tension between these two arrangements is unresolved. Its structures of accountability also render it vulnerable to interference by a political class who are times have incentives to undermine or limit police effectiveness in enforcing the law.

[‡] Currently, police budgets cover recurrent expenditure on salaries and leave only around 20% (by some internal estimates) for operations. A report by a police reform committee headed by retired Inspector-general M.D. Yusuf in 2008 estimated the total cost of adequately re-equipping, paying and housing the force at approximately US\$17.5 billion. This is nearly half the total 2013 national budget of US\$31 billion (N4.987 trn) and is clearly unfundable.

The bad news is well-known and acknowledged even within the force.

“The Nigeria Police Force has fallen to its lowest level and has indeed become a subject of ridicule within the law enforcement community and among members of the enlarged public”

The statement above was made by Nigeria’s Inspector General Mohammed D. Abubakar, on assuming command on 13th February 2012. He continued:

“Police duties have become commercialised... Our men are deployed to rich individuals and corporate entities such that we lack manpower to provide security for the common man. Our investigations departments cannot equitably handle matters unless those involved have money to part with. Complainants suddenly become suspects at different investigation levels following spurious petitions filed with the connivance of police officers. Our police stations, State CID and operations offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of Squads and Teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our Special Anti Robbery Squads (SARS) have become killer teams, engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collection. Toll stations in the name of check-points adorn our highways with policemen shamelessly collecting money from motorists in the full glare of the public.”

In the course of research this author personally encountered cases where police refused to respond to emergency calls unless pre-paid; conducted arbitrary raids to round up suspects for later extortion; collected personal possessions from deceased crime victims; sold phones collected from armed robbers instead of retaining them as evidence or tracing their calls to find their associates; charged members of the public for routine reports and simply refused to handle cases. These are shocking cases, but there is also another side to the NPF which is not often talked about.

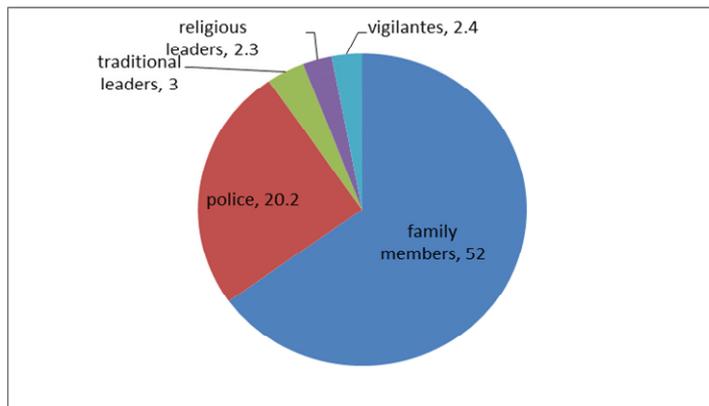
The author also encountered very talented officers with a sense of dedication at all levels. These included Divisional Police Officers (managers of a division) who used their personal money to pay for medical reports for child rape victims; commanding officers who courageously led from the front when responding to armed robbery incidents; officers who interact with the public with courtesy and concern. These officers can be found even in situations where conditions are extremely discouraging. In fact, the range of dispositions encountered during this research ranged from some very exemplary police officers to some deplorably bad officers. So the task of police reform can be seen as partly about which way

the majority in the middle is likely to lean – a question of motivating and incentivising them to spread the good example.

Groundwork for change

Police remain provider of choice, against odds.

The continued concentration on the NPF despite its problems is justified by one clear finding; despite its imperfections, Nigerians continue to turn to their police force for security and crime control. Even where they are not popular, ordinary people do report crime to the police more than any other non-family agency, and do so more than then they use any of the alternative community-based security providers, as demonstrated in the Nigerian NGO CLEEN Foundation’s comprehensive 2009 national survey of criminal victimisation. 52% of respondents reported crime to their family; 20.2% to police; but only 3% to traditional leaders, 2.3% to religious leaders and 2.4% to vigilante groups.



