Community Based Security and Crime Prevention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Vigilante Groups in Gombe State, Nigeria (2013-2023)[1]

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Abstract:

The paper examined the effectiveness of vigilante groups in the prevention of criminality in Gombe State, Nigeria focusing on the activities and effectiveness of the vigilante groups between 2013-2023. Primary data were collected through a field survey conducted in 2024 with respondents providing experiences and perspectives relating to the study period. The study was guided by the following research objectives: reasons for the emergence of vigilante groups and their level of effectiveness in crime prevention in Gombe State. The Broken window theory was adopted which underscores the effectiveness of vigilante groups in Gombe State highlighting how their prompt response to minor offences helps prevent the escalation of crime and strengthens community-level social control. Primary and secondary data were sourced from the selected three Local Government Areas affected by criminality in the State. The study adopted Taro Yamane's formula to determine the sample size and Bourley's Proportional formula to allocate respondents across the Local Governments selected. Using multi-stage cluster sampling and purposive techniques, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined for the study, and questionnaires were administered to all 400 selected respondents. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 371 were successfully retrieved and found valid for analysis, representing 92.75% response rate. Thus, the remaining 29 questionnaires were not returned. However, 24 Key Informant Interviews were conducted. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 was used to analyse the quantitative data using descriptive statistics and cross tabulations. The qualitative data were presented in themes and interpreted in a narrative form. Findings revealed that reasons for the emergence of vigilante groups were inadequacies of law enforcement agencies to prevent crime, increased rate of petty crimes, armed robbery and theft, cultural values that support community policing, and political interests of some elites. The study also revealed a predominantly positive perception of vigilante group effectiveness, with 76.28% of respondents rating their performance as effective to varying degrees (effective, fairly effective and very effective) compared with 23.72% who rated it as ineffective. However, the study concluded that modern equipment and logistics should be provided to address root causes of criminality in Gombe State. Vigilante groups should also adopt modern technology, sensitization, and collaborate with religious and community leaders in preventing criminality in the State.

Keywords: Vigilante; Crime; Prevention; Community; Security.

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Introduction

Globally, the issue of insecurity and the inability of the law enforcement agencies to deal with the situation has become a very serious concern and placed increasing demand on policing in the world today. Despite the existence of several formal security mechanisms, there are still incidences of criminal activities across many societies in the world. This results to the formation of informal security structures such as the vigilante groups which contributes to crime prevention and thereby complementing the efforts of the law enforcement agencies. Okunola (2011) states that security is important because it necessitates peace, protection of life and property, liberty as well as a precondition for economic investment and growth.

Durkheim (1970) posits that crimes have been a necessary part of every society. Macionis and Plumer (2005) maintained that all societies have crime and deviance, there is no such thing as a crime free society. However, the existence of crime is necessary even though, it is never a welcomed appeal to most of the members of the society because its presence tends to alter the peace and security of the society, thus, an indispensable requirement for the development of any human society (Onwuegbusi, 2017). Worldwide, criminality constitutes threat to lives and properties, this is so because it retards socio- economic and political development of different countries. The international Statistics of Crime (2014) reported that the problem of insecurity across the globe and particularly the escalation of crime incidence in Africa over the years such as Nigeria has eventually led to the establishment of vigilante security groups giving them full legal and legislative backing in 2008. In essence, the provision of adequate security is a social pre-requisite for the survival of any society. Building on this, Ashton and Bussu (2019) establishes that great efforts are being made by societies over time to combat the rate of criminality which differs across times and countries.

Historically, crime control and prevention were not the duties of the state but the traditional responsibility of every adult in the community. Community-based groups were formed by societies in this regard usually referred to as vigilante groups. Richard (2010) explained that security in Rome was in the hands of some unpaid private individuals appointed by the magistrates in approximately 27BC. Similarly, in Slovakia, vigilante groups were established to curtail mass immigration of people passing through their land. According to Akaayar (2010) vigilante groups in the 19th century were set up in towns and rural communities in the United States of America (USA) to keep order and checkmate illegal activities by criminals. Also, in Britain, vigilante groups were formed as partnership where community members' work together to protect themselves, their properties and communities against crime. In the same vein, communities in some African countries such as Sierra-Leone and Lake Chad established vigilante groups as a result of the ineffectiveness of their respective formal policies to combat crime (Brown, 1975; Chikwendu and et al. 2016). According to Ajayi (2007), the Nigerian task of policing and war against crime dated back to the pre-colonial days where many local communities-maintained warrior groups.

