

Understanding Contemporary Vigilantism: A Case Study of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN)

CHUKWUMA C.C. OSAKWE
Nigeria Defence Academy Kaduna, Nigeria

BULUS NOM AUDU
Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano State, Nigeria

Abstract. Vigilante groups in Nigeria assume different structures and patterns of operation and these are determined by the nature of their societies and the purpose for which they exist. Many of them that can be classified as militias represent interests along the plural Nigeria societies and religions. Yet there are other groups under the umbrella of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) that do not represent any political, economic and religious interest, but only tackles crime in Nigerian communities. This group (VGN) is the focus of this paper. Thus, this paper examines a rare and interesting dimension of vigilantism in Nigeria by reviewing the VGN which was established; placing willing vigilante groups under one National umbrella, and later given Federal backing with the aim of operating professionally alongside government Law Enforcement agencies in the country. Examining the VGN as a single body in effect provides a concise and more encompassing understanding of vigilantism in Nigeria. However, as exist in other Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria, there is the chronic challenge of logistics and adequate funding in not just boosting operational efficiency but also enhancing capacity building and manpower development to majority of members who are still largely illiterate.

1. Introduction

It is generally perceived that the presence of or the emergence of vigilante groups is either a symptom in the global south on the pervasiveness of private security and or the inadequacy of the police necessitating the need for some form of community policing. In Nigeria, it is a hybrid of these perceptions. Vigilante groups in Nigeria have often emerged when there is the perception of increased criminality or social deviance which threatens social order. These groups have flourished not only in places where States lack capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state itself is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy. Deep mistrust of the State and formal security providers, driven by the inability of Law Enforcement Agencies to provide basic security and protect its citizens' human rights, further encourages vigilantism. The vigilante groups in Nigeria assume different structures and patterns of operation and these are determined by the nature of their societies and the purpose for which they exist. Many of them that can be classified as militias represent interests along the plural Nigeria societies and religions. However the proliferation of these numerous, largely unprofessional, and unlicensed vigilante groups in the country is not

a focus of this paper as the debates of whether they be classified as ethnic militia, militants, or vigilantes is still ongoing.

2. Early Studies

Pratten's (2008:3-8) study provides one of the most significant findings on vigilantism in Nigeria. He adds that since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria witnessed a proliferation of vigilantism and that vigilante groups have been organized at a variety of levels from lineage to ethnic group, in a variety of locations from village ward to city street, and for a variety of reasons from crime fighting (due to the failure of the state to adequately police her citizens) to political lobbying. Thus, it is not surprising that these groups have often existed with ethnic, religious, and political identities. This is buttressed by ongoing claims of extrajudicial executions and torture, combined with evidence that vigilante groups were involved in ethnic and religious clashes in 2000 and 2001. However Pratten's analysis (despite being focused on Nigeria) doesn't make mention of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria.

Akaayar (2010:8-10) also notes that in Nigeria today exist more prominent heavily regionalised and sometimes factionalised vigilante groups in the three core regions of Nigeria; the Bakassi Boys among the Igbos of the East, the Hisbah among the Hausa/Fulani of the North and the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) among the Yoruba of the West among many other indigenous law enforcement and crime fighting organisations. This fact has also been emphasised in other similar studies by Fourchard (2008:16-40), Johanness (2008), Matusitz and Repass (2009). He adds that the Hisbah, an Islam-based law enforcement organisation, was officially responsible for enforcing the Sharia system in the North. and that the Bakassi Boys and the OPC on the other hand, though not religious based (as the Hisba), often used indigenous African charms and religious beliefs to carry out their police functions. However, Akaayar's analysis leaves out the extent to which vigilante groups complement law enforcement agencies in crime fighting

Okeke (2013:312) talks about vigilantism as a form of policing existing in contemporary Nigeria following the inadequacies of the police, its abysmal failure as a veritable law enforcement, and the discontent between the police and the community. He notes that over the years, the police had been accused of bribery and corruption, extra-judicial killings, intimidation and the use of excessive force on innocent citizens, giving arms to armed robbers, involvement in the armed robbery, mass and illegal arrest, unable to confront the armed robbers, etc.