Crime reporting preferences in Nigeria (after CLEEN, 2009)

Low-visibility successes

The NPF’s best work often goes unsung. The biggest successes are conflicts which do not make headlines because they don’t happen. The best policing is often preventive, and averts incidents before they reach the scale which makes headlines. When good intelligence, timely deployments, or negotiation is used to avert incidents we don’t hear of them. The habit of anonymising successes– partly as an established tradition of the institution, and partly from officers’ own fear of reprisals – compounds this, so that police successes are often much lower-visibility than police failings.

Answers within

Potential answers to many of the challenges can already be found within the Force – before we dismiss everything which has been achieved over nearly 100 years of formal policing in Nigeria, police reformers should identify what works, and enhance it. For instance, as will be detailed below, the police in Nigeria do a lot of dispute resolution – both officers and complainants frequently prefer to ‘settle’ cases rather than prosecuting them. If this is what the public want from the police, partners can find simple and useful ways of helping them do it more effectively.

Continuing evolution

The Nigeria Police Force has survived previous severe challenges, often by quiet internal policy responses which are not publicised outside the force. Military rule did a lot of damage to the police, and its legacy is still here, but the organisation has re-consolidated. Likewise, the 1990s era when ethno-nationalist vigilantes challenged the police’s crime control role is largely over as their role has been incorporated into a wider security repertoire. Most Nigerians outside the force don’t know about policy innovations led by the police, such as ‘back-to-state’ posting policy which stipulates that most rank and file officers should be drawn from the local communities they serve, or police joint patrols with community security groups, or police registration and official identification of vigilantes.

The direction of travel is positive. The NPF is increasingly frank about its problems and interested in solutions – from officers’ pay levels, to more transparent bidding processes, to housing schemes: the issue is how to support the force to retain that focus. This can be helped by the spread of programmes like the previous UK-supported Divisional Management Training in community policing methods, and spreading awareness of the impact of reforms such as donor-supported model police stations.

Focal areas

The remainder of this brief concentrates on five areas identified as important in my research: Recruitment, training, everyday working practices, morale, and structural issues.

1. Recruitment

Recruitment processes are essential to get the right raw material into the NPF. The Nigeria Police Force recruits at three levels – as constable entrants, who must have a secondary school certificates; as cadet Inspectors, who must have a further educational qualification; and as cadet Assistant Superintendents, who must be graduates. A system of screening is used to try and uphold standards and ensure equitable recruitment from all areas of the country. The Police Service Commission has a hands-on oversight role in the recruitment of cadet Inspectors (future senior officers).

- The NPF is not helped by decline of the educational system, which produces many inadequately-educated school-leavers. However, perversely it *is* helped by the situation of high unemployment, such that even university graduates may hide their degree qualifications to be recruited as constables.
- There are a wide variety of reasons why people seek police recruitment in an insecure economy. Some are from areas of the country where it has always been a popular career choice. Many are from families with a background in police, army or other uniformed services. Some want to serve; some like the security of the job and its career prospects; but some deliberately intend from the outset to abuse their uniform to get rich.
- Significantly, some communities organise to send their children to the police because of the perception it gives them of having a stake in the security agencies in case of crisis. Such communal recruitment patterns are self-reinforcing because of “following someone who know(s the) road” – joining the police with the help of contacts who are already officers - although Federal Character positive discrimination works to some extent to mitigate this.
- Recruitment embodies a tension between police procedures designed to ensure standards and individuals who seek to bypass those standards to gain access – it’s a constant ‘arms race’. It can be a particular problem when political office-holders try to push candidates into the police, as one Inspector observed:

‘By the time they are recruited, they will be trying to find ways to influence their posting back [to the state] and then come election time they do their masters’ bidding’.

- The regularisation of recruitment with the assistance of the Police Service Commission has observably helped – filtering numbers, trying to ensure transparency, equity between states and standardising guidelines. Previously, state Public Relations Officers responsible for initial screening of recruits made up their own procedures of very variable quality. The PSC’s role in regularising promotion is

also valuable – finding the correct balance between Federal Character and merit as a basis for promotion has defused complaints within the police about varying rates of career advancement due to positive discrimination.