Specifically, in Gombe State, the history of crime prevention dates back to the pre-colonial and colonial period where indigenous institution such as the Islamic legal system, 'yan banga groups and palace guards became ultimately responsible for crime prevention within the community (Rotimi, 2001). With the advent of the civilian government, the state faced a lot of crises comprising of religious, ethnic and political thuggery which made the state to be described using different terms such as Gombawa, 'yankalare, and goje boys (Criminals). However, in 2011, the state witnessed another approach of combating criminality introduced by the then governor referred to as The Youth Rehabilitation and Empowerment Program (YREP) (vigilante) in 2013 which recruited about 3000 youth to assist the police and other government agencies within the state (Umar and Bappi, 2014). Recently, Kehinde and Godwin (2021) noted that there has been heavy reliance on vigilante groups for security purposes at community level and as an important outfit to complement the state law enforcement agencies. Gombe State is not an exception, as crime rates increases in waves due to the inability of the law enforcement agencies to deal with the situation effectively. Thus, the resurgence of vigilante groups was informally established to ensure the security of lives and property of community members. It is against this backdrop that this study was set to assess the effectiveness of vigilante groups in the prevention of criminality in Gombe State.

Conceptual Clarification

Vigilantism

The concept of vigilantism has been defined by several scholars differently. Originally, to be 'vigil' means to be in a continuous state of alert. The term vigilante was derived from the Latin word 'vigilans' which means to be watchful. Vigilantism therefore implies an occurrence where groups are organized with the aim of detecting dangers. Baker (2003) stated that vigilante groups are largely informal and are mainly funded through communal contributions. They are primarily required to keep a watch over their communities and report suspicious persons to the police.

Criminality

Criminal activities refer to the violation of a law which poses threat to public safety. According to Gumus (2003), crime is an illness that attacks the rights of individuals such as rape, theft, armed robbery, kidnapping, and murder to mention but a few. Nigeria as a country has suffered myriads of security problems which affected the country's stability and integration. Presently, the security situation still remains adverse due to the increase of criminal violence which seem to have gone deep-rooted and increasing faster with each passing day (Phenson, 2014). According to the Global Peace Index (2015), Nigeria was ranked the third most unsecured (terrorized) country after Iraq and Afghanistan, which were ranked first and second respectively in the world (Adeyanju, 2015).

Empirical review

Reasons for the Emergence of Vigilante Groups

In most traditional societies across the world, there existed some form of policing prior to the emergence of the present police structure. The task of maintaining law and order as well as the prevention of crime and civil disorder in many societies were mainly the responsibilities of the adults. In the United State of America between 1851 and 1856, the inhabitants of San-Francisco created vigilante groups to deal with the incessant conflicts and crises which characterized the state at that point in time. Similarly, communities in African countries such as South Africa and Sierra-Leone established vigilante groups due to the ineffectiveness of their respective formal policies to combat criminality (Brown, 1975; Chikwendu, et al. 2016). According to Attafuah, (2008), high level of crimes and insecurity is the main motivation behind people to taking the law into their own hands. Strategies adopted by the Vigilante Groups in Crime Prevention

Moncada (2017) posited that the collective use of extra-legal violence while responding to alleged crime is one of the famous vigilantism structures whereas actions by the vigilante groups varied substantially. Vigilante groups in many cases were engaged in a show of force conducted patrols within the neighbourhood (Martinez and Ocampo, 2013). Vigilante groups also set up roadblocks in a bid to catch members of criminal organizations (Gil, 2013). Vigilante groups detained suspects of crime and carry out their own trials in some occurrences (Covarrubias and Cervantyes, 2013). They at times engaged in fire fights with organized crime groups over control of certain towns (Carrion, 2014).