Consequently, as Okeke states, community members resorted to self-defense or mob action for their own protection against criminal suspects which was often unregulated and in the form of violent reprisals; the emerging vigilante security apparatus too stopped handing over suspected criminals to the police and instead began to carry out extra-judicial executions killings of suspected criminals. In other words, the increased incidence of crime since the end of military rule resulted to the formation of armed groups posing as vigilantes in nearly every corner of Nigeria.

Nevertheless, this study largely depends on the use primary sources through the conduct of oral interviews with various leaders of the VGN in Nigeria. Oral data acquired is however supported through information gathered from secondary sources. Finally, the study follows the thematic approach. Thematic approach has to do with organizing and presenting the findings on the basis of similarity of ideas as opposed to the chronological approach based on sequence of events. In the thematic procedure, the sequence of events is maintained under each theme. In this way focus is easy to maintain in the description and analysis of issues throughout the study.

3. The Concept of Vigilante

The term vigilante is derived from the Latin word *vigilans*, which means to be watchful. However, the meaning of this concept, which has an old social history depended on the peculiarities of the situation where it existed (Akaayar 2006:4). While there is no precise

scholarly definition or understanding of what vigilantism exactly is, it is commonly understood as “an organized attempt by a group of ‘ordinary citizens’ to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence, in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the police and courts” (Sungusungu 1987:36). Vigilante-type organizations have existed in many cultures, in past and present times, in both rural and urban settings. These groups flourish not only in places where states lack capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state itself is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy.

Various studies also point to the effectiveness of these groups, and there are well-documented cases where vigilante success led to a dramatic decrease in crime. Of course, as the literature also demonstrates, “The history of vigilantism is filled with cases of mistaken identity, in which the wrong person was made to pay for someone else’s deeds” (1987:12). The public image of these groups often presents a one-sided picture of vigilante groups. They are often described as mere brutal and undisciplined mobs or crowds consisting of mostly young people without any clear social or political identity and as emotional and spontaneous. Pratten (2008:65) argues that often vigilante activities are not solely focused on security. vigilantism serves a range of other functions in a community, such as disciplining children, sponsoring unemployed youth, recovering debts, and screening political candidates. It sometimes include mediation and arbitration tasks. In Nigeria, groups created such as the Oodua People’s in the South West, Bakassi Boys in the South East, and Hisbah in the North have often been viewed as either vigilante or militia groups. This study recognizes the complexity of vigilantism, and looks beyond the one-sided picture of these movements as brutal gangs by examining it as an organised legal structure through the activities of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN).

4. Rise of Contemporary Vigilantism in Nigeria

The increasing frustration throughout Nigeria about uncontrolled criminality, un-managed violence and its associated problems has only highlighted the inadequacies of the police and its abysmal failure as a veritable law enforcement agency. Indeed, there is a wide gap between the police and the community that they are supposed to protect (Rotimi 2010). It is observed that the Nigeria Police Force in particular which was fashioned after the British security and law enforcement model lacks indigenous Nigerian foundation and is structurally and procedurally a stranger to Nigerians. As a symbol and tool of colonial occupation, this scenario has resulted in a resurgence of indigenous crime fighting agencies that are culturally and historically rooted in Nigeria’s pre-colonial past. In other words this contemporary Nigerian vigilantism is inspired by the articulation of claims to a set of rights based on historical and spiritual legitimacy of vibrant young men who are desirous of defending their communities under the protection of traditional or local religious practices (Pratten 2008:6).

Nigerian vigilantism, therefore, represents the logical extension of traditional ethics and historical practices concerned with the policing of Nigerian communities. Therefore, it is a grassroots response to the failures of Nigeria’s conventional police and judicial systems. Thus, the emergence of the vigilante groups indicates that the State security apparatus have failed to adequately protect the lives and properties of the Nigerian citizenry. Although, there has not been any time in the history of Nigeria that government was not faced with security challenges, the exit of the military and the institutionalization of a liberal democratic government in 1999 witnessed dramatic increase in security problems and the proliferation of the vigilante groups could be regarded as an outcome of the situation. Indeed, democracies guard against the militarization of the democratic polity hence the increased and expected viable role of the police.