INTERVENTIONS

- NPF can work more closely with Police Service Commission to evolve standardised tests and scrutiny procedures for constable and inspector recruits as well as senior officer cadets.

2. Training

Lots of police cadet training concentrates on producing a character type. There is less focus on teaching skills. Officers learn much of their actual occupational skills on the job, from Inspectors and Corporals. Partly this is a normal aspect of occupational learning, but one of the side-effects is that cadets only learn a narrow selection of aptitudes and skills. There are three areas which can usefully be addressed in the broader field of training. The first requires a focus on training institutions:

- Facilities are overcrowded and downgraded, and the numbers being put through them put too much strain on them.
- Training posts are not prestigious – they are seen as a ‘punishment’ posting away from operational duties, in contrast to the Army, SSS and other institutions where posting to a training institution is seen as recognition for exceptional ability, and is a step on the road to leadership.
- Lecturers are not trained in teaching – they are left to sink or swim, and so are their students.

INTERVENTIONS

- Basic training of lecturers in teaching techniques
- Enhancing the prestige of teaching posts – through bonuses, salary supplements or other incentives.
- Donor-enhanced curriculum development with scenario-based (rather than classroom-only) training in modern techniques and skills.
- Utilising skills of exemplary visiting and retired officers – so that the knowledge-pool built up over years of service is used effectively.

The second aspect of training is to address the skills gap existing among serving officers. Many have only partial knowledge of key skills, and mid-career training in specialisms is often provided far too late in the day. Short-term remedial or refresher training in the workplace offers the best way to reach most officers, sending NPF trainers out to State Commands and Divisions. Partners could assist in training of trainers within the force to build this capacity.

INTERVENTIONS

Basic and refresher training is needed in key areas of work including:

- Scene of crime documentation
- Handling of rape and abuse victims
- Firearms handling and safety
- Restraint techniques,
- Writing cases for presentation in court
- Mediation and dispute resolution
- Maintaining criminal records.
- Interrogation procedure and human rights

The third aspect of training is that donor interventions may benefit from explicitly considering long-term relationships and impacts. Trust and relationships take time to build. Well-designed partner strategies like the Divisional Management Training for Community Policing were evolved over time. Yet without continued partner interest, they may not be embedded in continuity. After the five-year DfID-supported Community Policing programme, some states took up community policing training – Plateau State, for instance, provided more training and used the techniques in resolving conflicting communities, but the Boko Haram insurgency and other issues introduced a ‘war footing’ mentality which saw community policing relegated to a secondary priority rather than a core strategy.

There is a strong case for seeing partnership with police in the same way as partnership with militaries is seen by development partners – a long-term relationship project with peers, involving links to training institutions. Crime and security threats are more than internal matters, and partners’ strategic interests should take cognisance of that by helping to enhance police effectiveness.

INTERVENTIONS

Partner support to police forces such as the NPF should be seen as a long-term strategic partnership, building links and relationships, not solely short-term output-focussed assistance projects. Key partners have a valuable role in helping the NPF evolve its strategic direction.

3. Everyday working practices

My research noted how officers working in low-technology and low-training environments where standard policing tools such as fingerprinting or criminal records are unavailable, use their craft – a wide range of innovated practices designed to secure outcomes in a situation of limited resources – ‘doing much with little’. In this they are no different from other professionals, such as doctors, working in challenging developing-world conditions.

Improvisation

Formal and informal processes which are used rely on public sense of legitimacy – for instance, rather than always sticking to the charge, solutions may be brokered in the presence of all parties to ensure transparency. Or, for example, a driver who has injured someone may be detained until the victim of the accident has been discharged and the driver has paid the hospital bills. This is not recognised in law, but is widely seen as legitimate by the public. Extra-legal techniques such as ‘proxy arrest’ of the relative of a suspect to ensure the suspect’s appearance, are used as a tool in the absence of effective ways to apprehend suspects who have fled.