Effectiveness of the Vigilante Security Groups in Crime Prevention

Community policing demands that community members and the vigilante collaborate with police to protect and safeguard their environment against crime and disorder. It, therefore, offers opportunity for the vigilante groups, community members and the police to work together to resolve problems existing within the communities. This is one of the major reasons for the provision of vigilante service laws in Nigeria. Adejoh (2013) noted that the emergence of the vigilante security group in communities in Nigeria is due to high level of insecurity and the unsatisfactory performance of the Nigerian Police. In order words, the vigilante security groups emerged to fill an unmet need. Thus, strengthening and improving the services of the vigilante security group in the rural and urban communities in Gombe State will enhance safety and security of the community members.

Challenges Confronting the Vigilante Groups in Crime Prevention

Despite the perceived effectiveness and commitment of vigilante groups, their operations have been noted to face many challenges. A study conducted by Nwaeze (2015) revealed that lack of firearms, poor funding, lack of patrol vehicles were the major problems confronting vigilante groups. Marx and Archer (1999) noted five

outstanding problems which the vigilante groups were facing, thus, their relationship to the police and legal system; their legitimacy in the eyes of the communities they wish to serve, the recruitment and management of personnel, the choice of appropriate operations, and the maintenance of resources, incentives, motivation for the groups' survival.

Theoretical Framework

Broken Window Theory

The paper adopts the Broken Window Theory which focuses on the control and prevention of crime within the community as against outside the community. It explains how effective and efficient informal policing structures are controlling crimes compared to the formal policing structure made up of 'Strangers' (Zimbardo, 1969). The major proponents of this theory include an American psychologist Philip Zimbardo (1969) and the social scientists James Wilson and George Kelling (1982). These theorists however believed that visible signs of crime, anti-social behaviour and civil disorder create an urban environment which encourages further crime and disorder, including violent crimes. As such, policing these misdemeanours through informal policing methods that target minor crimes such as vandalism, loitering, public drinking, and fare evasion will help to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness.

The theory assumes that only the community members can safeguard themselves from crimes. This is because they live within the community and can work and watch at all times. They also know who those potential criminals are and how best they can be contained. Furthermore, the core principle of informal policing (vigilante group) structures is the constant maintenance of law and order by members of that community. This is in line with the core notion of the broken window theory, which asserts that the constant presence of police structures makes a community less conducive for crime and criminals. Thus, increased police presence and enforcements of informal rules of conduct and laws can make a community seem less chaotic and safer thereby, increasing the presence and involvement of residents in their community and lowering crime rates (Palmiotto, 2000).

Furthermore, the broken window theory also assumed that heightened perceptions of disorder, increased fear of crime and diminished community social control were significant inhibitors of public participation in crime prevention arising directly from concerns of personal safety and sense of futility often associated with the effort required (Ren, Zhao and Phil, 2019). Charles, Ross and Lindsey (2020) posit that broken window theory emphasized that more serious crimes evolve from minor infractions. It stated that if the first broken window in a building is not repaired, the people who like breaking windows will assume that no one cares about the building and more windows will be broken, soon the building will have no windows. In essence, crime flourished because of the lack of law enforcement (Wilson and Kelling, 1982).

The broken window theory can be incorporated into the concept of informal policing in the sense that collective efforts by both the police and community dwellers can help

alleviate the rate of crime in the community as the police see residents as partners in development and vice versa. Likewise, the theory asserts that if there is a crack anywhere in the community and no one is available or observant enough to take care of it, overtime it becomes a deep ditch that would pose a serious security risk to members of the society. Thus, the theory also submits that most neighbourhood crimes are more often than not perpetrated by offenders who reside near the victims; this makes crime primarily a local problem which can best be solved locally. The contribution of this theory to the study is that there is a possibility that vigilante groups can be effective in dealing with crimes because they consist of community members who are privy to the community issues.