This study admits that during this time, the number of vigilante groups and militias rose steadily. However, it is important to state clearly here that vigilante groups are separate from

militia groups even though militia groups also claim to offer some form of communal policing against potential threats. This clarity is necessary seeing that both vigilante and militia have been erroneously discussed in various literature as synonyms. This paper argues that while vigilantes enforce the law of the land in collaboration with the police, the militias defy the police as they are found executing wars. In both cases however, the failure of government agencies to guarantee the protection of lives and property necessitated the provision of security from outside the formal security structures of the State. For example, the first category of prominent groups that can be classified as militia as against vigilante: Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) emerged in 1994, pursuing two objectives as flushing criminals out of Yoruba land and protecting Yoruba interests in Nigeria and outside. (Tell 2001:43). On the other hand, the 'Bakassi Boys' were created as a vigilante group in 1998 by traders in the City of Aba who wanted to protect themselves from robbers (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2017). Similarly in northern Nigeria, in the 1990s, the Hisbah groups were also vigilantes who enforced compliance of the Sharia law, which was to compliment the services of the police. Hisbah, came about to resolve peculiar security problems of their communities Umaru 2016). However some of these groups have gradually had their security services influenced by political interests. This has made many observers continually raise the question of if these designated vigilantes groups should actually be called militias instead. However it is important to note that the night guard (made up of local hunters) system of Nineteenth Century Ibadan remains the veritable precursor of the modern day OPC. The vigilante groups in the north, especially in Kano, were offshoots of the *Yantauri* (traditional hunters) as they were called (Olaniyi 2013:55).

However the second category known as the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) have been more officially recognised as they are comprised of the groups (inclusive of retired police and military men) that operate in both urban and rural areas in partnership with the police. Their aim was/is to protect government infrastructure,

the private sector as well as to protect people subject to attack from hoodlums. But generally, they have been better known for keeping night surveillance of their communities, halting suspicious movements and making arrests. The VGN is the focus of this study as far as vigilantism is concerned.

5. Controversies and Modes of Operations

Vigilante-type organizations in Nigeria have often emerged because of the rise in crime and due to the increasing failure of the State to secure life and property by maintaining law and order. These groups flourish not only in places where states lack capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state itself is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy. Deep mistrust of the state and formal security providers, driven by the inability of the police to provide basic security and protect its citizens' human rights, further encourages vigilantism. Again, the public image of these groups often presents a one-sided picture of vigilante groups. They are often described as mere brutal and undisciplined mobs or crowds consisting of mostly young people without any clear social or political identity and as emotional and spontaneous. More troubling is the perception of some of these prominent groups as militias promoting ethnic, political, and religious interests of private individuals or groups who finance them. Simply put: unprofessional in Policing. For example, while some members of the OPC are involved in vigilante activities, patrolling the streets and chasing down criminals, others members are known to have engaged themselves with issues that foment crisis than those that offer security (Abraham 2007: 407). The Hisbah groups in Northern Nigeria are seen as helping in the preservation of the Islamic culture. It is in recognition of their services that the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) requested the federal government not to see the Hisbah groups as Security rivals but as complimenting the services of the police (Jibril 2016). The Bakassi Boys on the other hand have been accused of operating under the orbit of the South-Eastern

State Governors and also of defying the law and killing real and perceived criminals.

Although the modes of action somewhat varied among the community watch groups and the vigilantes interviewed here, there were several similarities. Usually patrols were made up of groups of young men who meet after dusk (any time from 9pm to 12am) to patrol specific areas until the morning hours (until about 5:30am latest). While these young men patrolled or were gathered with one another, they kept a vigilant eye on their surroundings and for possible trouble and criminal elements. These patrols stopped and interrogated any stranger that entered their neighbourhood especially at odd hours. Once a person was deemed suspicious, the group would question the individual to find out their motive or intention for being in that area. If they found the explanation acceptable, they would let them go or escort them to where they claimed they were going. However, if the person in question seemed to have been lying then other actions were taken (Kabiru 2016).