Prosecution or dispute-resolution?

Most police cases, except for serious offences (those termed ‘non-compoundable’ in law), result in negotiated solutions – parties ‘settle’ with each other. Notably, of a sample of 75 cases this author recorded in June 2010, only 2.6% were charged to court – 54% were simply not recorded in the crime book, as they had dropped out of the official files into the system of informal resolution. To the public, the value of the police in doing this, rather than alternative community security providers’, is also in officially documenting the outcome in case of later lapse. Much of police work is enforcing dispute resolution, and police authorities should recognise this and look to enhance it.

INTERVENTIONS

- Make effective techniques of mediation and dispute-resolution part of official training.

Summary punishments

Summary punishments (both corporal and capital) have been widespread and are a source of international controversy. I observe that they also remain popular with large parts of the

public, who see vigilante justice as legitimate, and contrast this with the failings of the wider criminal justice system. The police often face serious pressure from the public to show summary solutions – what we may term ‘police vigilantism’ - because it is instant, visible and transparent. Therefore the solution is not only education on why it is wrong, but is related to strengthening of the wider criminal justice system to achieve results the public can trust.

Torture

In this research I observed that the use of torture to obtain confessional statements is intrinsically related to the lack of use of alternatives. Court cases often rely strongly on confession. Therefore the solution to the endemic use of such methods will be related to the provision of alternatives such as better training in other forms of evidence-gathering, and in presenting effective cases in court. Divisional Crime Officers (DCOs) who are supposed to ‘vet’ cases before allowing them to be presented in court, can play a role in this.

INTERVENTIONS

- More research into why cases fail in the wider criminal justice system and identification of points for strategic intervention.
- Training in gathering and use of material and contextual evidence beyond suspect confessions.

4. Management, motivation and morale

The research found that issues inside a police unit easily get translated to officers’ behaviour in their interactions with the public. Where managerial officers are respected by their rank and file, morale is better and the interactions with the public are noticeably better. Where managers are exploitative and not respected, the results appear in interactions with the public. Describing this, a Mobile Police squadron commander[§] talks explicitly of transferred aggression:

“I treat my junior as colleague... (they come to you saying) ‘my child has been admitted (to hospital), I need N3,000, I didn’t get annual leave since 2 years, make I visit my grandmother’. If you take care of this, your men will be happy... they will leave feeling good. But if all you know how to say is (acts) ‘What is this? I will dismiss

[§] Mobile Police (MOPOL) squadrons are paramilitary-style units trained for public order disturbances such as riots. They are portrayed as elite units within the force.

you!’ (the constable will be thinking) ‘What is this to talk of dismiss?’ And this is the attitude they take to the public – transferred anger... We use junior officer more or less as a tool; or an animal. When he goes to the road he will be thinking first of that 300 naira he took out from pocket to reach that place.”

When things go wrong, remedial action most commonly takes the form of seeking someone to blame and subjecting them to disciplinary mechanisms, either official sanctions or unofficial pseudo-punishments such as transfer to an unpopular posting. Blame comes from the top down, making junior officers acutely aware of the risk of incurring their superiors’ anger in day to day work, while everyday performance is not monitored according to any transparent criteria. The research also found that officers feel misunderstood and not respected by the general public and are deeply aware of being stigmatised – they internalise this and it builds resentment in their interactions, becoming a self-reinforcing loop.

Importantly, there is a direct connection between internal managerial practices and public events. Officers’ high awareness of risk and the danger of ‘embarrassment’ make them deliberately minimalist in approach. A dissatisfied party to a dispute might, for example, complain and cause the transfer of a DPO, and this influences how officers see risk more generally – especially the powerful workings of informal accountability, even despite the lack of formal accountability mechanisms for the public. What officers are most acutely aware of is vicarious risk – the danger of being blamed for something which went wrong outside their control – and therefore they would often rather do nothing than make an intervention without being explicitly ordered to. In the course of research I even encountered incidents where armed officers failed to intervene at a shooting because they were not confident of acting in the absence of direct orders from senior officers. The problem is especially noticeable when political issues are present. A constable notes:

“If it is threat to the nation, we will engage it strongly. But when it is something political it makes you to just stay back.”