One line of criticism is that there is little empirical evidence that disorder, when left unchallenged, causes crime. Another shortcoming of the theory lies in its failure of validity. To validate the theory in its entirety, it must be shown that disorder causes fear, and that fear causes a breakdown of social control, which in turn causes crime. Finally, crime must be shown to increase levels of disorder. Harcourt (2009) also criticized the theory for fostering zero-tolerance policies which are prejudicial against the disadvantaged segments of society.

However, critics alleged that the theory side-lines the need for formal security provision by the state actors like the police. As much as community policing is key, it cannot supersede the role of police and the government who have a constitutional mandate to provide security.

Otherwise, the strengths of the theory however lie in its ability to enable initiatives within the realm of community crime control, rather than relying on formal policing. It further argues that earlier social disorganization and economic theories offered solutions that are costly and would take a long time to prove effective. Whereas broken window theory is seen by many as a way to effect change quickly and with minimal expense by merely altering the police crime- control strategy. More so, the theory also posits that it is far simpler to attack disorder than it is to attack such gloomy social ills as poverty and inadequate education. Thus, the effectiveness of vigilante groups in their operations as informal security groups offers significant contribution to the prevention of criminalities right from their emergence in human societies.

According to Willson and Kelling (1982), broken window policing advocates for a proactive approach in crime prevention which focuses on minor offenses such as loitering to help maintain order and deter criminal activities across societies. As a result, the theory has fundamentally shaped the law enforcement strategies over the years leading to its adoption in various cities including Gombe State for crime prevention measures. Furthermore, the basis for adopting this proactive policing approach is grounded in the theory, that it prevents more severe crimes from occurring by maintaining a high standard of public order.

The theory has appeared to be very relevant to the findings of the study because the assumption that certain anti-social behaviours open doors for more other anti-social crimes which becomes serious threats to the security and safety of lives and properties

in the societies. Thus, community security arrangement is the most viable option and fundamentally needed. Based on this therefore, it can be seen that the vigilante as informal security groups in Gombe State are the products of community security arrangements to tackle the various internal security challenges bedevilling various localities within and outside the metropolitan areas of the state.

Methodology

The study covered the period between 2013-2023, which constituted the temporal scope for examining the activities and effectiveness of vigilante groups in community-based security and crime prevention in Gombe State. Fieldwork and primary data collection were conducted in 2024, during which respondents provided their experiences relating to the 2013-2023 period. Thus, it represents the period under investigation, while 2024 denotes the period of data collection.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The study adopted descriptive survey and cross-sectional research design which examined the reasons for the emergence and effectiveness of vigilante groups in crime prevention, and challenges confronting vigilante groups in Gombe State. The choice of this location was influenced by many reasons as such the state government flagged off the GoSTEC Program in which no fewer than 2,000 youths across the state were trained and engaged into various developmental activities including the local security arrangement where they assist the statutory security outfits in the state (Econs Intelligence 2022). The study consisted of purposively selected six wards of Akko, Garko, Jekadafari, Shamaki, Tal, and Tudun Kwaya from the three selected local government areas of Akko LGA, Gombe LGA, and Billiri LGA. However, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined for the study, and questionnaires were administered to all 400 selected respondents. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 371 were successfully retrieved and found valid for analysis, representing 92.75% response rate. Thus, the remaining 29 questionnaires were not returned. The sample size was also divided using the Bourley's Proportional Allocation Formulae in order to give accuracy and equity in the distribution of the sample size at wards level for the study.

Data generated was processed and analysed using descriptive statistics and cross tabulations through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive analysis using frequency distribution and percentages helps in presenting the data in a summarized form while cross tabulations were used to examine relationship within the data. The qualitative data generated through the interview was transcribed and analysed to compliment the quantitative data. In other words, qualitative data obtained from Key Informant Interviews (KII) was critically analysed through a "thick description approach". This was done via the transcription of the interview and discussion from the recorded tape into a readable form. Thus, the data was presented in themes and explained in descriptive form while triangulating with the quantitative data.