The specific course of action taken by different vigilante groups, when faced with a criminal or a potential one, seemed to greatly vary from group to group. Those groups that had approval from the police to operate as community watch groups clearly recognized that even criminals have rights and 'with power comes responsibility'. However, at times the captured person was never immediately, and not always, brought to the police; As an individual's guilt or innocence was often determined on the spot after an interrogation sometimes (Obiesie 2016). Patrolling the streets is a dangerous undertaking, and group members say that they themselves have often been injured when facing criminals. As a result, they have armed themselves with cutlasses, bows and arrows, iron bars etc, claiming that the criminals often were better equipped than they were. Consequently they felt forced to respond with armed violence.

Baker (2002:238) touches upon this issue of escalating violence. He argues that the most fundamental response to the use of force is counterforce. Despite the fact that citizens arm themselves, criminals continue their illegal activities while preparing themselves with the

intention to meet defensive violence with violence. However, criminal violence not only drives people to defend themselves but also to retaliate in anger. When this happens, the escalation of violence is often unavoidable. The 'defensive violence' of Nigerian 'vigilantes' could thereby be seen both as a response, a consequence, and a contributing factor to the structural and physical violence of everyday life in Nigeria. These aspects highlight that the existence of vigilante groups leads to a number of negative consequences. The most obvious one is when these groups become more of a threat, rather than the defenders of the community. The unpredictable nature of these groups can become particularly exacerbated when the young men patrol the streets under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or when their vigilante ways become profitable; for example, when they resort to extortion or other gang-like activities.

On the one hand, there is much evidence that 'so-called' suspects' rights are severely violated by these methods and the manner in which they are apprehended. But on the other hand, one can wonder who is protecting the rights of the community members who live in constant fear from burglary and other crimes. However this study observes that the escalating violence as mentioned was not only a reaction to better armed criminals, but also a result of frustration. Sam Eze (2016) notes that many vigilante groups typically feel a strong sense of frustration about the fact that apprehended criminals were not properly dealt with by the police or the courts, and that in many cases they were released after a day or two. A combination of either corruption, due process or lack thereof.

In their defense, a police officer in the department of operations, Force Headquarters (annex) Lagos, explained that often these groups would apprehend a suspected criminal and bring the person to the police without any concrete evidence (Dangana 2016). He also claimed that the group members were not always willing to follow up these cases and/or testify against the suspected criminals in court. This study observes that most vigilante groups seemed more willing to take the law into their own hands, rather than to hand over the suspected criminal to the police

force which the vigilantes have a notion of being inefficient, and corrupt. This clearly demonstrates an area where better communication and increased awareness between the police and Vigilante groups could lead to a possible reduction of violence and mob justice. However, this improvement between the police and vigilantes is already being seen following the activities of the Vigilante group of Nigeria (VGN).

6. The VGN

The establishment of the VGN could be traced to the year 1983 when various communities in Nigeria started to establish night watch from volunteers in the community who also consisted of local hunters and youths (*The Constitution of Vigilante Group of Nigeria* 2003). However it was from 1985, following the increase of crime in Nigeria that the then Inspector General of Police Etim Inyang, urged communities round the Country to establish their own vigilantes to assist the police in tackling crimes following an upsurge of crime (*The Vigilante* 2016). These vigilante associations were to aid the police in putting an end to the rising wave of criminal activities ranging from murder, rape, theft, and in protecting lives and properties. Consequently, elders in various communities in Nigeria thought it necessary that a civil defence organisation should be reinstated. Thereafter, the Vigilante Group was established. By 18th March 1999, the Vigilante Group was officially incorporated by the Corporate Affairs Commission and established as the Vigilante Group of Nigeria with nine Board of Trustees members. And by March 2003, the VGN had come up with a detailed Constitution. The Aim and Objectives were spelt out under Article 4 as follows:

- To assist the Police and other law enforcement agencies to curb crime.
- To protect and preserve public property.
- Assist the Police in crowd control and maintenance of peace at public functions where the need arises.
- With the clearance of the Police, assist public agencies in the protection of their establishment plants and equipment.
- To give information to the Police and other security agencies of criminals or

wanted persons residing in the Ward or Local government.