Demotivated officers are more likely to turn to corruption and extra-mural activities for fulfilment. It is notable that problems with petty corruption and discipline are lowest where officers are most task-oriented - specialist units like the Anti-Bomb Squads or Police Marine are observably more contented and motivated, and this is not just related to the rewards and perks associated with their roles, but the type of work they do and the recognition they get for it. This, as well as observation of the more successful techniques used in donor-supported training of divisional managers, strongly suggests the power of positive reinforcement in improving police conduct. In a motivating institutional environment, senior officers should commend high-performing juniors; instead, police newspaper *The Dawn* often features the opposite – junior officers commending their commanders, in the hope of

favour. The public, media houses, state governments, and other agents which are able to influence the police, should be equally aware of the power of rewarding positive examples.

INTERVENTIONS

- In order to improve performance of the police institution and of individual officers, managerial culture and practices need to be examined closely and overhauled.
- In order to get leverage with the police and embed reforms, stakeholders in government and wider society should devote specific attention to positive reinforcement, recognising and promoting positive examples of policing performance.
- Corruption *within* the police, such as diverting allowances or delaying salaries, badly affects morale, and those engaged in it should be identified and prosecuted as a priority by the NPF's leadership.
- Internal mechanisms for checking corruption need review and updating.
- Consideration should be given to enhancing the PSC's role in the investigation of complaints.

Corruption

Most literature on corruption by police officers ignores the supply side – publics who want to influence the police to their own advantage. This temptation is hard for officers to resist. Limiting police presence at salient sites of corruption such as checkpoints has helped the image of the police but there are others key nodes of corrupt behaviour which create systemic problems. The Divisional Crime Officer who charges a victim of crime to report a case shapes the whole image of the police from a single interaction.

However malpractices *within* the police system may even create larger problems, such as when allowances for equipment are stolen – the example of an administrative officer who diverts allowances intended to fund an operation in the end creates more lasting damage to the institution's effectiveness than a constable demanding a 'dash'**. Therefore, abuses affecting the force should be made subject to internal investigation to enhance morale and performance.

** A tip or gratuity.

5. Structural Issues

Governance

The highly centralised command structure of the Nigerian Police Force, covering a very diverse Federal polity, causes some problems. The centralised nature of the force, while allowing for easier inter-state co-operation than in decentralised police systems, tends also to filter human and material resources towards the centre, while many frontline units are under-equipped. Decision-making concentrated at the central level can also be restrictive in some contexts. Accountability is also centralised, and largely ‘upward-facing’ – i.e. the police are answerable primarily to the Presidency, Ministry of Police Affairs, and Legislative Committees, meaning that publics and local governments have limited oversight powers. The sole broad-based oversight organ is the national Police Service Commission, with powers restricted to recruitment, promotion and dismissal, concentrating mainly on senior officers. This lack of accountability mechanisms is compensated for by the deployment of informal pressure and influence, but this introduces yet more potential for blame, risk, and lack of transparency into the system. The system of police complaints is poorly-understood, little-used and not highly valued within the force.

INTERVENTIONS

One effective policy within the police has been to restrict non-specialist transfers to within each three-state administrative Zone, thus slowing the tendency of ambitious and skilled officers to seek postings only in the capital or major cities, leaving other areas underpoliced.

Politics

Political interference undermines the cohesion, effectiveness and performance of the Nigeria Police Force. If publics see the police as partisan, this will deeply impact their trust permanently. The centralised and hierarchical accountability structure of the NPF renders it vulnerable to political interference, and certain officers may compromise their professionalism to curry political favour in the hope of future career advancement. The tone is set from the top – when politicians restrain political considerations and promote police leadership in order of seniority, this helps to depoliticise the whole system. Conversely, when officers perceived as ‘politically connected’ are advanced over seniors, this incentivises other junior officers to make similar alliances, which compromise their independence.