The interpretation of perceived effectiveness, the response categories were grouped into positive and negative assessments. "Very effective", "effective", and "fairly effective" were classified as positive assessments, representing varying degrees of perceived effectiveness, while "ineffective" was classified as a negative assessment. The proportion of the three positive responses aggregated and compared with the proportion reporting "ineffective" was considered the dominant perception of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Inadequacies of police and other security agencies	71	19.14
High rate of crimes and insecurity in the state	118	31.81
Cultural and religious values that support community policing	52	14.02
Political interests of some elites and groups	34	9.16
All of the above	96	25.88
Total	**371**	**100**

Figure 1: Reasons Responsible for the Emergence of Vigilante Groups in Gombe State. Source: (Field Survey, 2024).

Figure 1 presents that 71 respondents representing 19.14% of the total responses have the belief that the major reason for the emergence of vigilante groups in Gombe State is due to the inadequacies of police and other security agencies in the state, 118 respondents representing 31.81% attributed the emergence of the groups to the rising high level of criminal activities across the state, 52 respondents representing 14.02% are of the perception that the emergence of vigilante groups in Gombe State can best be linked to the norms, values and culture of the people in the state that support and encourage local policing and local security arrangements, while 34 respondents representing 9.16% however were of the opinion that vigilante groups mainly emerged due to the interest of certain elite groups for certain political or economic interest, and subsequently the 96 respondents representing 25.88% of the respondents believed that all the aforementioned factors have simultaneously been the reason for the emergence of vigilante groups in Gombe State.

These responses point to the fact that many factors were the root cause for the emergence of vigilante groups in Gombe State. While it can be very true that inadequacies of policies, and the rising cases of security threat in the state made the

emergence of the groups necessary. In line with the above finding, an interview with a traditional ruler in Nayi-Nawa area of Akko Local Government, emphasized two factors as the major reasons for the emergence of vigilante groups in the State. The following are extrapolated from his statement:

> "*If I am not wrong, what I think to be the major reason for the emergence of vigilante group in Gombe State is, one, the lack of adequate and required number of state security agencies that will adequately cover all the areas of Gombe State. Secondly, the rising cases of petty-petty crimes in the state, especially in the outskirt's areas like Nayi-Nawa. Some years back when vigilante groups were not very active, coming to Nayi-Nawa in the night has been a high-risk issue, because phone snatchers were spread around, they snatch and run away, and sometimes they threat their victims with matches, knifes and other dangerous weapons. But, with the emergence of the vigilante group, I can tell you without any iota of doubt that these things have drastically reduced*" (Interview, 2024).

In a similar scenario, a traditional ruler stated that in Billiri Local Government Area;

> *"Years before vigilante groups became well active; we in Billiri lived in continuous cog mire of armed robbery especially between the villages. Thugs usually station in between villages and rob whoever falls within their trap. And so, that had been what happened before it was significantly addressed by the vigilantes in collaboration and coordination with the state security agencies*" (Interview, 2024).

The excerpt above demonstrates that the emergence of vigilante groups in its recent form has been a result of various forms of crimes that turned some villages and towns in Gombe State lawless and stateless societies. Vigilante groups therefore emerged to help address such security concern, and at the same time ensure the peaceful existence of Gombe State.

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Patrolling the streets and neighborhoods at night	192	51.75
Setting up check points and road blocks to search vehicles and passengers	5	1.35
Arresting and detaining of suspected criminals and handing them over to police	55	14.82

Gathering of intelligent information to the police and other relevant security agencies	60	16.17
All of the above	59	15.90
Total	**371**	**100**

Figure 2: The Strategies Employed by Vigilante Groups to Prevent Criminality in Gombe State. Source: (Field Survey, 2024).