- To locate the permanent or temporary residences of receivers of stolen properties and “419 practitioners” (obtaining under false pretence) for the purposes of enabling the police to arrest or monitor their activities.
- To make positive and useful contributions to the advancement, progress and well-being of the community by mobilising and assisting in communal development efforts.
- To abide by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and all relevant laws and bye-laws (*The Constitution of Vigilante Group of Nigeria* 2003).

According to Alhaji Ali Sokoto (2016), the pioneer founder of the VGN, the VGN started in the Tudun Wada area of Kaduna State (Nigeria) when at a certain period there was high rate of criminal activities and street thugs were roaming the streets oppressing people. Women were harassed and sometimes raped even in broad daylight sometimes in the company of their partners. The situation became worrisome which prompted the Commissioner of Police at that time to instruct the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Gidan Gayu (that is in the Tudun-Ido area of Kaduna State) to address the matter. “The DPO was Dabo Aliyu and he together with the ‘Hakimi’ (District Head), Dan Dawa, summoned a meeting of stakeholders of the committee and elders and I was among those that were invited. We deliberated for six weeks before we finally agreed that a security group to be known as ‘banga’ was to be formed and banga means vanguard or watch over”.

Everybody was allowed to be a member and when the Group started, the whole idea of properly organizing vigilante groups now spread. What followed was the drafting of a constitution and the registration of the Board of Trustee by 1999 with Ali Sokoto elected the National Chairman. There are branches all over Nigeria and there is no State that is not represented.

On the VGN's relationship with the Nigeria Police, Ali Sokoto says that it is very cordial. He says when a thief is caught, that they make sure they interrogate him thoroughly until he admits his faults before he is taken to the police station, but that their problem with the police is that they don't support or assist them with anything. This writer's submission here is that aggressive interrogation a thief when caught, as quoted by Ali Sokoto's may go against the tenets of professionalism especially in the eyes of most professional international organisations and in an era of increasing voices against 'jungle justice' and human rights abuses by law enforcement agencies in Nigeria; plus, the position of the law that all accused are deemed innocent until found guilty in a court of law. What is clearly extant is lack of professionalism and due process

Ali Sokoto however admits that some States give assistance to VGN State Commands but that the VGN at the National level hardly ever receives any assistance. In his words, members of the VGN are not paid because the services rendered are voluntary. Members of the VGN must be gainfully employed or engaged in some activity to earn a living and not depend on the VGN for salary. Also as part of the recruitment process, anybody who buys the recruitment form must take the form to his Ward Head and Village Head who will testify of his character. When the candidate completes this process and returns the form, he is then given an ID card. The purpose of this, according to Ali, is that when such a person commits a crime, those that signed his or her form can be held responsible.

Ali Sokoto contends that the VGN has a good relationship with the public and that as a matter of fact those who are members of the vigilante are people in the community. He points out that people love the VGN and that they have good relationship with the people, which is why they can easily arrest with ease someone in the community who has committed a crime. Again, although he mentions that members of his Group don't use conventional guns he admitted that they sometimes use traditional weapons like bows and arrows or local guns; the type used by

hunters and that permission to use such guns are usually gotten from the Local Government.

According to a source, Vigilantes have been in existence for a long time and different places had different ways of practicing vigilantism from the Local Government to the States. The VGN however came into existence from 18 February 1999 with the sole aim of bringing all the vigilante groups in the country under one body. From that period it was decided that the existing body of vigilantes that was prevalent in the north should work to embrace other vigilante across the country. Jahun (2016) says that when the VGN was registered, it was observed that all members occupying key positions in the Board were Hausas (and only one Yoruba), so the VGN was operating more like an ethnic and regional body. However, that before formation of the VGN, a vigilante structure had been existing in the Northern parts of the Country after independence with its first Chairman; retired Commissioner of Police Usman Faruk. Then in 1996/7 Ali Sokoto was elected as the National Chairman/Commander-General. Ali Sokoto held the position until 31st January 2009 when Usman Jahun was elected as the Chairman/Commander-General.