The police are particularly vulnerable around elections. In the 2011 elections, the police in general performed very well, with breaches documented and followed up by the Police Service Commission who observed deployments. The results showed a positive change in

the public's perception. The task for the new leadership of the Commission in the run-up to 2015 will be to consolidate that achievement.

State police

Some Nigerian commentators have advocated the creation of separate police forces for each state. Others have opposed this on the grounds that they could become politicised, or would have inadequate resources, or would fail to collaborate. The case for state police forces remains in debate. However state governments, many of which already partially fund NPF state commands, have much leeway to find better ways of supporting the Nigeria Police, such as setting performance goals and targets and resourcing them. State governments fund task forces but even then regular police formations go underfunded, At the same time, their mode remains reactive. States can ask the public to work with police to identify needs and prepare a strategic plan, and they can resource it. This is not yet being done and would be a simple step. The other argument for state police forces is political, as opposition politicians assert that the police are misused by central government. The constitution offers a tool to address this, in the form of the Nigeria Police Council, a body which is supposed to bring State Governors and the Presidency together to oversee the police, but which is currently moribund.

INTERVENTIONS

- The independence and professionalism of the police can be preserved by clear procedures of selecting top leadership based on seniority and qualification, implemented by a broad-based body, making it more similar to the independent professionalism of the judiciary.
- The creditable performance of the police in the 2011 elections can be repeated, but the involvement of the Police Service Commission as observers is key.
- Different accountability mechanisms which enhance oversight of the police by elected authorities and wider public beyond solely the central level need to be explored.
- Tensions between Federal and State authorities over policing can be reduced by regularisation of the Nigeria Police Council, incorporating both Presidency and State Governors, which is currently in abeyance.

Other current areas of public debate and controversy

Communal violence and terrorism

The police have a central role in combating communal violence and terrorism, and many officers have lost their lives doing so. Whereas individual cases of homicide are prosecuted, orchestrated violence on a larger scale is usually first the subject of a public order intervention, summary justice, and then administrative processes to restore peace. Ringleaders are rarely prosecuted, and this impunity acts as an encouragement to others. The police, backed by sufficient political will, have the power to change this culture of impunity and violence. Equally, if security forces treat suspects in terrorism and insurgency using methods and practices outside the law, such as collective punishment or arbitrary detention, this itself undermines the legitimacy of government and can create new grievances, inhibiting the effectiveness of counter-terror or counter-insurgency policies.

In previous work with the Nigeria Research Network based in Oxford's Department of International Development we have looked at the role of the Nigeria Police in controlling communal conflicts. We realised that people talk about conflict management in Nigeria, without talking about the role of police, which is crucial. A working paper on this subject can be found at <http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/nrn/nrn-pb04.pdf>

Further resources:

Alemika, E. 2009. *National criminal victimisation and safety survey, 2009 summary of findings*. Lagos, Nigeria: CLEEN Foundation.

Alemika, E.O. 2013. *Criminal Victimization, Policing and Governance in Nigeria*. Lagos: CLEEN Foundation. <http://www.cleen.org/Criminal%20Victimization.pdf>

Chukwuma, I. 2008. *Motions Without Movement: Report of the Presidential Committees on Police Reforms in Nigeria*. Lagos: CLEEN Foundation. <http://www.cleen.org/Report%20of%20Presidential%20Committee%20on%20Police%20Reform.pdf>

Rotimi, K. 2001. *The police in a federal state: the Nigerian experience*. Ibadan: College Press.

Official website of the Nigeria Police Force: <http://www.npf.gov.ng/>

Police Service Commission website: <http://www.psc.gov.ng/>

Network on Police Reform in Nigeria: <http://www.noprin.org/>

Nigeria Police Watch website: <http://www.nigeriapolicewatch.com/>

Discussion of State Policing by Kole Shettima: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201209030580.html>