Figure 2 indicates that 192 respondents representing 51.75% reported the major strategies employed by the vigilante group to prevent crimes and promote peace and security in Gombe State is patrolling the streets and neighbourhoods to ensure that criminals and thieves did not gain any free space in the state to commit crimes at night, 5 respondents which constitute 1.35% states that the group mount check points and roadblocks to search passengers and vehicles, 55 respondents that represents 14.82% knows vigilante group to be arresting and detaining suspected criminals while handing them over to the police and other security agencies within the state, 60 respondents representing 16.17% also reported that vigilante groups were known to them in terms of intelligent gathering of information to the police and other security agencies, with a view to gain a significant outcome towards combating criminal activities in maintain the peaceful law and order in the state. Nevertheless, 59 respondents that represents 15.90% reported that vigilante groups in Gombe State employed all the aforementioned strategies its operation to prevents crime and ensure sustainable peace and security within the state. These findings suggest that vigilante groups employ different strategies to complement the effort of the police and other security agencies who work to ensure the peace, security and development of Gombe State. However, what is very rare among these strategies is mounting of roadblocks and check points.

An interview with some of the famous vigilante members in Gombe State revealed strategies that are being used by the groups to ensure crimes are reduced and criminals are decisively dealt with. One of such vigilante personnel vividly revealed that:

> "*Yes, we use various strategies to ensure that criminal activities are dealt with. Some of these major strategies are: night patrolling. We do not sleep in the night, we patrol streets, and we patrol remote areas where criminals converge. We also carry out arrests job, especially in the case of such wanted personnel who are on arrest warrant but were able to bit all the plans of the police, so we are so close to them more, and we watch their movements more than the police, therefore, whenever such criminals sneak to come to home or any close by area, we arrest them quickly and hand them over to the relevant authorities. In fact, we employed variety of strategies including providing intelligent information to the state security agencies, and so forth*" (Interview, 2024).

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data above, it can be seen that vigilante groups in Gombe State employ variety of methods and strategies in order to ensure crimes in the state are decisively dealt with. And it appears that such strategies contribute a lot in ensuring that the perpetrators of any crimes are brought into justice, while deterring others from committing such crimes.

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Very effective	57	15.36
Effective	119	32.08
Fairly effective	107	28.84
Ineffective	88	23.72
Total	**371**	**100**

Figure 3: Effectiveness of Vigilante Groups in the Prevention of Criminality in Gombe State. Source: (Field Survey, 2024).

Figure 3 shows that 57 respondents representing 15.36% of the total responses believe that the performance of the vigilante groups in crime prevention and in the quest for promotion of peace and security in Gombe State is 'very effective', 119 respondents representing 32.08% of the respondents rate the performance of the vigilantes in the prevention of criminalities as 'effective', 107 representing 28.84% of the respondents consider the performance of vigilante groups in the prevention of criminalities and in promoting the peace and security activities of Gombe State as 'Fairly effective" In contrast, 23.72% see the performance of the group as 'Ineffective'. Thus, the finding reveal a predominantly positive perception of the effectiveness of vigilante groups among respondents.

From these responses, it can be concluded that vigilante groups in Gombe State performs significantly great in the contribution of crime prevention and promotion of peace as majority of the respondents stressed clearly that the performance of the groups is effective, very effective and fairly effective. However, differences in locations, security situations, lack of cooperation by members of some societies and wards within the state may likely be the reason why some may see the activities of the vigilante groups as ineffective, because in all places where their offices are situated, vigilante groups seek financial and moral support of the members of such environment, and in any case where such support are not being provided, they could simply vacate as they cannot be able

to continue operating without finance to equip their security equipment. Consequently, their absence in such an area opens a free space for criminals and criminality to continue.