When the VGN first emerged it tried to bring all the States together because formerly every State seemed to operating on their own using their own kind of uniform. However the VGN was later able to design a standard uniform (i.e. a dark brown shirt and trouser with a dark red beret) for all vigilantes throughout the federation and a standard leadership structure was eventually put in place. Furthermore, VGN has been going to all the States of the Federation, encouraging and seeking the support of State Governors to back the operations of the VGN by passing laws and bills to support their existence and offer some kind of State intervention. In the States that such bills were passed, vigilantes were assisted with facilities and incentives to help them in the day to day running of affairs. In these same States, security patrols were enhanced and stipends were provided for the members. For instance in Kano State VGN received fifty one Hilux vehicles for the State Command, in Zamfara State eighteen Hilux

vehicles and one thousand two hundred motor cycles, in Kaduna State four Hilux vehicles, twenty six motor cycles and two power bikes etc. In several States stipends are being paid monthly to the VGN members (Jahun 2016).

At the National level there is no financial support from the Federal Government, however VGN receives full moral support from Federal Security organs like the Nigeria Police Force, Department of State Services, Office of the National Security Adviser and the Federal Ministry of Interior. The only dependent source of income for the VGN National Headquarters sometimes mostly comes from the States where they have the full support of the State governor (Jahun 2016).

On the issue of carrying arms, VGN is not allowed to carry arms such as conventional guns, though they patrol with the Nigeria Police. They supply the police with intelligence since they are more familiar with the local terrain than the Police. But there are some exceptional cases where their members are allowed to carry guns for instance in parts of the North East due to the peculiar war situation. Also in some States where the level of crime is high and due to the severity of some cases, the vigilante are given arms but such arms are carried under licence from the Commissioner of Police in that state (Jahun 2016).

The VGN also boast of a data base where they keep the records of all registered members of the VGN across the 36 states of the federation and the FCT, prepared according to Local Government and State. Currently the VGN boast of about 1.4 million registered members (Jahun 2016).

On training, some institutions provide training for the VGN and also some private firms. For instance that they are in partnership with several leadership training centres in the country like the Citizens and Leadership Training Centre, Shere Hills, Jos. VGN collaborates also with the Nigeria Police who offer assistance in many ways by providing the training and allowing the use of their facilities especially some of the Training schools across the States. Likewise, the

DSS, NSCDC who offer lectures and drills using their facilities also in Katsina and Abeokuta. Vigilante members are offered training in the area of Intelligence gathering, disaster management, provost, conflict resolution, basic police duties, leadership training and organisational management. Most of these trainings are self-sponsored according to him, and in some cases participants from every State are sponsored by their States or Local Governments and others are also sponsored by individuals and community members.

Currently there is a Bill before the National Assembly which is the bill for the establishment of the "Nigeria Vigilance and Community Service Corps". The Bill seeks to bring all the different vigilante groups in the country under one body and all the other types of community self-help groups. It requires that any of such vigilante groups must be registered and operate under the National body. This would help in curbing the proliferation of Vigilante groups across the country. And it is also hoped that the eventual passage of this Bill would ensure that the Federal Government provides financial and logistic commitment to the VGN (*National Assembly Press Proceedings* 2016). VGN hopes to achieve proper partnership bordering on many areas such as providing security, safety, environment sanitation, environmental protection, emergency management services, disaster management etc.

Interestingly, Federal Cabinet members from the Interior Ministry and Heads of security agencies as well as some Non-Governmental organisations such as the Department for International Development (DFID), CLEEN Foundation (formerly Known as Centre for Law Enforcement Education) etc have attended or participated programmes and workshops or seminars organised by the Jahun led VGN (Jahun 2016). Maintaining security has become increasingly complex and, as a result, education requirements for security agencies should be increased. It is further opined that better educated officers will be 'more rounded' thinkers and exhibit a more courteous and refined behaviour (Banjiram 2014).