While responding to a question on the effectiveness of vigilante groups in the prevention of criminality in Gombe State, a resident of Burundi Ward of Akko Local Government Area, made it clear that the performance of vigilante groups in the area has been very effective in dealing with criminal activities bedevilling the area. The following is directly quoted from his words:

> "*The activities and performance of the vigilante group has been very effective in curbing criminal activities that are disturbing us here. Few years back, we were used to frequent Kalare confrontations in this area. There was a time when we live in this area in constant fear of possible Kalare boys attacks, because during that time, this area too was saturated with many of them, and whenever they attack other Kalare boys from other areas, some boys in those areas also retaliate through attacking in such a manner, popularly known as "SHARA" (a situation where everybody and everything would be attacked, nobody and nothing is spared, both men, women, children, animals, vehicles, and in fact, everything). This operation usually caused injuries and deaths in some cases. But with the emergence and resurgence of vigilante group, all these issues have been effectively addressed. So, without any doubt, I can tell you that the performances of vigilante groups in this area are very effective*" (Interview, 2024).

Also, an interview with the group leader in Gombe State revealed the level of the successes and effectiveness of the activities of the group in combating crimes in the state. The following include some of the statistics he has given:

> "*We have been working tireless to ensure that we sanitize this environment off the activities of the criminals. And we record and have recorded many successes. For instance, contrary to years before 2019, between 2020 and 2023, we have arrested more than 75 criminals, from whom we in collaboration with the police been able to recover stolen properties worth more millions of naira. Some of the recovered properties include plasma TV set, 7 set of vehicles - 2 Haojue, 1 Kasea, and 4 commercial boxer bikes. So, we have many of these recorded successes, and we are still working to ensure that the state and its environs are at peace and stability*" (Interview, 2024).

In a different account, a resident of Lawushi in Billiri Local Government Area doubt on the effectiveness of the performance of vigilante groups in the area. These are his words:

> "*The performance of the vigilante operations in this area is not very effective. Sometimes, they act like sympathizers of the criminals, they do not cooperate with us, they keep given excuses, sometimes even try to blame the community for its*

security problems. We still suffer cases of night raids by the thugs, phone snatching, day light crimes and other security issues which could have been addressed by the vigilantes. What I think is, one, many of the vigilantes here are ex-criminals who still have sympathy for the criminals in the areas, and secondly, they are not adequate enough to address the issues on ground. Therefore, the performance rate in their activities here is grossly ineffective" (Interview, 2024).

The response from the interview above may not be surprising as it is very common that the operation of vigilante groups in Gombe State is still not fully developed. While some areas might be enjoying full scale activities of the group, some may not be due to the challenges of manpower, and funds as was boldly said by the leader of the Group in Gombe State.

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Lack of adequate funding	92	24.80
Lack of equipment and training	81	21.83
External interference	85	22.91
Community Acceptance Problem	23	6.20
All of the above	90	24.26
Total	**371**	**100**

Figure 4: Challenges faced by Vigilante Groups in the Prevention of Criminality in Gombe State. Source: (Field Survey, 2024).

Figure 4 indicates that 92 respondents that constitute 24.80% of the total responses see lack of adequate funding as the major problem confronting vigilante groups in their attempt to help drastically prevent the incidence of criminal activities in Gombe State, 81 respondents representing 21.83% of the respondents considered lack of equipment and proper training as the major problems undermining the activities of vigilante groups in Gombe State, 85 respondents representing 22.91% attributed the challenges faced by vigilante groups in Gombe to the interference by police and other security agencies in the activities of the group. However, 23 respondents representing 6.20% of the total responses see the challenges associated to community acceptance issue as the major setback that put cock to the wheel of progress as far as the operations of vigilante groups in Gombe State is concerned. Finally, the remaining 90 respondents representing 24.26% of the responses believe that all the first four challenges simultaneously formed

the core of the challenges disturbing the success of the operations of vigilante groups in Gombe State.

These responses indicate that vigilante groups face various challenges which affect their performance essentially in the prevention of criminalities in Gombe State. This is evident from the findings, as it could be seen that significant number of respondents agreed with all the options, while a significant number of the respondents equally believed that the vigilante groups in Gombe State face all the aforementioned challenges.

In an interview with Commander of vigilante groups in Gombe State, he revealed that;

> "*We in Gombe State as vigilante groups, we face serious challenges some of which include financial problem. Our men who workday and night to ensure the security of people in many cases run out of funds to buy security equipment like bullets for the security guns we use. So, for them to get so, they have to be going round the houses soliciting for ₦200, ₦500 or ₦1000 at most. So, it is very painful, sometimes we completely run out of funds, and we have to seize our operations for a while. Apart from this, we still face the problem of community acceptance. Some members of the community still see our men as ex-criminals or sympathizers of criminals, many look at us with serious suspicion, which demoralizes our men. In addition to this, we face cases of interference from various quarters. The problems are too many, I cannot disclose everything here, but the fact remains the same that we have a lot of problems*" (Interview, 2024).

In a similar interview with a member of vigilante in Bolari east local government area, he stated the following:

> "*You see, we work as vigilante without having a salary or any other emolument to support us. To be frank therefore, we work just for patriotic purposes, not because we get any reward from either the society or the state. To even maintain our guns active, we have to go round and solicit support from the community, and what we get is nothing to write home about, we just manage it like that, and so we need interventions just like a grant of at least not less than ten million naira #10,000,000 for our salaries and other expenses*" (Interview, 2024).

A community member in Burundi quarters of Akko local government area confirmed that he met severally with members of vigilante groups in front of his house soliciting for financial support to purchase equipment in order to replenish their guns with bullets and all that is required. So, it is undeniable that vigilante groups in Gombe State are faced with serious financial problem.

The above findings clearly revealed that vigilante groups in Gombe State are faced with serious challenges often leading to a setback in their operations and other crime prevention activities.

Conclusion

The need for sustainable peace and security has been the motives where forced countries around the world to come up with certain security arrangements in addition to the official state security agencies. These security arrangements are mostly built from the grassroots in order to have a firsthand chance of gathering intelligent information and perform other important tasks to complement the efforts of police in ensuring peace and security in the society. Vigilante group is one of such security arrangements existing in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Thus, members of vigilante groups live within the community and have occupied a better position to fish out criminal operations within the community relatively quicker than other law enforcement agencies. In recent years, there is a significant collaboration between the vigilante groups and the police in the pursuit of sustainable security and peace in the state. In many instances, they patrol together, share intelligent information, and work at all levels to ensure peace and security in the state. This collaboration led to the recruitment of many youths to join the vigilante group named "Operation Hattara" under the recent government administration of Inuwa Yahaya. Therefore, vigilante in Gombe is very crucial as far as the security of the state is concerned, and all hands should be on deck to ensure that financial problem, community acceptance and external interference slowing the success of crime prevention activities of the group in the state are tackled head-on.

Based on the above findings, this research outlines the following recommendations:

1. There is need for the state government to work toward addressing the root causes of crimes within the state. For instance, most of the youths engaging in thug activities, in-town armed robbery, phone snatching are unemployed or poor youths who were not properly taken care of by their families and the state. Therefore, the state should first address the issue of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy among youths as the root causes of criminality in Gombe State.
2. The research also recommends the use of modern methods such as modern technology, social sensitization and campaign against crimes in collaboration with religious and community leaders to prevent crimes without much adoption of kinetic and militaristic measures.
3. In addition, the vigilante groups should endeavour to be properly organized to enable getting assisted and monitored by the police and the government in general. For instance, recruitment should be transparent based on proper referrals, medical checks, behaviour and criminal record checks as this will strengthen their relationship with the police.

4. More so, the research recommends that members of the vigilante groups should be routinely trained in various aspects of crime prevention and upholding of human rights. Adequate equipment and logistics should be made available to the vigilante groups; this is done in order to enhance their duties effectively.
5. Finally, the research recommends the need for the local, state, and federal government, to wholeheartedly support vigilante groups both financially and morally to overcome their challenges. Specifically, their financial problem which affects the successes of their crime prevention activities.
6. Awareness should also be created on information given to the public concerning the duties of the vigilante groups. Hence, communities should be ready to contribute significantly to the funding of vigilante groups. This will enable members of the community have a cordial relationship with the vigilante groups.
7. Finally, the police and the government on the other hand, should endeavour to carry out strict supervision on the operations of vigilante groups in order to check any abuse of power.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

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