7. Structure and Operational Guidelines of the VGN

Membership of the VGN is usually open to Nigerians who are supposed to be or:

- Are not less than 18 years of age
- Are of unquestionable character
- Are physically and medically fit
- Are residing in the community where they work
- Have not been convicted of any criminal offence
- Pledge to abide by the rules and regulations of the organisation and the laws of Nigeria

An intending member shall be guaranteed or recommended by traditional rulers in the area and identified by two persons in the community (Obiesie 2016).

It is worthy to note (as shown in the VGN constitution) that termination of one's membership can be through resignation, termination, expulsion, death, insanity, gross disability, or conviction by a court of law. As part of the VGN operational guidelines, any VGN member can arrest any person who:

- Commits an offence in his presence.
- Is reasonably suspected or having committed an offence unless such offence is one which the suspect cannot be arrested without warrant of arrest.
- Has escaped or attempted to escape from lawful custody.
- In whose possession is found goods or properly stolen or reasonably suspected to be stolen.
- Is found taking precautions to conceal his presence or goods or property in circumstances which afford reason to believe that he has committed an offence or who is taking such precaution with a view to committing an offence (Obiesie 2016).

Added to this is the fact that a vigilante member or members making the arrest shall actually touch, confine, or subdue the body of the person arrested unless there is submission to custody by

ward action. As a way of further checkmating the activities of its own members there are certain offences which disciplinary action may be taken such as breach of the constitution, acts or conduct likely to bring the organisation into disrepute or ridicule, engaging in dishonest practices including defrauding the organisation, engaging in activities likely to cause disaffection among members, issuing un-authorised pronouncement or press releases in the name of the organization, acts of sabotage against the activities of the organization, disorderly conduct of meetings, holding illegal meetings and making unauthorised contacts on behalf of the organisation, and illegal arrest extortion and torture of suspect (Usman 2016).

Following arrest there are procedures that VGN members are expected to follow. First, the person arrested must be immediately informed in the language he understands of the reason of his arrest; Secondly, the person is to be treated in a dignified manner and not subjected to any torture, extortion or fine; Thirdly, the person upon arrest is to be taken to the nearest police station as soon as practicable but definitely within twenty four hours of the arrest; Fourthly, family members of the arrested person are to be allowed to see the person and to converse with him; Fifthly, whenever any member or members of the VGN arrest a person, his name, address and relevant particulars must be taken and entered in the organisations appropriate register; Sixthly, the arrested person should not be prevented from eating food, drinking water and saying prayers if he so desires; and Seventhly, the VGN is to follow up the case of an arrested person handed over to the police and if the suspect is arraigned in court, they should be ready and willing to testify in such case (Usman 2016).

Kano State Commander Alhaji Kabiru (2015) emphasises that a VGN member is expected to work to the best of his ability without showing any personal interest, tribal, religious and political bias in the execution of his duties. Neither is he to take the law into his hands nor go out on duty without being assigned to such duty. Again, is not to reveal the modus operandi of the organisation or its secrets without authority. He must also respect and obey his

senior officers, members of the public and the law enforcement agencies as well as abide by any lawful directives of his superiors and the law enforcement agents. This includes going on patrol as assigned in company of the police or with their clearance where applicable. Members are warned against instituting or maintaining any proceedings in court against the organisation unless a member or members have first exhausted the internal machinery for resolving issues by appealing to the Executive Committee at the appropriate level up to the National Council and Board of Trustees (Kabiru 2015).

Sam Eze (2015) notes The VGN is structured along the lines of a Ward, Local Government, State, and National level all having Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen, Secretaries, Publicity Secretaries, Treasurers, Legal Advisers, Auditors. To complement VGN efforts Ex-officio members comprising representatives of the communities, police, DSS, two religious leaders, traditional leaders, and one person of high integrity, at the various structural levels (as they apply) are directly or indirectly involved in supervising the activities of the VGN. To play an advisory role, there is also a Board of Trustees of Nine persons which are supposed to be individuals of unquestionable character and reputation appointed (or terminated) by the General Meeting of the VGN (the highest organ of the VGN) and which comprises of the States Chairmen, The States Secretaries, The States Treasures, Members of the National Executive Council, and Members of the Board of Trustees (*Vigilante Group of Nigeria* 2014).⁶¹

In terms of remuneration, the VGN have no standing allowances, but in appreciation of their contributions to the maintenance of community security, members of their communities and other philanthropists make financial and material donations to them. Also, the Local Government Chairmen sometimes extend financial assistance to the groups in their local government area. Twenty four States have however supported the VGN with Kano, Zamfara, Ogun, for instance providing twenty one, eighteen, and twelve Hilux vehicles respectively to their State Commands. Ogun also provided thirty four motorcycles and Jigawa provided ten buses. This

is apart from the torchlight's and related items that some well wishers donate. However, all these are still a far cry from taking care of the bulk of the needs of the VGN, hence the constant appeal to federal government support(*The Constitution of Vigilante Group of Nigeria*, 2003).

Contrary to popular belief, The VGN though largely comprised of poorly educated individuals, is also made up of educated and enlightened individuals. For instance, VGN Commander General Jahun, is a retired Army Colonel who possesses a Masters Degree and other professional qualifications. The minimum expected qualification for membership into the VGN is First School Leaving Certificate. However, one of the main challenges apparently being faced by the VGN is that of funds not just for equipment but also for training and psychological development. The members and their executives often reach out to government and individuals in the society for financial assistance.

The VGN is also to protect younger people, women and the aged who are vulnerable and subject to attack from hoodlums (Akaayar 2010:16). In regard of their mode of operation, these groups have no uniform operational mode throughout Nigeria. It varies from place to place depending on the circumstances that prevail in their areas of operation. In some places, their attention is directed to road surveillance by day and night like the police, but generally, they keep night surveillance of their communities, halting suspicious movements and making arrests. During the day, they retire to their offices, which are their constructions, where they continue to receive cases, conduct trials and administer punishment on convicts. Cases that defy solution or require detention are sent to the police for appropriate actions. In other to keep the police abreast of their activities and progress, the VGN submit monthly progress reports to the police unit nearest to them, who evaluates the extent of the VGN's supplementary security services and makes its observation available to the State Police Headquarters. Jahun (2016) says his groups of vigilantes have no relationship with groups like OPC, Bakassi Boys and other such similar groups.

He gives some examples of recent successful operations carried out by the VGN with the support of the police and army. For example he says that in collaboration with the police in 2015 and 2016, over twenty thousand cows were recovered from cattle rustlers in Kano alone with ten thousand in Katsina, and six thousand in Zamfara and Kaduna States respectively. Also, that there was an arrest of several cult leaders in Benue State in 2016. Interestingly, the VGN according to Jahun has also been in the forefront in the ongoing battle against insurgency in the North East of the country. When Mubi in Adamawa State, was captured by the Boko Haram insurgents he said his men fought to take back the town and that even Magdalli, and Baga town in Bornu were recaptured with the active participation of his men alongside the military. Unfortunately, Jahun adds that many of the VGN members have lost their lives in the line of duty without any form of compensation. For instance, over one thousand died in 2009 as a result of the North East insurgency which also claimed the life of the VGN State Commander in Maiduguri and virtually all the State Executive Officers and their family members, as well as the destruction of the state secretariat.

8. Conclusion

An issue bearing on the success of community policing in Nigeria is the emergence of local vigilante groups to fight crime in communities where the police have done little to maintain law and order. The VGN is a national organization as well as a voluntary one whose membership is made up of people from the very community where they operate. They are involved in community policing as a registered group with the backing of the law. In other words, they liaise with law enforcement agencies to carry out their community policing duties. However it must be mentioned that it is not part of their duties to prosecute criminals. Once any criminal is arrested, they forward such a suspect to the police. Their closeness to the grassroots and their knowledge of the local terrain thus makes them a necessary tool in community policing. There is however the need for adequate funding of the VGN to enable it improve its public perception. Such funding will help it gear

towards being more professional made possible through better training, and regular seminars to enlighten and educate them on their roles in cooperation with other law enforcement agencies.

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